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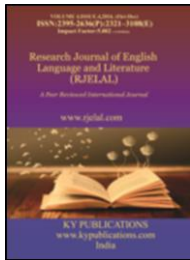
## FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

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### ABSTRACT



The study aims to find out if Shashi Deshpande's women really assert themselves or somewhere in their assertion process conform to endurance. For the purpose of this study, all her novels have been considered, but the thrust of this research is on three of her major novels viz., *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*. These three novels have won awards and have been translated into a number of foreign languages. In this paper an attempt is, therefore, made to study Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists, as portrayed by her in her novels, with a view to understand and appreciate their trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. It critically analyses their response to the emerging situation in life so as to fit them in the contemporary society. Without probing deeply into the novelist's conviction of what would serve as the ideal panacea for the different kinds of challenges, the study considers the problems of her characters which have had to contend with the given situations.

Key words : protagonist, feminism , novels, writer,

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande, the daughter of an eminent Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Adya Rangachar Sriranga, is a widely acclaimed novelist who has ten novels and five volumes of short stories to her credit. Her father is called "the Bernard Shaw of the Kannada Theatre." Like her father, she has also won various awards such as "Thirumathi Rangammal Prize" and prestigious "Sahitya Akademi Award" (National Academy of Letters) in 1990 for her novels. She also won the "Padma Shri" award in 2009 for her valuable contribution as a writer. She also wrote the screenplay for the Hindi film "Drishti." She is a postgraduate in English from Mysore University. After her marriage in 1962, she went to England with her husband. After her return, she started writing short stories which have records of her personal life. Earlier her short stories were published in bestselling Indian Magazines such as

"Femina," "Eve's Weekly," "The Illustrated Weekly of India," "Deccan Herald" and "J.S. Mirror." Later on, after getting popularity her short stories were collected in five volumes. These are: "The Legacy and Other Stories" (1978), "It Was Dark and Other Stories" (1986), "It Was the Nightingale and Other Stories" (1986), "The Miracle and Other Stories" (1986) and "The Intrusion and Other Stories" (1993). Shashi admits that three things were responsible for her development as an English writer. She says: "There are three things in my early life that have shaped me as a writer. These are: that my father was a writer, that I was educated exclusively in English and that I was born a female" (Of Concerns 107). This statement clearly echoes the voice of a feminist soul in her. However, unlike the early feminist authors who chose to portray the subjugation of women in ordinary life, Shashi Deshpande moved a step further and made educated women as the subject of her writing and

voiced the agony of such women who have to depend on their male counterparts for the choices and decisions of their life. In the words of Y.S. Sunita Reddy, "She gives us a peep into the state and condition of the present day woman who is intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under the weight of male chauvinism" (Reddy 146). Neither her male characters are culprits nor do her female character sufferers. Infact, the female characters in her novels know their rights and they raise their voice against the male domination and women oppression. Through her novels she raises various issues related to women and her position in human society.

## **2 FEMINISM - SHASHI DESHPANDE'S VIEWS**

As the study attempts to study Shashi Deshpande's women characters, her portrayal of women needs to be studied from a feminist angle. As an author of the '70s and 80s', she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist. A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how the themes in them are related to women's problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel *Roots and Shadows*. In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and traditionbound society. She refuses to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in the novel. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel, is about the traumatic experience the protagonist Saru undergoes as her husband refuses to play a second-fiddle role. Saru undergoes greathumiliation and neglect as a child and, after marriage, as a wife. Deshpande discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters and their desire to have a male

child. After her marriage, as she gains a greater social status than her husband Manohar, all begins to fall apart. Her husband's sense of inferiority complex and the humiliation he feels as a result of society's reaction to Saru's superior position develops sadism in him. Her husband Mann vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism, which has been vividly portrayed by Deshpande. That *Long Silence*, the third novel, is about Jaya who, despite having played the role of a wife and mother to perfection, finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya realizes that she has been unjust to herself and her career as a writer, as she is afraid of inviting any displeasure from her husband. Her fear even discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with another man. These three novels belong to her early phase and portray a mild form of feminism.

*The Binding Vine*, her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi to focus attention on the victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape. Mira, in the solitude of her unhappy marriage, would write poems, which were posthumously translated and published by Urmi. Urmi also narrates the tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband for another woman. The worst part of her tale is that Shakutai's elder daughter Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, her sister Sulu's husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana's behalf and brings the culprit to book. In *A Matter of Time*, her fifth novel, Shashi Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. Basically, it is about three women from three generations of the same family and tells how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal, and she faces her humiliation with great courage and stoicism. Deep inside, she is struck with immense grief, and tries to keep herself composed for the sake of her daughters. Sumi's mother Kalyani was married off to her maternal uncle Shripati. When their four-year-old son gets lost at a railway station, Shripati sends Kalyani back to her parents' house with their two daughters. On his mother-in-law Manorama's request, when Shripati returns he maintains a stony silence for the rest of his life. Kalyani's mother

Manorama fails to beget a male heir to her husband, and fears lest he should take another wife for the same purpose. Manorama, to avoid the property getting passed on to another family, gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati. Thus, Deshpande has revealed to our gaze the fears, frustrations and compulsions of three women from three generations of the same family. *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her musical genius. She has led the most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by a society that practises double standards — one for men and the other for women. Even as a child she was a victim of gross gender discrimination. Besides, Madhu the writer of her biography, narrates her own life story and also those of her aunt Leela and Savitribai's daughter, Munni.

### 3. CONCLUSION

A close analysis of her novels leaves no doubt about her genuine concern for women. Her protagonists are acutely aware of their smothered and fettered existence in an orthodox male-dominated society. Caught between tradition and modernity, her protagonists search for identity within marriage. Deshpande's novels contain much that is feminist. The realistic delineation of women as wife, mother and daughter, their search for identity and sexuality as well, leaves the readers in no doubt where her real sympathies lie.

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