

MEN AND WOMEN RELATIONSHIP IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

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Abstract

Traditions are necessity of human life that travels from one generation to another. At the same time while observing the past there will be some mutations gradually. These are exhibited in Shashi Deshpande novels. Shashi Deshpande has also tried to exhibit how to scroll on the path of modernity by holding the hand of tradition. The authentic recreation of India is also a distinct feature of her novels. The woman deprived of love, understanding, and companionship is the centre of her work. Her subjects are the realities of women's lives and the truths that lie behind their silence. Keeping in view the long-standing traditions of Indian society, she seeks solution to the problem by changing mind set of the men folk towards the women. The world of men now is in a process of women thinking. It cannot be changed without changing man's way of thinking.

Keywords: Women, Tradition, Modernity, Identity, Passion

Introduction:

Most of Deshpande's novels are in the form of first-person narrative. The narrator is usually the protagonist herself. It is only through her point of view that the readers are watching the actions. Since her novels are mainly concerned with the women's quest, every novel becomes an exploration into the female psyche as well as an understanding of the protagonist's place in it. When most Indian novelists glorify the virtues of Indian women such as their patience, chastity, selflessness and sacrifice, she explodes the myth of woman being an embodiment of all virtues.

Shashi Deshpande accidentally became a writer and her rise in the literary world has been meteoric. Her writing career began after the birth of her two sons. First, she started to write her experiences only and her father published it in Deccan Herald. Later when she was working for the magazine On Looker, she wrote a short story, which was published and was highly

appreciated by the readers. Then she started to write stories. She herself has stated how she suddenly became writer in her interview to BBC world service.

Men and Women relationship

The novel *Roots and Shadows* published by Orient Longmans in 1983 has won the Thirumathi Rangammal Prize as the best Indian novel of 1983. “Roots” stands for tradition and “Shadows” signifies the marginal culture. In this novel Deshpande’s protagonist Indu recalls how women are subjected to ill-treatment. She feels unhappy, repressed and restless and seeks liberation emotionally. She also bitterly recollected how crudely the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her – her husband Naren’s question as to why she always fought for her womanhood makes her think in retrospections about the day when she was first made aware of it:

My womanhood --- I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day, I had grown up. ‘You’re a woman now Kaki had told me. You can have babies yourself --- And I, who had all the child’s unconsciousness about my own body had for the first time felt an immense hatred for it. And don’t forget, she had ended ‘for four days now you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything’. And that had been my introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman. I was unclean – (*Roots and Shadows* 86-87).

Mother daughter relationship has also occupied an important place in Deshpande’s fiction. She does not give much credence to mother who is treated as goddess in Indian culture. She presents different facets of Mother-daughter relationship. The female protagonists of Deshpande are not representations of traditional ‘Sita’ images. They break out of the family mould to choose their own way of living life. All her novels deal with the women’s psyche and feminine consciousness. She seems interested in highlighting secondary position occupied by women. Shashi Deshpande is very aptly puts forth her idea of the ‘new woman’, a woman with a refreshed identity. She struggles to transcend her restrictive traditional role to make her new woman who decides to face her husband and not runaway.

Binding of Tradition

Deshpande’s main characters that can be seen moving from a passive acceptance to that of active assertion. They neither succumb to societal pressure nor break away from accepted traditional and societal institutions. They remain intact as successful individuals. Though they were born and brought up in traditional families, they want to be more than mere daughters, wives and mothers. They are neither rebels nor conformists. Every woman is a preserver of peace and happiness at home. If one says that every home is happy, it does not mean that all the members of the household are happy, but what it means is that all the women in the household are happy and their happiness keeps others’ happiness assured and in fact. Such happiness arises out of peaceful, harmonious and prosperous life in a house, and so it mainly depends on women who rule it for its betterment and economic advancement.

“Our own lands...for generations they were our...And we had to hand them over just like that....If someone had told me some years back, I’d never have believed it. When father was alive, he just had to go there and the fellows would fall at his feet. Now they have become too big. They know they have the upper hand. They’re arrogant, disrespectful. And for generations we were kings” (*RNS*59-60).

Deshpande has tried to highlight the matter of patriarchal society and its problems as a whole. She projects the inner world and thoughts of Indu, the heroine. She is a revolutionary woman, and she appears to be acting against dominance right from her childhood. She declines to be bullied down by Akka, the tormenter who is dominating her home. After marriage, she is totally unwilling to become a puppet in the hands of her husband Jayant. She is not able to understand the type of life she is leading.

We see a silver lining in Akka's character when her husband is struck by total paralysis. She serves her husband, gives him medicine and meal at appropriate time and takes excellent care for two years, but she has not forgotten the tortures of her husband, so she decides to take revenge on him. She does not allow his concubine, whom he loves passionately, to meet him and kicks her out of door. She is grieved to remember her sleepless and nightmarish nights, no night passed without tears. The novelist is of the view that arranged marriages are discriminatory towards women and that women do not get proper respect and place.

Indu laughs at the idea of not calling one's husband by his name as it shortens the age of the husband. She fails to understand the connection between a man's longevity and his wife calling him by name. For her it is as bad as praying to the tulsi to increase his life span. But she oscillates between tradition and modernity. She finds her roots in the age-old tradition or custom, she is not able to break herself free from the clutches of tradition. She painfully realizes that despite her education and exposure she was no different from the women who moved round the tulsi plant to increase their husband's life span.

Even her husband who is educated and apparently a modern man is only a typical Indian husband. He likes a submissive and passive wife. His wife tries her best to keep him happy and satisfied. She does not like the frustrating job of writing for the magazine but she continues the job just to keep her husband happy. During her career she comes to know about a social worker who had received an award for social services. She wrote an article on her because she was very much influenced by the soft-spoken woman, her seemingly sincere and dedicated behaviour.

Arise of Modernity

But that social worker turns out to be diametrically opposite what Indu thinks her to be. She is ruthless and unscrupulous and always in the pursuit of fame, power and money. Indu reads another article against the woman and shows it to her worldly wise editor, but he rejects the story written against the woman. She is shocked to see the woman's hypocrisy and the editor's attitude, she goes to her husband and tells him everything. Her husband is steeped in middle-class values and he says that he cannot change the whole system and asks her to continue her job for money. She starts writing what suits the magazine and not her own conscience. She makes a compromise with the situation just to keep her husband in good humour and realizes that in a hypocrite society success is counted sweetest.

Slowly but surely Indu realizes the absurdity of the existence. Marriage has changed her. To her great shock and surprise she finds that Jayant had not only expected her to submit but had taken her submission for granted and she also, without being aware of it, submitted herself to him step by step in the name of love. She realizes that it is not love but an adjustment because she never wants conflict in her married life. She has done love-marriage, so she does not want to give any chance to her parents to blame her for the step taken by her. She wants to prove her success.

We See Her Pathetic State:

The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this.....that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure, I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success.....And so I went on lying, even to myself.(115)

Here the novelist has very rightly and minutely put forth the situation in which young modern women, who are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, who leave behind the conventions and take the initiatives to join modernity, are entangled. Indu is of the view that one should pay attention to the dictates of one's conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as in action.

Hence, she starts questioning it and rethinking of her life such as her journalistic career, her marriage, and her illusion of hard-won-independence. She meets Naren, her cousin and feels that he understands her more than Jayant does. She gets attracted to him and shares her problems and lives with him. At last, she decides to return to Jayant. It shows her individuality and freedom.

In this Shashi Deshpande's novel, "Roots and Shadows" the protagonist love-hate relationship symbolizes the conflict between tradition and modernity. Looking at the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not blame entirely men for the subjugation of women.

Deshpande, as a writer of realism, likes to create the new atmosphere and widen the scope where the wife and husband live together happily and satisfactorily. She also likes to maintain a balance between old values of life and modern fashions coupled with individual and economic freedom. Sudden jump to modernity, according to Deshpande, may be harmful to the Indian women because of the deep-rooted culture and civilization which basically differs from that of the Western people.

Deshpande focuses on the issues regarding women struggles, rights and victories. Her 'new women' dare to question and challenge the age-old traditions. Her sole aim is to harmonize the man-woman relationship as equal partners. Her heroine is bolder, self-reliant and rebellious. At that end they realize that 'walking out' does not solve their problems.

Conclusion

Deshpande's novels do not limit itself to woman's predicament and woman's quest for identity and space as an individual but it also shows how conflict between tradition and modernity deals with each other and how it impacts on human relationship within the family. Shashi Deshpande has wonderfully conveyed that life is not pure acceptance or pure rejection but it is integration of both. The family is a foundation of human history and a very little change in the role of woman seems to threaten the existence of the family which follows certain values and traditions.

How traditions and beliefs can put its impact on relationships between parents and children, brother and sister, husband and wife. Here Shashi Deshpande wonderfully explores the journey of the protagonist from rejection of traditions and attraction to modernity to her acceptance of both at the balanced level. And all their transformations affect the concept of family. But it shows how the concept of family can exist in the battle between tradition and modern. It reveals cultural unity as well as diversity in the society, which can be useful for the students of literature from sociological point of view. The analysis of the literary works presented can also be helpful to the students of literature for further research in the field.

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