

“A Study of Women Empowerment in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande”

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Abstract

Over the last few years woman empowerment in India has acquired centre attention in the country's development arena. As a matter of fact, women all over the world and in India have remained under the male force. Deshpande in her works has perfectly presented this reality. She depicts women in myriad roles – wife, mother, daughter and individual in her own right. After reading her novels, it is quite clear that Deshpande is a highly sensitive writer who is aware of the male-female imbalance in society. Research findings portray that women of India are showing outstanding performance in both their personal and professional lives and therefore have become a role model for many developing or least developed countries. However, there is hardly any authentic research on the socio-economic condition of the urban educated professional women of India. Although it is assumed by many that women with professional success are empowered, there is no significant study that endorses this preconceived notion of the people of India. Keeping this void in mind, this study endeavors to understand the social & familial status of educated & professional women residing in India.

Keywords: Social struggle, women in India authority to act.

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is a leading woman novelist on the literary horizon with nine novels and four collections of short stories to her credit. In all of her literary works, Deshpande deals essentially with the empowerment of women to expand her viewpoint. In fact the change in the position of women in a society is a reliable index to social change in general. The status of women all over the world, particularly in India, has been undergoing a rapid change in the recent decades. Shashi Deshpande, in all her novels, deals with the problems of women. She has specially concentrated on the theme of lack of identity experienced by ladies in tradition oriented society or institutions. The reality of the modern Indian woman is her state of subordination in all spheres of life. Shashi Deshpande's novels faithfully mirror contemporary Indian social scenes. She doesn't profess any specific ideology but only portrays contemporary social realities in artistic terms, when presenting the attitude of women in her novels.

Though not a rabid feminist, she has carved a niche for herself in voicing the feelings of the educated urban middle class woman. Most of Deshpande's protagonists are women who are educated and exposed to western ideas. The emotional upheavals in the minds of these women and their reactions to various issues related to women caught between tradition and modernity are susceptible to treatment from a feminist angle. The woman of today stands poised on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her and unlike her counterpart a generation ago, she doesn't believe in an inferior being who must remain passive and submissive.

This awakening of the women's consciousness as delineated by Shashi Deshpande in her novels deserves a close study to assess the extent of articulation of women's point of view. Hence the need for a close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels as products of feminism which offers a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking literature with real life situations.

The patriarchal power has been exercised over women constantly to assert their superiority over women as men feared the power of women to naturally exceed them. The biological superiority is upheld only to hide their inability to the supreme power of childbirth, which gives rise to an unequal relationship among human beings. It is the cause for the differentiation which neither is accepted nor be rejected and sometimes creates forms of pleasure or suppression and negation. In Deshpande's writings, not only the sorrow and exploitation is expressed but also their social and moral success. Her creative thoughts and imagination excels in novels with different points of view.

The 'Feminine consciousness' is displayed in her writings as vivid pictures of the impact of the burning issues of the society like freedom movement, the industrialization, urbanization on women is reflected in all her novels. The advent of industrialization affected the women folk not to confine themselves to the hearths but was motivated to seek jobs which changed them into empowering women. Deshpande has more native awareness of these issues that concern ordinary women. She writes from a more authentic cultured milieu even though it would be simplistic to assume that they are primarily rustic, innocent of all urbanization and derivative consciousness. The intention of foregoing a survey of Indian women novelists in English is to have a broad idea of their achievements so that Shashi Deshpande may be placed in a proper perspective. She is a prolific writer, mapping out and uncovering the boundaries erected around a woman's life from childhood to womanhood in the traditional Indian male-dominated Indian society even though she has refused to be identified as a feminist. Depicting the middle-class milieu, her novels provide a pointer to the catatonic status of women and concentrate on the struggle of women to overcome the constricting differences of pre-fixed definitions and gendered behavioral norms. Her writing convinces us of the need of social restructuring in the light of gender equality and poignantly reveals how the conventional norms of Indian social system mould women's inner

life stifling their individuality of the male ethos. Her women characters are decisively conscious of their marginalized position in conventional social configuration and want to achieve selfhood by transcending them.

In nutshell, the status of women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande as she is a writer with specific urge to explore and define the areas of experiences of women, which have not been previously explored. This is based on Deshpande's sincerity and ability in voicing the concerns of the urban educated middle class woman. Trapped between tradition and modernity, Deshpande's sensitive heroines are fully conscious of being victims of gross gender discrimination, Deshpande's commendably realistic depiction of the contemporary Indian women's situation and the pragmatic solution given by her will be the main feature of this study.

Deshpande concentrates on the middle-class women as her protagonists who came to awakening through a crisis. In her novels we locate extreme forms of love, ranging from sexual abuse and cruelty to the love that transcends sex. Both implicit and explicit forms of patriarchy have been critiqued in her novels. An extensive range of women belonging to different classes, castes and educational levels is found in her novels. For her protagonists, writing is an important means of liberation. There is a prominence of characters not plots. Depicting the empowerment of suppressed sections makes her a novelist dealing with national experience and national consciousness. At the end we find transformation of consciousness; thus a liberal feminist ideal has been followed. Common quest of identity leads to the repetition of the form but not of content.

Conclusion

Thus, her novels reflect changing times through private lives. Breaking up of joint families, the empowerment of the suppressed and more and more liberation are some of the major changes. As a matter of fact the changes in the position of women in our society are a reliable index to social change in general. The women of today stand poised on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. Awareness of injustice heaped on women making and strengthening her and promoting her to fight for her rights and existence. She doesn't believe herself as an inferior being who must remain passive and submissive. Male dominated society finds it difficult to accept that today's woman is aware of egalitarian values. Not only male society victimizes females but women themselves perpetuate patriarchy through their own actions. It is reality that by refusing to change themselves, by not rebelling against patriarchy and by dominating those who are weaker, a lady herself promotes exploitation of the whole female community. Deshpande clarifies that this has been imbibed by generations and has taken the well-established traditions. Not this situation is not so easy to retaliate against because the victims themselves have internalized these values. Shashi Deshpande deserves a close study to assess the extent of articulation of a woman's point of view.

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