

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

FELIX NAYAK

Assistant Professor & Head, Department of English, Mahant Laxmi Narayan Das College, Raipur (C.G.), India

ABSTRACT

Among Indian women writers writing in English, Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent place in Indian English writings. She happens to be one of those Indian women writers who make their women protagonists question the authority of men. Her women characters don't accept life as it is, but display a remarkable capacity to establish their own identities. Gone are the days when women like Sita and Gandhari submitted to their husbands and obeyed their commands without raising their voice of protest. Man's relationship with woman is like that of a master and a slave. The bond between man and woman was one of submission and mute acceptance. In the past woman was regarded as a showpiece having no identity of her own. This kind of treatment of women by men is changing and to a great extent has changed considerably. Women no longer look upon their husbands as role models.

KEYWORDS: Role of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande has denied being a feminist time and again though most of her women characters don't hesitate to articulate their feelings boldly and without any fear of being bossed over by men. It is true that feminism in its early stages demanded more authority and power in the hands of women but over the year's feminism has undergone a sea change. Today, feminist writers and critics talk of equal treatment of women by men. They don't want women to be given a superior position in society. What they actually want is equal treatment and place in every sphere of life. Shashi Deshpande's women struggle for establishing their self so as to go deep into the female psyche. They want to know the mysteries of life and their actual place in society. The study proposes to limit itself to the two prominent novels of Deshpande "Roots and Shadows" and "The Dark Holds No Terrors". These two novels present women protagonists as individuals in a quest for self and the paper intends to focus on the role played by women protagonists in these novels. Women protagonists here establish themselves as autonomous beings, free from the restriction imposed by society and also free from their own fears and guilt. Their main concern is to know and understand the fundamental truth governing life. Indu, the protagonist of "Roots and Shadows" has the capacity to know the truth about her, and display commendable courage to liberate herself from the shadows which she had thought to be her real self. All along, her life had been enclosed in shadows but through her sheer guts she succeeded in realizing the truth that she is destined to be a writer.

Indu lost her mother immediately after her birth and Alka, a widow, became her mother figure. Alka is presented as a dominating women but Indu refused to dance to her tune and rebels her against her values and authority and marries Jayant against her wishes. Alka is presented as the symbol of authority and it is her wish that Indu should obey her without questioning her authority. Indu inherits Alka's authoritative nature and temperament and becomes as dominating and authoritative as she is. Indu, at the start refused to buckle under her pressure and take her as her role model. She decides to live life on her own terms and curves a life of her own hoping that by escaping from Alka, she will gain independence and

freedom to live according to her own terms without any fear of society which is symbolized by the house.

“The Dark Holds No Terror” presents Sara, the woman protagonists almost in the same mould. Sara’s mother does not hesitate to show gender difference in her treatment of her son, Dhruva and Sara. The childhood experience of watching her brother drown in water creates guilt in her and holds her responsible for his death. Her mother blames her for killing her brother and goes to the extent of saying that she has no right to live. This makes Sara hate her mother and rebels against her by moving to Bombay to pursue medicine. Sara’s marriage is presented as a means to get away from her mother and her home. The departure of the heroine from the mother is the first step towards autonomy. Sara’s second step towards autonomy is evident when she marries Manohar outside her caste. Her decision to marry Manohar is indicative of her rejection of the orthodox, traditional values that have become outdated with the passage of time. Sara’s mother opposes the alliance and reminds her of the adverse reaction of the society. But Sara doesn’t care what label people attach to her so long as she is certain within herself that what she is doing is right.

There are recurrent images of enclosure in both “Roots and Shadows” and “The Dark Holds No Terrors”. Sara, time and again, talks of the dark room that is out to suffocate her and stall her growth as an individual. The dark room reminds of the prison which confines man to the four walls of the prison room. The male clothes hanging on the wall makes her feel that she has no room of her own. The room where she fears to enter is suggestive of encroachment on her privacy. The enclosed walls create feelings of suffocation. Both Indu and Sara want to escape from the enclosed room so as to breathe the air of freedom. Both of them want to move away from the room and take shelter in a place which they can claim to be their own. They feel that they do not belong to the dark room as they consider themselves to be an addition to it. One of the critics has rightly observed: “There comes a time in the life of every individual when he/she has to take his/her decision to assert their individuality and realize their dreams of being independent and assertive.”¹

CONCLUSIONS

The movement of the Shashi Deshpande’s heroine from her parental home to the outside world through knowledge gained from education and marriage prepares her for a better understanding of life and her ‘Self’². Her rebellion against the mother indicates that she desires to be free from the shackles of tradition. When she was with her parents she came to realize that her presence checked the growth of her personality and hence she lost no time in deserting them. But when she found that her husband failed to understand her feelings and did all he could to create obstacles in her way she defied them and returned to her parental home as the mother/mother-figure would no longer be there to prevent her from coming into her own. Her fear of losing herself in the mysterious world gets evaporated by her understanding that “The Dark Holds No Terrors” if one is confident of one’s own self and if one is in a state of readiness to accept the responsibility for one’s life and face the challenges of life and society boldly. The two novels bring out the simple fact that nothing is impossible of attainment if one moves out with confidence in oneself. Nothing is lost so long as one acts in the belief that the game in which they are engaged can be won. This is the message the novelist attempts to convey to the readers.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. R. Mala, “The Predicament of the Indian Woman”. The Heroines in the novels of Shashi Deshpande’s: A select study Pondicherry University, 1889.
2. “Women in Indian English Literature. The Question of Individuation, ‘Journal of South Asian Lit.