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# The Women Characters of Shashi Deshpande: A Study

Ashikur Rahman

The main purpose of this paper is to focus on the concept of ineffectuality on the part of woman. Regardless she is a mother, wife, daughter or a sister, our society always wants to see her passive, cowardly and weak. With the help of Shashi Deshpande's novels it has been tried to focus on the transformation towards which our community is moving but still there are miles to cover to this changed world where a women gets respect and treated commonly with men. Shashi Deshpande maintains an extraordinary position among the modern and upcoming Indian English writers. Women starving for love, affection, understanding and respect is the main theme of her novels. The crucial battle is between the traditional rules and her personal satisfaction and happiness leads to defeat and quitting. According to Shashi Deshpande, any women regardless married and have so many responsibilities have all the right to live her life as she wants with all the due respect, happiness, satisfaction and can develop her qualities and can fulfil her dreams.

**Keywords:** *Indian Women, Traditional Rules, Male dominated society, Feminism, Shashi Deshpande*

It was the year 1983 when the writer Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, India. She is the second daughter of famous dramatist and Sanskrit professor, Shriranga. Shashi Deshpande graduated in Economics from Mumbai at the age of fifteen. After this she gained a degree in Law from Bangalore. She gave her primal years of her marriage in the care of her two young sons, and simultaneously took a course in journalism and worked for a magazine as well for some time. In the year 1970 she began her writing career seriously. Shashi started her career writing short stories which later got developed in writing novels. 'The Legacy' which was published in the year 1972 was her first collection of short stories and that was also prescribed for graduate students in the University of Columbia.

Shashi Deshpande has completed her M.A. in English Literature and lives with her husband who is a pathologist by profession and both lives in Bangalore. She is appreciated as the most talented contemporary Indian women writers in English. Since, 1980's Shashi Deshpande is the most versatile Indian English writer and a winner of Sahitya Academy



award. Individuality of educated Indian middle class women has been explored in the novels and short stories of Shashi Deshpande. Indian women who is trapped between the male dominated society and her own aspirations has been displayed in her novels in a very sensible manner. Domestic situations and the relationship of man and woman within marriage is the main focus in her novels.

Shashi Deshpande writes about people around her and not about politics or poverty of India. Characters of her novels are so real that we feel them like our own family or people we know. Therefore the novels and stories she writes match with the reality of life of people. Her stories are full of sympathy, humanity and understanding especially of the women. Her stories want women to remain herself as a normal human being rather than playing a role of daughter, wife or a mother.

Female writers faced a lot many struggles to put their voice placed in society in the nineteenth century. From the past couple of years many historians, experts and even women have worked hard to change this common feeling of bitterness in reference to women writers. Stand has been taken by the women writers expressing their uneasiness to several factors of life identical to that of their male fellows, the social unfairness, and search of identity. It is assumed, accepted and inevitably claimed that the appearance of women in the tentative field either from the domestic or professional point of view it is unquestionable and irreversible.

Stories also reveal the pain and problems of women imprisoned between male domination and custom at the same time her self-respect, identity and freedom. Out of all contemporary Indian writers in English, Shashi Deshpande appears as a renowned name. However, at the beginning she started writing short stories, she also writes four children's books and six novels. She is the expert of this type of writing is shown from this collection. Her English is simple and natural, and are without any craftiness. Her stories are mostly women-centered, women who are imprisoned in male-dominated society, women who is a daughter, a wife and a mother, a woman who is suffering loneliness and failure in life. Shashi Deshpande does not call herself a feminist and does not have any objective to become a promoter of hindrances of middle class Indian women. Her stories and novels presents reality of the society the way it is, beyond any clear censorious claim on the way it is obliged to be. Women characters in her stories are much stronger as compared to male character. Male character when compared to women males are weak and powerless. In spite of high education levels and economic independence women are treated as less powerful than men even in modern times were shown in her stories.

Woman is allowed to gain education and do a job but is not allowed to go out of traditional framework and how a woman give her life as a mother and wife is showed in her stories. Women's educations and goals do not allow them to fit in the socially established channel which outcomes as their isolation and detachment is proved by her stories. After reading her stories young women of current generation can identify themselves with the



characters and can feel comfortable. She also writes about well-known mythological characters like Amba and Bhima, disputes of Draupadi and Kunti from the Mahabharat are also refigured and reinterpreted in her stories apart from the stories of common woman. The feelings and emotions of women are illustrated from the point of view of men in Epics and Vedas as they were written by men, but the feeling of women can be understood by women only in this situation. Shashi has tried to controvert with representatives present in mythology and has tried to display the emotional disturbance of women of our Epics and Vedas through her stories. Stories of Deshpande can be classified as the as the mirror that shows the practicality after analyzing the defeated condition of a women of Indian society and the stories that heal the position after drawing the women's valuable insistence of herself. But any women moving from the conventional norms are not seen in her stories. The relationship of mother, daughter and wife are generally seen in her stories in short family centered stories. The importance is given to the problems faced by the women as a wife, daughter and a mother. She talks about how important is the human relationships are and also says that being a mother or a wife is not a burden but when there is a lot of pressure on a women with lot of rules and regulation then it becomes a burden for her. Although she writes about woman's suffering in a male dominated society, but does not like her to be called as feminist writer as it sound very narrow sense of words. Deshpande does not want to show men as only wrongdoers and women as only victims, rather she is just concerned about human relationships. She do not want herself to be called as a women writer and her work as woman work, but in her thoughts she think herself as a feminist. Shashi Deshpande wants her to be known as established writer. In one of her interview she said that I am a feminist but do not anyone to call her a feminist writer, her main focus is on women, but there is a difference in the way of looking them as human beings and not as just women who always suffers and she writes about the issues faced by woman at personal and communal levels.

Shashi Deshpande tries to display woman of modern India and in search of meaning of herself and the relationship that are primary to women. Her novels deal with the journey of self-identity of a woman. The complicacies of a relationship in which man and woman are involved especially in the frame of marriage. The character named **Jaya**, as shown by Shashi Deshpande in "*That Long Silence*" is not a silent sufferer. A woman plays different roles in her life as a mother, daughter and wife but has never been able to claim her own identity. In "*The Binding Vine*" **Mira** hated the way her mother use to surrender herself to her husband and do not have her own identity. Women associated to middle class family and their inner world is narrated in her novels (Bhatt, 2012). Feminist nature of Shashi Deshpande is not pessimistic or dishonest. Only after analyzing significant problem of a woman, Deshpande goes beyond view point of feminism. For her feminine appeal to woman's problems she was known to be sensible and natural person. In '*Roots and Shadows*', of Shashi Deshpande the state of character **Indu** represents the larger situation of woman in conventional Indian society where the new concept of western education, economic independence and globalization have completely shaken the roots of old Indian culture and



social values. Shashi Deshpande's positive and broad-minded side can be seen from her novels where she has represented woman as a person who use to get involved in her problems rather than getting detached Fathima (2012). All the novels of Shashi Deshpande are dealing with the problems of the women. Even for the love and sex the women of modern India is in the condition of total confusion. Today's women always suffers due to the imbalance between the expectations and demand of the tradition as she has developed different attitude towards the life where there is sometime rejection of tradition and betraying the same, and in this condition it is only women who suffers, and she questions and looks for the answers. In Shashi Deshpande's novel *'In The Dark holds no Terrors'* the character of **Sarita (Saru)** and her feeling of homelessness is a confirmation of her sense of isolation. She leaves her home twice in the novel in an attempt to get free, when victimized by Manu. Shashi Deshpande is competent in dealing to give full answers of the unrealistic attitude in the aspirational manner which is very important for any educated modern women to live a happy life (Rajwanshi, 2016).

Deshpande has not been much concern to the current aspect of the modern educated earning women, their arrangements and disturbances, rather her novels deal with the troubles and struggle of Indian middle class women and responses given by women by her silence which the mode of her communication. "*The Binding Vine*" was published in 1993 is a novel with a difference. Contrary to the other women character, the character of this novel **Urmila** has an encouraging and supportive family, she loves her husband and is happy being married to him. In this novel she decides to fight for another women's battle. In novel "*That Long Silence*" **Jaya** and husband moves from cozy and comfortable house to a small and old fashioned house. Jaya getting confined in an old house becomes an introvert. Problems and struggles of educated Indian middle class women is the backbone of stories of Shashi Deshpande and she has very finely dealt with the same in her novels Kanchana (2016). Social world of complicated relationships have been presented in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. In the course of their life women's are the sufferers of the gender difference. Personality of a women is blocked by male portion of the family but also by the female section. Their male-controlled mind set always overcome their bluntness, kindness and revolution countering unfair treatment towards them. In novel "*Matter of Time*" Husband leaves his home and wife Sumi with three teen aged daughters, Sumi then moved to her paternal home with her daughters but the same is not liked by her mother as she thinks that after marriage husband's house is the only house for a woman. In this male-dominated society even the well-educated modern women are getting victimized (Ashalata and Usha, 2014). Shashi Deshpande has made a common world in which a genuine circumstances of the inner view of the Indian women strongly displayed through the means of illusions and beliefs. How man has taken the world in himself deeply and actively is shown by the illusion. It articulates the fact in a meaningful image. Many traditional worlds have smashed to create a new world from their point of view for the women writers like Shashi Deshpande. The misconception used by Shashi looks appropriate to her vision of life. In novel "*The Dark Holds No Terrors*" in this novel character **Sarita** is a career women who in the daytime



is a doctor and at night is a trapped animal in the hands of her husband. Overall, it is woman's view point that is showcased but there is barely any reference of emotionalizing and overemphasizing of woman's problems (Jaishree, 2018).

Shashi Deshpande understands how tradition of our community is narrow-minded and partial against women. Hence, she is famous for constructing powerful women supporters who reject to get dominated by male of the society and face their life with bravery and power. In "*That Long Silence*" **Jaya** comes up as a conquering new woman who has learned the means to overcome cruelty and ultimately utilize her powers and abilities not only for personal fulfilment. Freedom brings in commitment as well as loneliness. Hence, human beings seriously want freedom when encircled by people but require people to get free from lonely life (Panda, 2017).

Woman is under domination at any stage of life, it may be under her father, her husband or her son. Marriages are known to be the transfer of dominance from father to husband. The enslavement of conventional marriage are strong and there is scope of avoidance due to which woman looks for support and shelter in enchantments, despotism and mental enslavement which usually leads to physical weakness or deaths. The social fundamental values that has been participating in the constancy of woman concealment ensures that the unrecognized sufferings of a woman becomes a part of their lives and they become the silent sufferers all over there life. In "*The Binding Vine*" Kalpana the second important character is a rape victim but belonging from a poor family her mother wants to close the whole matter (Sekhar, 2016).

Family is an institute in itself, everything starts here and anything that occurs outside the family embodies in the family. The homely environment totally melodious and blessed by the standard ethics of the community is constantly seen with conflicts, dictatorships and misbehavior. In "*Roots and shadows*" Indu got stuck between the old age traditions and her own individual views. The complicated nature of human relations is examined regardless it is inside the family or outside the family in social margin. Deshpande created her own stories that consist of various moves of wrongdoings and crimes that bring in the disputes of man, woman, material, feelings, sex, ethics, individual and social. Hence, the steps of reconstructing and destruction remains in the novel in a story form (Saravanan and Agalya). Male-dominated community the presence of a women is drained and restricted and this is very well known to her supporters. Her supporters searching for individuality inside the married life were captured between tradition and modernity. The readers are left in no doubt after reading her novels that presents a real picture of a women as mother, daughter and a wife who are in search of their identity as well as sexuality. In "*The Binding Vine*" **Urmi** has mentioned about her mother-in-law **Mira** who is a victim of marital rape, and is stuck in an unhappy marriage (Lakshmi and Arvinda, 2017).

Shashi Deshpande is not a complete feminist, she tries to feature established rebellious ideas regarding depiction of female voice and fight for their individuality. Shashi



Deshpande's "*That Long Silence*" **Jaya**, the character, is a well-read woman, blessed with literary sensibility though nurtured in silence. Jaya is a modern, convent educated, fluent English speaking woman and a creative writer who symbolizes the emerging new woman conscious of her status in the society. She also kindly give stress on the requirement to become constructive and take steps towards attaining identity and create better existence in this modern world Sundariand Kanitha (2017).

It is love and understanding with the help of which we can battle with the problems of life at the same time sorrows of her novels gives us anger and shocks. Novels of Shashi Deshpande makes us understand that diversity is absolutely basic to interventionism. Topics of her novels are many a times conflicts, not logical even though disbursing other registered accords both are victims and agents, agents who bring a fetch a transformation in the conventional picture of womanhood. In "*The Dark Holds No Terrors*" the character **Sarita** occupies the centrist position because she is financially more secure and can fend for the family. But Manufinds it difficult to occupy a peripheral position (Bakayaraj, 2017). It is not a common women's voice but an intellectual voice of her that is Shashi Deshpande through her stories and novels. Western audience is not catered to magic realism, or concession to marketability, no themes etc. It has been three decades since when she is writing about human difficulties. Common and ordinary people who we might meet on the streets and our society is the main part of her novels. In "*Roots and Shadows*" she has displayed a series of girl-children, where each girl faces a different problem within the family circle. They are Mini, Akka and Indu. It is human being that is behind her characters but it is true that she writes mainly bout women and her difficulties of life Bakayaraj (2017).

From the study it can be concluded that the woman that Shashi Deshpande wants to present in her novels is different from the one who is suppressed, silent and struggler in various phases of life. She want women to break their silence and fight for their identity and respect in this male dominated society. Women are intelligent who can fulfill their dreams and goals and can build homes by their strength and power and pursue their career at the same time. They can remove all their doubts, confusions and misconception and can see the truth from their journey of self-examination and self-discovery. Supporters who shape their life as per their potential is tried to be presented in the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

A female supporter who has tried for find out their identity and individuality and has ultimately reached to the resolution and has become the voice of modern women is also shown in the novels of Deshpande. Comprehensively Deshpande's novels present a picture of Indian middle class women who is bounded between the relationships it may be as a wife, a mother, a daughter or sister. Shashi Deshpande's novels shows that she is very sensitive and is totally understand the imbalance between male and female in the community. Her novels mainly bother about women's fight for herself. After being involved in so many relationships like a mother, a wife , a sister a women feel burden on herself as she is trapped between the traditional rules and not been able to live her with freedom and not able to



fulfill her dreams and goals. Every person on this earth is equal and should get all the rights to live their life on their own rules and regulations. The image of women's inner self is the main and powerful point of Shashi Deshpande's novels. Her supporters are those women who are under pressure to find their identity and are constantly in hunt to explain them. In the past it was difficult for women to put her voice in the society, but now she has learned how to create her own individuality, how to fulfill her dreams even after so many responsibilities of life being a mother, daughter or a wife. In her interviews Shashi Deshpande have mentioned that she do not want herself to be known as a feminist writer, even though she writes mainly about women's suffering in the male-dominated society. Her stories recommend that common life of Indian middle class women are full of compromises. Therefore they develop the tendency of self-withdrawal. Several relationships and dimensions of family relations have been seen in one of the survey of her novels, there are daughter and mother, daughter and father, sister and brother, and in-laws, but the main focus is on husband and wife because that is the base and platform of any family and it is that relationship from where new relations start and give a shape to the family. There are joint families where there are uncle and aunty, their children and other relatives all these relationships are pictured in a very sensible and practical manner. The supporters of Shashi Deshpande are not very courageous but they are women who are in trouble who are trying to put their voice in society and trying to get their identity and respect. The society which is male-dominated and male-controlled are pictured in her novels where women are afraid of their husbands and other male members of the society. Society where preference to sons are more than given to daughters. Shashi Deshpande do not want to show men as only criminals or villains and women as only sufferers or victims rather she is just bothered about the relationships and the love and respect that is required from both the sides male and female. ■

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