CHAPTER –V

Feminism and Shashi Deshpande’s Feminism

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CHAPTER V
FEMINISM AND SHASHI DESHPANDE’S FEMINISM

5.1.1 FEMINISM—

The term ‘feminism’ has its origin from the Latin word ‘femina’ meaning ‘woman’ (through French ‘féminisme’). It refers to the advocacy of women’s rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of ‘equality of sexes’. In other words, it relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. The term became popular from the early twentieth century struggles for securing women’s suffrage or voting rights (the suffragette movement) in the western countries, and the later well-organized socio-political movement for women’s emancipation from patriarchal oppression. The political scope of feminism has been broadened by the impact of Marxist ideology that has made feminists challenge sexism along with capitalism for both encouraged the patriarchal set-up.

Shashi Deshpande’s women characters keeping in mind the various types and phases of the women characters expressed in her six novels are studied here and it tries to link these novels with the various phases of feminism. For this purpose it is necessary to have some discussion of feminism and feminist literature.
Writers like Jane Austen, Mary Wellstonecraft, Virginia Woolf pledged for the equality of opportunity for the woman based upon the equality of value. But it was left for Simone De Beavoir to come out with a bold manifesto for a frontal attack on the patriarchal hegemony in our society. In her famous treatise, *The Second Sex*, she has, like a raging rebel, hit hard at the androcentric customs and conventions, art and culture, philosophy and religion which have always assigned women the secondary or rather slavish position to men.

5.1.2 FEMINISM AND FEMINITY

Feminism is, indeed, a serious attempt to analyze, comprehend and clarify how and why is feminity or the feminine sensibility is different from masculinity or the masculine experience. Feminism brings into perspective the points of difference that characterize the 'feminine identity' or 'feminine psyche' or 'feminity' of woman. It can be studied by taking into account the psychosomatic, social and cultural construction of feminity vis-à-vis masculinity.

The male writers have mostly seen women as inferior and weak. Gendering and some sort of misogyny are evident in the texts written by men. They see men as 'superior sex' or the 'stronger sex' while women are seen as the 'inferior sex' or the 'weaker sex'. Men are considered as logical, rational and objective, and, women are perceived as emotional, inconsistent, intuitive, subjective and lacking self-confidence.
But the modern woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her by the system. And it is their pronouncement in an overt tone that has created the difference also in textuality.

It was mainly after the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s that the contemporary feminist ideology evolved and the female voice was heard with special concern. The focus of the literary studies was shifted to women's writing with a view to re-reading, revisioning and reinterpreting it in the light of long-existing gender bias and sexual politics in history, culture, society, family, language and literature.4

5.1.3 POST-FEMINISM

The first wave feminism has been the political movement for women's rights. The second wave feminism relates to the historical context of patriarchy and oppression and attacks the male domination in aggressive, militant tone. The third wave feminism challenges the gender discrimination and attempts to find a rationale for the identities of masculinity and femininity. The fourth wave feminism is termed postmodern feminism and may be called 'post-feminism', which lays emphasis on individual woman's inner freedom and awakening. It tries to resolve the issues and problems raised by feminism and attempts to understand the relationship of interdependence between man and woman.5
The term ‘post-feminism’ has become an umbrella term to cover a variety of concepts. Besides the egalitarian perspectives, it covers the concepts of the ‘brave new world’, ‘the girlpower’, cyberspace’, ‘androgyny’, ‘pluralism’, and to a certain extent the doctrine of ‘multiculturalism’. The ‘brave new world’ and the ‘girlpower’ refer to the world of young women who are bold, assertive, self-assured and competitive, and do not require the crutches of feminism to secure space for themselves. The ‘bad girls’, who can counter men by their feminine wiles and their assertive-aggressive sexuality, are also included in post-feminism.\(^6\)

The major thrust is now on the *homo sapiens*. The discrimination based on race, class, sex, gender, colour, community or ethnicity is seriously challenged. It inculcates the concepts of mutual understanding and respect, irrespective of the differences. Particularly speaking about gender differences. Allan and Barbara Pease’s book *Why Men Don’t Listen and Women Can’t Read Maps* (2001), with a subtitle *How we’re different and what to do about it*, is the latest research-based survey of man-woman relationship and the problems of gender identities, and is, no doubt, a significant work towards that end.\(^7\)

Post-feminism would certainly find out definite constructive, consensual resolves for the various issues raised by feminism. It is hoped the ensuing century (and the millennium) is free from all those conflicts that have been too much stretched out only because of conceited egos and several other complexes among the genders. The
‘post’-phase of feminism would hopefully fill up the gaps between one human being and the other created in the past.8

5.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE’S VIEWS ON FEMINISM

As the study attempts to study Shashi Deshpande’s women characters, her portrayal of women needs to be studied from a feminist angle. As an author of the ‘70s and 80s’, she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist.

A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how the themes in them are related to women’s problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel Roots and Shadows. In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She refuses to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in the novel. The Dark Holds No Terrors, her second novel, is about the traumatic experience the protagonist Saru undergoes as her husband refuses to play a second-fiddle role. Saru undergoes great
humiliation and neglect as a child and, after marriage, as a wife. Deshpande discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters and their desire to have a male child. After her marriage, as she gains a greater social status than her husband Manohar, all begins to fall apart. Her husband’s sense of inferiority complex and the humiliation he feels as a result of society’s reaction to Saru’s superior position develops sadism in him. Her husband Manu vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism, which has been vividly portrayed by Deshpande. *That Long Silence*, the third novel, is about Jaya who, despite having played the role of a wife and mother to perfection, finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya realizes that she has been unjust to herself and her career as a writer, as she is afraid of inviting any displeasure from her husband. Her fear even discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with another man. These three novels belong to her early phase and portray a mild form of feminism.

*The Binding Vine*, her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi to focus attention on the victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape. Mira, in the solitude of her unhappy marriage, would write poems, which were posthumously translated and published by Urmi. Urmi also narrates the tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband for another woman. The worst part of her tale is that Shakutai’s elder daughter Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, her sister Sulu’s husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana’s behalf and brings the culprit to book. In *A Matter of Time*, her fifth novel,
Shashi Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. Basically, it is about three women from three generations of the same family and tells how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal, and she faces her humiliation with great courage and stoicism. Deep inside, she is struck with immense grief, and tries to keep herself composed for the sake of her daughters. Sumi’s mother Kalyani was married off to her maternal uncle Shripati. When their four-year-old son gets lost at a railway station, Shripati sends Kalyani back to her parents’ house with their two daughters. On his mother-in-law Manorama’s request, when Shripati returns he maintains a stony silence for the rest of his life. Kalyani’s mother Manorama fails to beget a male heir to her husband, and fears lest he should take another wife for the same purpose. Manorama, to avoid the property getting passed on to another family, gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati. Thus, Deshpande has revealed to our gaze the fears, frustrations and compulsions of three women from three generations of the same family. Small Remedies, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her musical genius. She has led the most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by a society that practises double standards – one for men and the other for women. Even as a child she was a victim of gross gender discrimination. Besides, Madhu the writer of her biography, narrates her own life story and also those of her aunt Leela and Savitribai’s daughter, Munni.
A close analysis of her novels leaves no doubt about her genuine concern for women. Her protagonists are acutely aware of their smothered and fettered existence in an orthodox male-dominated society. Caught between tradition and modernity, her protagonists search for identity within marriage. Deshpande's novels contain much that is feminist. The realistic delineation of women as wife, mother and daughter, their search for identity and sexuality as well, leaves the readers in no doubt where her real sympathies lie.

She has been against her works being labelled as "feminist," as it has traditionally been regarded as an inferior type of literature. She denies any influence of the militant feminism like that of Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, and Kate Millet. She concerns herself with women's issues in the Indian context. In an interview she tells Lakshmi Holmstorm:

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\text{It is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences.}^9
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Women-centered narratives in her novels have led many interviewers to ask her as to what extent does she consider herself a feminist. In one such interview Shashi Deshpande says:

I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it.\(^{10}\)

In a paper presented at a seminar, ‘The Dilemma of the Woman Writer’, Shashi Deshpande protested: “It is a curious fact that serious writing by women is invariably regarded as feminist writing. A woman who writes of women’s experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, caused her strong feelings. I don’t see why this has to be labelled feminist fiction.”\(^{11}\)

Shashi Deshpande was so fascinated by her women characters that she laid more emphasis on women. Shashi Deshpande says that she knows how the women feel and she knows the mood of India. It has been observed that the predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place from conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught in a transitional world.\(^{12}\)
Shashi Deshpande's novels mainly portray women from the middle class. For her creative expression might be: (a) her own background as she hails from a middle-class family, (b) she is pre-occupied with the social forces at work in society: the clash between the old and the new; between idealism and pragmatism; and (c) the middle-class woman in her works represents a larger part of the contemporary Indian society. The woman she portrays is undeniably a forerunner of the "doomed female" of modern India. The portrayal is quite unique. Her protagonist neither represents the old, orthodox image, nor a modern westernized woman, and she is the 'every woman' of the Indian middle-class society, who tries hard to rise above tradition but is involuntarily adapted to it.

It is not difficult to agree with the view that in Shashi Deshpande's novels, we observe a change corresponding to the change in the contemporary society. We notice that the plot in her novels begins with an unconventional marriage and later on deals with the problems of adjustment and conflicts in the minds of the female protagonists and ultimately portrays their endeavour to submit to the traditional roles.¹³

Shashi Deshpande maintains a unique position among the contemporary, up-coming Indian writers in English. Many writers appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family. Shashi Deshpande has minutely dealt with the phenomenon, arriving at the conclusion that women, after attaining all types of
rights, are now struggling to adjust rather than to get free from the traditional world. She deals with the middle-class woman who represents the majority and covers a wide area in the modern society. She takes up women characters very carefully. The female protagonists in her novels are:

(1) Young girls who can be led astray. For example, in *Come Up and Be Dead*;

(2) Married women who suffer silently. For example, *That Long Silence*; and

(3) Working women who, most of the time, are out of the family and come in direct contact with society. For example, *The Dark Holds No Terrors.*

Woman in Shashi Deshpande's novels is initially an unconventional one. She willy-nilly submits herself to the tradition, perhaps realizing the wisdom of the traditional ways at this stirring moment of the transitional phase of society. Ultimately, she is an appendage to man or family. Though economically independent, she is emotionally dependent on her husband.

In Shashi Deshpande's novels, the protagonist's growth towards an honest acknowledgement of responsibility for her own repressed state is shown in her earlier novels as well as her later novels.

The protagonists' quest for identity gets largely accentuated due to their frustrating experiences in the Indian patriarchal society. In her novels, the host of male characters – husbands, lovers, fathers and other relations – display different aspects of patriarchy and oppression. While the majority of the husbands are patriarchal in
their approach, the older men, particularly the fathers, are broad-minded. Surprisingly, the male friends are “feminist” in their approach and sympathise with the protagonists’ lot. Deshpande’s male characters only serve to enable the protagonists to define their identities more fully.

One agrees with Sarla Palker when she says that the writer has tried to convey to the society that the need of time, in this transitional phase, is not a total revolt but a gradual change in the society for which everyone has to put some effort to bridge the gap between the old and the new generation.\(^5\)

5.3.1 MALE REPRESSIVE FORCE WITHIN MARRIAGE

With Shashi Deshpande, we move into a much more middle-class ethos and the forms of male repression within the family that takes on an uglier, more obvious form. In novel after novel, marriage is shown to be an institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male domination. Shashi Deshpande’s exploration of female subjugation in patriarchal family structures takes on a larger dimension than the inner psychological world. In her novels she creates, in fact, a mosaic of marriage, women come and go, aunts, cousins, mothers, mothers-in-law, friends, acquaintances, each providing a different slant on marriage, a dozen sub-texts to the main text of a protagonist whose marriage is collapsing. Shashi Deshpande is a writer who can focus intensely and elaborately on a network of male repression and
is concerned with making statements regarding the politics of male power and its effect on women.

In *That Long Silence*, Mohan's mother had been the traditional long-suffering Indian wife, uncomplainingly bearing the burden of her husband's harshly imposed authority over his household. The father had been an unrelenting autocrat, demanding that fresh food should be served to him whatever time he decided to return home. The sights and sounds of beaten womanhood reverberate through the novel sometimes creating an impression of unrelieved gloom.\(^6\)

It is tempting to fit the Jaya-Mohan relationship into this slot of the very real human tragedies caused by male attitudes of superiority. The assumption of the masculine right to control is seen in Mohan's attitude to Jaya's writing career. It is he who sets the parameters for the kind of writing his male ego and the norms of male-dominated society might permit her to indulge in. He boasts, "From the very beginning I've allowed you to write, I've encouraged you, I was proud of you." But, in reality, his wife's writing was merely an extension of his own status. And because he is unable to recognize her identity as distinct from his own, his fragile male ego had been unable to accept when she had won a prize for a story of "a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body." Mohan, to whom she is not a writer by profession, but an object to be exhibited, is worried: "They will think I am this man. How can I look anyone in the face again?" Stricken with guilt at her unfeminine selfishness, Jaya had quit writing. However, Mohan's male
attitude of "I am the centre of the world" is only partly responsible for the yawning gaps in the relationship.\textsuperscript{17}

In the \textit{Dark Holds No Terrors}, Sarita survives in a male dominated world which offers no easy-outs to women. The preference for boys over girls which is openly witnessed in most Indian homes is seen in the blatant discrimination between Saru and her brother which leads to a sense of insecurity and hatred towards her parents. Devoid of love and security, she wanted to be loved and gets that attention from Manu whom she marries. There is an inverse decline in her conjugal relationship with her social and financial rise. She becomes clear eyed with no illusions left about love and romance, after her relationship with three men Manu her husband, the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padmakar. Saru neither surrenders nor escapes from the problem, but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own protégé.

In \textit{The Binding Vine}, the father is only 'a gentle memory' but values were embedded into Urmi by the patriarchal norms. A girl is always asked to behave herself in society and she is not allowed to interact much with men. Any deviation from these norms invites the wrath of the family members as it invites danger of her modesty getting outraged. Urmi the protagonist also focuses attention on a man’s lust and a woman’s helplessness. Urmila, at every turn of the novel, emerges fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. Here protest comes easily for Shashi
Deshpande’s protagonist and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes.

In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi deserted by her husband Gopal, for no fault of her own is not emotionally broken. She does not contemplate divorce, yet the social stigmas associated with divorce in the Indian society haunt her. Shashi Deshpande shows that a woman may get relief from the painful life of a wrong marriage through divorce, but it will not always re-establish her socially, psychologically or financially. In her parents’ home, she feels she is lost and has no place there. However Sumi deliberately plays cool and maintains her matter-of-fact attitude. She is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity. Her pride prevents her to show her grief to Gopal.

The protagonist Madhu of *Small Remedies* had sensed from childhood the discrimination that women had to undergo in a society that had one law for men and another for women. Men could lead a life of their choice with impunity like Savitribai’s father who was unconventional, and Savitribai’s father-in-law who had a well known Thumri singer as a mistress. Both men could get away without any censure or disapproval from society. Women were jeered and looked down upon if they showed any deviation from the assigned roles set by society for them. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande, through the marriage and later estrangement between Som and Madhu, gives a stark picture of the patriarchal mind-set of men.
While many writers, both men and women passively accept and thus perpetuate social stereotypes, feminist writers either reject gender stereotyping in toto or modify and re-define them after critical scrutiny. These stereotypes exert pressure on every aspect of a woman's existence. Two major areas are foregrounded in the novels selected for this thesis— the role of a woman as a wife and the attitude to female sexuality. The novels, each in their own way, construct representations of these stereotypes before exposing them to a critical re-appraisal through their female protagonists.

Most of the protagonists do not have a separate identity or role outside their home. Some of them are not economically independent as they have no jobs, and this proves a great hurdle to their self-realization. Sarita, who is a successful doctor and economically independent, finds her personal expectations and familial duties in conflict. Jaya and Indu, too, attempt to find a role outside the family but soon realize that the restricting bonds of the family hinder them in the process. Even their desire to express themselves through writing is suppressed or hindered. The traditional male fails to realize that a woman needs to realise her identity not only within but also outside the domestic sphere.

Indoctrinated with the idea that any aggressive gesture of sexual attraction towards a male, even her husband, is somehow lacking in feminine modesty, a woman schools herself to repress her sexual desires. The male repressive force is shown working in various ways in Shashi Deshpande’s novels.
5.3.2 STEREOTYPICAL IMAGE OF WOMEN AS WIFE

In Deshpande's novels, discords or disappointments in marital relationship impel introspection in the protagonists. They do not disregard the importance of marriage as a social institution and seek solutions to their marital problems with marriage. They seek a balanced, practical approach to their problems. They have the courage born of their being honest to themselves after an objective appraisal of their situation. They do not blame the others or their husbands for their troubles, but blame also themselves. Their desire to seek solutions to their problems leads to their temporary withdrawal from their families, followed by an objective appraisal of the whole problem. They are traditional at times in their approach as they strive to seek identity and self-realization upholding social conventions and institution. They are women who are individuals with awareness of their rights and duties; they have legitimate passions and expect an independent, autonomous existence. Their circumstances lead to their becoming mentally mature and they finally consider marital relationship as worthy of preservation.

Marital sex in *That Long Silence* falls along well-defined lines. Jaya's experience is that of many Indian women married off to virtual strangers. A pre-marriage inhibition: "intimacy with him had seemed a gross inadequacy"; her husband's unquestioning assumption that she could slip into marital intimacy with the greatest naturalness, a gradual awakening to physical pleasure and then a sinking into a wordless routine activity which exacerbated the sense of aloneness. She, who longs
for a communion rather than a mere physical union, never has the courage to make demands, for that would entail freeing herself from psychological shackles regarding feminine behaviour.\textsuperscript{20}

And yet, so schooled is Jaya in denying her own sexuality, that she walks out on Kamat, the man who had reached out to her physically and emotionally, afraid to face the truth of her own sexual arousal by a man who is not her husband.

Jaya’s power of self-determination is severely corroded by this interiorization of patriarchal role-expectations. She had acquiesced to all her husband’s decisions, to leave the job and come to Mumbai, to seek refuge from an unpleasant situation in the family flat. Even values are jettisoned in the trap of the Sita-Savitri-Gandhari syndrome. She had traded her self-respect as a writer for his approval, had sacrificed her talents as a serious writer and confined herself to the weekly ‘Seeta’s Column’ which had measured up to Mohan’s idea of what was socially permissible writing for a wife. The insidious inducement of the security of marriage, a security which could be shaken by attempts at self-assertion, had led Jaya to a painful decision: “I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I have been scared – scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage.”\textsuperscript{21}
Shashi Deshpande deals with the theme of sexual repression with an unusual forthrightness for an Indian woman writer. In *Roots and Shadows*, there is a powerful depiction of a woman’s deliberate repression of her vibrant sexuality.

The result of this perennial lack of individuation is an intense self-alienation. Deshpande is able to suggest a life of stultifying mechanical routine in which the thinking, determining self is lost in the desperation to fulfill role-expectations. In a powerful passage in *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande hints at the soul-destroying effect of such total self-obliteration of Indu:

> When I look at 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... And one day I thought, ‘isn’t there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own?’

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru for whom escape has always been her mode of resolving the tangled knots has come to realize that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. Saru learns to see reality clearly. She realizes that “we come into this world alone and go out of it alone.” (208) Finally she realizes that if all is ‘alone’ what is there to fear. She realizes that her ego is responsible for all the problems that crept into her life. Escapism is no solution, a permanent solution has to come from within. Her father’s advice and the call of her profession steadies her and gives her the courage to confront reality. The steadied woman in Saru says: “Baba, if
Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can." (221) These words stand as a proof of the assertion of her individuality and her willingness to confront reality.

In *The Binding Vine*, Urmila is one who endeavours to help other women. She is an upper middle-class career woman who is fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. For Urmi, happiness in marriage is magical and she never dares to overstep the boundaries chalked out in the system of marriage. Urmila loves her husband so dearly that when Dr. Bhasker asks her whether she loves him, Urmila confesses, “I love my husband and therefore, I am an inviolate.” (165) At the end Urmila is seen recollecting the bonds of love.

In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal for no fault of hers. However she learns to pick up the threads of her life. Though deserted, Sumi does not contemplate a divorce, and unlike any other woman in her place, she does not seek any explanation from Gopal and bears all the disgrace and humiliation. Sumi does not even wish to talk about Gopal’s act of desertion with anyone. She gracefully frees her husband from marital bonds without venting ill feelings.

Madhu of *Small Remedies* is a victim of double standards for men and women being practised in society. Through the marriage and later estrangement between Som and Madhu, Shashi Deshpande gives a stark picture of the patriarchal mind-set of men. Once, Madhu discloses to her husband a secret that she had slept with a man
when she was fifteen. Som, her husband, with his typical male psychology holds on this lone act of sex forgetting the fact that he himself has had a full-fledged relation with a married woman before marriage. Here Shashi Deshpande suggests that in our society pre-marital sex could lead to the disintegration of a marriage.

Shashi Deshpande appears to believe that by not protesting and offering resistance, the women have to blame themselves for their own victimization. She, therefore, suggests that they themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them from a state of captivity for several centuries. They have to free themselves from the socially constructed stereotypical images.

5.3.3 GENDER STEREOTYPES

Shashi Deshpande expresses the position of woman in a patriarchal society — someone without a clear sense of purpose and without a firm sense of her own identity. Her women characters do not place themselves in the centre of a universe of their own making, but rather are always painfully aware of the demands and needs of others.

Jaya in That Long Silence is ensconced in the structures and prescriptions of security, acculturated firmly into socially-determined roles and attitudes. Jaya the narrator protagonist is confronted with the basic problem of fixing her identity, of recovering the “self” from the roles of dutiful daughter, submissive wife and caring
mother. Jaya rejects the very idea of a unitary self, as if there is no such thing as one self, intact and whole, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, there are so many, each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other.

In *That Long Silence* the protagonist has raised her voice against the straitjacketed role models of wife and mother, and rebels against the suppression of the age-old patriarchal set up. Thus the novel can be seen as a feminist critique of patriarchal practices. 23

In *Roots and Shadows* the protagonist Indu struggles to assert her individuality to achieve freedom which leads her to confrontation with her family and the male dominated society.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is all about male ego wherein the male refuses to play a second fiddle role in marriage. A mature Saru shuns extremes and takes a practical view of the circumstances. She is neither the typical Western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one's identity within marriage.

Shashi Deshpande has presented Urmila of *The Binding Vine* as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by her daughter's death. Despite her longings and frustrations, Urmila is not a radical feminist but one who,
as Basavaraj Naikar opines: “Having entered a *chakravyuha* from which there is no escape, they want to make the best of their life by hardening themselves to face the harsh realities of life.”

In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi accepts her husband’s desertion without any protest. She raises no fuss over it and lapses into a stone like silence. The later reunion of Gopal and Sumi is an unusual one. When he returns she neither cries nor abuses him nor does she ask him for any explanations.

Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behaviour. Thus, Madhu in *Small Remedies* is a victim not only of the double standards of society but of her own innocence. She had slept with Chandru one night in a hotel room in her innocence, and again, in her innocence, she discloses this to Som. Had she spared him the knowledge of her indiscrete act, the relation between the two would have remained normal.

In portraying struggles of these women for identity, Shashi Deshpande waves no feminist banners, launches into no rabid diatribes. She drives her point home with great subtlety and delicacy.

Besides, Deshpande has taken a bold step forward by exploring the working women’s needs of the head, heart and the anatomy. Deshpande has ventured out of the cordon she had confined herself to and articulates the agony, pain, doubts and fears of her protagonists – male and female alike. She does not fight for justice of
women at men’s cost, but presents their respective limitations as spouse. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande fight the prevalent gender stereotypes and assert their individuality.

5.3.4 PROBLEMS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE’S NOVELS

Marital relationships have almost inevitably been the focal point of novels written by Shashi Deshpande. But there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance. The emphasis is not on the development or mechanics of the relationship but on the forces which work together to make the relationship a farcical exhibition of togetherness. Functioning along fixed parameters, marriages become an arid formality, devoid of contact.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu undergoes great mental trauma in her marriage due to her husband Jayant’s double standards who, though educated and liberal, does not tolerate any deviation on Indu’s part from the traditional role of a wife. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the marriage is on the rocks because Manu feels embarrassed and insecure with the rising status of his doctor wife and is intolerant about playing a second-fiddle role in their marriage. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya has been told that her husband is like a sheltering tree. She has to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if she has to water it with deceit and lies. Hence with her new self-awareness, Jaya ironically views herself and Mohan as “a pair of bullocks yoked together”, moving together merely because it was more “comfortable.” In *The Binding Vine*, Urmi has a long distance marriage since her husband Kishore is in the navy. She
craves for some physical gratification during his long absence but she never
oversteps the boundaries chalked out in marriage and remains virtuous. In *A Matter
of Time*, the marriage breaks because Sumi's husband walks out on her. In the end
he returns to a new Sumi, who has coped with the tragedy with remarkable stoicism.
In *Small Remedies*, Madhu too gets totally estranged by her husband Som after she
naively discloses to him about her single act of physical intercourse before marriage.

A sense of non-fulfillment, of incompleteness, had lain dormant in Shashi
Deshpande's characters, suppressed out of fear of denting the façade of a happy
marriage. The woman learns to adopt certain strategies in order to survive within
marriage. These strategies conceal her true self much like a purdah hides the line of
the body. Silence is, perhaps, the most common strategy of survival.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists withdraw from their families for a while; analyze
their circumstances objectively without any external aid or advice. Then they return
to the home and family knowing full well as to what is to be expected of themselves
and their respective spouses.

These protagonists lack a cordial relationship with their mothers. Sarita articulates
her dislike for her mother: "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one." Jaya
likes her father more than she does her mother. Even Indu dislikes the domineering
matriarch Akka's domination, who is a mother figure for Indu.
Shashi Deshpande has presented a woman's world from a woman's point of view. None of the novels discussed have well-developed male characters, and are seen only in relation to the protagonists as husbands or fathers or brothers. In Deshpande's novels husbands have been indirectly made responsible for their wives' troubles.25

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are strong. They refuse to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of upholding the traditional role models laid down by society for women. But they attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Sarita returns to her paternal home to escape from her husband Manohar’s sadism. This temporary withdrawal helps her view her situation objectively. In Roots and Shadows, Indu frees herself of the constricting traditional role of a wife and mother, and dons the mantle of the family matriarch at Akka’s bidding. She realizes that her husband Jayant need not determine the role she should play in her own and other people’s lives. In That Long Silence, Jaya undergoes great mental trauma because she has refused to go into hiding with her husband as an enquiry against his financial irregularities is on. She kept her eyes shut to her husband’s illegal earnings at office like Gandhari. Even her journalistic writings are circumscribed by her husband’s likes and dislikes. After having rejected traditional role models, Deshpande's protagonists display great strength and courage in evolving their own role models as per the requirement of their social milieu.26
Deshpande’s protagonists display a tangible development during the course of the novel. They go through a process of self-examination before they reach self-actualization. Thus, Shashi Deshpande has been successful in creating strong women protagonists who refuse to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies, and face life with great courage and strength. Comparatively, they appear to be more life-like and more akin to the educated, middle-class, urban Indian woman of today.27

5.4.1 THEMES AND CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Among Indian women writers Shashi Deshpande is specifically committed to the reorganization of female subjectivity. Her concerns related to the feminist questions are important in the interest of an Indian feminist-praxis. Her fiction holds a great promise and helps us in finding ways in which the historical ‘location’ of Indian women can be interpreted in terms of their subordination accentuated by law, sacred literature and practice. Deshpande’s feminist ideology stems from her belief in ‘self-striven’ approach towards women’s empowerment or what S.L.Sharma terms as ‘empowerment without antagonism’ in her article of that title. She refuses to indulge in ‘adversarial-orientation’ or intemperate expressions towards men. She attributes profession to her protagonists as a ‘strategic interest’ which enables them to enter the prevailing and androcentric system and to dismantle their politics. Deshpande’s treatment of issues like Indian woman’s autonomy, identity, space and
desire may lead to an Indian model of feminism which will be workable, honest and more viable for indigenous condition. Instead of providing tales of female victimization she seems to be concerned with the idea of ‘how women can live afresh?’

Deshpande provides a revised version of Indian women’s world as her protagonists come out of the bedrooms, kitchens and attics to articulate and reconstitute their lives through their ‘feminist awareness’ and introspection. Deshpande’s novels record polyphonic voices behind every structure and relationship which have contributed to silent Indian women. Muted by society and patriarchy her protagonists feel crippled by a sense of inferiorization, non-entity and loss of ‘self.’

Deshpande’s novels encapsulate the tensions underlying women’s aspirations and their cultural identities. Their urge for self-definition culminates in the identification of the areas of conflict. They are encased and suffocated in the patterns of androcentric culture and their desire to perform is taken over by the necessity to conform. These women are steeped in the conventions and customs of a patrilineal society which dislocates and alienates them from the process of being and becoming. Deshpande’s novels are polemical attacks against the patriarchal world, where women are treated as a ‘kind of non-man.’ Like Margaret Atwood, Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Deshpande also argues that male assigned roles of wife and motherhood entrap women in the masculine plot of desire and thereby marginalize them from other socio-political, economical and creative spheres of life.
Deshpande explores the traumas and agonies of being a woman. She is concerned with women’s quest for self-definition. In an interview Deshpande admits that all her characters are concerned with their “selves” and they learn to be “honest to themselves.” Women’s passivity and submersion in the traditional roles of wife and mothers terminates in their self-diminishment. Deshpande’s women, however do not walk off this marriage which institutionalizes the essentialist construction of the feminine selflessness and masculine self-assertion and self-conquests. These women seek for an ‘aesthetic space’ within the restricting confines of domesticity which is provided by various professions, occupations and creative activities. The traditional criticism on Deshpande’s fiction recognizes her significant contribution to the field of feminist studies. Her contribution lies in her portrayal of professional Indian women which is a fast emerging class. The strength of Deshpande’s work is her awareness of gender-disparity, sexual division of labour which starts at home and which are deeply enrooted in the public and private lives. “The discrimination based on gender differences are interlocked at every level of society from the most intimate to the most general.”

Shashi Deshpande’s approach is different from that of all other feminists. She also deals with the excesses committed upon the female-fold for centuries leading to their deep but quiet suffering and their passive resignation. She shows how women revolt against it and try to search their own identity in the hostile world of male chauvinism. She has also consideration for a home- a home of peace and love that can provide security for women.
She feels that security is an important requirement of women. If a home provides her safety, she may not revolt against the home. She is not for revolt for the sake of revolt but rather for revolt in the sector and degree to which it is required. So, she shows that there are some husbands who are good and some women who are not at all prepared even to raise their voice.

5.4.2 TITLES OF THE NOVELS

Take, for example, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The title is paradoxical. Darkness usually holds terror. But here it is not darkness but the protagonist Saru’s husband that haunts her. The pathos and irony in the title is apparent. Saru says, “The dark holds no terrors. The terrors are inside us all the time. The sorrows are inside us all the time. We carry them within us and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them to scratch and maul.” (85) This is how our obsessions and fears haunt us like nightmares. The title is not simply symbolic but also metaphoric.

The title of *The Binding Vine* is appropriate in a number of ways. Its symbolism has got what Empson calls the first type of ambiguity— that is, the words or phrases connoting several things, some in one direction, some in the other one. *The Binding Vine* suggests, among other things, the following:

1. The protagonist’s bond of familial ties of parents, husband and children,

2. her bond of pregnancy; that is the bond of the umbilical cord,
3. her bond of love for her lost daughter,
4. her bond of love for Mira’s poems,
5. her bond of sympathy for the wrongs done to Kalpana (who has been raped and killed),
6. her being bound by the chain of untoward circumstances.

Now, the beauty of the novel lies in showing all the above-mentioned connotations interplaying with one another in the pattern of the book and suggesting multiple connotations.

We would like to look at the different shades in the symbolism of The Binding Vine. In the following two passages of The Binding Vine, Mira says in one of her poems:

“Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;
but how escape this cord
this binding vine of love?”(136-137)

Mira also says in anguish in another poem:

“Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm will I emerge a beauteous being? Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist.” (65)

So, we see first the bond of love and then the bond (chain or fetters) of forced silence. This is the predicament of a typical middle class Indian woman who wants expression but gets suppression and oppression.
The title of *That Long Silence* is both symbolic and metaphoric. The silence in the novel is the silence which has been the destiny of Indian women down the centuries. They can be refuted, abused, beaten, expelled and raped and still they have to be silent. Thus, the "long silence" contains rich suggestions. The feminist movement cannot afford to put up with the silence. Silence is as good as death. It has to be broken ruthlessly.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Deshpande makes a point that economic deprivation and physical torture are the instruments used to cut and curb the spontaneous growth of a woman from her roots. The predicament of Indu portrays the inner conflict when she wants to express herself through creative writing. But at the same time there are those traps, the shadows of wanting to belong. "To belong, to be wanted, needed, loved, desired and admired....how many traps there are! And I fall into all of them."(27)

The title *A Matter of Time* shows how Sumi who has been deserted by Gopal is not emotionally shattered but with time is seen emancipating as a new and independent woman. The title is apt because the novel deals with the human predicament of three women representing three generations of the same family.

With the title *Small Remedies* Shashi Deshpande reminds us of the pain and sorrow that accompany the ephemeral happiness we experience in the process of living. The common symbols of Om, mango leaf toran, charms, amulets, the myriad
superstitions, are small remedies and they have to counter the terrible disease of being human, being mortal and vulnerable. Shashi Deshpande’s titles are expressive, symbolic and meaningful.

5.4.3 HER CHARACTERS AND THEIR BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS

Shashi Deshpande portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle class women who are sensitive to the changing time and situations. They are aware of the social and cultural disabilities to which they are subjected in the male-dominated society. They want to rebel against them in their search for freedom and identity, but they find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. Conscious of the predicament of a woman in a male-dominated society, especially when she is not economically independent, the author presents her women as desiring to become economically and ideologically independent. She finds them caught up in a conflict between their family and professional roles, between individual aspirations and social demands. Indu of *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya of *That Long Silence*, being women writers, are torn between self-expression and social stigmas-material and psychological traumas. As Maria Mies observes, “Her problem arises firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a social status and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity.”³⁰ Her women like Saru succeed in overcoming social stigmas asserting their potential arena. Deshpande’s career women
... are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives.31

Shashi Deshpande’s women stand at the cross-roads of traditions. They seek change but within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them but merely to make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They perceive it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it. Soon thereafter, they realize that one restrictive set-up is replaced by another “new bonds replace old, that’s all” (Roots and Shadows 14). Her women protagonists are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role of wife. They do not accept to be considered merely as the objects of gratification. They challenge their victimization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Yet their concept of freedom is not imported from the west. They believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which result in the disruption of family relationships. Deshpande’s woman protagonist generally seeks to come out-

... from inherited patterns of thought and action in favour of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in.32
A glimpse of her novels reveals how poignantly she expresses the frustration and disappointments women experienced in social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. *Roots and Shadows*, her first novel, highlights the agony and trauma experienced by women in male-dominated and tradition-bound society. The novelist exposes the absurdity of rituals and customs which only help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This shows how a woman grows from ‘self-surrender’ and ‘self-abnegation’ to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity. Indu, in Shashi Deshpande’s first novel, *Roots and Shadows*, is one who, in her quest to be independent and complete, realizes that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. Indu’s predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in general in contemporary Indian society which is passing through a transition from the old cultural modes to the new socio-economic forces impinging effectively on the pattern of human lives. Indu represents a woman torn between age-old traditions and individual views. Because of her awareness of the sanctity of the familial bonds, she restrains herself from the precipitous action of fleeing from the domestic scene. She views these bonds as unreasonable in the beginning, gradually, she learns to be bound by them as a typical traditional Indian woman, for she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realizes that it would be wise to seek freedom without undermining her obligations and responsibilities and without losing her individuality. Indu’s decision not to submit herself to anyone’s dictates, not to get influenced by her husband in career matters shows that she is making independent decisions. Her search for freedom results in
her emergence as a bold and challenging woman of determination. She negates all feminine limitations and also acquires the power to change others.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife's existence is to please her husband. It reveals a woman's capacity to assert her own rights and individuality and become fully aware of her potential as a human being. Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the representative of middle-class working women in modern India, rebelling against traditions but ultimately trying to compromise with existing reality. When her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life, she undergoes a trauma, but eventually stands up to the situation. She realizes that escapism is never a solution and that she is her own refuge. She succeeds in realizing her selfhood through her profession and proves to the world that economically independent women like her can bring change in the society and that women as individuals can have some significant control over their relationships and professions. Her promise of reconciliation with her husband is not her defeat or submission but her newfound confidence to confront reality. Thus, she achieves freedom and harmony in life without compromising on her obligations and responsibilities.

*That Long Silence* traces the passage of a woman through a maze of doubts and fears towards her affirmation. Viewing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on men for the subjugation of women. She observes that both men and women find it difficult to outgrow the images and
roles allotted to them by society. All the expression of concern for women is a raid upon this silence in *That Long Silence*. But Shashi Deshpande does it not by speaking against their silence on a public platform or through a handbill or a manifesto. Instead she maintains an aesthetic distance. She weaves the things into a metaphoric structure. It shows how the protagonist Jaya, after long, decides to break silence and give vent to her suppressed feelings. This may also be read as the expression of the entire womankind which has been forced to keep its lips sealed for centuries by the system of the society, especially middle-class. So, Jaya begins to write a fortnightly column "Seeta." To the Indians, Sita is the best example of undeserved suffering all through her life with brief interludes. Perhaps Jaya might have thought: "Is woman born to suffer and that too without complaint?" Hence she decides, "I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us." Thus, Shashi Deshpande presents Jaya as a role model for all the women suffering from this or that kind of injustice. They have to articulate their grievance. Jaya, a modern woman rooted in tradition, experiences an impulsive desire to be emancipated and, at the same time an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. As a result, she tries simultaneously to be a suitable wife and to retain her identity as an individual. However, in order to fulfill her roles as wife and mother, as Mohan wants her to, she gradually transforms herself to be a stereotyped house-wife always trying to please her husband. But slowly she begins to realize that her very compromise shatters her individuality. She realizes that women have allowed themselves to be victimized instead of working for a partnership. She too has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and
work out her own strategy. Accordingly, she decides that she will live afterwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She, no doubt, makes some adjustment of her own volition, taking care to see that she does not lapse into servility. Her decision to have her own way gives a new confidence to her and this confidence brings her emancipation.

Another characteristic concern for other women is observed in Shashi Deshpande’s novel, *The Binding Vine*. It shows how the educated earning woman helps a poor woman and thereby inculcates the spirit of solidarity among women. The novelist depicts the agony of a wife who is the victim of marital rape. She also portrays the plight of women raped outside marriage who would rather suffer in silence in the name of family honour. If Indu, Saru and Jaya are involved in fighting their own battles, Urmila of *The Binding Vine* is ahead of them by her endeavours to help other women—the poor and the downtrodden. She strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves fearlessly. She is indignant at the uncomplaining attitude of the victims in the name of family honour. Accordingly, she exhibits interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils. If her predecessors finally emerge as fulfilled individuals finding the strength to decide what they want to do, Urmila is an independent individual from the beginning with an identity of her own. Urmila draws the society’s attention to the inequality of sexes and thus she has less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. In spite of all this, she does not rebel against the established system because she believes that things are improving gradually but surely, though at a slow pace.
Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time*, portrays Sumi a woman who is more mature and dignified than her predecessors. The other women protagonists cannot think of themselves outside the familial bond. Sumi being a little detached, she manages herself admirably and almost becomes self-dependent.

Sumi of *A Matter of Time* gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from the utter desolation and trauma of being a deserted wife. At the age of forty, deserted by her husband, she stands alone and helpless along with her three teenaged daughters. But she is not emotionally shattered as is common with housewives without economic independence. She demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She displays rare courage and self-confidence in trying to cope with the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliations and frustrations, all by herself. Unlike any other in her place, she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion by Gopal, instead of making her an emotional wreck, has surprisingly brought out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent and assert her identity. She revives even her creativity. She, thus, comes a long way from Indu, Jaya, Saru and even Urmi. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. Shashi Deshpande seems to look hopefully at the younger generation to restore equality between the sexes and achieve harmony.
In *Small Remedies*, each individual character solves her problems on her own and does not reject all relationships in life. Her protagonists Madhu, Savitribai and aunt Leela need to be on their own to come to terms with life, but once they have achieved that, they return to their normal life, fortified by their newly found wisdom. Madhu, the woman character of the novel also returns at the end to her husband, Som.

Her women characters exhibit different behavioural traits. The young ones reject the traditional behavioural patterns and try to create new ones by synthesizing the old with the modern.

### 5.5 CONCLUSION

Each of Shashi Deshpande’s novels is special and offers food for thought on human relationships and emotions. Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears and feelings experienced by humans, by women. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one’s own mind. Recognizing oneself in her characters, one does not feel lonely in the world anymore. Reading her novels and stories is thus an immensely satisfying experience, as reading becomes a healing process.

Her concern about the problems of women and their quest for identity makes one consider her novels as feminist texts. She however does not like this labelling.
A woman who writes of women's experience often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feeling. I don't see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction. Later, Shashi Deshpande changes her stand and admits herself to be a feminist but only as a person and certainly not as a novelist. She declares her stance in an interview on the issue: I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first, and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it.

Further elucidating her viewpoint, she declares:

...I am a feminist, I'm a very staunch feminist in my personal life...cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders, this is my idea of feminism. I am a feminist very much and I strongly react against any kind of cruelty or oppression, denial of opportunities to women because they are women...the important thing is we have the right to live ourselves. But as a writer I'm not going to use my novels to carry the message of feminism. Then it becomes propaganda."

She, more or less, affirms the same opinion in another interview when she says: "my objection was to being called a feminist writer."
Shashi Deshpande is not a militant strident feminist. She believes that we are all part of society, and we need a family and some ties. More than being a feminist, she is a humanist. Her views are more akin to the modern feminist thought which is no longer regarded as radical. She expresses her desire to be a humanist in an interview given to Vanamala Viswanatha:

...I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women in relation to men. I don’t believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective, it’s only a coincidence.\(^{38}\)

Shashi Deshpande describes, in unequivocal terms, her idea of feminism. To a question from an interview whether she would like to call herself now a feminist, she reacts thus:

Yes, I would, I am a feminist in the sense that, I think we need to have a world, which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior; we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone De Beauvoir that the fact that we are human is much more important than our being men and women. I think that’s my idea of feminism.\(^{39}\)

She effectively portrays the lot of Indian women and the convoluted state of things. Her writing is known for courageous and sensitive handling of significant and
intractable themes affecting the lives of women. Her works, therefore, constitute an outstanding contribution to Indian literature in English.
Chapter – V


3. Ibid., p. 74.

4. Heather Dobson, ‘*Language and Gender*’. [http://www.essaybank.co.uk](http://www.essaybank.co.uk)


6. Ibid., p. 178.


19. Anuradha Roy, p. 43.

20. Ibid., pp. 45-49.

21. Ibid., pp. 50-53.

22. Ibid., pp. 50-53.


27. Ibid., pp. 102-103.


29. Shobha Dwivedi, To be or not to be: The Question of Professional Women in Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows & Small Remedies (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2003), p. 224.


31. Ibid., p. 130.


33. S. Prasanna Sree, pp. 15–23.


36. S. Prasanna Sree, p. 22.
