



## Still in Cages: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Females (With Special Reference to 'That Long Silence')

1. SHARMILA SAXENA 2. RUPALI SAXENA

1. Asso. Prof. Deptt. of English, Govt. Degree College, Someshwar-Almora, (Uttarakhand), India
2. Asst. Prof. Deptt. of English, SGN Degree College, Rudrapur- Udham Nager (Uttarakhand), India

Received- 30 .09. 2018, Revised- 10 .10. 2018, Accepted - 14-10-2018 E-mail: rupalisaxena345@gmail.com

*Summary- Indian parents nurturers their children not as posterity but girls and boys since the very beginning (their birth). The gender construction begins right from the birth of a child The present research paper deals with the issue of socialization and gender construction in Indian male dominated society as sincerely highlighted by Shashi Deshpande in her fiction. Our prime focus is to expose the unhealthy environment and biased gender discrimination of the patriarchal society. The terms 'Gender' and 'Sex' are often considered as the synonymous but both the words have different meaning in their contexts. The term 'gender' is differentiated from 'sex'. Gender is a social cultural construct. It has nothing to do with biology or physic. It is defined on the basis of social activities, men women relationship, their behaviour and assigned duties and responsibilities. While the term 'sex' refers to the biological differences between male and female. It differentiates men and women according to their body organs, reproductive functions and chromosomes and hormones.*

**Key Words: Gender Gender Construction, Chromosomes, Patriarchal norms, psychological aspects.**

Gender discrimination is a multi-dimensional issue which is deeply rooted in the traditional culture of the Indian society. In the words of Jannatul Ferdaush, K. M. Mustafizur Rahman:

"Gender discrimination is the consequence of persistent inequality between men and women in all spheres of life. The dimension and degree of discrimination against women manifests itself in different culture, politics, race, region, countries, and economies differently. However, gender discrimination is considered as a tremendous constraint towards the development process and it is found as a causal factor of violence against women." (Rahman 2011)

The issue of gender discrimination is one of the most important factors in Indian society. Male and female are not equal or complementary for the society. They, on the contrary, are treated as competitor or rivals. This is very unhealthy and harmful viewpoint of most of the people. As a progressive novelist of modern century Shashi Deshpande highlights all these problematic aspects which not only hurdle in the way of Indian modern women but torture them to a large extent. The novelist raises the issues of domestic violence, rape, gender discrimination and unhealthy biased social set up of the society for women. Deshpande draws our attention towards all these problems successfully. She finds a sharp division between male world and female world. In her own words, in an interview;

"Even today, you'll notice, to insult a man, you say, 'go wear bangles.' Bangles mean kind of 'insulting identification' totally, and absolutely, with a woman." (Kuoriti P - 36)

A woman is not born it is made by socialization. Deshpande deals with social issues and shows resistance towards the patriarchal norms that set norms of socialization for women. Her each and every novel projects biased ideology of social system. She has made an attempt to analyze and expose the actual condition of modern urban women in Indian society. The modern Indian women are still struggling to prove their identity. All the factors which influence a girl's social, cultural and psychological aspects are well discussed. These factors shape the whole personality of a woman. The protagonist Indu, in *Roots and Shadow*, expresses her childhood experiences how she has been taught by the female members of her family. She says:



"As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace, because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive." (Roots and Shadows, P-158)

Obviously Indian society gives more importance to a male child rather than a girl child. It is the epic truth, which (unfortunately) is still in practice in the society, that boy (son) will bring about the name, fame and 'Vanshavalī' of the family and girls (daughter) can't. They are considered as the 'Paraya Dhan' or the 'Dusre Ghar Ki'. The conversation between protagonist Jaya and her neighbor friend Nayana in *That Long Silence* reveals same social outlook of a woman: "Why did you give birth to a girl?". Nayana replies that "behnji, who'll only suffer because of men all her life? Look at me! My mother loved me very much, she wanted so much for me ... And here she was again, saying confidently, this time it will be a son. He ... "she gave a contemptuous shrug with the pronoun ... "He says he'll throw me out if I have another daughter." (*That Long Silence*, P-28)

Women are absolutely unwilling to give birth a girl. This unwillingness is flowing in their blood for a long time. For they knew that without boys they will lose whatever is needed 'to live' and 'to breath'. Jaya discussed previously, recalls her mother's love, affection and care, reserved only for her brother. She was given less attention. Sarita, the female of another novel, experiences the same anguish. The childhood experiences of all the female characters - Jaya, Indu, Sarita are the same and equally bitter. They all suffer from partiality and are deprived of a child's right that is its parents impartial love care and attention. Jaya recalls one incident of her childhood. One she visits her uncle's house. After the dinner her cousin sister are told to clear the pots. The sister ask her mother why they? And why their brothers don't? Jaya's Chachi replies: 'Why can't Jaya do it today?'

'She's here for just tonight and you want her to do the work!' the Kakis had squashed her. 'Then why can't the boys do it? Jannu, or Sridhar? Why does it have to be me and Veena?' They had all laughed at that, genuine amused laughter, Sujata herself too, and even Ajji has smiled her small, rare smile."

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the novelist presents mother- daughter relationship from a different angle that is based on gender discrimination. The relationship between Sarita and her mother is based on prejudices. There is no understanding between the mother and the daughter. Dhruva brother of Sarita, is the cause of the bitter relationship between the mother and her daughter. Undoubtedly the mother loves her son much more than Sarita. Very often the mother humiliates Sarita and becomes partial for Dhruva. This pinches Sarita and she suffers from the acute sense of inferiority complex. She feels herself like a step child in her own home. Shashi Deshpande has shown whatever she or any other impartial person observes. The things discussed above are sufficient to spoil women's psyche. Modern women have become the victim of unhealthy outlook of the society. They are deprived of equality even in their family. They are given equal status only on the posters, rallies, seminars, movies etc. In reality they face gender discrimination and tortured not only by male but the female members also.

As a modern and conscious novelist Deshpande deals with the issues of gender discrimination and social construction honestly. Sarita is the victim of bitter gender biasness. She is never treated as a girl in the home by her mother but always as a female and a woman.

Sarita's mother is the dictator of the house and her father is the 'pusillanimous'. The mother loves only her son Dhruva. Sarita feels herself an unwanted and unloved creature of the home and outside too. And as a result of this Sarita becomes the victim of sibling jealousy. She knows that her birth is the cause of unhappiness for all - even for her mother. The birthday of the Dhruva has been celebrated like a religious festival by the mother. It is celebrated on the grand level. She further thinks: "There was always a puja on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening during which Dhruva, as an



infant, sat solemnly on Baba's lap, and as a child, by his side, cap on head, fatuous smile on face, while I helped my mother to do the aarti." (p-168) Once her mother shares talks-about her birth, Sarita's mother, says : "I was born.' But of my birth, my mother my mother had said to me once .... "It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible." And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains." (P-169)

The way, the words used by the mother about the birth of her daughter clearly show her unwillingness for a girl child. Deshpande has exposed the reality of the real condition of so called modern women. The condition of modern women is pitiable and badly needs to be reformed. Like others Sarita has also been a victim of gross gender discrimination. She is a lesser loved children of her parents only because she is a girl. She does not like her mother's treatment. Her mother always tries to mould Sarita in the role of an ideal and submissive girl. Her mother's gift defines her as a girl and directly urges her to construct herself for the womanhood: "So that was it! It was not for me, not to please me and make me happy, but because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear- I don't want them, I don't want to eat, I don't want anything." (The Dark Holds no Terror, P- 171)

Deshpande's novels show the impact of society on the psyche of females. The females as a result of present unhealthy social set up, under-estimate themselves. They consider impartial laws of society as the laws of God. They have become like those birds which are kept in the cage for a long time. And even after getting freedom, they can't fly, because their mentality and psyche has been encrypted by the syndrome of masculinity, inequality and the unfair division of superior and inferior. They can see everything, understand the unjust behavior, but can't react because unconsciously they have been stuffed with the sense that they are born weak and made to be ruled. The things like suppression, inequality, domestic violence and house hold responsibility are the very essential and general matters for them. It is the integral part of their life. So it is not possible for them to consider themselves as equal to their counterparts. It is deep-seated in their unconscious mind that they are inferior to men. The things Shashi Deshpande forth, may seem petty but their effect is vital. They are common but not normal. If they are ignored, the results will be very fatal for everyone. In this era of development our society can't afford things like that. An unhealthy and inhuman attitude will stop the ways of development and lead us to an unhappy, unhealthy and a savage society.

#### REFERENCE

1. Deshpande, Shashi, "Writing from the Margin", The Book Review 22, No. 3 (March 1998), p.9. Print.
2. Deshpande, Shashi, 2003, Writing from The margin, New Delhi: Penguin Books, P- 87. Print. Ephesians , 522, The Bible. Print.
3. Hunter college, Women's Studies Collective, Woman's Realities, Women's Choices; Introduction to women's Studies. New Delhi: Oxford University Press 1983, p-68. Print.
4. Jannatul Ferdaush, K. M. Mustafizur Rahman (2011), Gender Inequality in Bangladesh , Unnayan Onneshan-The Innovators. Print.
5. Kuoriti, Joel. Maybe Only Your Wife Interview with Shashi Deshpande Tense Past, Tense Present Woman Writing in English, Kolkata Street: 2003, P - 36. Print.
6. Vishwananthn, Gita Conversation with Shashi Deshpande Writing Difference. Ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Pencraft International, Delhi: 2005.

\*\*\*\*\*