

WOMEN ISSUES: FEMINISTIC READING IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AND ANITA NAIR

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This paper aims to focus on women's issues in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair. Life is full of choices. Life is full of compromises. Life is an adjustment. Even a compromise is one of the respectable choices that are developed as a survival strategy by Shashi Deshpande in her novels. As R.S. Pathak rightly remarks:

The novel focuses on women's awareness of her predicament; she wants awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognized as a social person than as women wanting to have an independent social image. In a society, where these are considered out stepping the limits ...They succeed in achieving self –identity and independence and choose their partners in life to within pursuance of their felt need to lead a family life (32).

Shashi Deshpande is a contemporary Indo- European novelist who has presented the predicament of middle class Indian women who are struggling between traditional and modern roles in their life. Shashi Deshpande's works are well established merely on India setting. She has exemplified the inferior position of women in the conventional –bound Indian society. These existing norms damage the rights women and marginal their survival as human beings. She has taken up the issues of gender discrimination and social conditioning of the girl-child, husband-wife relationship: the antagonist and the suppressed, and the sexual mistreatment of women within and outside the material status. Shashi Deshpande has energetically exhibited the predicament of the girl-child who has to tolerate the trauma of gender - discrimination and social conditioning and is made to feel inferior to the young since her childhood. Social conditioning confines the zenith of a girl's personality as it lays stress on the mind to fix the beliefs or some ideas, especially by repeating often of predefined feminine mannerism, sensibility, servility, stamina, patience and forgiveness. Marriage has set as a vital goal for girls. Women have to accept, adjust, accommodate and convert themselves to go well with the interests of their male counterpart and in this process suppress their self identity. In one of her interviews she conveys to Lakshmi Holmstrom that:

“I am difficult from other Indians who write in English, my background is very firmly here. I was never educated abroad. My novels don’t have any westerners, for example. They are just about Indians people and the complexities of our lives. Our inner lives and our outer lives and reconciliation between them” (248-248).

The first novel of Shashi Deshpande is *Dark Holds No Terrors*, which was published in 1980, shows evidence of the cruelty of unjustified gender discrimination meted out to their girl-child. The protagonist of the novel, Saru, is intensely aware of her mother’s partiality for her brother, Dhruva, even as a child. Saru is not able to endure partiality which her mother offers to her brother, Dhruva, just because he is a boy. Saru recalls that there was “always a puja on Dhruva’s birthday. A special lunch is offered in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening. My birthdays were almost the same – but there was no puja” (DHNT 168-169). Saru finds her mother’s partiality towards her brother Dhruva and an indifferent attitude with respect to her as embarrassing because they were invalidating her survival as a person in the family. Dhruva dies by drowning in water. Though Saru tried her best to save her brother, Dhruva, all her efforts went in vain. She brings to mind, “Dhruva was swiftly, silently going away from me” (DHNT 145). Saru was underprivileged of all the rights of a child after the death of Dhruva. Mourning encircles the family and Saru’s reality was not noticed. The recollection of her girlhood reminds Saru of her fifteenth birthday, which was special to her as she received a pair of earrings as a gift from her friend, Smita. After admiring the earrings secretly, Saru feels a sense of supremacy and consequence. However, Saru dislikes the gift given to her by her mother because she becomes aware that the gift was to give her a colorful appearance as a young girl and was not a sign of love. She decides, “So that was it! It was not for me, not to please me and make me happy, but because I should, as a growing girl, have these things to wear ... I don’t want anything” (DHNT 171). Saru is never excused by her mother for the death of her brother, Dhruva.

Anitha Nair is one of the finest writers in Indian Writing in English with an international reputation. She is considered as a brave, fearless and straightforward writer. She mesmerizes the readers with her evocative language and descriptions with which her novels abound. Her novels represent the real life of her characters without hiding anything from her readers. The important point is that her novels reveal the consequence of social conditioning on women. Society utilizes many different resources to propagate beliefs. Literature is one of the greatest sources to transmit these thoughts further enclosed by such messages. The girls are brought up in a traditional way which educates them to obvious truths or wisdom. This is the process of conditioning in society.

In those days, they were purely portrayed as the souls of dependence and this dependence can be effectively acknowledged with a couple from Manu, the ancient codifier of Hindu law: Duteous girl obeys her father, Husband’s ways the duteous wife, son controls the widowed mother, Never free is a woman’s life (173).

Anitha Nair has very brilliantly, portrayed this concept in her novels, especially through Akhila, in *Ladies Coupe*. The characters of Nair’s novels commit faithlessness and disrespect as depicted in *Mistress*. They break the restrictions of social norms and do not imprison themselves to the restrictions of women. Her female characters are bold enough and confident to fulfill their wishes by going against the society. Many of the characters experience sex before entering the

social setup of marriage or ruin in extra marital affairs that is strictly against the Indian society. By representing premarital and extra – marital status that she break the chains of the society in representing her woman’s character which can show the way to its disintegration. She never hesitates to enlighten the reality however bitter it is and at the same time she influences to feel on the consequence of eliminating treachery to save family life.

Anitha Nair has depicted some of her protagonists are economically self-sufficient women and still they don’t have control over their own life, even major resolutions of their life are taken by others, she has obviously brought this impression in the light that women in modern Indian may be educated and independent but still the rope their life is in the hands of others. In her writings there is some similarity between the protagonists. They learn to refuse, and to accept against such social violence by going away from family restrictions. In the *Mistress* the character of Radha is bold and dominating. Being unhappy with her husband, she decides on for extra – marital affair with Chris her husband Shyam tries his level best to bring back to him, he is ready to forgive and forget her for all her mistakes, he is ready to accept her at any cost. “ I think of the other Radha to go back to” (*Mistress* 247) in many of her novels, Anitha Nair has depicted husband-wife relationship. Her female characters are bold enough to fulfill their desires by opposing family bond go up to the level of establishing physical satisfaction with other men. “Shyam’s call leaves me angrier than ever(*Mistress* 206). She confesses that in spite of being married some women are not satisfied with their marital life and they destroy in extra – marital affairs. The ruthlessness in husband – wife relationships lost which puts a big question on the way of life of such relationship. Anitha Nair’s feminism does not suit the Indian social system as it supports that all human relationships should be restored.

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