



## SOCIAL ISSUES OF WOMEN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

### DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

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A study of ShashiDeshpande's novels will automatically address the intricate issues of gender of which women are always as the victimized subject . Women in Indian society as they are elsewhere has been subjected to a position where gendering is prevalent under which social and cultural norms have been designed to opposed women as a class identified with their sex . Although gender is a social construct dividing man and woman as different categories of domination and subjugation. It is often related to how men and women are sexually divided and determined. Sex is a biological aspect of man and woman which has been used on the expectation of the latter by making deliberate confusion between sex and gender in the patriarchal society .

Gender is socially or culturally given with a number of attributes all of which aims at the perpetuation of women sufferings with ascribed roles , attitudes that would form the female nature and female essence , all to put women to a disadvantageous position . Gender therefore a deeply implanted ideology of man that allows him to control and rule women .It is based on the power relations between men and women . Feminist writers and critics are keen on deconstructing the imbalance caused by sexual or gender discrimination . It can be done through protestations and challenge in the society by a conscious campaign initiated and launched by women with the ultimate reason of removing the disparity between the sexes.

On the other hand , it can be achieve through the deconstructive approach by which the symbolic order is disturbed and marginal or minority voice entering and occupying the centre-stage . The two methods adopted by the Anglo-American feminists and the French Psycho-analytical feminists have resulted in dismissal or ordering of women in patriarchal society or the representation of women as stereotypes .

All conscious women writers in India like Anita Desai ,ShashiDeshpande and few others had taken up this challenging topic as the very core issues dealing with Indian novels . Perhaps they agree with the biological difference of the sexes but most of them cannot be simply carried by the assumption that all women are to be treated as inferior beings . Certainly women have the right to take decisions , determined their fact s ignoring the culturally given feminine aspects .



Time has come for the New Women to prove their potentials through new roles brought about by education and other forces that have harness women self-development . With this traditional cocoon position offered to women as to be dismantled .

In this chapter , the study will focus on how gender issues are related by ShashiDeshpande in her novels . There are however conformists and non-conformists in her novels among the women characters but this is not say that she accepts the oppressive system prevailing in India . She gives an opportunity to the readers to see how women suffer and are treated differently in male-oriented society . Through some of her characters , at times she tries to dissect the methodology surrounding gender . Now we can look at her novels with a critical bent of mind for more elaborate results to her best .

Notably in *The Dark Holds No Terror* , gender became a master identity, a system that shunned women from enjoying socially, economically, psychologically, politically, etc. Saru , the woman protagonist suffer from such mounting pressure , denying her opportunity to fulfill the potential as a human being . This makes her rise to fight for justice and gender equity further visualizing other forms of liberation with sexual liberation .Complimenting this ideas of ShashiDeshpande's protagonist Saru, considering gender as a social construct , we can fit in the expressions of Maureen Perry Jenkins :

Gender is not a given, it is not fixed, static phenomenon that all individuals of one biological sex experience in the same way. Gender is constructed and re- constricted continually through daily interaction.<sup>4</sup>

Gender became the hierarchal structure that provides opportunity to a man and oppression of women finds true in the family life of Sarita (Saru) before and after marriage. It has its construction in depth as Maureen Perry- Jenkins remarks:

Another strength of gender perspective is the focus on the construction on gender as a dynamic process. If we were to accept the sex role socialization perspective, it suggests that attitudes and behaviors socialized at an early age become stable and enduring personal characteristics.<sup>5</sup>

Thus ShashiDeshpande through her novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* reflects the necessities to be more generous and favorable to the female than our ancestors with their traditional voices and assumptions to please man and find happiness in pleasing .The female protagonist Saru deconstructs the traditional role of education, love and life by becoming a medical practitioner. She even promotes inter- caste marriage by getting married to Manohor of the different religion. The novel breaks the social conventions and the patriarchal ideology



which subordinate women to men in familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic domains which hamper socialization of women.

Saru, in her childhood suffers as a victim of gender and discrimination in her family. She was living under the threat of the values and norms established by the patriarchal society which are represented by her mother and then by her husband, Manohor. During her childhood days she was neglected for being a girl child. Dhruva, her brother is her mother's dearest and she a neglected one. She was even called a murderess of her brother making her life filled with deprivations. She was also denied further education as a medical practitioner on the same ground that she was a girl. She had to fight back and thus succeeded. To her, women education and economic self-independence became the insurance against any subordination or suppression. This is her realization even from the childhood when she saw her grandmother separated from her husband, who called her an unwanted burden. This is how Saru's self-will was strengthened more and more. But then again after marriage she suffered much because of the tyranny of her husband's nature. He dislikes women to be far better in status and respected by the society more than the husband. He even rejects the idea of women having enjoyed a higher economic position than their husbands. In a sta..... ShashiDeshpande writes against the traditional view through the lips of her protagonist Saru:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an M.A., you should be a B.A. If he is 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3" tall. If he is earning Rs. 500, you should never earn more than 499. That is the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage (124).

This idea is still implanted in the mind of Manohor. Therefore, he always takes revenge, not with words but with action upon his wife who earns more than him. He becomes cruel to her when he is insulted by her by her wife's higher economic position. This is seen when he was asked by a girl who came to interview Saru, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only butter but most of the bread as well?" (182). In fact this question makes the relationship between Saru (Sarita) and Manohar who takes to heart, and as a reply to that he now turns into a wild animal, becoming more sexually aggressive towards his wife that every night he takes revenge through his sexual brutality. Manu becomes a wild animal at night, taking revenge of the daytime happenings. Therefore Saru became a victim of marital rape several times. It becomes a terror, an inhuman insult to her personality. Thus the bringing of two bodies and souls is not the uniting force in married life. Rather it turns out to be an instrument of hate, and revenge that ultimately makes her go away from him. This in turn affects the whole being of the female protagonist and not to look for any kind of forgiveness. She refuses to accept the force of this culture and so struggles for removing it. She finds herself being tormented more and more in a male-dominated society. But she does not run away from the problems or surrender nor does she commit suicide.



At the same time she does not accept defeat, but accepts the challenge by proving herself as a good daughter by going to her father's house. There she is welcomed. Saru is now the liberated woman, liberated- socially, culturally, economically and sexually. With all these freedom she comes to live with Manu, not to seek his help but to compliment for everything that happens. Her coming back to the male-defined atmosphere in her husband's house is with the scope for change of a new society. With herself as the New Woman, Sarita (Saru) deconstruct the aged-old culture and tradition which ShashiDeshpande employs in all her novels. She is sufficient with her own self with the social recognition and achievement. Further her self-confidence give the power to regain love and affection from her father and the will power to fight the domineering attitude of her patriarchal husband. She is no more the meek and docile woman who suffer under the harsh patriarchal authority .This provides the picture of the woman who survives by breaking the androcentric world that is encountering throughout the lives of the middle-class Indian women. She thus fulfills her long desire for love, social recognition, the power and her craze to prove to the society that a woman is not less than a man. This makes the life of Saru comparable to the Dhammapada at the beginning of the novel:

You are your own refuge,

there is no other refuge.

This refuge is hard to achieve. (7)

This connects to the life of Saru who goes for support but ends up as a self-sufficient woman. Such portraying of Saru's struggle for liberation of Women attacks patriarchal structure and discrimination under the gender based patriarchal society that are found among us since the beginning of the time.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu rejects the cultural feminity, the naturally given appearance, role, character and so by just becoming a woman. Here, the female protagonist is undertaking a journey towards deconstructing the sexual and gender differences so as to break the older and outdated models, inscribed by the hostile-masculine world. ShashiDeshpande here strives to achieve personhood without negating the family and the society. She creates a picture of woman as a subject in her own right; reflecting her potentialities for action and self-actualization. Deshpande is all out against the position of woman that insists on women's passivity. In her fiction she is the woman of different mindset - those who are tradition-bound, and who are modernist in outlook. The later group is quite independent and they can transgress the gender and sexual discrimination prevalent in traditional Indian writings. To speak of or act against such a



system calls for entering into the system and breaking from inside. This is what Deshpande does in her fiction. In this connection what ShubhaDwivedi says may be seen:

Her fiction present a murkiest picture of gender based compartmentalization in our society and she goes to the root of hegemonical politics where women are depicted as women while theoretically 'femininity' is valued.<sup>6</sup>

Roots and Shadows revolves round the orthodoxy of a middle-class Brahmin family headed by Akka, the mother surrogate. Here is shown a journey by Indu across the cultural confinement of patriarchy, represented by the ancestral home which reminds us of.....House in A House for Mr. Biswas. The home picturises the division of male and female worlds in clear terms in regard to the code of conduct, beliefs, customs and role allocation in clear terms. This relates to the biologism and sexism which retard the mental, emotional and intellectual growth of Indian women, strangling their efforts at selfhood. Roots and Shadows thus confirms the 'cultural colonization' where women are subjected to hardships and confinement to their homes, bedrooms, kitchens, and attics, muted by the society, and crippled by a sense of inferior complex, non-entity and loss of 'self'. Against these ShashiDeshpande brings out the journalist, a woman, as an agent of change, a change for the better, involving positive constructs. The concept of domestic division of labour under gender specification keep the life of the Indian women bound. ShashiDeshpande through her protagonist dares to alter the ideologies of male superiority and the circumscribing perspective enclosed under patriarchy.

Through her process of portraying her inner conflict as an artist Indu discovers her real "self". It is the combination of her inner and outer voyages of self-discovery that works against and strikes the severally colonized and biologically subjugated women subject. Her dissatisfaction with her women's magazine and leaving it is expressive of her sensitivity towards the discrimination against girls and women – "Women, women, women. I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. As if we had locked ourselves and thrown away the key"(78).

The protagonists of ShashiDeshpande are always forced to accept femaleness despite their attempts to fight gender roles. Indu even though does not remember her mother, is under the dictatorial authority of Akka, projecting marriage as the final goal in life. Indu rejects the rituals of praying husbands indicating ShashiDeshpande's rejection of female bonding and thus she marries Jayant, a person of her own choice. But soon she comes to know that in marriage the wife has to do only what the husband want: "When I look into the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants what he would like. What would please him..." (p...). Here Deshpande uses the tools of withdrawal for her protagonists from their suffocating circumstances of life for self-realization. It is a kind of



psychological and sociological withdrawal to rediscover personality and liberty. Here Indira Nityanandam reflects:

Withdrawal is not a means of escape but a means to self-realization. Having withdrawn from Jayant physically and being away from their home, Indu knows what she wants from the future. The restricting bonds that she had tormented herself with could be totally broken as she realizes that they were all self-made.<sup>7</sup>

It happens to Indu when she goes back and starts her life, realizing what she wants from life. Her physical withdrawal from her husband while living in Akka's house gives self-realization in true sense of the term. It is not the sense of escape but a withdrawal necessary for re-integration into the society; breaking the illusions that she had created and then face life courageously.

Out of self-realization, the protagonist of ShashiDeshpande could emerge as individuals in their own right from their assigned roles, without breaking the societal pressures and without going away from the accepted, tradition, social institutional, the protagonist could achieve success as individuals. The conflicts and dilemmas of life gives them individual freedom and growth in the tradition-oriented, middle-class family.

In *The Binding Vine*, the personal experiences of the protagonist Urmi through education and accumulated knowledge from self-analysis leads to psychic progression, self-discovery and protest. She is representing the Indian woman with regard to their status in their society. She is challenging against the indifferent Indian male role model; their patriarchal structure and chauvinistic nature. She portrays a women faced with family, social, economic and political convulsions, corruptions, fears, chaos, disintegratetion, abuse of power and individualism.

*The Binding Vine* is a disturbing story of one woman's struggle for independence and her eventual acceptance of the position of the traditional Indian wife. The novel can be refered to as a perfect example of rape; forced sexual relationship where women are like Barbies for men to play with. In the fiction, Mira is the mother-in-law of the protagonist Urmi who died leaving all her stories of oppression and agonies in diaries. The writings are a struggling against internalization of role models thrust upon women. It expresses the untold narrative of being a woman. Probably, the writings are the valuable insights of the societies giving psychological understanding, and reformation of epistemological constructs. Here we can bring in Jasbir Jain's words:



Women's writing focuses attention on both the manifestation of a female sensibility, a feminine reality, and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality.<sup>8</sup>

Young Mira is subjected to rape in her marriage. She is a symbol of female oppression as express in her poems.

“Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm

will I emerge a beauteous being?

Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?” (P. 65)

Such violence and denigration is more worst when we come within the sanctity of marriage. Mira always suffers marital rape whose result is a clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband. It leads to a physical repulsion from the man that married.

Rape is the worst of all crimes even more heinous than murder. In murder, the victim dies. But the victim of rape has to go through her life with the stigma of rape. The effect of rape is horrific. The murder victim is gone, but a rape victim can never forget. Hence, rape is a terrible moment, but is a planned action of vengeance. The victim is like a living corpse, as happens to Kalpana, dejected by the society; a blackening of the victim's name. Hence, Kalpana mother cried out “I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girl, we're decent people” (P. 58). It clearly depicts the discrimination between man and woman, where rape is the form of total suppression and oppression to woman. Further she expresses the social concept of the difference:

“If a girlshonour is lost, what's left? The girl doesn't have to do nothing wrong, people will always point a fingered at her”. She further says to the doctor;” even if its true, keep it to yourself, don't let anyone know of it. I have another daughter, what will become of her.....?” (P. 59)



Having a daughter seems to be a curse on the part of the parents. Because there is no sympathy for her. On the Contrary, society believes that she must have done something wrong to deserve it. She is considered guilty or of loose morals. Her family will have to bear barbed remarks as well. The victim has to live the entire life under a shadow. Her character, her chastity, personal habits are all mercilessly probed into as if in some way or the other she deserves to be regarded. Under such conditions, no woman is allowed to have the privacy of her tongue in a patriarchy. It spring on every conscious individual. So man can easily escape to patriarchy.

As against the patriarchal structure, ShashiDeshpande brings out Urmi, the protagonist to fight out the age old discrimination between man and woman. She brings out a new image of the Indian woman, emerged and subverted the stereotyped visions of Indian woman each as demure seductress or passive and silent mothers. Through UrmiShashiDeshpande makes the woman realize that although progress is there, woman have extreme strength and honorably contributed to the achievements of Indian community.

Urmi represents the contemporary woman's struggle to attain autonomous selfhood .The protagonist assert herself as independent individual through confrontations with the traditional constraints in Indian society.

ShashiDeshpande's woman protagonist usually started with the traditional roles assigned to them by the society. They are not satisfied with their roles since they have a strong urge for liberation. They struggle the hazardous way to assert their own self, their individual to emancipation from the age-old patriarchal pattern of thought, quite different from the western feminist movement. So, S.D. in most of her novels presents the real picture of the Indian society and a woman's position having to freedom or separate state; political or otherwise . Keeping in view for all this, she had depicted the life of a middle-class, young and educated house wife as the protagonist of her novel in *That Long Silence*. Jaya, the protagonist represents the woman who suffers from all sorts of inhuman behavior of the husband and never speaks a word against him. But her excessive tolerance generates the source of her crisis where she wanted to present her views and ideas before the society. To this Guru CharanBehera reflects:

*That Long Silence*, thus is a representation of a woman's struggle in marked by supremacist ideology and of her situation as a woman writer in a patriarchal literarily 9



The novel thus begins with the married life of Jaya and Mohan, shifted and settled at Dadar flat. The First day make her feel about them as “A pair of bullocks yoked together .... it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?(P.11-12) During the period of their stay she suffers physically and mentally, quite intolerable for her, a period filled with only the waiting and hysteria of self-examination, self-analysis and self-criticism. She became bored with such social structure of double standards. But to Mohan; “He did not know what waiting was. He had steadily moved from one moment to the next” (P.30). But to woman everything in their life is waiting right from their childhood till death as ShashiDeshpande depicts “wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you have kids” (P.30). Besides Jaya has many other things to wait for,”...waiting fearfully for disaster, for a catastrophe

“(P.30). She wants to speak up and protest against such odds and

looks between man and woman. But she can't say anything in order to save the peace of the family. She also remember the word of Vanitamami-“A husband is like a sheltering tree”(P.137).

The novel thus focus on gender differentiation and valouring of the male categories, along with the silence and surrender to which woman is subjected to in our society, with no identity of her own, “Just emptiness and silence”(P.144). To this R.K. Sharma remarks that the protagonist of ShashiDeshpande emerge from conservative, middle-class, semi-urban milieu and thus writes:

While it gives them an inherent strength to survive, it also handicaps them by burdening them with heavy inhibitions. The notion that woman is inferior to men is instilled into them from the start, giving them a mindset which they find difficult to discard subsequently.<sup>10</sup>

But the protagonist Jaya is not static or passive cling to her husband. She craved for independence, and struggling to become more independent of her

and strong enough to fall back on her own inner resources. ShashiDeshpande gives Jaya, the opportunity to realize and then to express herself. Her home acts as the only home to realize her inner feelings. So, in spite of Mohan's disapproval to her writing for the magazine, she keeps writing serious stories and sending them to magazines. Her writings are merely a form of escape,



a creeping into a 'safe hole' (p.149) a struggle to give up the traditional role of a model wife. Altogether the novel focus on the life of Indian woman, their fear, doubts guilt, anger, feelings and lack of understanding intensifying the crisis of human values. But ShashiDeshpande gives an unexpected twist at the end with her innate pragmatism and traditional middle-class background. She does not rebel against the male-dominated world to the bitter end. So, Jaya is looking hopefully towards the future. But unlike other female protagonists of ShashiDeshpande, Jaya does not feel trapped or vulnerable. Her's is a 'homecoming' (25), a resurgence of strength. To this R. K. Sharma confirms:

Marriage may not offer the best of all possible worlds to a man and a woman, yet in the present dispensation it is more or less essential and must be made to work, for neither a man nor a woman is complete in himself or herself. Both biologically and emotionally they need each other and if they can develop a measure of harmony in their relations, so much the better. 11

Thus the novelist concludes by resolving the marital discord, making Jaya and Mohan compromise to satisfy the typical middle-class Indian society. The home continues to be a domain of woman, the only place where they can realize themselves. The woman is given the opportunity to realize rather than to express herself even though it would be a highly challenging one.

Hence ShashiDeshpande concedes through Jaya that, "we don't change overnight,... But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: Life has always to be made possible" (193). This is the innate idea which leads to the emancipation of the woman.

ShashiDeshpande through her novels is delving into the labyrinthine depths. Of the Indian psyche and shows its relation to the society. She shows the repressions of the woman's feelings and desire which are in consonance of the accepted norms of the society. Her protagonists are therefore women; who are mercilessly denied of all opportunities for open expressions of their true feelings and emotions in the tradition-bond Indian society. This leads to the birth of many great disadvantages in their life when compared to men. They are being



compelled to silently suffer the limited freedom, insular mode and the strains of life, but in return ShashiDeshpande through her

protagonists fight against such social injunctions for revenge and the compulsion for revenge. To this R.S. Pathak remarks:

In due course, Indian women novelists aimed at portraying realistically Indian women's sense of frustration and their alienation. Their characters are shown very often as torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity.<sup>12</sup>

Hence ShashiDeshpande produced her protagonists to have the strength of their own and remain uncrushed despite the challenges and hostilities. She fights for justice of men and women as human beings. It is more strengthened by her words of supporting Simone de Beauvoir's words that all are humane is much more important than our being men and women. Her fight against categorization is clearly depicted in her fiction *A Matter of Time*.

The novel revolves round the presentation of their women generation in the same family under one roof with Kalyani the granddaughter as the first generation followed by Sumi, the mother and Aru, the daughter. The "Big House" named "Vishwas" stands as a potent symbol of patriarchy, which was built "by a man not just for himself but also for his son and sons' sons" (3). This marks the power of patriarchy and the evidence of male-domination. Only at the hands of Kalyani and Aru, there came the ending of male anarchy in the house. But the reign needs to be countered, deconstruct and re-construct. Here the three protagonists have their own values and mental setup; "a finely individualized unconventional relationship" (23), reading their personalities. This novel begins with the working out of Gopal from his family which became the pivot of the whole stories and its reactions.

Among the three characters, Kalyani is the worst sufferer under discrimination. She faced a great disappointment only because she "was a girl" (129). In marriage also, hers is an arranged one to her maternal uncle, to save and prevent the property. Again the lost of her four-years-old mentally retarded son brought her marital life to an end. Right from that incident Shripati; Kalyani's husband stopped speaking to her for about thirty-five years. This oppressive silence



created a picture of Kalyani as a self-punishment woman right from childhood. Here UshaBande reaffirms:

The family becomes complete when a son is born, a woman feels fulfilled as a mother of a male child. Kalyani has been the sufferer for being born a girl while her mother expected a son.<sup>13</sup>

This reveals the life of Kalyani as a silent suffering being, a woman, throughout her life. She represents the typical and faithful self-sacrificing character of the Indian women of the older generation.

Sumi, which represents the present day India suffers from the socio-cultural construct. To her ShashiDeshpande works out the man-woman discrimination under the entire patriarchal structure that has generated the value system. Gopal himself is tinged with the patriarchal thinking. He believes that women have no existential problems. But to Sumi, ShashiDeshpande brings out a different character having good opinion of herself. She is a person who does not want pity but getting on with life even after her husband Gopal walks out her married life. Her self-controlled character is revealed as she tells to Devaki:

“ I’ve never been able to cry easily, you know that. And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don’t know why and may be he doesn’t know, either? And that I am angry and humiliated and confused...? Let that be, we won’t go into it now” (P.107).

Sumi could easily relate herself to the world even though Gopal walks away. Her creativity revives and shows boundless patience. She does this not because she doesn’t have the courage to counter Gopal but knows the futility of remonstrance. She is refraining from the unpleasantness that happens in a patriarchal society. Hers is not passive to this UshaBande says:

A closer look at her refusal to react to Gopal shows not a passive acceptance of man’s supremacy but a contestation, a critique of tradition.<sup>14</sup>



The reason made her express; “I just want to get on with my life..... let him go, Aru, just let him go” (P.61). This reflects ShashiDeshpande’s presentation of her protagonist as an “unusual people” (P.26), an epitome of silent suffering and passive resistance; the boundless patience of the middle-class Indian women. Here, R.S. Pathak remarks Sumi as heroic:

Her silent suffering assumes at times a heroic proportion. She is not unaware of the bliss of human relationships, but she accepts the harsh facts of life boldly ...15

Thus the man-woman relationships in her novels are oppressive, strange, uncomfortable or silent out of discrimination under patriarchy.

Likewise, Aru, the third protagonist of *A Matter of Time*, Sumi’s eldest daughter is the most sensitive character, rebellious and understanding. She is strictly against the oppression and the discriminating looks of the women. So, Gopal’s walking away on his family is thus expressed by her “not just a tragedy, it is both a shame and disgrace” (P.13) and its acceptance by Sumi as “violent and sharp” (21). She regarded marriage as the great provider of space for oppression and harassment of woman, making her a hated woman. She declares; “I’m never going to get married,” (176) for she could perceive “new dimensions of betrayal and cruelty in the woman-man relationship” (145). Here, ShashiDeshpande’s depiction of marriage is reflected as a means for economic security. To this Jasbir Jain reflects:

Marriage is viewed not as self-fulfillment, but as fulfillment of a social and familial duty where duty is foregrounded as a commodity.16

The protagonist Aru is clearly examining and understanding the life of the Indian woman handed down through generations. This ShashiDeshpande reveals that women live not only through their bodies, but also their minds. The protagonist, Aru is observing the Indian woman handed down through generations. First the novelist created Kalyani representing the survival could silently reach out to others and feel the predicament of the Indian woman keenly and perfectly. The novel clearly relates the network of human bonds and affiliations between each and every person. To this R.S. Pathak comments:

The novelist has tried to show that human relationships tend to have a continuity and human beings, despite inter-generational shifts, have potential of corresponding with each other in



certain significant respects. It is this continuity of relationship that ultimately gives meaning to life in the long run.17

Thus the novel brings out the community of woman with a common heritage of expression, to understand themselves, working out towards a social change in a positive way.

Thereafter in mother novel *If I Die Today*, the story revolves round the story of a middle-class family life, caught in a tender trap by the silent action of her husbands. Even though the novel moves around the chain of deaths, there is an underlying theme of women's predicament. Here Avadesh Kumar reflects:

ShashiDeshpande narrates the predicament of women in such a way as would voice her concerns for problems and perils of those of her sex.18

The novelist depicts the life of woman after marriage; their ongoing life and what the future stores for them. She gives a clear vision of the surface blessed with a happy married life and children but underneath rotten at domestic levels and the relations distorted. The main cause of disturbing the existing equilibrium came out to be from the education, economic independence and motherhood. It reveals the deconstruction of the traditional image of woman under the patriarchal construct or the socio-cultural construct. Here we can bring in the kind of relationship that Manju and Vijay faced in their married life. Manju turns to be an emotional pretzel even though others saw her as a loving, affectionate and understanding women. She suffers silently and quite miserable, unable to find out the real cause of her sufferings. To this, ShashiDeshpande brings out the real plight of the middle-class Indian wife, who suffers silently out of fraught, silence and barriers in their married life. This makes herself "feel like a breeding animal" (23). The condition creates Avadesh Kumar Singh claim:

... she is neither content nor confident. She is in a rather miserable state and unable to see that her feelings of misery are not due to her faults. She seems to have become a victim of what psychologists call a passive aggressive husband who neither hits the wife nor says a word to her, but by his actions and comments make her feel guilty, ridden and censured. It is through this tender trap that Manju and others like her find their married life controlled by their male counterparts.19

It reveals the attitude of the middle-class male that dominates the woman rights from the moment of marriage. The problem does not lie either with womanhood, wifehood or motherhood. Marriages of all the characters in the novel are almost on the verge of wreckage due to the ideology of the "Indian male" (27) and burden towards the woman.



ShashiDeshpande also brings out the character of Dr. Kulkarni representing the traditional Hindu male who longs for a son and a heir. The discrimination between a man and a woman starts even in the mind of such a well-educated man, reducing the wife Shanta into a colorless “Shadow of her husband” (36). Avadesh again reflects to the life of a womanhood without motherhood, a burden as:

Womanhood without motherhood remains inadequate but it inveigles a woman into dependence and reduces her to a shadow of her husband.<sup>20</sup>

This makes her slowly silenced and distanced herself from her motherhood and wifhood. But she does not leave the family, but comes back, a home coming, as found in all the novels of ShashiDeshpande, a heart that changed, a mind with freedom, that is evident in act the middle-class wives. Meanwhile, life sprouts again through the narrator who gave birth to a baby girl at the end, naming it Gauri according to the wish marked the reconciliation between the husband and the wife, a celebration of life, referring to all the Indian middle-class families. Hence ShashiDeshpande could successfully bring out an optimistic and conciliatory note in the novel.

In *Come up and Be Death*, a psychological thriller, involved murder mystery framework with the Indian milieu. The conflicts resembling Indian

Middle – class realities arises and felt through a woman’s gaze; the chief protagonist, Kshama.

Here ShashiDeshpande brings out the postmodernist relationship with the readers. The novelist thus begins with the life in a girl school in the post-independence era. ShashiDeshpande projected KshamaRao, as an authoritative picture, the Head Mistress of the school, to handle crisis happen in her custody. The first crisis was on the death of Mridula, a fifteen years old student, who happens to be pregnant. Here, among the fear and trauma of death, the novelist brings in the domination and the sufferings of womenfolk. This is evident with Mridula’s death, which might be the outcome of pregnancy. Hers may be of rape, the symbol of male domination. Among the macabre drama, she also recollects her traumatic childhood, sibling rivalries, a father who is larger than life and a younger brother who is always preferred by her parents. She is an epitome of a woman’s character suffered under patriarchy, right from childhood. To this A.A. Mutalik-Desai comments:



She flares upon at a particularly low ebb in her emotions. So, this fragile existence, this arrangement, this retreats behind the walls of the school separating her from the realities of life, insulating her from her own inward conflicts comes crumbling down with the death of Mridula .21

Here ShashiDeshpande brings out the postmodernist relationship with the readers. She begins with the line of the girls in a school in the post-independence era. There is an exploring of the predicament of men and women hailing from a middle-class milieu. Thus she brings out Kshama, the chief protagonist as a young, cool, efficient, phlegmatic, and prim with a good manner. She got praises and personal life is filled with complexes and agitations. To this Rama Gautam remarks:

Thus there are faint and dark murmurings within, juxtaposed with a calm, correct and dainty faced.22

This created a troubled memory that always haunt and intimidate her. It looks shape in the form of her cousin Devayani and younger brother Pratap, who is in charge of her. Thus she says “Am I my brother’s keeper”

(75). He mind keeps recollecting the discriminations look between a male and female in her past life. There is the regard for Pratap as the sole heir of their parents, “the son”. The condition let Kshama feels to have no relation with her father; “There is nothing left of all that there was between Appa and me...” (95). Such emotional, fragile existence; the outcome of the patriarchal society makes the chief protagonist feels alienated from such a society. Devayani is also one of the victim of the Patriarchal Society; a woman who survives by seeking support and shelter at her sisters place after the death of her parents. She is the picture of a lone woman, unmarried, struggling for existence in the male-dominated society, striving to forget the past frustrations and resentments by making herself busy with her task as a servant.

As with the case of ShashiDespande’s other novels, *Come Up and Be Death* also deals with women’s silences, revealing the truth behind the silences. Here Rama Gautam again comments:



Silences of a mother, daughter, sister, widow, a young girl, silences that speaks a thousand words that pave the way to search for one's own space and voice, to come to terms with oneself. It reflects the life in post-independence era, where a discrimination happens between man and woman; the life of the woman under total suppression by the male-sections of the society.

Like other novels, ShashiDeshpande ends with the homecoming of the protagonists, a realization that they could find release from their enforced confinement. Thus Devayani returns to her home and leads an independent life. Then Kshama realize after Devayani has left: "I know we have to break down our walls" (234). She could thus successfully analyse the life of the women caught between tradition and modernity; home and freedom.

ShashiDeshpande reflects through her novels, the unhappy realities of Indian life, the melancholic world of the woman. Her protagonists tried to conform to their assigned roles and ends with an optimistic note, with the possibility of coming to a positive action in future. To this R.S. Pathak remarks the optimistic view of the novelist:

The novelist emerges in them as a bridge-builder between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. For this and for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it in a sensitive and authentic manner her novels are of immense value. 24

It is quite remarkable to include that gender is a concept of power. And with the newly accepted rules and forms, women generally have changed.

Significantly today's gender roles have been reversed. Instead of challenging and discarding sexist stereotypes of male aggression and destruction, it is only reversing and justifying them as expressions of the social behavior. Generation's changes, resulting to the drastic and immediate changes – socially, politically, economically and psychologically. It is a symbol of protest against centuries old male oppression. It is not only to liberate the women, but to establish more equitable just men– women relationships, to deconstruct the notions of women as tender and men as reasonable.

Hence, ShashiDeshpande's treatment of human predicament with the contemporary angst in an existential manner reflects gloom and depression. But the women protagonists learn from their life and its sufferings, coming at a compromise and find balance in life at the end. They have the dignity and strength of their own. At the same time, they does not affect others but adjust and accommodate without sacrificing their identity, facing the challenges of life boldly and resolutely.



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