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MAKING OF THE NEW WOMAN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S SELECT NOVELS

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande has created authentic female characters-flesh-and - blood characters with recognizable credentials. She believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be. There are number of Indian novels women facing with problems in their day- to- day lives. She shows her concern about women who are helpless on account of orthodox and established norms, beliefs, customs and conventions deeply rooted in Indian Patriarchy. She wants her protagonist to free themselves from male-ego and male domination. Her fiction explores the search of the women to fulfill herself as a human being; independent of her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother Deshpande's concern and sympathy are primarily for the women. Women's struggle to secure self-identity and self-respect for themselves should be the main concern. Her protagonist fights for their own rights and equality. She wants them to be complete and independent human being, to be 'new' and 'modern' in the true sense of the term. The heroines of Deshpande are totally different in the sense that they explode the myth of man's superiority and the myth of woman being the paragon of all virtues. Female character occupies a pivotal position in her novels. She creates live characters of day -to- day life and carefully avoided creating wooden characters to fulfill her dream. The novelist presents the portrayal of women characters. But she is against the character of superwoman or idealizing them.

Keywords

Self-Actualization, Revolutionary, Distressing, Sterling, Silence, Liberation.

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Shashi Deshpande, a popular Indian woman novelist in English, has ten novels, two novellas and a large number of short stories to her credit. Her women- oriented novels deal with the middle-class career oriented Indian women with their pains, sorrows and sufferings. Being a feminist, she raises her voice protest against injustice to them in name of gender-discrimination deeply rooted in Indian society. She is basically concerned with the prediction of appear 'new' women ready to have their own ways remaining well within the boundaries of Indian family and society. She wants her women to be complete and independent human individuals, equal to their male-counterparts. Deshpande sees the need to balance the man-woman relationship as equal partners. There is no victory in the domination and desolation of the male. The need is to see each other's need for space, freedom of expression and love (Kaur, 2009: 24)

Female protagonist in Deshpande's novels stand apart of their counterparts in the writings of many contemporary women writers. Sandwiched between tradition and modernity, fantasy and reality. Progressing self- analysis, protest and self - discovery, they try to create both physical and non-physical space for themselves to grow on their own. New woman, Deshpande's protagonists are all educated, proactive and progressive, moving on unafraid. Anita Myles writes:

Shashi Deshpande, in all her novels, exhibits a sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of human mind and society. She focuses in all detail working of psyche of her women characters that plunge into periods of psychic disturbance due to traumatic experiences of life. Nevertheless, the suffering leads to a stage of self- introspection and later self- discovery which evinces a fresh perception of life. Ultimately her characters emerge out of the crisis as strong women willing to compromise with life as it comes. In her analysis of the post-modern dilemma of women, she concentrates on career women and the problems they face outside the threshold of their homes in a basically male-dominated social set up. (Myles 11).

Deshpande wants her women not to remain quiet, silent, passive and tolerant but to appear as strong, confident and positive characters in their own way, attempting to and

succeeding in striking a fine balance between traditional beliefs and individual needs. She wants them to be 'new' and 'modern' in the true sense of the term. The present article is an attempt to peep deep into the inner psyche and responsiveness of her protagonist emerging as 'new' women set on to move on with their lives with courage, confidence and will power. A new woman is one who is bold and strong, rebellious and groundbreaking, who has an open mind to accept new ideas, which believes in the principles of individuality, equality and freedom and who strong and fearlessly stands against orthodox, norms and beliefs, customs and protocol which are in favor of men. A 'new' woman is one who is conscious of herself as a free and independent individual willing to live with a heightened sense of dignity, status and individuality. She is a product of a new social and economic order in which she casts her submission, silence and invisibility. The New woman is primarily characterized by the spirit of defiance, visibly exercising its influence on all relationship, the boundaries of time and space. A woman's rejection of her assigned role inside the family and society refusal, refusal to follow traditional paths, innate disgust to the idealism associated with normal physical functions of the body such as menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth which often act as motivation for sexual colonialism, avoidance to the practice of favouring the male child over and above the girl child. Deshpande believes that the strength of the woman lies in the power of her feminine sensibility. Her women undertake a journey towards self- awareness, self-realization, self-assertion and self- discovery. Deshpande wants her female protagonist are educated, career - oriented and economically independent. They fight to prove themselves as individuals attempting to set themselves free from traditional, social and moral restraint and hoping to live their lives with dignity and status. Her protagonist is determined to live without fear, fear of being unloved, misjudged and misunderstood. They are typical Indian women with strong desire to assert their self, identity and individuality. Women who struggle to find and preserve their identity as free human beings they undertake a successful journey towards their intellectual, psychological and growth and development. They are strong in the sense that they refuse to sacrifice their self and ultimately emerge as 'new' women ready to face their life with courage, confidence and will power.

Sarita, the protagonist of the novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is a modern woman who strongly recants the attack of Indian Patriarchal society on her identity and individuality. It explodes the myth of manes unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues (Paul 30). Sarita is a symbol of a progressive woman who always tries to exercise her influence on others. She desires to join medicine in order to be economically independent. With her father's support, she goes for her medical education. Being ambitious and revolutionary by nature, she revolt against her parents and marries Manu and leaves her parental home. But Sarita realizes her marriage become a trap in which she is caught to go through marital violence imposed on her almost every night by her sadist husband. She returns to her parental home to escape from all her unbearable nightmares and her husband's sadism. Away from her husband and his sexual violence learns a lot from Madhav who unknowingly makes her change her approach to her life. She is motivated by his words 'My life is my own'. These words bring her sudden change in her internal behaviour. She realizes that self- trust plays a constructive role in human life. She believes: 'If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk'. (Deshpande 220). She realizes that she has destroyed her life. She is responsible for her own trouble. She emerges as a 'new' woman ready to face her marital life on her own terms and conditions.

Jaya, the protagonist of the novel, *That Long Silence*, has been a silent sufferer right from her childhood. She is Indian wife, marries Mohan, her husband as a sheltering tree. A mother of two children follows her husband blindly and obediently. She is far away from happiness in her marital life. When Mohan leaves her; she begins to feel that her marriage is almost over. She believes that it is difficult for the woman to live without her husband. The novel traces how Jaya gradually come out as a confident individual fully in the control of herself and refuses to be led by trap. The protagonist of the novel rejects the image of traditional women like Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. She prefers the image of a pair of the bullock to describe a married couple. She decides to erase her long silence, to throw off the label of a mute and silent sufferer and not to be mere shadow of her husband. She decides to follow Krishna's advice to Arjuna: "yathecchasi tatha kuru", the words that mean, 'Do as you desire, in her life. She decides to do what she desires. She confidently says: "I'm not afraid anymore. The panic has gone" (191). She rejects the image of marriage as two bullocks yoked together. She comes out as a new woman by rejecting the name 'Suhasini' given to her by her husband. She is determined to declare herself and individuality and to move on with her marriage on her own terms.

Madhu, the protagonist of the novel *Small Remedies*, is fully aware of the fact that women are the victims of social evils like gender-discrimination and marital violence. *Small Remedies* is a vivid portrait gallery of the members of a large family wherein no characters share similar tastes. She is characterized by the spirit of rebelliousness which is expressed through her rejection of her assigned role in her family and society, her refusal to follow the traditional ways of life her hatred to the practice of favouring the male child and her inattention for the conventional social taboos. Caught in her own pain over the loss of her only son, Aditya, she tries to find a way out of her own grief with courage and confidence. She is a 'new' woman in the true sense of the term as she raises a voice of protest against injustice done to women in the name gender-discrimination. Savitribai and Leela, too, represent 'new' Indian women who have courage, confidence; urge and ambition to revolt against bad transgress the established norms, beliefs, customs and conventions of Indian society. The novel explores the lives of two women, Savitribai, who is obsessed with music and Leela who is a passionate believer in communism. Savitribai, born in an orthodox Hindu family, elopes with her *Muslim* lover, Ghulam saab to follow her career in the field of music while gentle and strong-willed Leela gives her life to the party and to working with the factory workers in Mumbai. Indu, the protagonist of the novel, *Roots and Shadows*, symbolizes 'new' women who live in a close association with society keeping aside all narrow and outdated social norms and conventions. She is against blind faith and superstitions, dowry system, class-distinction, caste-system and gender- discrimination. Being a girl, she suffers a lot in the name of gender- discrimination in her childhood. Follows the step of Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, by marrying Jayant, man of different caste, in order to liberate herself from the trap of her ancestral home. She was frustrated with her marital life. During Akka's illness, she gets a chance to set herself free from the trap of marriage. Away from her husband, she breaks all conventions by getting physical relationship with Naren. She was not happy away from her husband. She begins to believe that she herself to be blamed for the marital conflict separated from her husband. She created the hell out of the heaven, locked herself in the cage and thrown away the keys. She felt herself guilt of her physical relationship with Naren, she rethink about her life her career as a writer,

her marriage, her relationship with her husband. At last she decides to go back to her marital home and to start her life fresh.

Shashi Deshpande, at heart, is a realist. She presents a credible story of authentic characters and not shadowy abstractions. She believes in presenting day- to-day life and very carefully avoided creating wooden characters to fulfill her dream. Deshpande's women characters have the strength of their own, and in spite of the challenges and hostilities, remain unhurt. Every heroine of her novel rejects rituals that are the fragment of the past. Deshpande's women protagonist are determined to reject the old myth of femininity that makes the woman a typical Indian woman, a martyr, a heroine to use Indu's words, a woman moving around her husband, living for her husband, submitting herself and individuality and to live a life of a human being as a free and independent individual. Indu and Jaya after realization their mistake decides to face their husbands and live their life fresh. Instead of running away from the problems, they are determined to face them. The novels of Shashi Deshpande reveal the fact that she upgrades the position of women. She strongly believes in the reciprocal relation between men and women. She feels that both men and women should understand each other to make their lives beautiful. As we see Jaya and Indu hoping for the happiness and peace in their life, decide to start marital lives with new hope and confidence. They are certainly not perfect and complete human beings. However, with morality as well as wickedness in them they succeed in make an appearance as 'new' women ready to face their lives afresh.

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