



Gender studies with reference to Shashi Deshpande's novels

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Abstract:

The word 'Gender' gained prominence with the emergence of feminist & many women movement in the world. Gender and feminist issues reached the forefront due to some fundamental inequalities that have existed in the society since times immemorial. The new discipline of gender theory raised questions about the patriarchal society and the various connotations of the word 'Gender'. This paper intends to observe the glorification of masculinity and marginalization of femininity in India. Indian family patterns polarize the roles of a male and female. The paper explores the novels of Shashi Deshpande's. 'The Long Silence' which tries to erase the stereotypes of this claustrophobic society. Her fiction depicts the conflict protagonist Jayas goes through a process of rediscovering herself in this complete social world where she concerns herself with the predicament of her role as a mother, wife, daughter and a human being as juxtaposed to the imperialistic attitude of her husband. In the novel 'The Dark Hold No Terror' is a powerful novel by the novelist by which she drives home the process of socialization when the protagonist Sarita is reminded that she is a girl & should behave as a girl. She is reminded that the ultimate goal of her life is to find a good match & get married. The mother is always apprehensive of her daughter's complexion that it might not grow darker otherwise it would become quite troublesome to find a good match for her.

Introduction

The word 'Gender' gained prominence with the emergence of women movement & feminist theory in the west. Gender is a dynamic phenomenon & it changes in accordance to the role that one performs in the society. Men or women acquire a gender status after repeated acts of performances. Masculinity & femininity are considered as two separate constructs of gender. Under the premises of gender and feminist theories, issues were raised about the fundamental differences and inequalities that persisted in the patriarchal society. In this set up one gender resumed more power & became more superior to the other.

This newly emerged discipline of gender studies invoked question of power of male dominated society over the marginalized world of women. In any society, the social positions, be it masculine or feminine has certain expectations programmed in such a peculiar manner that trains them to communicate with others conventionally. Our behaviour, cognition, emotion are always in relation to the notion of gender. The role employed by males & females assist in differentiating their identities. Reinforcing gender roles by associating attributes and characteristics to each gender restricts one's identity. A common gender role stereotype for instance is that boys are autonomous as compared to girls. The image of femininity has been constructed since ages reflecting gentleness, sensitivity, care, submissiveness etc. A Focus on its relevance in

India, femininity had a complex existence. Whatever a woman was spoken of, it was always in relation to man. She was presented as wife, mother & daughter, but never as a woman. Her entire life was idealized as a life of devotion, sacrifice & service. Shashi Deshpande, one of the most prolific Indian Writers, who has always represented middle class Indian women concerns her writings with the challenges she faces in this patriarchal society. Shashi Deshpande writes about the marginalized state of women & their failures in the rapidly changing socio-economic background of India. Her fiction revolves around the women's battle between tradition & modernity. Shashi Deshpande depicts a society of many complex relationships. On this society men and women of different age groups, classes and gendered roles live together. The commonness of all those people is mistrust, uneasiness and a feeling of emptiness of values especially women. Women are caught in the course of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationships within their claustrophobic domain. The male oriented society inculcates in girls and defines their roles as a daughter, wife and mother. It brings in them a great sensitivity about their roles and future states in the society.

Gender Oppression in "That long silence"

The novel, 'That long silence' by Shashi Deshpande is a quest for gender specific definition of women, who are educated & progressive but cannot leave behind their background & forget their

upbringing. In the Indian society the supreme woman has been embodied by Sita who is depicted in The Ramayana for the complete dedication to her husband. The image of women has emerged deep in the Indian psyche & women deliberately or involuntarily have molded themselves to conform to this image. It is only since the past there decodes due to the spread of education & western thought, women of India are evolving from their conventional roles of wife & mother to more independent human beings who are capable of much more than just fitting into their traditional images.

A change in the thought process in the Indian women & the gender roles she assumed underwent a drastic shift in the writings of post-independence era. Deshpande in particular has dealt with the changing ethos of womanhood and all her women protagonists occupy the centre stage. Jaya, the protagonist in 'That long silence' is the typical house-wife who follows her husband like a shadow. The decision of her husband Mohan about leaving his church gate flat and shift to a small, shabby flat at Dadar makes Jaya articulate: I remember how that he had assumed, I would accompany him taken for granted my approved of his plans. So was I, Sita following her husband to exile Savithri dogging death to reclaim her husband' It is here that Jaya starts rediscovering herself. She reflects upon her life and finds out that the life she had been living so far was not hers but somehow else's. She recollected how she had to give up the name 'Jaya' given by the father during her birth change it to 'Suhasini-a name given by her husband. Her entire life she had assumed the role of a soft, smiling, placid, nurturing mother & a wife Deshpande presents this facet of woman's life which intensely enlightens how the existence of a woman is confined to the gender norms of a close minded society.

Jaya is basically modern but rooted in tradition. Her innate sensitivity revolts against the attempts to claim herself into the ideological mould of a conventional wife. To conform to the ideals of a wife & a mother, she suppresses her emotional needs. Marriage and home does not give her any autonomy because Mohan takes up the role of a protector, provider without trying to understand her nature of silence. Their marital life turns shaky and gloomy due to the differences in their attitude.

Jaya's attitude seems to be similar. Her decision to give up 'Seetha' the column she was writing symbolizes her longingness to give up her traditional role-model wife. When Jaya searches through herself she finds, "the woman who had once lived Mohan's wife, Rahul's and Rati's mother, Not myself. Shashi Deshpande makes a deliberate focus on the marginalized voice of the Indian middle class women. She does not completely blame a man for subjugation of woman. It is the gender roles which confine a woman in the maze called as male

dominated society. Women may be weak but they have the will power to rise up like a phoenix out of its ashes. Jaya's vigor and courage makes her question the operation of society, religion & culture but she refrains herself from taking the radical path suggested by the western feminists. Woman rather prefer their own paths is seeking human happiness & emerging victorious. She brings harmony, Yet achieves individual self identity without changing the culture and tradition of the society.

II. Gender aspect in "The Dark Holds No Terror"

Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self, an exploration into the female Psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. Sarita the protagonist is a successful lady doctor. This discord & disillusionment of the educated women in a tradition bound Indian society, is the theme of the Novel. This novel explores the trauma of a middle class working woman who has become a trap in the male oriented society. The Heroine of the novel Sarita seeks freedom without impinging on her obligation and responsibilities & achieves harmony in life. It shows how she past a shadow on her married life and how boldly she stands up to situation and audaciously accepts the challenges of her own protegee. Sarita's tragic story "She was the victim of circumstances and convention an orthodox and reactionary society. A family consisted of only four persons her parents, younger brother named Dhruva & herself. In Indian middle class family as they are, son is always given a preferential treatment, while the daughter is subjected to a strict discipline and treated as a burden at times Sarita was no exception to this general rule.

Sarita's life was but a series of incidents which came one after the other. All by themselves, to deprive her of even the simplest of Joys. Her life began with serious charge of killing her brother Dhruva. She was just a victim of fate. Children very often show their resentment against parents, but when Sarita did it her brother, pampered and self willed as he was, followed her and got drowned. She made every possible effort that a child could make to retrieve her brother, but she couldn't succeed. The child was branded a murderer and the stigma stuck to her till the end. The stroke of fate alienated her from her mother completely. Her mother said time and again that she was the murderer and that she should have also died. The child could not bear the false allegation. Sarita, consequently was deprived of love even of the parents from childhood. This particular fact of her life was the cause, to a great extent, for her miseries. The novel The Dark Holds NO Terror, observes regretfully that woman, irrespective of her class and character, has to play a second fiddle to man, has no room of her own. A

woman is put under several restraints right from the day a girl becomes a woman due to menstruation. She was aghast to hear that she was to be ashamed of herself, even in the presence of her own father. It became torturous when she was prohibited to enter the kitchen or puja room during those three days.

Women in Indian society have to live virtually a life of a maid servant. Sarita had the example of her mother before her. She had to retreat to the kitchen to dress up, go to a ding and dark room to comb her hair and apply kumkum. She slept in bed like an over-night guest in a strange place. She had literally no room of her own. Sarita had experiences during her married life to show that women are often victims of male chauvinism. It happened once with herself also. Once she went home late in the night because she had to visit a newly admitted patient. She had to go directly from consulting room to the nursing home. She had asked her compunder to inform her husband that she would be late. Yet when she reached home, she found Manohar, her husband in a brooding mood. Sarita Couldn't understand what she had done to spoil the mood of her husband. While living in a chawl, Manohar was upset to see that people greeted his wife, showed greater regard for her. In order to be rid of such a humiliating situation, he declared that he was fed up of the place and wanted to shift to a new house. the situation became a cause for troubles of her married life. Man always tries to dominate over woman in Indian society. Sarita had heard about several women who lived utterly neglected yet they did not revolt or try to change their lives. Her own grandmother, she was told, had been deserted by her husband only a few years after marriage. She had experiences which made it clear to her that wives were treated as a possession and show pieces. She knew that her father had helped her against the wishes of her mother, but the question that tormented her was whether her father fought for her or against her mother, whether he used her as a weapon against her mother.. If he used her as a weapon, it would change the whole scenario. Instead of being helped, it would mean exploitation of a daughter against her mother, and exploitation of a woman by a man. If that was the case, it was to cause bitterness in her mind against her father, because he had exploited her daughter.

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande has presented the state of women in India. She has shown that woman suffer due to man and marriage. Shashi Deshpande is at her best in creating a central character, which not only describes her own experiences as a woman but also makes a fuller study of women in society. She has showed although woman has acquired education and knowledge alone with economic independence, they have been observed as a victim of domestic violence as wells not getting legal rights outside

home. She is very realistic on presenting different aspects of the problems and facts of a girl's life. She has shown how the heroine of this novel had to pass through difficult situations all of her life. Shashi Deshpande has made a survey of women who suffered due to superstitions prevailing in the society or male chauvinism.

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