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**Research Article****Crossing Patriarchal Threshold: A Study of Deshpande's New Women****Dr. Naresh Sharma**

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande who refuses to be puppets at the hands of men in the male-dominated society. They try to prove that exploitation is never possible with the consent of the individual.

Key words:

Patriarchal, Threshold,

This article deals with the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande who refuse to be the objects of social and cultural oppression by the age-old patriarchal society. One of the ubiquitous feature of the patriarchal cultures the world over has been to treat women as the object or the other in relation to the male who constitutes the subject. Although the woman is desired, adored, and petted, but remains the passive recipient of the male's exuberant and passionate energy. She functions as the speculum of her male counterpart who narcissistically treats her as his own reflection, in complete and callous disregard of her feelings, and thoughts. She constitutes the 'absence' while the male has 'presence'. The dominant male strain in the society successfully puts woman under "erasure" and, consequently, she is not allowed to foreground her ideas, joys and sorrows. She has been continuously and steadily suppressed and exploited by her man, the master, who is the transcendent centre of power.

However, the aggressive rise of feminist movement from sixties onwards succeeded in subverting some of the entrenched male attitudes and practices, giving woman a chance to acquire solidity and specificity and in the process letting them bring to the centre stage of social set, their aspirations, their dreams and most importantly their "joissance". Female 'Joissance' came to be regarded by the feminists as the cardinal principle in determining whether women in a society were regarded as individual entities with personalities of their own.

In a patriarchal society like India, women are not considered as independent entities rather a thing to be owned. Consequently, the women starting resolving to set themselves free from the prison of patriarchy. The green signal was already shown by the feminist movements. In this connection, Seema Suneel writes:

This awakening among the feminists and women writers has helped them to project in their writing the image of new woman. In such times, when radical change is going on all over the country, it has become quite desirable for woman to redefine her new role and determine the parameters so as to become an integral part of family and society, striking a true balance between extreme feminism and the conventional role of subjugation and self-denial.

It is evident from the views of Seema Suneel that extreme feminism has neither practical value, nor the orthodox role of subjugation and self-denial is praise-worthy. A balance is required to maintain the purity of relations and hence, a new face of the woman has emerged in Indian English fiction. But, it does not mean that the new woman is merely an aggregate of certain personality traits to be studied through the methodology of social sciences. She is a being in her own way and is on the process of becoming. Though it is a queer fish to define a New Woman, she can be defined as woman who seeks self-fulfillment through self-expression in a milieu where there is mutuality, understanding and affection. Sharad Srivastava writes in this connection:

The woman is 'new' when she analyses and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social, moral and spiritual fields.

A new woman is absolutely different from the woman who thinks of seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and emphasizing on her own rights as a woman. She is gifted and blessed with depth and rationale thinking and is aware of value system. Quite contrary to the new woman is the woman who is wedded to self-assertion and dominance and who calls herself emancipated and economically independent. Such face of the woman is diagnosed as aberration. Thus, the new

woman clinging to her basic values modifying herself according to the modifying circumstances, goes ahead on the way seeking her identity with new depth and getting recognition but unlike like the aberration type. Sharad Srivastava writes:

Like the traditional woman, the new woman, too, tolerates, makes adjustments for the family and the husband, understands him and even forgives him but nowhere do we find her changing or moulding her basic personality.

Studies shape the character of man and generate inquisitiveness among readers. Literary endeavours by various writers bestir the readers and put them in thinking cauldron. The present study is also the off-shoot of such literary endeavours attempted by various women writers of English fiction. Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the gamut of Indian English literature. In the mid of 19th century many Indian women started to write in the English language. Beginning with feeble attempts at being heard, women novelists have incorporated the recurring female experiences in their writing. Evolving from a representation of their traditional and confined position, their expression has emerged fully liberated and bold in the contemporary era. Shashi Deshpande is also one of the new women writers, who has given a much coveted voice to various female characters. She had given a clarion-call to the women to bestir themselves through an article in Women in Indi-Anglian Fiction. The following poignant lines from her article may have forced the female sex to wake up from their long slumber:

Gender is undoubtedly one of the most important factors in our lives. The first question asked when a child is born, is 'boy or girl'? Our lives are, to a great extent, shaped by our gender I also realized that in a world dominated by male values, while the class and the class-struggle are taken seriously, the gender struggle is not.

Woman remained a partner of man in the advancement of civilization and she always stood by him through mazy paths. But the tragic part of story is that, there has been utter discrimination against women in all spheres of life. The electronic and print media is replete with stories of women's sufferings. New fanged methods are being discovered to exploit women. Infants are raped and women are molested. From the womb to the tomb, the life of a woman is full of ordeals.

There is no problem with the roots, but, what about the branches. The reasons are multifarious. Men are always on the stage and women are among the audience. But the most plausible reason is that the scepter is in the hands of men and women end up as dumb-driven cattle. The power is in the hands of man who believes in conquering and subjugating. Even the social setup favours the patriarchy. Women are forced to reap the harvest of men's frustrations. Man wants to win with the weapons of violence and autocracy. Man is the king of family kingdom because he gives security and shelter to the family.

Now the women are working, but they are out of the frying pan into the fire. Her job has failed to shift her responsibilities. Her shoulders are lifting the responsibilities of bread-winning but her family responsibilities are not shared. Things are changing by and by, but at snail's place. She still stands at the threshold of her existence.

The working women in the offices have to face male-dominance who cannot digest the fact they should be bossed over by a woman at the office. Out of compulsion, she has to use authoritative steps to show people their respective places at work. Every night is followed by a day and everything is nine days wonder. When snake is alive, it eats ants. When it is dead, ants eat snake. Time matters. It always gives chance to everyone provided an individual or group swallows the pill of patience. Optimistically enough, the tables are being turned and it is anticipated that a new woman has almost emerged. To whom, evil is done, do evil in return. Politically, the woman is on the verge of getting one-third reservation of seats in Parliament and at other places, too. These reservations are not charity, but is the offshoot of apprehension that they may unfurl the flag of their capabilities in all spheres and the line must be drawn somewhere. Though, at the receiving end in society, she is raising her head rapidly to protect herself and her individuality. The change is on the cards and she has put on the robe of determination. Men have to stop barking in their self-concocted glory. The iron is already hot and women should strike it and rather bend it to make a sickle to fight for their rights. It is now or never for the New Woman. She has come to stay: to assert herself not as beneficiary, but as an equal participant in the advancement of civilization.

The stage is set and the era of change is round the corner, at least in Metropolitan India. The New Woman is confident in her manner of walking, talking, acting and almost in all other arenas of life. She is on the war-path and she has taken a step ahead from the threshold. She is on the path of discovering or re-discovering herself; her needs and her identity. She has made a name in the classrooms, in space, in politics, in bureaucracy, in the fields of game and where not. She has proved and shown that she can walk shoulder to shoulder with man even ahead of him provided she is given opportunity. Most importantly, women have carved a suitable and sure niche for themselves in literary endeavours. The bookshelves in libraries and bookshops hardly find any title, attempted by male writers.

The problems of women have been raised in the works of many Indian writings in English. R.K. Narayan, Kamla Das, Anita Desai, Bhavani Bhattacharya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Rama Mehta, Bharati Mukherjee, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy are a few of the prominent names in this field. Kamala Das may perhaps be said to be the first voice of the woman, for the woman, and by a woman. Candidly speaking, Indian literature has given voice to women. The Indian literature has mirrored the women, who resist patriarchy and have emerged out as New Women.

The present chapter deals with the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande who resist and question the patriarchal and male-dominated society. Traditionally speaking, women have been characterized as warm, self-effacing, gentle and submissive, who are to be kept in subordination to the male members. Manu declares:

Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons [...] Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasures elsewhere, he must be worshipped as God.

Women were deprived of the right to study the scriptures and the Code of Manu was so rigorously observed that the role of women was confined to the family, and thus they were denied rights equal to man. Although her lot in the family kept changing with the times, but it invariably remained inferior one. Still she is hardly given much freedom. Shantha Krishnaswamy comments on the general lot of women thus:

She is a creature who as a child is sold off to strangers for a bridal price, or when she grows up, serves as a supplier of dowry for her husband's family, or who as a widow, in a final act of obliteration immolates herself on her dead husband's funeral pyre to be acclaimed as 'Sita-Savitri', as an immortal.

The early decades of the 20th century witnessed an improvement in the women's lot, which was the result of the initiatives and movements of Raja Rao and Jotiba Phule. A major change was effected by Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on women's participation in his non-violent movement. In an article on Gandhi entitled, "Not by Faith Alone", Ramachandra Guha observes:

Woman is the companion, Gandhiji affirmed as early as 1918 with equal mental capacities and she has the same right of freedom and liberty. He (Gandhi) dismissed the ideas put forward by Manu as an interpolation and it was not an interpolation, he could only say that in Manu's days, women did not have the status they deserved.

Further, the dawn of western liberal education forced new values of life upon women. Legally, she has been given equal rights with man, the submissive and gentle nature of women embedded deeply into their psyche did not disturb the male-dominance in the family. The male mentality is so shaped that it cannot adjust to the notion of woman being equal to man.

Despite equal opportunities of education and economic independence, women remained a victim of domestic injustice within the family, and other legal rights outside. Despite the universally acknowledged fact that women perform on par with man physically and mentally, they have been denied the freedom to express their feelings, thoughts and anguish. The women have been working indoors and outdoors, but their services remain unrecognized. Although the lot of women in the family and society has changed with times for the better, but remained invariably inferior to those of men.

The last quarter of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of some great women writers like Toru Dutt, Mrs Ghoshal, Sorabji Cornelia and Krupabal Sathianatham, K.S. Ramamurti, in his book "Rise of the Indian Novel in English", says, "*it (their works) was qualitatively superior to those of many others who wrote before and after them*".

The movements of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi proved a great relief to women as they were brought out of the tyranny of the social evils. But still the goal was away and the number of women enjoying considerable freedom was very meager. For the majority of women, subordination to men and misery was synonymous. The battle for emancipation was taken over by a few educated women, and they emerged out as revolutionary writers. The motive was to voice their own bitter experiences as women with a view to influencing the society and effecting social reforms. Professor John B. Alphonso Karkala in his book *Indo-English Literature of the 19th century writers*:

They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts, which attracted publishers, both in India and abroad.

The orthodox and ideal image of woman like the traditional Sita or Savitri was gradually replaced by the realistic one, i.e., the frustrated and alienated one. The introduction of liberal English education not only brought significant changes in the middle-class life-style but also raised a consciousness of freedom in the minds of women. This only led to a romantic desire for a freedom that wasn't easy to come by. The women writers, thus, used this conflict between tradition and modernity. It was portrayal of women facing the conflicts and problems issuing from the fusion of the traditional and modern values. The transition from the old to the new; from the traditional to the modern affect both the sexes, but the fair sex gets the worst of it – the crisis of value adaptation being the more excruciating. The modern age has left woman confused between the opposing forces of modernity and tradition, and they find it difficult to reconcile between their romantic aspirations and realities of life. It is a conflict between a personal fulfillment of desires and their duty towards family and children.

Thus, most of the woman novelists took up the theme of the problem of adjustment, and they are shown adjusting themselves to the ground reality. Earlier, the problems of women were more of an emotional nature due to her attachment to home and family, but with her increasing consciousness as an individual, she has begun to assert herself within the family and outside it as well. A society conditioned to the age-old patriarchal mindset opposes and rejects such deviation from the established social norms, and his opposition to her quest for identity and selfhood becomes a cause of her seemingly impossible struggle. Although, there are many women forums voicing their concern, but the going seems tough except through literary endeavours.

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