



Women as a victim of the patriarchal culture :Shashi Deshpande's point of View

Dr. Mamta Ekka, Assistant Professor, Govt. Hamidia Arts & Commerce College, Bhopal

Abstract : *The field of reading and writing was the domain of the male for a long time. It was absolutely unthinkable for a woman even to think of education. Ancient Vedic age bears the worth of scholarly women – characters like Ghosha, Apala, Vishwabara, Gargi, and Maitreyi established their identities in different fields through their educational expertise. After the Vedic age the status of women began to diminish. Then followed a long history – there are so many ups and downs in the field of women's reading and writing. Victorian period is significantly marked for the development of women's education. Some women started to write using male pseudonyms³ so that the readers would not throw them away because they were written by a woman. So, gender politics was there from the beginning but not severely identified and focused to a great extent unlike it is done in the 21st century. Still women from the very outset were trying to create a space of their own.*

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Contributors to Literature in India :

Since last many decades literature in India is greatly enriched by the literary contributions of the women writers – Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, *Shashi Deshpande*, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shobha De and much more. Each of these writers have developed style of their own – but they have one thing in common- all of them talk about women as a category of analysis. Down through the ages, if we study history, we hardly find “her” stories, that mean women's stories (personal narratives) have very little space in the



dominant discourse. The fictional narratives composed by these writers give a chance to the readers to delve deep into the heart of women and finding out their stories. These narratives would raise a question in their minds- is feminism really in search of identity

In Ancient Indian culture it is supposed that women of society are supposed to be weaker sex. It signifies that a woman should serve her husband as minister while counseling, by her looks she should be as goddess , like the earth in forbearance, as a mother like feeding and in bed, she must be like the extraterrestrial beauty, in short she was considered to be a matter of substance. If a woman obeys all these she is supposed to be honored by society. But this is only a myth. Women perform everything but she is regarded only as the “weaker sex”, the “other”, a child producing machine and so on and so forth. She never gets equal status as man. So the equality of man and woman is only a myth.

Patriarchy

In most of the novels of Shashi Deshpande *patriarchy* is in the conventional sense and her female characters are consistently seen in a quest for their identity. Her female characters are aware of their condition but they constitute the group known as “the gendered subaltern.” Women are no doubt at the margins and men at the centre. But as has pointed out, even some of the females join hand with males to exploit the other members of their sex and in a way try to draw privileges by moving a step towards the centre and leaving the margins behind.

Shashi Deshpande, a novelist of the later half of the 20th century, has made a profound psychological journey on the minds of women. Her focus is on the Indian women – women who are urban, middle- class, educated, cultured and some of them, even empowered. One can raise the question if her women have so many qualities and comforts then what is the necessity of bringing their stories into the dominant discourse. The gender politics lies here. When women



have so many things in their hands apparently positive then it is really difficult to find the trap of patriarchy⁶. Studying Deshpande's novels help us to understand the trap. Most of the Indian societies are based on a patriarchal framework and Deshpande's novels are set within such a framework. So placing there her women characters and trying to fit them up within it is one of the agendas of the novelist and it is often claimed by many as a "feminist" agenda. Even the writer agrees with it but in the later part of her literary career.

Deshpande's fiction focuses on the women characters trapped up in a conflict between tradition and modernity. She has clearly pointed out the gap between the prejudice stricken traditional women who prefers her daughter's marriage to career and the modern, educated, empowered women who prioritizes her personal opinion and empowerment.

Deshpande has tried to show how her women characters reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system and how they vehemently deny the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. The women characters in her novels are, like the colonial women, been reduced to certain stereotypes and the society denies to sanction them an identity. So her women characters crave for identity – to establish a space⁸ of their own.

One of Deshpande's women characters in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is Sarita, familiarly known as Saru. From the beginning of her life she has been constantly reminded by her mother that she is a "woman". So there are certain do's and don'ts for her. From her childhood she was asked to take care of her complexion so that she can easily be appreciated by the groom and his mother. "Don't go in the sun, you will get darker"- these words made a deep impact in her mind. Deshpande's women character like Saru proves her to be a rebel when her mother expresses her reluctance to pursue her career as a medical student. She finally manages to become a doctor. Again she has to show her resistance when asked by her mother not to marry



Manohar, a man of lower caste in comparison to them. Deshpande is trying to concentrate on a society where most of the women are not economically and ideologically independent. So she presents such characters who want to create a space of their own to serve as a living symbol.

Saru is caught up in a dilemma between her personal and professional life. She is a successful doctor and her husband, Manohar, is an underpaid lecturer. Manohar feels jealous of her. As a result, to take revenge, he imposes physical torture- every night Saru is raped⁹ by her husband. Saru is proved to be marginalized in terms of resistance because she could not resist her husband's brutal tortures. So the way she is silenced by the dominant ideology of her husband is prompting her to speak on behalf of herself. The patriarchal structure of our society has given the man a discretionary power to use the body of a woman in any of the ways – whether it may be love making or it may be consuming her body against her consent.

Saru found herself trapped in Manohar's frustrated sexuality. Her limitless agony, deep psychological trauma, oppression finally prompts her to leave her husband's home and look forward to her father. Her quest for self, her desire to serve people by offering them medical treatment and her invincible will to search her identity - this trio make her a vulnerable being. Saru's character can be understood in terms of psychological precepts. From the early childhood she had the clear idea of gender discrimination – her mother emphasized that boys are “assets” whereas girls are burdens. This is the very stereotypical notion of gender discrimination and Saru's feminism is a manifestation of this discrimination. Her idea of being an unwanted daughter to her parents developed from her mother who emphasized that her birth created lot of calamities – “it was terrible” (169)



Deshpande's women characters do not confine themselves to one particular man- in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* we find the same strategy. After leaving Manohar, Saru has affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao. Deshpande talks explicitly about female sexuality. She liberates her women characters from sticking to one particular partner. This is also seen in her other novels like *Roots and Shadows*, *Small Remedies*, *That Long Silence*, *Moving On* where women characters like Indu, Madhu, Jaya leaves the idea of living and loving one particular man. This is a bold attempt made by Deshpande to leave the traditional ideas and going beyond the "norms". Our society is full of paradoxes. A man can do everything – he can develop several extramarital affairs but when it becomes the question of a woman the idea gets reversed. So whatever the term equality denotes, in case of a woman it is actually a myth.

In Deshpande's novel *Moving On* Manjari's sexuality is explicitly portrayed. Manjari, like Deshpande's other women characters, is bold and steadfast. She decides to marry Shyam against her parents' wishes and she even gives up studying medicine. But very soon the novelist problematizes the situation. Manjari's sister Malu is made pregnant by Shyam. Malu dies after delivery, followed by Shyam's suicide. One can understand the amount of mental agony Manjari went through. She tried to come out of the trauma. What makes Manjari's sexuality explicit is the betrayal of her body. Her husband's betrayal and his illicit relationship with her sister have already made her a frustrated being. On the other hand, her long detachment with a male body arouses her desire. As a result, she sleeps with her tenant who is much younger than her. It is absolutely her physical desire; the mind has nothing to do with it. "Only the body, his body, only my body, and my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensations."(257)



The Binding Vine has such thematic dimensions and facets of consciousness in the handling of women characters that force a reader not to accept Deshpande's persistent rejection of the label 'feminist'. If a writer gives such a sensitive and thought-provoking handling of women's rights with regard to their bodies, he or she is bound to be called a feminist writer. The label should not be taken as a derogatory term. In her essay, 'The Newly Born Woman', Helen Cixous says that women should win back their bodies and it should be independent of male sexual urges. The Binding Vine has some such thematic foci because Shashi Deshpande probes rape within and outside marriage. Very few women writers have written about these sensitive issues. The novel, therefore, is an improvement upon her earlier novels as far as feminist ideology is concerned.

In A Matter of Time Sumi liberates herself by such an action which de colonizes the patriarchy. She starts creative writing to resist her marginality and liberate herself. There is a question in front of her- whether she is Gopal's wife only or the mother of her children or an individual being. Definitely her heart has selected the third one from the multiple choice question because it is not the question set in her exams – it is the question of her identity – it is a question related to her life. Her mode of liberation is writing.

Madhu, in Shashi Deshpande's novel Small Remedies adopts the same means of liberation. She is appointed by a publishing house to write a biography of a famous classical singer, Savitribai Indorekar. She wanted to get rid of her marital tension. Writing gives her a scope to escape from the tension in her marriage and to identify her self. Typical of Deshpande's women characters, Madhu was once involved in a physical relation with someone and when she reveals it to her husband Som, the tension begins. If the same would have been done by Som then it was not that serious because a man's act of adultery is not at all a crime. Whereas if the same act is performed



by a woman then it is the violation of the “sacramental”¹² union called marriage. In a country like India women are still expected to be a mother goddess like Sita or Savitri¹³.

Deshpande’s women characters also signify the changing time with the change in their private lives. It has been significantly pointed out that marital tension and adjustment problem of a woman within marriage is one of the notable features in Deshpande’s novels. So many obligations were imposed on them by their mothers and aunts – as a result they were disgusted. They needed some private space – a space of their own. Their constant deprivation by the patriarchal society made them bound to walk out from home and to search a world of their own. But surprisingly the fathers of these women characters do not impose anything on them in the

Conclusion :

Shashi Deshpande’s feminism is certainly not cynical or nihilistic. She analyses the universal significance of the woman’s problem, thereby transcending the feminist perspective. She believes that feminism is “.... very much an individual working out her problem.” She is quite down to earth in her feminist approach to the woman’s problem. For though she is aware of the seriousness of the Indian Woman’s dilemma and the generation old struggles behind it, she also believes that a positive change in women’s social status cannot materialize without bringing about a change in woman’s mindset first.

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