

Aggressive and Oppressive women in the Early novels of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract : Shashi Deshpande has written many novels and short stories. This paper deals with her novels and studies problems of women in her novels. We find her female protagonists undergoing mental torture in their quest for identity, Deshpande's women do present themselves as eve women who want to meet herself. Her novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self, as exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of their mysteries of life and the heroine's place in it. The women in her novels have established themselves as autonomous beings, free from the restrictions imposed by society, culture, nature and also free from their own fears and guilt.

Shashi Deshpande's heroines question and disparage social institutions of love and marriage. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are so much intelligent that they questions, confront their problems and analyze it keenly. The shift from the "pativrata" image to that of a free woman certainly marks the emergence of new class of Indian women who are coming out of their conservative shells and are ready to accept the psychological realities of human life. It is really a sign of radical change in our Indian society.

The women in her novels have established themselves as autonomous beings, free from the restrictions imposed by society, culture, nature and also free from their own fears and guilt, the women have reached a stage of understanding the fundamental truth. The thirst for identity is manifested in the different women characters of her in their rebellion against Indian tradition and conventions, their attempts in assertive their individualities, their efforts to develop a whole and harmonious self, at both emotional and intellectual levels and thus experience real peace and happiness in their lives.

Aggressive and oppressive women in the novels:

Shashi Deshpande's first novel *Roots and Shadows* is about the struggle of the protagonist Indu who is a representative of the educated middle-class. It describes her assertion of her individuality to achieve freedom leading to her confrontation with her family and the male-dominated society. Feeling smothered in an oppressive male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She attempts to explore her inner self to assert her individuality. It tells us about Indu's painful self analysis dismissing all the shadows, she had thought to be her real self.

The chimeras that she has been chasing through her life, end with her realization that she is a writer: “That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing” (205).

The statement of Indu is her assertion of her will and self. She can no longer cheat herself saying that she will do things for the sake of Jayant, her husband. She shall not remain a puppet but she will take her decisions for herself. As Simon de Beauvoir observes, “the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of the other will die in them” (74). Indu brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family, headed by Akka (the mother surrogate in the novel) left home full of hatred for the family, specially for Akka and she had sworn, “I would never go back”(20). She rebels against Akka, her values and marries Jayant against Akka’s wish.

All along Indu has been playing the role of wife to perfection to keep Jayant happy. She has to continue the frustrating job of writing to keep his husband satisfied. Her realization is manifest in her private conversation with Naren, her cousin to whom she bares all. She tells Naren, “as a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl they had told me I must be meek and submissive,” because “you are a female”(74). Being so snubbed by Jayant she feels insulted and disappointed.

Deshpande also highlights that middle class families face in their search for suitable grooms for their daughters. The matter is here of Padmini, another character in the novel. Like Padmini, for the other Indian girls also, it is marriage that matters, not the boy. Indu wonders about Padmini’s acceptance of a boy who was no match for her. The woman in order to achieve her liberty seeks marriage as an option to the bondage created by the parents. She hates the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that her new role will help her in winning her liberty. The parental home, symbol of tradition and the old world values has no space for Shashi Deshpande’s women, for they breathe the air of rituals that hinders the growth of a woman as a being. Indu moves on the road of self-realization. The novel suggests that Indu has learnt to see not only her life full of possibilities for growth and grace, but the very meaning of life itself. At the end of the novel, Indu has faced her real self and she knows her roots.

The Dark Holds No Terrors, Shashi Deshpande’s second novel, is about Saru who is an educated, economically independent, middle class wife who is made conscious of her gender as a child and whose loveless relationship with her parents and strained relations with her husband lead to her painful search for herself. Saru was ignored by her parents in favour of her brother Dhruva, in her childhood. No parental love was showered on her. The preference for boys can be seen in the Indian homes, steeped in tradition and superstition, considers birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage. Life becomes more desperate for Saru after Dhruva’s death. The mother constantly pines for her dead son and rejects even the presence of her daughter. As she grows up, resentment and

hatred drive her to leave home and obsessively seek success in medical college. There she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parents' wish. She succeeds and emerges as a successful and reputed doctor. After sometime her marriage began to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. Manu, her husband, can-not tolerate her success. At a personal level, she feels a gradual disappearance of love which she had once developed. The financial ascendance of Sarita renders Manu impotent. The only way he can regain that potency through sexual assault upon Sarita.

mother's death and goes back to her parental home. She expects sympathy from her father, but to no avail. Acute confusion overpowers her. She feels that she has done wrong to her mother, husband and children. Many times she wants to tell her father, "Baba, I am unhappy. Help me, Baba, I am in trouble. Tell me what to do"(44). The duplicacy of her life has been killing her real self. She reaches to the conclusion that there is no escape. She can get happiness by her own efforts. She is ready to face life.

Through this narrative, Deshpande questions the assumption that the employment can serve as the means of her economic independence but at the same time, the profession of women does not entail the potential to reduce the gap between man and woman.

Deshpande,s next novel *If I Die Today* depicts what happens to women after marriage. There is something rotten in the state of their domestic and married life, for which to a considerable extent their spouses are somehow responsible. The story of Manju and Vijay is a telling example of it. Manju has been as loving and understanding wife before she turned out to be an emotional woman. Now she is neither satisfied nor confident. She is in a miserable state and unable to see that her feelings of misery are not due to her faults. She seems to have become a victim of what psychologists call a passive aggressive husband who neither hits the wife nor says a single angry word to her, but his actions and sly comments make her feel guilt-ridden. Manju finds her married life fraught with silences and obstacles. Even the second pregnancy, which is supposed to bring husband and wife closer fails to give the desired results. She finds her first daughter clinging to her father like a vine. It seems that motherhood is the cause of her misery and it makes her "feel like a breeding animal" (23). The real problem does not lie in womanhood, wifehood or motherhood but in the attitude of middle class males who deprivileges the females the moment she becomes a wife. The pattern of relationship remains more or less the same in the novel- be it the case of Manju and Vijay, Sumita and Shyam, Suman and Vimla, Shanta and Kulkarni or Meera and Ashok. Even the issueless wives suffer in the novel. In most of the cases seems to have failed or reached the point of wreckage, in spite of education, economic independence and material well-being. Ironically, women are at the receiving end. It is their middle-class mentality that dissuades them from revolting against the tyranny.

Conclusion

Thus we can say that Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals her deep insights into the plight of Indian women in a tradition bound and male-dominated society. She presents her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. Her women are conscious of great social inequality and injustice towards them and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of social norms that they limit their capability and existence as a wife. Her novels suggests ways of adjustment by the heroines to the issues of marital problems and their different expressions. Deshpande's creative talent and ideology have established her as a great feminist writer genuinely concerned with women's issues and anxieties.

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