

## CHAPTER II

### THE CRITICAL SCENE

Shashi Deshpande thinks, feels and writes about women. She has got a deep concern for women. If that is enough to call her a feminist, she is a feminist. Unlike Western Feminists, however, she does not believe that men and women constitute basically hostile groups in society. While Western Feminists, atleast a section of them, dislike the institution of family and advocate its abolition, Deshpande stands for the solution of women's problems within the framework of family.

Women in her novels rediscover their relation with tradition while re – establishing the bond within their home. This new bond is anchored on a mature interpretation of women's roles and responsibilities in the society. It is true that Deshpande's women protagonists reconsider the value of the traditional world. The understanding of the modern world which still has something to offer constantly balances the search of these women protagonists for a complete realisation of the self and its vivid articulation. The way she portrays the relationship of women characters expresses her keenness to counter balance the modern and the traditional and the individuals with their selflessness. Women try to re – establish their self – respect by managing their duties as wives and mothers. Their lives within the society make them realise

the significance of family. Women's roles are no longer closed and inhibiting. In fact it helps them gain fulfillment and self – awareness. Their social relations are a reflection of their creative self – awareness.

Deshpande herself claims,

“I am not a feminist. I am a human being and I write about other human beings who happen to be women”. [The Times of India News Service, Jul 22, 2011]

Most of Deshpande's characters are true to life and deal with problems most women would not want to talk about – rape in marriages, lust and breaking free from traditions and stereotypes.

"May be 30 years back nobody wanted to talk about these things, but today more and more women are talking about such issues freely," she said. It is difficult for women to break away from stereotypes, more so in the lower strata of society. "When women have money, it definitely becomes easier," she said. The sensitivity towards women, their problems and issues is changing. "It is a slow change, but there has definitely been a change," she said. The change is percolating from the urban society to the rural society. And the maxim which still holds true – a woman has to do twice as much to prove herself half as good as a man.” Deshpande said. [The Times of India News Service, Jul 22, 2011]

“The women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande’s novels crave to break the silence over swayed in their relationships. At earlier stage they have their regression for past life as they are outcome of fractured families. Their parents are too traditional to accept the existence of woman or girl child in the family. Their parents are dead psycho – emotionally but her protagonists emerge out of such emotional turmoil by showing the maturity in understanding by not losing their identities and cope the problems of the life. They emerge as changing face of new woman.” [Dahibhate 2014: 24]

Shashi Deshpande tries to focus on the aspect of a man – woman relationship keeping in mind a society based on equality where every individual acquires their ascribed status irrespective of gender and without dominating one another. The eternal quest for self and recognition of the existence is the focal point of her novels. Women are not ready to accept the secondary status in the family and therefore they always struggle to prove their importance and individuality through different activities.

Rashmi Sahi points out

“Deshpande does not believe in portraying her characters in black and white. Her characters may be guilty of dividing human beings into the categories of good and bad. In the struggle of these women to give shape and content to their individual existence in a sexist

society the realization comes in the end that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and tenacity to adhere to it.” [Sahi 1998: 170]

Shashi Deshpande has received attention from numerous critics. Several anthologies and books dealing partially or wholly with her works are also available.

*Recent Indian Fiction* edited by R.S. Pathak (1994) contains but one article on ‘That Long Silence’ by B.K. Das which discusses the novel “in the light of the recent reader response”. *Critical Studies on Indian Fiction in English* edited by R.A. Singh and V.L.V.N.K. Kumar (1999) has similarly one essay by T. Ashoka Rani: “Women in Marriage: Novels of Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande”. *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* edited by R.S. Pathak (1998) comprises essays discussing the main ideas of Deshpande’s novels and their literary value while the interviews included in the volume shed light on the mind and art of the novelist in her own words. *Feminism and Literature* edited by V.N. Dass (1995) has three articles about Shashi Deshpande by G. D. Barche, M. Rajeshwar and Seema Suneel which notice *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* in passing. *Changing Faces of Women in Indian Writing in English Literature* edited by M.G. Khan and A.G. Khan (1995) contains an essay by Adesh Pal on *Ego – self – crisis* in the first three novels of Shashi Deshpande.

Besides the above, there are studies solely about Shashi Deshpande by some scholars examining her works from specific stand points. *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (1991) by Sarabjit Sandhu, *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Perspective* (1998) by Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal and *The Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* (2001) by Y. S. Sunita Reddy are feminist appreciations though Sunita Reddy takes note of technique and style in a chapter while Atrey and Kirpal assign a chapter to *The Art of Shashi Deshpande*. Sandhu's attention is confined to the first three novels of Shashi Deshpande, while Reddy discusses six leaving *Moving On* out of her purview. Atrey and Kirpal too have not been able to take note of *Moving on*. Atrey and Kirpal have devoted three chapters of their works (Chapter 2 – 4) to family relations and one to the position of Women in Indian Society (Chapter 5). Then, *The novels of Shashi Deshpande in Post – Colonial Arguments* (2000) by Mrinalini Sebastian and *Shashi Deshpande's Fiction: A Study in Women Empowerment and Post Colonial Discourse* (2003) by P.G. Joshi are concerned with the theory and application of post colonialism.

Khan (1998) in his article “*Shashi Deshpande's Heroines: Prisoners by Choice?*” opines that in the process of introspection and antagonism Shashi Deshpande's heroines fail to come to terms with reality and are maladjusted where as most of the males are well adjusted.

Nityanandan (2000) in the book “*Three Great Indian Women Novelists: Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee*” attempts to study the women characters in the novels written by the three women novelists. The women characters are now no longer objects but become protagonists. Though writing in the same period, these three women novelists exhibit marked contrasts too, along with their similarities. They appeared on the scene with an exceptional ability to penetrate into the consciousness of their characters.

Bala (2001) in the article “*Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: An Introduction*” discusses the typical stories of Indian women in search of identity in a patriarchal world. Women’s quest for identity is the central theme of all the novels written by Shashi Deshpande. According to the author after a great deal of suffering and self – introspection, women come to terms with their present with an understanding and acceptance of their past and are ready now to march ahead with new acceptance of life.

Shalmalee (2005) in the research paper “*Gender, Feminism and Post Colonialism: A Reading of Shashi Deshpande’s Novels*” has attempted to demonstrate the variety of Indian positions / representations in the intersection of gender and post colonial readings, in the context of Deshpande’s work. The author also argues that Deshpande is translating aspects of feminism into a particular Indian context. Her work is also symptomatic of an inbuilt bias in the

study of Indian writing and post – colonial literatures that continue to privilege the narrow spectrum of Anglophone expression.

Ranganathan (2009) reflecting on the three major novels of Shashi Deshpande, attempts to prove the point that Indian feminism as reflected in the Indian fiction is a unique phenomenon that has to be valued on its own scale and should not be weighed against the scales of the western feminist literature. For this purpose in her paper “*Indian Woman at the Cross Roads: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s Heroines*” she has attempted a critique of the female protagonists in three of Shashi Deshpande’s novels, namely *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*. In all these novels, Shashi Deshpande objectifies new female subjective experiences with a gynocentric vision. She basically reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings, rooted in the culture in which she lives, remain sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences, and they give artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. Her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities: tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature. Her art is intensely personal, not political. Her feminism rooted in the native environment tends to be humanistic and optimistic in its outlook.

Nayak (2011) in “*The Making of a New Woman*” takes into account the works of Shashi Deshpande. She says Indian women, unlike their western counterparts, have always been socially and psychologically oppressed, sexually colonized and biologically subjugated against a male – dominant setup. Any attempt by a woman to rise above the oppressive forces rooted in the middle class margins has either been curbed mercilessly or ignored in the name of social dignity. Shashi Deshpande all through the gamut of her ever expanding creative horizon always makes it a point to provide a separate space for her characters.

Ambika and Latha (2012) seek to focus primarily on the psychological exploration of the inner mind of women characters in their article entitled “*Tradition Vs Transition: A Psychological Study of Shashi Deshpande’s The Binding Vine*”. The writer being a woman dives deep into the inner mind of the repressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and brings to light their issues, which are the outcome of Indian women’s psychological and emotional imbalances.

Bite (2012) talks about domestic relations in the short stories of Deshpande. Shashi Deshpande deals in the above stories with the daughter and mother relationship. Often she compares the present with the past and shows that even in the modern context there has been no change in the relationship.

She sometimes sarcastically comments on the situation. There are seven stories and they deal exclusively with the daughter – mother relationship.

Devi and Mahalakshmi (2012) make a contrastive study of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De in “*Depiction of Women in Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De’s Works*”. They make an attempt to depict how the attitude and behaviour of women differ according to the society they belong to.

Padmarani Rao (2012) deals with the women characters in “*The Literary Corpus of Shashi Deshpande*”. She points out how with a style marked by economy, brevity, concentration and vivid clarity, Shashi Deshpande presents the life of middle class Indian women in her fiction. The changed post modern society and the adjustments that a woman has to make to fit into the paradigm, with a comparatively traditional cultural outlook is wonderfully presented by Shashi Deshpande in her creative writing. The heroines of Deshpande strive for and obtain certain autonomy and thereby realize their immense potentialities for action and self – actualization. Their return home is not defeatism but the triumph of the independence of women. They learn to live in the modern society with self – identity and self – realization.

Usha and Ashalata (2013) in their article on “*Reduction of Gender Role: A Study with Special Reference to Shashi Deshpande’s Novels – The Dark Holds no Terror and That Long Silence*” tries to explore issues like gender discrimination and social conditioning of a girl child .Woman has to

conform to the norms in a patriarchal set up of family. But when she refuses to be, confronts uneasiness in the relationships. Saru and Jaya, reflect an emotional fracture of women on account of gender discrimination and male dominant social set up exist in the family. Women lose their rights, identity and sustainability which culminate in the symbolic reduction of their gendered balance.

Trivedi (2015) in her article on “*Shashi Deshpande’s Novels: In the Light of Indian Feminist Ethos*” points out that the chief concern of her novels is social dynamics that repress individuality of modern, educated, Indian women. Her paper focuses on the two novels: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows*. Deshpande advocates emancipation but not at the cost of Indian ethos of matrimony. Any of her female protagonists, however troubled they are, does not choose the path of violating marital cords. In their place, western female might have opted for divorce or some other similar options. Saru and Indu regain their respective individuality without breaking social norms. Deshpande has justified Indu’s infidelity by killing Naren dramatically. She does not let her heroines indulge in adultery even though it is a matter of gaining individual identity. Thus, these two novels represent the trait of feminism that is Indian.

Thus the works published so far approach the novels of Shashi Deshpande from one of two starting points, namely, post colonialism and

feminism if not dealing in the conventional way with plot, characterization, style etc.

Nayak states that

“The resonances of cross – cultural intertextuality are perhaps greater in postcolonial societies in a liminal space – neither fully traditional nor fully modern – as in the case of present day India. Both Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy have had migratory experiences within the Indian sub – continent, which is itself a mosaic of multiple cultures. These experiences find expression in their fictional works which literally resonate with inter – textuality, both intra – cultural and cross – cultural.” [Nayak 2004: 59]

Both Deshpande and Roy manipulate various texts and discourses to achieve radically different effects of intertextuality: while Shashi Deshpande uses intertextual references to present the inevitable clash between tradition and modernity, Arundhati Roy deliberately uses them to create a world view of decadence along with nostalgia for the old way of life. Roy shows a clear inclination towards glorious past, now rotten to the core. But, Deshpande presents before us the claws of traditionality which intend to pose a barrier before smooth progress of modernity.

Shashi Deshpande uses intertextuality as a means to reveal women's role and position in historical perspective, a repressed part of history. Intertextuality for Arundhati Roy is a tool to emphasize a pessimistic world, a darker world with its decadent aspects.

A third approach, the psychological one can be seen in some papers only like *Dimensional Depth of Female Consciousness: Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine* by Dr. Krishna Mohan Pandey and *Psychological Knots in The Dark Holds No Terror* by Dr. Shubha Tiwari. Both the papers mentioned appear in *Indian Novelists in English: Critical Perspectives* (New Delhi, 2000) edited by Amar Nath Prasad.

Social progress means improvement of the lot of people in a society. It demands removal of oppression and exploitation and basing social relations on freedom and equality. How far a society has progressed can be judged by the extent of harmony we find in social relations, by the way it reacts to social problems and the attitude it adopts towards people who deviate from the norms. Once people had to lose their limbs for minimum offences and now a number of countries have abolished capital punishment for any offence. That illustrates the progress of society. The studies which have already been done on Deshpande leave much to be said about social relations and social problems. 'Social relationship' was conceptualised by Weber to describe patterned human interaction which is intentional, meaningful and symbolic. The ends and means

of social actions determined by customs and traditions lead to social relations. Social actions are so common and expected that they are taken for granted. Deshpande's novels are a reflection of a social world comprising many complex relationships. Deshpande's male and female protagonists travel together across their lives in their varied and multi – faceted roles. The lead women characters are always found struggling to re – establish and rediscover their identity, social position and social relationship within their given world. Deshpande has presented in her novels modern Indian women's much discussed search for self and society, and the relationships that are central to women. The clash between the traditional and the modern from women's point of view is central to Deshpande's novels. Her young heroines are portrayed revolting against the traditional way of life, its rituals, norms, ceremonies, and patriarchal bias. Her attempt to reconstruct the identity of her protagonists, particularly, their intellectual identity in the form of their creative talents is well reflected in all her novels. The silent sufferings of women find expression in her novels. Deshpande's women not only struggle to gain new identities but also simultaneously make effort to align themselves with the accepted conventions of family and society.

It is desirable to examine the social reality reflected in the novels of Shashi Deshpande by placing the same in a historical perspective. While subscribing to the view that the position of women in society is a major factor in judging the progress of a society, it is also important to explore other factors

like the relationship of parents and children, social problems and social attitudes toward them that are relevant to any assessment of social progress.