



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE AND MANJU KAPUR'S WORKS

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Abstract

This study explores the feminist themes and perspectives in the works of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur, two prominent Indian novelists. Through a critical analysis of their novels, this study examines how the authors portray women's experiences, identities, and struggles in Indian society. The study highlights the ways in which Deshpande and Kapur's works challenge patriarchal norms and stereotypes, offering a feminist critique of Indian society. By examining the intersection of feminism and literature, this study provides insights into the complexities of women's lives and the role of literature in shaping our understanding of gender and identity.

Keywords- Feminism, Indian literature, Women's studies, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur

Introduction

Feminism is a complex set of ideologies and theories, that at its core seeks to achieve equal social, political, and economic rights for women. Although feminism benefits everyone, its aim is to achieve equality for women, because prioritizing those who are most oppressed means freeing everyone else. Since men's rights are already secured and institutionally protected, feminism does not aim to help men.

The Origin of the Word "Feminism"

Although the term "feminist" is frequently used to refer to individuals like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), the phrases feminist and feminism were not used in the contemporary sense until one hundred years after the publication of her book "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" in 1792.

Although there has been some conjecture that the phrase may have existed earlier, it was first used in France in the 1870s as *féminisme*. The term then denoted the liberation or emancipation of women.

Leading French feminist and suffrage advocate Hubertine Auclert coined the term "*féministe*" in 1882 to refer to herself and other women's rights activists. A Paris gathering in 1892 was characterized as "feminist." As a result, the phrase became more widely used in the 1890s, first in Great Britain and then in America starting around 1894.

Feminism and Society

Men dominate the majority of political, economic, and cultural decision-making in almost all contemporary societal organizations, which are patriarchal in nature. This is mostly because of European colonization and imperialism. Eliminating the numerous matrilineal civilizations that existed around the world and replacing them with Western patriarchy was one of the cultural

erasures carried out by imperialism. The core tenet of feminism is that since women make up half of the global population, real social development cannot be made without their full and unplanned participation.

The focus of feminist ideals is on how women's culture differs from men's culture. The ways that women are not treated similarly to men are studied by feminist scholars.

Feminist ideology takes into account the ways that gender-specific culture can and should differ: Do men and women have distinct aspirations, values, and visions? Moving from point A (the current quo) to point B (female equality) by a declaration of commitment to behavior and action to bring about that change is highly valued.

Protecting the lives and rights of queer, transgender, and gender-expansive individuals is just as important to feminism as defending the rights of cisgender, heterosexual women. The intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and other variables are also taken into account by feminism, especially as those who live at these intersections—such as trans women or women of color—are frequently the most vulnerable. By taking these interconnections into account, academics and activists have created conceptual frameworks for what feminism entails. The Combahee River Collective Statement from 1977 is one such founding document. The statement, which was created by a group of Black feminists, explores the intricacies and difficulties of feminism as it relates to the politics and identities of race, sexual orientation, and class. It also offers a more comprehensive understanding of what feminism means for people who are not White, heterosexual, and cisgender.

Feminism and Sexuality

Sexuality, which encompasses behavior, sexual encounters, posture, and physical exposure, is one area where women have historically faced oppression. In patriarchal cultures, women are supposed to be more submissive and silent, while men are supposed to be the leaders, standing tall and letting their bodies speak for them. According to these social norms, women are not expected to occupy a lot of table space and, most definitely, should not be perceived as a distraction to the men in their immediate vicinity.

Unlike many social norms that penalize sexually aware and empowered women, feminism aims to promote and encourage female sexuality. A double standard is created for both sexes when sexually active men are praised while sexually active women are denigrated.

Men have a long history of sexually objectifying women. In many communities, women are expected to completely cover their bodies, and many cultures still hold onto the idea that women should dress in a way that does not attract men.

However, in some supposedly enlightened societies, the media frequently takes advantage of women's sexuality. Full nudity in films and television shows, as well as scantily dressed women in advertisements, are usual, but breastfeeding in public shames many women. In addition to being among the most vulnerable and institutionally disadvantaged, sex workers—the bulk of whom are women and queer people—are also barred from some so-called feminist circles.

Women and men must constantly negotiate a perplexing terrain of expectations brought about by these divergent perspectives on female sexuality.

Feminism in the Workforce

The constellation of feminist principles, organizations, and movements pertaining to workplace injustice, discrimination, and oppression that arises from the actual disadvantages faced by women is diverse. Sexism, which oppresses and/or disadvantages people who identify as women, is still a problem in the workplace despite feminism's assumption that it is undesirable and ought to be eradicated.

The workforce is still rife with wage disparities. On average, women still only make 80.5 cents for every dollar earned by men, even after the Equal Pay Act of 1963. However, when race is taken into account, this changes considerably. Asian women made 90 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2018, while White women made roughly 79 cents. However, Black women made only 62 cents, Latinx or Hispanic women made only 54 cents, and Indigenous women made only 57 cents. In 2017, the median annual income for women was \$14,910 less than that of men, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Femismim OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande primarily focuses on depicting the inner anguish of an educated Indian woman in the modern era who is divided between tradition and patriarchy on the one hand, and women's freedom, individuality, and self-expression on the other. Her female characters are all searching for their own identities apart from the traditional roles of mother, wife, and daughter. The female protagonists of novelist Shashi Deshpande's works evolve in tandem with the stories they tell. Indus (Roots and Shadows), Saru (The Dark Holds No Terror), Jaya (That Long Silence), Urmila (The Binding Vine), and Sumi (A Matter of Time) are the five female characters who begin the novel in a condition of confusion. They progressively start to doubt their presumptions, examine their behavior, and realize their true selves as the narrative goes on. After it, they feel more confident, in control of their lives, and full of hope and optimism for the future. Modern Indian women, as depicted by Deshpande, are neither submissive goddesses nor angry superwomen. She portrayed the death and evil of a mystery universe while creating engaging and intriguing characters. Though they are middle-class, educated women, they are at risk due to tradition's rigidity. They continue to live their lives, but now they speak for themselves and have a distinct viewpoint on the world. It works to establish a civilized society, driven by the need to bring order out of chaos. Jaya of That Long Silence is also resisting the treatment of women in our culture. The place to find for a woman's true self is not in middle-class respectability. She possesses innate talent, empathy for others, and deep self-awareness. She is on the verge of being her best self, psychically speaking. She is now anxious and crazy because she has had to suppress her individuality for so long. A form of protest is raised by inquiries about the status of gender equality and the rights of Indian women. Regardless, she is attempting to present us with a feminine perspective on the past. Shashi Deshpande addresses rape, death, and decay once more in A Matter of Time. Over the span of three generations, we witness the current state of marriage and married life in contrast to its

idyllic, peaceful origins. Our main character, Aru, challenges the socially prescribed roles of men and women. Deshpande represents the pinnacle of tradition and modernity as we currently see it. Aru is situated in the liminal space between the past and the present. Shashi Deshpande is breaking down patriarchal conventions and empowering women by doing this. She is demeaning the image that guys create and she is also channeling her anger and resentment toward a positive goal. Renowned feminist novelist Shashi Deshpande fervently advocates her brand of feminism while upholding a broad humanistic viewpoint. Through her artistic ability and convictions, Deshpande has demonstrated herself to be an exceptional writer who genuinely cares about the struggles and anxieties of women. Her characters are courageous and strong, and they respond to the demands of their society by creating their own role models. She is a master at creating strong female characters who overcome hardship and whose tales encourage us to follow in their footsteps. The challenging lives of contemporary Indian women are frequently portrayed in her writings, which she has written with extraordinary artistic talent and inventiveness. Because of her admirably accurate depiction of the current situation of Indian women and the workable remedy she offers, her books will always be significant for the positive eloquence of their message for women and for all of humanity. She has examined a number of common crises that cause people to begin searching. Deshpande's feelings toward the feminine characters are more intense and sympathetic. The author depicts a woman's struggle to establish her own identity and self-respect while tactfully exposing the many forms of oppression, particularly sexual oppression, that women in our society must contend with. A new generation of women who accepted the new ideas finally heard the voices of women who had been hushed for generations. Authors of the new generation portray women as powerful, self-reliant, and able to make their own choices without depending on men's tastes.

Feminism OF Manju Kapur

This contemporary kind of feminism is addressed in the works of novelist Manju Kapur, whose books *A Married Woman* and *Home* have been examined in this essay. In her writings, she has attempted to breathe new life into feminism. The female protagonists of Manju Kapur's works endure a great deal in their lives, including mental anguish, physical abuse, social prejudice, and gender bias in their relationships. Despite this, they never give up on their goals. In 1948, Manju Kapur was born in Amritsar, Punjab. She graduated from the women's college Miranda House, then went on to get an M.A. from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada, and an M.Phil. from Delhi University. She is currently employed at Delhi University's Miranda House as an English literature professor. Manju Kapur became extremely well-known in the literary world after her first book, *Difficult Daughters*, received the 1999 Commonwealth Prize. *A Married Woman* and *Home*, written by Manju Kapur, were published in 2003 and 2006, respectively. Astha and Nisha, the respective protagonists of these two novels exhibit the traits of modern feminism that is never ending spirit and thirst for success in life. Astha and Nisha are so much dynamic in their souls and spirits that they are determined to make their own space in the society, in the world and on the sky. Like the other protagonists of Manju Kapur, these two protagonists also do not believe only in sulking, blaming others, cursing themselves or getting frustrated in their lives. Astha and Nisha want to change their lives as per their choices and conditions but at the same time they do not want to violate the circumference of their

responsibilities also. The novel *A Married Woman* revolves around a middle-class Hindu family which belongs to Delhi. Hemant is a business tycoon based in Delhi and has returned from the United States, and gets married with Astha, a well-educated middle class Hindu girl. At first, the couple's marriage life goes very smooth without any problem. But the norms of the male-dominated culture make Hemant go by his own desires and demands whether it is about his personal life or professional life. At the same time, Hemant does not treat his wife Astha with respect. As a result, Astha, who is dissatisfied with her life as a wife and daughter-in-law, begins looking for work. She quickly finds a position teaching in a nearby school. Since Astha never questions Hemant about anything, their traditional married life seems to be going well. When Astha meets Aijaz Khan, a Muslim who has no religious faith, her life is upended. Astha and Aijaz's developing romance ends suddenly when Aijaz and several members of his street theater troupe are slain in a communal violence in Ayodhya. Following that, Astha meets Aijaz's widow, Pipeelika. Subsequently, Astha and Pipeelika both start dating as lesbians. When Astha reestablishes her emotional connection to her family and Pipeelika chooses to pursue her PhD in the United States, their covert romance comes to an end. Even though Astha and Pipeelika have a very happy relationship, Astha is well aware of how superficial it is since Pipeelika constantly pressures Astha to leave her family, something she cannot do. Numerous concerns that are deeply ingrained in the family, the initial unit of our social structure, are revealed in this story. These concerns include the uprising against long-standing customs, marital difficulties, women's survival struggles, the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, and family. All these issues are discussed in the novel. Along with all these problems the novel also deals with the illusion of fulfilment which is provided by the home, and which is shattered even by the home, and which is disillusioned with acquiring a 'home in true sense'. This journey of 'disillusionment from illusion' is presented through the character of Nisha, the chief protagonist of this novel. Nisha is the symbol of a 'New Woman' in its perfect sense, self-confident, self-dependent, extrovert, dynamic and realistic. Nisha is more assertive and self-assured one in her family than any other women and she proclaims her womanhood in a bold manner. Nisha is physically exploited by Vicky two times during the early childhood phase of her life. Nisha is severely disturbed and mentally broken as a result of this maltreatment. Finally, the decision is made to send her to her aunt Rupa's home. Nisha heals from her tragedy and focuses on her academics at Rupa's house. Under the tutelage of her uncle Premnath, Nisha excels academically and outperforms all of her brothers. Nisha has been living with her uncle and aunt for the past eleven years. However, Nisha is returned to her parents' home to provide emotional support to her grandmother following the passing of Lala Banwarilal. This turns out to be a significant shift in Nisha's life for which she is unprepared. Rupa's home and her own had a very different ambiance. Nisha is expected to assist her mother with household chores and share cooking duties, and no one here is interested in her academic pursuits. Nevertheless, she attends college to further her studies. While attending college, Nisha develops feelings for Suresh, a youngster from a lower caste. Nisha is not permitted to wed her in the interest of family honor. Then, due of her horoscope's Mangli element, she would have to wait a long period to get married. Despite this, her younger brother Raju marries and has a son. Nisha's circumstances inside the house had been worse recently.

Conclusion

In her stories, Shashi Deshpande hopes to portray strong, sensible women. Like males, women are entitled to full autonomy, including all of its means and acknowledgment. They advocate for women's rights in politics as well as other areas of society. They draw attention to how well the public views women. A simple examination of Shashi Deshpande's writings reveals that she raises women's position. She firmly believes that men and women should be treated equally. According to her, the success of the nation as a whole and the well-being of both sexes depend on a peaceful society where men and women live side by side. In general, women's attempts to discover their uniqueness are shown in Kapur's novels. Her works' female protagonists are notable for serving as role models for modern Indian women, describing the male-controlled boundaries and opportunities for them to claim their individuality and achieve self-actualization and self-righteousness. The author consistently favors realism in her works, and her novels are notably influenced by feminist ideas. The female protagonists in Manju Kapur's book are convincingly portrayed as striving to define their identity and survive in this patriarchal Indian society. They use their education and independence as a tool to stay strong even when they defy the rules, traditions, and relationships. Her female characters are not the kind who merely hide behind traditions and customs; rather, they make a choice and work hard to strive for a better result.

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