

# Feminist Discourses of Mother - Daughter Relationship in Shashi Deshpande's Select Novels

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**Abstract-** During the pre independent era, under British Raj women writers like Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutta started writing in English, to voice their opinion about freedom fighting against British rule and the love for nation. Mahatma Gandhiji's movements, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayanand Saraswati's fight to abolish the Sati system, boycott on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows, custom of child marriages, distinguishing widows and numerous other practices impacting women and their libations amid pre Independence India. These impacts were portrayed by Indian women writers in both English and regional dialects.

With the passage of time and after independence more women began participating in social, political, cultural and economical causes. However they were not acknowledged as greatly as men in patriarchal society. Between 1960s and 1990s, Indian women have attempted to place themselves equally as men within the society by connecting themselves with family and professional duties.

**Key Words:** Shashi Deshpande, Identity, Oppression, Individual, Feminism, Patriarchal, Independence

## I. INTRODUCTION

In modern India there are a lot of women writers who hold their own feministic perceptions and they try to present women psyche as a whole in their writings as male writers. The themes of Indian women writers stand for women's emancipations and their rights. Such issues are the center of a number of contemporary feminist writers such as Shashi Deshpande, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kamla Das, Namita Gokhale, Kamla Markandey, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Indira Goswami, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, migrated writers Jumpha Laheri, Bharti Mukherji and so on who have contributed to Indian English literature. And the major theme of these writings is to expose and criticize the subjugation of woman by man in all its forms.

## II. FEMINISM

The term 'Feminism' has been inferred from the original Latin word 'Femina' implies a woman, later been referred to an advocacy of women's rights, status and power within patriarchal society to adhere with same equality of sexes. Simone de Beauvoir, famous French writer and feminist once said "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." The Second Sex (1949). In this quote he claims that the being a woman is not the way in which one is born, but rather something one becomes. A girl is born individually fair with diverse physical organs as a boy but it is society which gives social recognition to a gender and changes it into 'the other sex'. According to Virginia Woolf, one of the famous writers of the modernist era, "A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction." (Woolf, 1929) The 'room' here is associated with economic independence, not just a space in which to write. She believes that a woman should be economically independent to get the power, freedom and whatever she desires. It can readily be accepted that women and men have not been treated equally and that woman was not allowed or was not considered capable enough to participate in the various spheres of the society. Feminism is awareness of the same fact and also a desire to bring about a state of change. This would involve discarding of old assumptions, questioning the pre-defined norms, and inviting new perspectives. It is not possible to define feminism in concrete terms because more than being something tangible it is an ideological concept that is taken to support/favor women. It is also important to accept that feminism is not something which only women practice. Men also are feminists.

## III. ROLE OF WOMEN IN FAMILY:

Family is one of the greatest gifts to humans and is an abode of learning for relationships, love and affection, sharing and caring, pain and suffering. And Women play a vital role in any family as a mother, wife, sister, daughter, etc. Of all the familial relationships, the mother daughter relationship is the most powerful and most natural one as mother nurtures the child with his blood and milk. So, the influence of mother on the child is the strongest in his/her formation. In the patriarchal setup as depicted by Shashi Deshpande in her major novels, the role of mother becomes a major and vital in shaping the personality of a child especially the girl child.

Mothers are everywhere in literature, especially, though not exclusively, in work by women writers. Mother-daughter relations are particularly ambivalent, as daughters negotiate their way through ‘the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation’ in their relationships with their mothers, in a quest for their own sense of self.

Bonds between women suggest a dominant model for feminist intercommunity relations. Its originators see it carrying the meaning of shared oppression, common victimization, and solidarity. It has been used to advocate interracial, international, and cross-cultural bonds among women. It has been used to unite women of every class and society to fight against patriarchy. The term ‘sisterhood’ which promotes understanding, equality and solidarity among women has faced considerable criticism especially from feminists of the developing countries. The critics like Chandra Talpade Mohanty see it as a product of white, Euro-centric feminism that neglects the distinct political, cultural and financial conditions of women in different countries. There is a diverse range of cultural background, personal experiences and problems faced by women and the same is found different in developing countries and those in developed countries. These differences also restrain woman’s life and position.

In each of these the normal man-woman relations get disrupted and women find comfort in the bond with other women (mostly childhood friends and sisters). Yet crucial differences among them are revealed. What we find in recent Indian English literature is the bond with women has various emotional shades. They are aware of each other’s needs, understanding and support of each other during critical times, coming together against male domination and tyranny etc.

#### IV. FEMINIST APPROACH IN SHASHI DESHPANDE’S WORKS:

This paper intends to investigate the relationships between women in the works of Deshpande. Deshpande dealt with the problems of middle class educated women in major. She always had in her mind people from the real India to write about, but as she proceeded, gradually and unconsciously women have become the major focus in her writings. For Deshpande, “every novel starts with people”. Character occupies a pivotal role in her fiction. But she carefully avoids creating wooden characters. The novelist excels in portraying women characters. She is however averse to idealizing or sentimentalizing them. She says, “My characters are all human beings one sees around the world.” She also opines, “My characters take their own ways. I’ve often heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are.” Deshpande’s women characters have strength of their own. In spite of challenges and hostilities, they remain uncrushed. As compared to her women characters her male characters are generally typed or flat. She admits her inability to create a round character of the opposite sex.

Shashi Deshpande is a careful and conscientious writer. She re-wrote the short story “The Liberated Woman” seventeen times. Her novel *That Long Silence* begins with the sentence: “To achieve anything, you’ve got to be ruthless.” Certain ruthlessness characterizes all her writing. She frankly admits that “even writing requires a certain amount of ruthlessness.” One thing that characterizes all her writing is its transparency. She does not indulge in technical innovations or stylistic deviations, but her use of language is precise and fresh. She learnt the secrets of language assiduously. As a mature writer she has been conscious of the significance of this aspect of fiction writing right from the beginning. “I learnt about language. Craftsmanship is so important in writing, and you only learn it by doing it. And the short story was the perfect form to learn from, because one has to be brief. One had to be careful. And that training is still with me: I am very careful about not using extra words. I was also very conscious that I didn’t want to make any melodramatic or overt statements, ever. That’s how I learnt a kind of subtlety of approach. Not that I wanted to be subtle for the sake of being subtle, but because I didn’t want to overplay anything.” Her writings once again prove that art lies in concealing art. The highly functional language with telling economy that she uses is an important asset of hers as a fiction writer. In her modesty, Deshpande thinks of herself as “an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home.” But she would not like to compromise with the dignity and essential freedom of a writer. Without subscribing to the myth of elitist snobbery clamped on to Indian writing in English she is honestly concerned with expressing herself in English as clearly and effectively as possible. Asked whether she thinks in English while writing her fiction, she replied, “When I write narrative, I think in English; when I write dialogue I think in Kannada or Marathi, which are my languages.”<sup>22</sup> Justifying this kind of code switching, she added, “In our middle class families, most of us converse in English but automatically switch over to our mother tongue when we speak to our elders, relatives and so on.”<sup>23</sup> At places, the dialogue in her novels reads like a translation from Kannada, Marathi or Hindi, but her narrative is generally free from all Indian coinages. “I do not use Indianisms to make my writing look Indian...I never try to make India look exotic.”<sup>24</sup>

Deshpande writes in English because she finds it the most convenient mode of self-expression. She is however aware of handicaps of doing creative writing in a language other than one’s mother tongue. Writing in English makes her somewhat inhibited. She frankly admits: “I lose the range of nuances which are available in Marathi—for example, the richness of the phrases that make up the language. So I lose out on that, but I gain in other ways because English has its own special qualities too.”<sup>25</sup> But her English is different from other writers, she says: “I am different from other Indians who write in English, my background is very firmly there, I was never educated abroad.

My novels don't have any Westerners, for example. They are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives. Our inner lives and outer lives and the reconciliation between them. My English is as we use it. I don't make it easier for anyone really. If I make any changes, it's because I think the novel needs it." Despite all constraints, Deshpande uses language comfortably. According to her English should not be called a foreign language because of its wide application in India.

#### V. DESHPANDE'S PERSPECTIVE ON MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP:

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the inner commotion of a woman, fighting within herself, and her surroundings as she is perplexed about her own role in society as well as family. The psychic imbalance is a result of the conflicting relationship between mother and daughter. While tracing the conflicts of her women characters, Deshpande has also observed that, in some cases, women themselves create turmoil in the lives of other women.

A mother tries to teach what she has learnt in the war like situation of superiority of sexes. It is upto an individual that how he/ she interprets the experience that a mother has passed in terms of struggle. One must try to find and maintain some peace, beauty and respect for themselves as woman. The mother-daughter bond has been revisited during the Second Wave Feminist movement and has been accorded a central place in the family, social structure and in the development a woman's personality. There has been an urge by feminists for depiction of the voices of female relationships. The voicing has come buzzing out of the void of silence, revealing the pains, pleasures, struggles and misunderstandings that blind the understanding of motherhood and daughterhood, "a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, pre-verbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other." (Rich 19)

Deshpande's writings are full of disagreeable mother daughter relationship as the cause of clashes in the lives of her women characters. Saru's mother in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* plays a crucial role in bringing about her neurotic situation. Her mother inclines towards her son Dhruva to Saru. Dhruva's drowning and further leading to his death in blamed on Saru. Her mother's remarks "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" (35) The distressing effect of these words on Saru's psyche turns her rebellious and she starts moving against the wishes of people. Later, she joins a medical college and gets married against her mother's will. Both mother and daughter love and enjoy hurting each other.

The separation rises significantly, and the reconciliation does not occur even after the death of Saru's mother.

In *A Matter of Time*, a similar kind of conflicting relationship between Manorma and Kalyani results in Kalyani's terrible life. Manorma stops her education out of doubts on her and forcibly marries Kalyani to Shripati, her maternal uncle, so that her property is kept safe in family hands. *Moving On* also exhibits Vasu's stubborn attitude to unruly her daughter Manjari and to marry Shyam against her mother's wishes. The mother-daughter relation also suffers partly because of the generation gap resulting out of industrialization, urbanization effecting the collapse of joint family system. Deshpande's protagonists are mostly educated and awakened, and fail to agree to the conflicting views of the older generation. Jaya, the female protagonist in *That Long Silence* feels irritated and turns furious when Vanitha Mami says, "Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree" and "without the tree, you are dangerously uprooted and vulnerable ..." (TLS 32).

*Roots and Shadows* is again a depiction of the old order. Akka, the mother figure of novel herself is a victim of gender inequality and oppression but in turn victimizes the other women of the family. She reproves Indu as the latter talked to a boy in the secluded corner of the library. She also refrain Naren's mother from learning music, and says:

What learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of the strangers! Like THOSE women? Are we that kind of family? Isn't it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a decent family need to know? (RAS 55)

Akka imposes rigid rules on the women of the family. She forces Indu to believe in the fact that woman should never pronounce the name of her husband as it would curtail his life span.

Deshpande, here not only highlights the motives of alienation between mothers and daughters due to the latter's failure to understand the socio-economic situations in which the mothers are trapped, but moreover gives subtle insights into how they have to endure the pain of their helpless suppression of their own dreams and desires for their daughters, even in these brief portrayals of mothers. They are subjected to double dismissal, first of their rights as mothers in their daughters' lives, and second, ironically from their daughters themselves. Deshpande makes her portrayal of the mother-to-daughter relationship more detailed and compelling by comparing it to the patriarchal set-up in which even the modern educated woman is trapped in a dilemma between the stipulations of motherhood on the one hand and on the other, her desire for independence by working outside the home.

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