



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PROJECTION OF THE FEMALE PROTAGONISTS AS SUFFERING MENTAL TRAUMA AND EMOTIONAL CONFLICT IN THE FICTIONAL WORLD OF SHASHI DESHPANDE: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

***Dr. Chelliah, S.**

Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021, India

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ABSTRACT

This paper beautifully examines mental conflict of female protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, a prominent novelist in the contemporary Indian Literature in English who depicts logically and unpretentiously about the innermost feelings of Women. This paper out and out concentrates more on the Women's suffering mental trauma and emotional conflict from cultural restriction, patriarchal domination, male child preference, child marriage, forced marital love making. And also this paper neatly analyses the point, the struggle of Women in restoring their dual role as Wife and Mother. Thus this paper brings out the fact that Shashi Deshpande reveals Woman's torment out of purely Indian Environment.

Key words: Logically, Unpretentiously, Mental Trauma, Conflict, Cultural, Patriarchal, Wife, Mother, Torment, Environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Feminism has become a highly important issue in contemporary thought. Helping to theorize a woman's discourse, the strong wave of feminism in the 1960's and 1970's gave rise to women's rights and issues for it was not until the 1960's that equal rights and opportunities for women became once more a matter of widespread and lively concern. The feminist's goal of equality with men has undergone a significant change in recent years laying focus on the point of equality between men and women. In the name of equality between the sexes, women demanded greater civil rights for wives, the rights to higher education, the right to share various powers. In brief, feminism is committed to the struggle for equality for women making it a point that women are of equal human value in their own way. As the historian Linda Gordon puts it, "Feminism is an analysis of a women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (Singh 8). Thus, the very purpose of feminism is 'reform and change'. Feminist criticism emerged as an off shoot of the women's Liberation movement, sharing its polemical force and activist commitment. Elaine Showalter writes:

"It was through the women's Liberation movement that we began to draw connections between our own work and our own lives to note the disparities between the identifications and

ambitions that had attracted us, along with thousands of other women, to the study and teaching of literature and the limited and secondary roles granted to fictional heroines, women writers or female scholars. Feminism spoke to our lived and our listening experience with the fierce urgency of a relation or a Great Awakening" (P5). Feminism is also defined as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. As a critical tool, feminism aims at providing an altogether new awareness of the woman's role in the modern complex world. Fiction by women writers does constitute a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. In any appraisal of the Indian English literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is essential. A host of women writers, beginning especially with the 1970's started writing about and dealing with women and their issues. Many such notable women novelists at Attia Hosain, Nargis Dalal, Santha Rama Rau, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahgal, Dina Mehta, Jaim Nimbkar, Anita Desai, Raji Narasimhan, Bharati Mukherjee, Gita Mehta, Shobaha De, Gita Hariharan, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapur and Kiran Desai appeared on the literary scene, of whom, "Shashi Deshpande has emerged as one of the mainstream woman writers in India and has drawn critical attention because of her detailed, sensitive and realistic representation of Indian middle class women in the domestic sphere" (Nasifa 196). In 1990, she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *That Long Silence* (1988). She believes that her works have an impact on women's lives. She herself says:

***Corresponding author: Dr. Chelliah, S.**

Professor, Head & Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai – 625 021, India

“... my books have been very empowering for woman because I have more and more women coming and telling me about how they felt kind of liberated after they read, and I think they say it does give them courage. And I also had a man who wrote me a long letter saying that I never knew what women thought of until I read your books. Hopefully I has opened up certain areas” (quoted in Nikam 14). In her fictional world, one can find a reflection of the plight of women in the male dominated society, where they suffer mental trauma and emotional conflict but all the situations bravely and at the end get a solution to their problems. The inner psyche of a female character is beautifully portrayed by her in almost all of her novels. She studies them, observes them and puts them in a furnace to fight the situation. Her protagonists rebel, protest and revolt against injustice and harassment but they do not disturb the peace and harmony of the family. The protagonists in almost all her, taboos, culture, tradition and behavioural patterns. No doubt, Deshpande's female characters are in-between women “who fight for their own identity in urban contexts thereby exploring the female psyche. They are initially meek but at last gain courage to fight the patriarchal norms. Clara Nubile rightly observes:

“Shashi Deshpande's heroines fight till the end to break free from tradition abhorring signs and manifestations of the good Hindu wife” (P23). Deshpande's writing must be read with special and intense concentration as it speaks the language of the common man, focuses the tradition of middle-class woman and presents the multidimensional Indian ethos. Rooted in the culture in which she lives, she sees the ordinary experiences, vividly rendering the ordinary with intelligence and insight. As her fiction is women centred, the feminine consciousness becomes the protagonist of her novels. One can see in her fiction not the identical or fictionalised but the perceived and felt ‘human relationships’, like that between a mother and a girl, between a father and a girl, between a husband and a wife etc. In all those, the central stage is occupied by the woman and significantly the narration is shifted through her feminist consciousness. This gets neatly pronounced in the novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*.

In all novels of Shashi Deshpande, the woman reflects the eversuffering, self-effecting and self-sacrificing female. She is the ideal woman whose place is with her husband. Whatever her suffering is, she does not leave her husband and she strives for an ideal relationship with him, representing the typical Indian womanhood. In olden days, the voice of women used to go unheard and unsung in the patriarchal world. Though the world today is still patriarchal and male-oriented, the women have gained legal as well as social liberty to voice their problems and to protest against injustices done to them. The novel *Roots and Shadows* explores the inner struggle of Indu, who represents modern woman who is educated and is very much in contact with society, dealing with the critical problems like love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality. The novel deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in general. Deshpande has created Indu as a feminist in her approach towards life. Indu comes back to her ancestral place to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. The large family is on the threshold of change through everybody is unaware of it. And the key to their future lies in the hands of Indu. Indu has been a determined girl, who

always wanted to be free and independent. But how, a number of questions come before her, which leave her puzzled and baffled. She is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stranglehold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband, which again, she feels, is not a true love. She realises that she has accepted Jayant nor for love as she used to think but because she wanted to know her family that she was a success. She goes back to her parent's home to find out the roots but she finds the shadows instead. It becomes a time of reckoning for her, she thinks about her own life, her career, her love, the traditional concept of marriage, her own marriage based on love etc. After illuminating interactions with the varied personalities in her family, she works out their futures and also her own future. She decides to go back to find out her own home. Indu is projected against the women belonging to the older generation.

Thus, the writer has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian set up. One set is represented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitra, Kaki, Kamla Kaki, Atya, Snanda Atya; and the other set is represented by Indu. To the old generation, a woman's life is nothing “but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand children.... they were still for them the only success a woman could have” (Roots and Shadows 128) and the ideal woman is the one who doesn't have her own independent identity: “A woman who sheds her ‘I’ who loses her identity in her husband's (IRAS 54). She can no longer cheat herself saying that she will do things for the sake of Jayant, her husband. She shall not remain a doll or a puppet but she will take decisions for herself and affirm her being. As Simone de Beauvoir observes, “the more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of the ‘other’ will die in them” (Beauvoir 73). Jayant is an epitome of Indian husband, who gives no choice to his wife and expects her to be submissive. Too much of passion in his wife shocks him as it is always demanded of an Indian wife to subjugate her passions and desires. Indu is exactly a traditional Indian woman in felling for her action and in her wish for showering love and affection on her husband without expecting anything in return. Perhaps, marriage has taught her the things like deception and artificial show. She has achieved completeness with Jayant but she does not want this sort of completeness. She realises the futility of her marriage:

“Jayant and I

I wish I could say we have achieved Complete happiness. But I cannot fantasize” (P 14). She speaks about her own incompleteness thus: “This is my real sorrow that I can never be Complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it that was somewhere outside

me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete” (RAS 34).

In marrying Jayant, Indu has thought that she had found her alter ego. She tells us, “I had become complete. I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And in Jayant, I had found the other part of my whole self” (126). Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary India where the new socio-economic forces have shaken old cultural modes. The society continues to be male dominated and attitudes towards women continue to be the same. *Roots and Shadows* ends with affirmation of the individuality of Indu and also the principle of life as endless.

In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande present the condition of the women in Indian society and how the different types of women act out their roles with silence. The title emphasize the silence that the protagonist Jaya wishes to break and to search her own self, the role of wife and her real individual self. Jaya feels hurt and humiliated but endures all only for the sake of Mohan and her family. She has every reason to be bitter with him. When a woman asserts “her right to take a different path and ceases to be the silent sufferer, there is hostility” (Awasthi 24). Jaya finds the very edifice of her existence crumbling. Mohan leaves her, accusing her of not being supportive at the time of crisis. A.N. Dwivedi finds the cause of Jaya’s predicament as,

“... lack of communication between the couple. The moment she decides to override the false sense of pride in her – as the heroine Elizabeth does in Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice* – and to communicate with Mohan, a perceptible change in their behaviour is observed and the icy ‘silence’ creating a chasm between them is broken” (P 146).

Jaya is basically a modern woman rooted in tradition whereas her husband, Mohan is a traditionalist rooted in customs. Jaya is an example of the emerging new woman very much conscious of her status. The novel is not only about Jaya’s efforts to obliterate the silence that is suffocating her. It is also about the despair and resignation of women like Mohan’s mother, Jaya’s servant and Jaya’s cousin Kusum. Shashi Deshpande has also highlighted the silence of these characters.

They may be considered to be the epitome of the oppressed women in the Indian society. This novel is an exceptionally accomplished portrayal of woman trying to erase a ‘long silence’ begun in childhood and rooted in herself and in the constraints of her life.

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