

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDEYAUL USHA¹DR. RAMAN ASHALATA²¹Assistant Professor,

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Abstract: *Almost all the novels of Shashi Deshpande narrate the story of the women who are the victims of exploitation, separation, negligence and even rape by their own family members. Gayatri Chakraborthy's Spivak has pointed out, even some of the female members join hands with males to exploit the other members of their own sex. This is true of Deshpande's novels too, where women also exploit each other. There are hierarchies among women and women like Vanita Mami, Jeeja, Nayana and Tara indirectly reinforce patriarchy as they behave like a silent spectator and do not oppose the wrongs done on the other members of their sex. Salu in "Binding Vine" and Akka, Padmini and Sunanda in "Roots and Shadows" also feed and strengthen the patriarchy. In the novels, we cannot deny the glimpses of self imposed dominance of patriarchy. To a considerable extent women are the victims of self imposed patriarchy in the name of family honor and respectability.*

Keywords: *Woman, fair sex, patriarchal mind set-up, self imposed patriarchy, silent spectator*

INTRODUCTION:

Shashi Deshpande, the daughter of an eminent Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Adya Rangachar Sriranga, is a widely acclaimed award winning Indian 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 won various awards such as "Thirumathi Rangammal Prize" and prestigious "Sahitya Akademi Award" in 1990 for her novels. She also won "Padma Shri" award in 2009 for her valuable contribution as a writer. She also wrote the screen play for the Hindi film "Drishti". She is 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 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), "The

Intrusion and Other Stories”(1993). Shashi Deshpande 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 Concerns107). 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 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.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels present a social world of many complex relationships. In her novels many men and women are living together, journeying across life in their different age groups, classes and gendered roles. The tradition bound world consists with the modern, creating unforeseen gaps and disruptions within the family fold. Women have been tutored right from the day they had the glimpses of this world, to follow unquestioningly and relentlessly the ideal of the patriarchal set-up of the family. The Hindu woman has been asked to put up all sorts of repressions and suppressions in the name of family honour and for the good name of the children. Women’s sexuality, her experience of pain, pleasure or love, desire, sorrow were matters that were routinely ignored. Throughout the novels Deshpande tries to depict this predicament of women. Women’s understanding becomes questionable as the old patterns of behavior no longer seem to be acceptable. These struggles become in tense of quests for self-definition, because it would not be possible to relate to others with any degree of conviction unless one is guided by clarity about one’s image and role.

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as an eminent writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. In the present paper she tries to focus on the parental and marital relations she seeks to expose the traditions by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novels reveal the man made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them. Shashi Deshpande uses this point of view of present social reality as it is experienced by women. To present the world of mothers, daughters and wives is also to present indirectly the fathers, sons and husbands the relation between men and women, and between women themselves. The words which we always associate with what we consider to be the concept of an ideal woman are self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering.

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are well educated and self conscious middle class women. They are caught in dilemma. Deshpande writes about the situation of women and their failure in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. Through her protagonist she highlights that the women are the victims of gender discrimination as a girl child, wife and mother not only from their male but also from their female counterpart. They are trapped between tradition and modernity. We find them undergoing great mental trauma in their quest for self.

Deshpande's first novel *Roots and Shadows* depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male dominated and tradition bound society. Indu belongs to the group of women who stand against the age old set-up of women's life and views and reviews the concept of self, sin, faith, love and other values. She has visions and revisions of her own ideal of detachment and freedom and tries to achieve them. She tries to see and listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But in all her efforts she fails miserably either due to the impact of Sanskar or fear and timidity or all these together. Indu, being an educated and highly sensitive starts aspiring to become independent and complete in herself, but then she finds Akka and the family to be hindrance in attaining independence and completeness. Akka does not allow her to meet the boy in the lone corner of the library and speaks ill of her mother.

Akka is worth special mention because she has a great impact on Indu's life. Only after her death does Indu come to know about Akka's life from Narmada Atya. Akka was married at twelve to a man well past thirty. Akka was small and dainty. She went to her husband's house after six months. By the time she was thirteen, she made two abortive attempts to run away. Her mother-in-law whipped her and kept her starved by locking her up in a room for three days. Then she was sent to her husband's room. She cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, "lock me up again, lock me up"(77) .

Akka, on her return to her father's house after her husband's death, she enforces a rigid code of conduct on women in the household. She insists that a woman should never utter her husband's name, as it means disrespect and shortens his life span. But as Akka told Narmada that there was no escape from a husband then. This is a self imposed patriarchy.

Deshpande's second novel "*The Dark Holds No Terror*" brings out the struggle of a woman in a family where male child is preferred to female child and novel reveals how the insensitive attitude of the family towards a female can drive her into a schizophrenic state of mind. The central character of the novel is Saru (Sarita) who experiences indifference of her mother towards her. Saru was blamed for her brother Dhruva's death. She is always neglected. Years on, her mother's harsh words still bothered her, "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead ?" . Not only this, even for her dark complexion mother used to torture her. This novel throws light on the gender discrimination of serious nature exercised by mother towards her own daughter. She remains denied of parental love and becomes a victim of her husband's ill treatment. In the end Saru, at father's house objectively mulls over the reasons of her disastrous marriage. She blames herself for it. In guilt consciousness she ruminates, "My brother died because I heedlessly turned my on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is failure because I destroyed his manhood. " (217) Saru is dissatisfied with her marriage but in her quest for the wholeness of her identity she does not advocate separation from Manohar but a tactful assertion of her identity within marriage. In the end she leaves her father's house and goes back to Manu with a determination to assert her identity. What Shashi Deshpande suggests is the gender discrimination by parents towards their children prevailing in

our society, and the compulsion to perpetuate male dominance if the marriage is to be kept going.

In the third novel "*That Long Silence*" Deshpande depicts the plight of an educated Urban middle class woman Jaya, caught in a web of troubles after marriage. In her anxiety to play the role of wife and mother she suppresses her own individuality. Jaya does not protest the change of her name from Jaya to Suhasini at her marriage just to keep Mohan happy. Her dress and appearance are the proofs of her submission to Mohan's likings, replicating an absorbed family woman. Her upbringing demands the suppression of the self so that the marriage can survive. Jaya thinks that she has no face to show to the world in the absence of her husband. It is he who provides comforts and gives meaning to her life. She becomes merely a puppet. Jaya, the protagonist has lost her authority as a human being. She has shaped herself to the wishes of Mohan. She has given up the job she wanted to take, the baby she wanted to adopt and the anti-price campaign she had wanted to take part in. For seventeen years of her marriage she successfully manages to suppress her feeling, as she thought it more important to be a good wife than being a good writer. She not only suppresses her writing career but also her association with her one time neighbor, Kamat. She tries to adjust to Mohan from all angles. Her words "Two bullocks yoked together..." indicate that to some extent she is a victim of self imposed patriarchy nurtured in her mind.

Jaya's helpmate, Jeeja also is a victim because of her drunkard husband's male ego. He used to beat her as she could not bear a child to him. So the patriarchal set-up of her mind accepts her husband's second marriage. Jeeja brings up their boy after their death in an accident. Even the son is no different from his father as he too is a drunkard and begins to beat his wife. Surprisingly, Jeeja supports the son to exercise his male domination over his wife.

The fourth novel, "*The Binding Wine*" presents the challenging of the chauvinistic and indifferent attitude of Indian male by the female. The innermost recesses of woman's heart are focused through the experiences of the protagonist, Urmi. The writer makes a bold attempt to portray the agony of wife who is subject to marital rape. Urmi becomes sensitive due to the death of her own year old daughter, Anu. In her aggrieved state of mind, she happens to meet Shakuntala, mother of a rape-victim, Kalpana. Urmi meets her in the hospital where her sister-in-law, Vanna works. Kalpana is lying unconscious and her mother thinks that she has met with an accident, however Kalpana has been brutally raped. Her mother Shakuntala's reaction is that of a typical Indian mother bred in an oppressive male dominated society. She tells Vanna: "It's not true, you people are trying to blackmail my daughter's name" (58). Most Indian mothers react in a similar way as they are concerned about their daughter's marriage. Shakuntala doesn't want a report to be lodged with the police.

Urmi wants justice to be done to Kalpana by bringing the culprit to book but she finds herself a lonely crusader in her fight. Though Urmila is filled with all sympathies for Kalpana, she is unable to do anything. In a way she remains a mute spectator.

“Take her, Urmila, take her away with you.

I can't look after her,

I don't want her, I'll destroy her

I'm not fit to look after her.”(192)

Shakutai even wishes for her daughter's death. She says, “but sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death”. (178) Kalpana's mother moans, “Why does God give us daughters ?” (60)

In spite of her (Shakutai) doing all kinds of works to support her family, her husband deceives her for another woman.

Urmila reconstructs the tragic tale of her mother-in-law, Mira through her diaries. Mira's writing reflects the extent of sexual activity resulting in rape in her marriage. Her situation reflects the mute suffering of such unfortunate women. Every moment she spends there is a cry of rape and anguish. Mira too was a victim of physical abuse years ago, but the mother did not defy the norms of the society. On the contrary Mira's mother used to say, “never utter a no; submit and your life will be a paradise.”(83) Actually Mira has hated the way her mother has been surrendering herself to her husband and opposes every inch of her mother's advice. Urmi knows that the life which seems terrible to Mira is normal to most of the women of her time.

In case of Harish and Vanna also we see Vanna's submission just to keep her marriage intact. This type of acceptance with deceit makes Urmi angry. It makes woman as a spineless wooden creature subjected to male domination.

Urmi, who tries to give justice to Kalpana by bringing culprit to punishment, and to Mira by publishing her poems and stories, she has been accused of being “traitor” by other women.

In the fifth novel “*Matter of Time*” the writer records the lives of women of three generations from the same family. Women have their own values, mindset and a well defined unconventional relationships with the other with whom they interact in a meaningful way. The novel begins with Gopal walking away from home deserting his wife Sumi and three teen aged daughters. Gopal's desertion is a cause for great worry to Sumi's mother, sister, and cousin. After Gopal's desertion, Shripati, Sumi's father brings her at parental home 'Big House'. But for Sumi's mother Kalyani 'after marriage, daughters at parental home is not just a tragedy but a matter of shame and disgrace, while Sumi expresses her sense of loss and humiliation with a note

of stoicism. Even Sumi's daughter blames her for Gopal's desertion. Like other women of Shashi Deshpande's novels Sumi also decides to fight her own battle.

Shashi Deshpande's sixth novel "*Small Remedies*" attempts to reconcile the different strands of women. The novel deals with grit and determination of Savitribai Indorekar, an eminent vocalist. Savitribai has referred to "gender discrimination" when she says that takes a long way for a woman to reach the topmost position, and how difficult it is for a woman to break through the barriers that come in her way. Madhu, the protagonist in biography records how Savitribai felt hurt when her grandmother asked her to stop singing immediately during her performance at a family gathering.

Like her father and father-in-law, she too had led a most unorthodox life and had paid price for it as a woman. In the course of time, a daughter Munni is born to her from Station Director Gulam Saab. Savitribai while narrating her life story to Madhu, conceals the fact that she had any lover and had a daughter from him. Savitribai is ashamed of her indiscretions and considers a blemish on her character and respectability. She keeps aloof from her illegal daughter Munni, lest it should tarnish her image. In her quest for identity she has become overly selfish and possessive, for she gives the child her own identity for her own sake, but disowns her when it comes to sacrificing her hard-earned name for own child. But this dissociation of hers from her daughter is too much for Madhu as she herself is a devoted mother, grieving over her son's death. Savitribai loves the child till her own emotional need get fulfilled but when it comes to Munni's own identity and happiness, she selfishly keeps her out of her life recoiling under the guise of respectability and a good name. As Meenakshi leads the life of a disowned child and is unhappy and ashamed of her existence, she dissociates herself from her mother Savitribai.

Thus all the novels of Shashi Deshpande reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian women in being a part of them. Women are more conscious for social shame than the physical and mental anguish of their own and near ones. Traditional social order neglects both the individuality and femininity of women. It gender based social structure, sexual colonialism is doing a great harm for woman than the social discrimination.

CONCLUSION:

Shashi Deshpande's novels present a social world of many complex relationships. Her protagonists are well educated. Though they are grown up in tradition bound male dominated family, but they are trying to assert their individuality and search for identity. In the journey of their life they are the victims of gender differentiation. Their individuality is suppressed by not only male section of the family but also by the female member of the family. Even their frankness, liberality and rebellion stand against unfair treatment, is overcome by their submission to the patriarchal set up of own mind. The women in Shashi Deshpande's novels experience the non violent violence from the fair sex. In fact, male oriented societies nourish

women in such a way that they start looking at the world and interpreting it from male point of view. Even the well educated and independent women are victimized by their self imposed patriarchy.

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