



THE ROLE OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AS A SOCIAL REFORMER RESEARCH PAPER

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"Today, when I call myself a feminist, I believe that the female of the species has the same right to be born and survive, to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the potential that lies within her as the male has. I believe that women are neither inferior nor subordinate human beings, but one half of the human race." 1
(Shashi Deshpande)

Shashi Deshpande is one of the finest novelist and feminist of twentieth century English Literature. Like other feminists Deshpande has selected women's problems and predicament for her writing. As an aware feminist writer, she has her own attitude to the concept of women liberation. Through her female protagonists Deshpande has redefined the image of Sati-Savitri woman. Her women characters are from real life whether they are house wife or working women. She does not write as a feminist but she has a woman's perceptiveness on her works. Shashi Deshpande has presented educated middle class Indian women in her novels. Her protagonists are modern, qualified young women, crushed under the weight of male dominated and tradition bound society. The novelist has exposed their problem and sufferings authentically. In her fiction she deals with psyche of the middle class women. She exposes their anguish, frustration and disappointment realistically. Her characters are real and of flesh and blood. They are not kings, queens, princess, or

from superior class. They are not artificial. She showed the real human beings. In an interview to Vanamala Viswanatha, she herself talks about her characters as: "My characters take their own ways. I've heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are." 2 Though Shashi Deshpande is not a story teller, but her stories reach straight to the heart and soul of the reader. Her fiction is an imaginary tale told by grandmother and novice. She has not presented the royal life of queens and princess but the real woman of India who is wavering between the tradition and modernity. She has successfully highlighted the social evils. These social evils are still in practice after the advancement of science and technology. Today we talk about women liberation but reality is quite different. Though women have opportunity to find jobs and equal place in society yet she is faces inequality, domestic violence, mental agony, and sexual harassment, rape outside and within marriage too. She faces all such problems

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and tries to overcome. She feels Identity crisis also. Search for identity becomes the part of her struggle. Deshpande has revealed all these vices in her fiction. The high hopes of feminism have been washed away in the present social milieu the relationship between man and woman becomes one of structured interdependence. Still woman has to work for her liberation without resigning herself to her destiny. Thus to talk about Gender-equality is talk about a myth. Unlike her other contemporaries Shashi Deshpande consider man as sole cause of women's sufferings and suffocations. She is not anti-man at all. She discusses the social and cultural disabilities to which Indian women are subjected to the patriarchal society. In her novels, women are economically and ideologically independent but they are not able to come out of the social snares they are entrapped in. in the process of raising gender issues in her novels, Deshpande seems to be engaged in a constructive process of conscious rising. Though she does not offer female bonding as a solution to women problem yet she is confident that it will provide some comfort to women. Finding themselves trapped in the roles assigned to women by society, her women try to assert their individuality. They are not against of the traditions and values but they oppose the way of hypocrisy in the name of honor in the society

In "Roots and shadows" Shashi Deshpande depicts her deeper concern for the importance of economic and emotional independence of women. Indu, protagonist

for thirty-five years after they lost their only son Madhava in Bangalore railway station. Kalyani's daughter Sumi, protagonist of the novel faces the same thing in her life. In "The Binding Vine" protagonist Urmila has witnessed the long silence of Akka, of Mira, of Shakutai's sister, and of Kalpana who was in coma and many others like them. Deshpande raises burning issues like rape within and outside the marriage. Rape within marriage is a painful secret of Indian woman. She tolerates it and doesn't share with anybody until it become intolerable. In "The Dark Holds No Terrors" Sarita subjected to the brutal rape of her husband Manohar every night. Her husband was a lecturer in a college who could not bear high status of his wife. In day time he is a normal man but in night he turns into the rapist of the esteem of her wife Saru. Similarly in "The Binding Vine" Mira is also a victim of sexual invasion of her husband. Kalpana, another character in the same novel is also the victim of rape by her uncle. Kalpana refused to become the second wife of her uncle. So to teach her a lesson and to take revenge Prabhakar raped and injured her. As a result she was in coma, fighting for her life. Kate Millet very aptly writes about the condition of women in "Sexual Politics". According Millet: "The position of women in patriarchy is such that they are expected to be passive, to suffer and to be sexual objects, it is unquestionable that they with varying degrees of success, socialized into such roles."³ This is what women live,

think, face, suffer, opine in Indian society. Deshpande has observed this minutely and expressed honestly. Her wish, no doubt seems to reform the society. Her concern with the suffering of Indian women declares her intension that is to stop the silent tears of women. This is really praiseworthy and noteworthy

In spite of revealing all these social evils Deshpande has also suggested some suggestions and improvement indirectly. According to her if women wants to liberate themselves, they need to change their mindset regarding to the norms and roles of society. It will help and encourages women in standing themselves as an independent individual in this man-made society. In an interview she expresses her statement. Thus: "It is not enough for the women to be educated and economically independent Education and economic independence are the tools. They can help you, they may not, and you may be both educated and though economically independent and you may still be bound and wrapped by conventions and brainwashed by the centuries of conditioning To me it is important to liberate yourself but even after that you are still living in a society where everybody is not thinking the way you are. It does not necessarily mean that you are going to be free, but then you are able to at least take the first step, which is for me always the most important step."

4 It is absolutely right to consider Deshpande as an aware social reformer of

twentieth century. Although she does not declare herself as social reformer but she wants to remove all the evil practices and vices from the society. That's why she has exposed them she is working for the welfare of the society indirectly. She has exposed the problems of modern women because she wants to remove it. She wishes for the perfect harmonious relationship between men and women in the society. She advocates for the perfect communication between husband and wife. She observes the problems and discussed them and wants to remove them also. She shows that many women are sufferings from death like agony due to these problems. This should be removed from our society. Only then the society will be happy and healthy. Healthy atmosphere creates healthy minds and thoughts. And it would be very helpful in the development of the country. So Deshpande takes deep pain and concern for the women as well as for the society. And

this approach clearly appears in her novels. Her novels are not narrow and limited in range but they are wide. In this way they are full of universal value.

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3. Millett, Kate, "Sexual Politics", (Rpt. London: Virago, 1997), 144.
4. Thakur, Pallavi, "An Interview with Shashi Deshpande," The Quest, 17/2, June (2003): 67.
