

## FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL "THAT LONG SILENCE"

R. KRISHNAN

Assistant Professor in English, Srimad Arts & Science College (Autonomous), T.V.Koil, Trichy, Tamil Nadu, India

### ABSTRACT

The term 'feminism' has its origin from the Latin word 'femina' meaning 'woman' (through French 'feminisme') and thereby refers to the advocacy of women's rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of 'equality of sexes'. In other words, it relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. The term became popular from the early twentieth century struggles for securing women's suffrage or voting rights (the suffragette movement) in western countries and the later well organized socio-political movement for women's emancipation from patriarchal oppression. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at raising a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist. All her novels can be viewed through a feminine consciousness, Saru in the "The Dark Holds No Terror", Indu in "Roots and Shadows", Jaya in "That Long Silence".

**KEYWORDS:** Feminism, Shashi Deshpande, Women's Emancipation

### INTRODUCTION

#### About Author

She is an Indian novelist, born in Dharwar, North Karnataka, India, educated at Bangalore University. Both her first collection of short stories, *The Legacy* (1978), and her highly praised novel, *The Dark Holds no Terror* (1980), signalled the arrival of an important new feminist voice in Indian fiction; through a network of familial relationships, and above all men and women, Deshpande explores conditions of women in India and illustrates the complex adjustments and social changes of the 1980s.

### PERSPECTIVE VIEW

Deshpande's stories are about a woman: her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common run of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy traditional morality or social conventions, the middle-class women themselves are enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, marital discord and male chauvinism. Deshpande's chief thematic concern is with a woman's struggle, in the context of Indian society, her effort to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, daughter and most of all as a human being.

Deshpande's honest treatment of sexuality, gender, and generational conflicts is evident in *Roots and Shadows* (1983); its intelligent, mature narrator, the journalist Indu, is a more independent, less tortured example of the modern urbanized Indian woman than some of Deshpande's other protagonists. In Deshpande's vision, liberation for the Indian woman is circumscribed by boundaries of class, social position, and marital status. Arguably her most accomplished novel,

“That Long Silence” (1988) combines acerbic realism with subjective exploration, political awareness with Hindu philosophy.

### **SILENCE SURRENDER AND COMPROMISE**

From the traditional roles of daughters, sisters, wife and mother, Deshpande’s protagonists emerge as individuals in their own rights. They achieve this not by being brazen feminists or iconoclasts but by a gradual process of introspection and self-realization. The female protagonists of Deshpande wish to move out of the narrow confines of their homes and choose a career of their own, for example Manjari (Jiji) keeps deliberating different roles she can adopt for asserting her independence and to keep herself busy after her husband’s death.

Deshpande’s heroines are specific, modernizing women even in their traditional milieu. Her writing widens the space for women. Her books talk about family ties, relationship, commitment and the generations. Deshpande in her novels has explored every possibility of change from stereotypical role of women. Her women redefine themselves for freedom from stifling traditional roles of Indian women in patriarchy system. In her novel *Moving On* Deshpande through her protagonist Manjari has shown that change is essential for inner independence and to have positive and meaningful identity.

In her novel *Moving On* Deshpande has suggested that life is always moving on. Introspection and confrontation are essential for women to keep pace with men to achieve their identity and get rid of subordination and subjugation. They have to overcome their predicament through firm resolution. Accepting the through in life they should change the circumstances in the prevailing situation and redefine themselves. Chaos and disintegration do not stop the movement of women life.

Most of the heroines of Deshpande are deceived at homes. They are not treated equally by the other members of the family. They are discriminated by their male partners. Equality between men and women become a fantasy. Women to the needs of their husbands and husband families. Other women members of the family and society compel them to play the stereotypical roles of wives and mothers.

In spite of all these, Deshpande’s women characters are constantly vigilant about themselves in connection with the relationship they have to survive. They always possess their inner independence to assert their self-knowledge which empowers them to have their identity. They have the earnest desire to live the life of complete freedom and obtain success in life like any individual. They want to play roles of equal partners in their relationships. There are many ups and downs in life. The mountains of problem cannot break the stream of life, which always keeps moving on. Problems simply bring obstruction which can be overcome.

Deshpande is highly critical about the traditional concept of the Indian woman. Potentiality of her identity is dependent on her relationship with others. She feels “An identity becomes active, positive and meaningful only in relationship with others.” (*Moving On* p.56) Most of her heroines like Manjari of *Moving On*, Saru of *Dark Holds No Terror*, Jaya of *That Long Silence* are the new women who prefer change for their survival. They confront the problematic situation and reject the life of subjugation and adopt the ways for melioration in life through hard labour under the influence of Postcolonial sensibility.

Jaya and Manjari are the two heroines of Deshpande, who are very skilfully portrayed. They never ignore their

self-affirmation under the prevailing situation of patriarchal society. They reaffirm their identity. They bend to some extent to the traditional system of patriarchal society but never breaks like Virmati of Manju Kapur's Roy's *The God OF Small Things*. Ammu and Virmati break for change and asserting their identity. But Manjari and Jaya bend for their survival. They struggle hard for self-identity, but never breaks to constrain and restrictions in the path of their survival.

Unlike her contemporary writer Anita Desai protagonists, the female characters of Deshpande do not commit suicide but they strive hardly to compromise with the existing situation. Faced with dilemmas of life, they search a path that allows the individual freedom and growth, without succumbing to pressures and without breaking away from accepted, social institutions. These protagonists succeed in being individuals. Her female characters also face isolation, alienation. They introspect and do not break.

## CONCLUSIONS

Deshpande's writings hold a universal appeal that clearly emanates from her rootedness in everyday India, a society in which we breathe and a culture to which we belong. She can be admired for entrusting her characters with the vocabulary common to their day to day life. She casts women as hero in the tradition of Indian writing in English. It is here that Deshpande seems to emerge herself as a kind of female Tolstoy.

Women are in no way inferior to men in any aspects proud to be woman.

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