

Preface

Women's studies as a discipline is still in its infancy. This does not mean that serious thinking regarding women's problem did not exist in the earlier centuries or until recent times. The concept of women's studies as an independent discipline has still not gained its maturity. It is still more difficult to place it in a straightjacket because the women's question is no longer confined to women in the family situation and their status. So, it is a part of much broader spectrum. It is much difficult to pinpoint the area of research on women's studies.

This thesis is an investigation of the women characters of a renowned and established women-novelist Shashi Deshpande. She has written all her novels in the last two decades of the twentieth century. She reflects the realistic picture of the contemporary middle class woman and also provides a glimpse into the female psyche and deals with the full range of feminine experience.

Like other women novelists—Kamla Das, Anita Desai, Rama Mehta—Shashi Deshpande also takes up the theme of women's cause and their individuality in her novels. Actually the image of her woman character and position comes to explicit itself when we critically examine her relationship with her husband. Man-woman relationship is one of the dominating theme of Shashi Deshpande which includes in its gamut the problems of gender, self-hood, identity and male-

dominance etc. All such problems shape the various women-characters of Shashi Deshpande.

The introductory part of the thesis includes Biblical view of the creation of woman. As it precedes the views from the Vedic age and the modern age, regarding woman have been discussed. In the present age it also discusses the beginning of the feminist movement 1960 along with the different facets of the definition of feminism.

The first part of the chapter I embodies the survey of Indian fiction written by women writers. It begins with Toru Dutt, Cornelia Sorabji, Kamala Markandeya, Jai Nimbkar, Ruth Prawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Gita Hariharan, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Dina Mehta, Gita Mehta, Manju Kapoor, Namita Gokhale, Nirmala Moorthi and Bharti Mukherjee.

In this part of the chapter the themes of these novelists have been discussed.

Second part of the chapter sketches the biography of Shashi Deshpande and discusses the factors responsible for moulding in her a creative mind.

The second chapter deals with the images of women created by different Indian novelists. It includes the views of 'Big Three' and the contemporary women novelists like Bhavani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandeya, Anita Desai, Kamla Das, Veena Paintal and Shashi Deshpande.

Chapter III deals with the various feministic theories propounded by the western critics. At the same time it delves into the discussion of feminism in third world countries. It is also devoted to the views of Shashi Deshpande on feminism. How she accommodates western feminism Indian feminism in her writings. She analyses feminism from different angles. She forcefully argues for the rejection of the male - dominance for it leads woman - folk into the dungeon of alienation, rootlessness and identitylessness.

Chapter IV and V deal with the different novels of Shashi Deshpande and the women characters in it. Both these chapters embody a critical study of various women characters.

Finally, the last chapter VI concludes the thesis and describes how the women of Shashi Deshpande compromise between the tradition and the modernity.