



A study of women struggling for freedom towards in novel of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande is prose rhapsodists of feelings, sentiments and emotions passing through the human consciousness, like Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen. Their attention is focused also on feminine suffering in the complex cultural stresses and strains of Indian society. A new generation of women emerged, embracing the changed values in which women have a voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. An attempt has been made in the present study to identify the concept of domestic relationships with reference to three novels of Shashi Deshpande namely *The Dark Holds No terrors* (1980), *That Long Silence* (1988) and *The Binding Vine* (1992). The above excerpt from one of the study by the author herself truly portrays Shashi Deshpande, a name well known in literary circles for depicting the quotidian life of the average Indian Women. Deshpande is quite clear that for her finding her own voice meant not first a women's voice but a literary voice of her own. No magic realism, no concessions to "Marketability", no themes or situations that cater to so called western audience, no adapting her style to what a target readership might prefer, without the air of exotic element brewed in her style is marked by an absence of flamboyance or literary finish. She has been for the last three decades writing quietly about human predicament. Playing out the lives of ordinary people who we might encounter on streets, bringing into sharp focus the meaning of life itself. Though her writing is very Indian, the themes honour no borders. It is true indeed that Deshpande writes about women, but its human beings that link behind her characters. Her novels also reveal one very striking chord that human being is often a lonely one though not alone. It is needed true that most of her female characters have an incredible inner strength, which empowers them along their way through conflicts, turmoil's and even absence conditions. Women in Shashi Deshpande's novels seem to be hiding their own strength, their own capability probably to smoothen up their home-because the other believes that women's strengths weaken man. It is clear from the study of each novel that the women of Shashi Deshpande novels are rebels and feminists, but they are unlike their western counterparts. In western countries, the women's issues are mostly related to identity, jobs, equality and sexual roles. In India, for the majority of women, it is a question of stark survival. The few who have escaped the vicious existential circles through education and better opportunities, also find themselves in a constant tussle with inevitable social mores and with the oppressive weight of tradition behind. In the Indian milieu all the talks of transcending biology of reproduction. However, the Indian female is now beginning to stir out of her placid stoicism. In novel after novel, Shashi Deshpande treats Indian feminine consciousness turn into dissent. The woman of India now reflects a shift in sensibility in Shashi Deshpande fiction. She is no longer the paragon of virtue and chastity to be extolled by poets, priests and philosophers. She is a symbol of imagination, of sensibility itself, of nature arraigned versus the alien forces that are actively denaturing humanity. The Indian woman seeks to be emancipated. Even though poor, she wants to be independent though bound by affection, she craves for deliverance from manipulation. In short, what a woman wants, in India and elsewhere, is the same emancipation for the female as for the male. The question of superiority or inferiority to man is irrelevant. What is relevant is the modern woman's endeavor to grapple with the particular, the concrete and the immediate. This is precisely, Shashi Deshpande message loud and clear, through her fictional corpus, and ESP.

Keywords: women struggling, freedom, novel, Shashi Deshpande, stresses, Indian society, centuries, etc.

Introduction

The gender prejudice and the ambivalent position of the Indian woman has always been strange and shocking, reminding us of situations in some absurd drama. On one hand, she is a Goddess, Grih-Lakshmi, Durga, Saraswati, Kalyani etc. but on the other hand, she is an instrument of corruption and evil, a vamp, a toy for sexual gratification, a door-mat or a housemaid. In the dark room, according to Jayant Mahapatra 'a woman can't find her reflection in the mirror: we are told of women as sages, scholars, leading an independent life. But the same Vedic ages have as well told us the stories of Sita's abject exile and Draupadi's stripping in a Court full of sages, scholars and warriors. No doubt, there has

been a minor change in her lot, as a small percentage of them have been leading a life of many privileges, much freedom and some respect. Here, I would like to quote Dr. A. N. Prasad's observation:

Right from the Vedic age, women have been the subject of vitriolic comments, though a bit eulogistic too. In Vedas, most of the hymns are attributed to only sons – never to daughters. Atharva Veda says: "The birth of a girl grants elsewhere, here grant a son." In the Koran, a woman is "described as a fitna, one who tempts man and bring trouble." The Bible observes that God formed woman out of the rib of man. This led to the age-long disparity between man and woman. Man boasts and brags and tries to dominate and domineer over woman only

because woman has come out from man - she being one of the ribs of man ^[1]. But the detractors of the female sex mustn't revel in saying that crookedness is an innate part of a woman. They should bear in mind that if sometimes women become cold and cruel, it is only because woman was made of the ribs – the crookedest part of a man's body.

Today a woman is not a doll in the hands of man. She is being seen establishing her identity in almost every walk of life. Apart from many other fields, women have also heralded a new consciousness in the realm of literature. Their immense contribution to English literature in general and fiction in particular is worth noticing and praiseworthy. Kamala Mark Andaya, Ruth PraverJhabvala, Santha Rama Rau, Nay AntaraSahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai Geeta Mehta, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapoor and many more have left their indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

However, the life of the common Indian woman hasn't changed much ^[2]. Educated or uneducated, a working woman or a housewife, her status and position have remained almost unchanged. She is still dominated by her father, husband and sons in turns, and she has to dance to their tune. Cases on Honour-killings in the Northern India clearly make a non-sense of all the hue and cry over the Woman's Emancipation Movements. The Indian society is yet governed by the prejudice of the Gender Divide – i.e. Male is male and female is female. The one has all the rights by birth; the other receives whatever is granted to her. However before we discuss the feminist approach of the Indian Writer, it would be worthwhile for us to make a quick survey of the history of feminism in the literary circles ^[3].

The term 'feminism', has its origin from the Latin Word 'femina' meaning 'woman' (through French 'feminism') and thereby refers to the advocacy of women's rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of equality of sexes.

That Long Silence

I'm not writing of all those innocent young girls I've written of till now; girls who ultimately mated themselves with the right men. Nor am I writing a story of a callous, insensitive husband and a sensitive, suffering wife. I'm writing of us of Mohan and me. And I know this – you can never be the heroine of your own story. Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.

Shashi Deshpande claims that only a woman writer can portray and tell the complete story of a woman, from the inside as it were. Thus, her stories and novels are gender-specific ^[4]. *That Long Silence* also portrays an educated middle class Indian woman's predicament with minute analysis of the unwholesome situations in which a woman is supposed to work, to live and move about. She feels herself caught between two currents that push this way and that way that she feels crushed and annihilated. She loses her voice of self-assertion, which ultimately leads to confusion and termination. Thus the writer shows her female protagonist on the road to self-discovery.

That Long Silence is a story of a female protagonist, Jaya, who

suffers in her childhood days and after marriage faces the worst crisis of her life, pushing her towards insanity and madness. She has been receiving the over-dose of advice at the time of marriage that husband is like a sheltering tree and a woman should not leave it at any cost. Unfortunately, differences crop up between husband and wife and Jaya is forced to live along all by her, while nothing is heard about her husband for a considerable time ^[5]. This long period of silence between Jaya and Mohan creates emotional upheaval in her and she experiences worse traumatic experience of her life. Ultimately, she gains inner strength and discovers her true identity. She comes to realize that one must learn to compromise with life's problems and realities. At the end of the novel, Jaya is an altogether different lady with new perception of life. Thus, she redefines her relations with the world.

Dark Holds No Terrors

The Dark Holds No Terrors is Shashi Deshpande's favorite novel. She confesses this herself at the very outset of the book. Thus, she says;

"*The Dark Holds No Terrors*' is, of all my novels, the one dearest to me. Perhaps this is because it is the one that came closest to the vision I had when I conceived it. Perhaps, it is because it was this book that gave me the near to-be-experienced-again happiness of a first acceptance... (Prefatory note to the D.H.N.T.)"

The predominance of marriage in a girl's life, had never let Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, forget that she was a girl. Her mother, a woman rooted in tradition constantly reminded her of the difference between her and her brother, Dhruva. Her remark that she was nothing more than a burden, a responsibility that had to be transferred at the appropriate time, makes Saru detest the tradition, which limits the life of a girl to marriage.

The bitterness that had crept into their relationship after Dhruva's death and her mother's constant reminder that she is a girl makes the growing Saru hate her sexuality. "You're growing up she would say [...] and it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your own father". (Deshpande, *The Dark* 62)

Saru grows up hating her womanhood that consisted of feeling impure and ashamed of one's sexuality and living with the sole purpose of getting married. She vows to rebel against such traditions and in spite of her mother's objection joins a medical college in Bombay. It is here, while studying anatomy and physiology that she begins to accept her womanhood rather than detest it. She begins to enjoy her female identity and learns to dress and walk gracefully ^[6].

Her meeting with Manu (Manohar) brings back the memories of her old college days when she a student of first year and was fascinated by Manu, a post-graduate student. His multifaceted personality of a good student, secretary of literary association, an active member of the dramatic society, a budding writer and a poet of promise, had made him a college hero.

Her mother's disapproval of the match because of Manu belonging to a lower caste brings back in Saru's life the obstructions laid by tradition. Adamant not to yield to the

traditional views of her mother, she marries Manu the day he acquires a room for them to live in. Hence Saru ignores her mother's warning and overlooks the hierarchical difference between their caste and profession to marry Manu.

With marriage Saru experiences the joy of discovering her sexuality. For the marriage becomes a means to fulfill the love and affection she always longed for. Later, she recalls, "I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted." (Deshpande, *The Dark* 40).

The meager income that Manu gets from his job of a college lecturer and their one room in chawl does not interrupt their bliss. Basking in Manu's love, Saru feels that she has achieved the traditional aim of being chosen by a "superior male." But soon she realizes that Manu is no superior. Instantly her profession achieves for her a position superior to Manu's. She is recognised and respected by the neighbours who come frequently to consult her. The respect that Saru gets disturbs the traditional equilibrium of the superior husband and inferior wife. Later analyzing her marital relationship she recalls, "But now I know it was there it began [...] this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this too that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteems with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller made him inches shorter. He has been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (Deshpande, *the Dark* 42).

Saru's ambition and her desire to attain a comfortable life makes her take help from Boozie, a senior doctor and a philanderer. She aims higher and responds to Boozie's interest in her. He moulds her in to a polished sophisticated urban woman and helps her career progress in leaps and bounds.

Hence Saru finding a means to attain her dreams, moves forward while Manu retains his old position of a lecturer in a third grade college. This disparity deepens the rift in their relationship. But things change for the worse when a reporter from a woman's magazine comes to interview Saru and asks Manu, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (Deshpande, *the Dark* 200) This question makes Manu even more conscious of the reversed positions held by them. That night Manu attacks and physically assaults her in bed. This nightmarish incident is repeated and with increased brutality every time he is reminded of his inferior status. One such night Saru wakes up "to darkness and an awareness of fear. Panic then pain. There it was, for the second time, what I had just lulled myself into believing was just a nightmare. The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. And above me, a face I could not recognise. Total non-comprehension, complete bewilderment, paralyzed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength which overwhelmed me. My mind, fluttering, threw itself despairingly on the walls of unbelief and came back staggering, bruised and spent. And then mercifully, the end, the face still hovering over mine, changing as the body relaxed, becoming the familiar known one of my husband's. The face and body both are moving away to become a familiar huddled shape by my side." (Deshpande, *the Dark* 112).

Realizing that her profession and economic superiority have become the cause of Manu's frustrations she even talks to him of quitting her job but Manu quickly reminds her of the monetary loss and deterioration in life style her decision would bring. Commenting on Saru's decision to quit her job Chaur Chandra Mishra opines, "Once a big catch, a handsome and virile man for husband, Manohar fails her in bed in satisfying her nymphomaniac urge. Now she is empowered to ride over him either by blackmailing to resign her job or corner him to accept her domination as the bread-earner of the family."

Roots and Shadows

Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with women belonging to Indian middle class, who are brought up in a traditional environment and are struggling to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence. The crux of all the prevailing problems of women is their subjugation which is always present in the form of silent servitude. Their social conditioning generates slavish attitude which in turn creates compunctions in their psyche, when they decide to remould or change it. Since her childhood, the psyche of a girl-child is moulded in a particular fashion to inculcate in her all types of feminine qualities. Simone De Beauvoir writes:

"One is not born but rather becomes, a woman [...]; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature [...] described as feminine."

Shashi Deshpande gives minute details of the development of girl-child in her novels. In *Roots and Shadows* she has displayed a series of girl-children, where each girl faces a different problem within the family circle. The present study discusses three main female characters and their girlhood. They are Mini, Akka and Indu.

Mini's obedience, silence and submission never allow her to go-beyond the rules and regulations set by the family for girls. Brought up under strict supervision, guidance and restrictions, she becomes acquainted within the real duties of a girl at a very early stage. Indu, her cousin, recalls Mini as a child.

"Mini has always been very much of a girl was expected to be, helping the women with small odd chores from a very young age, waiting on her father and brothers and being generally docile. Our worlds rarely touched."

Indu contemplates on the existence of inner strength in the women of her family who have spent their whole life slavishly without a word of appreciation for their services^[6]. While following their footsteps Mini too accepts that the life of a girl is devoid of 'Choices'. Indu could gauge the reason behind Mini's submission before her parents' decision of getting her married to a man who was neither properly educated nor mentally sound. Indu states:

"A woman's life, they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, especially in this house, I had seen the truth of this. The women had no choices but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered [...] have they been born without wills, or have their will atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength^[7]."

Mini's father Anant faces a financial crisis. With no job in his hands, his family depends on the cultivation of the land they

possess. His sons having inclination towards office jobs were reluctant to look after the lands. Anant was aware that with his weak financial position, he won't be able to get his daughter married. Finally he agrees to marry Mini to a distant relative of Akka as she promises to pay for Mini's wedding. In India, a girl's marriage is consummated only after satiating the demands of the groom and his parents. VrindaNabar writes about the dowry system of India in *Caste as Woman*:

"The bride's father gives according to his means, frequently out of proportion of them, borrowing if necessary, since he believes that his daughter's prestige and happiness are at stake. Ironically, no one who is party to such a transaction appears to wonder what happiness measured in these terms implies, or whether it exists at all, or is worth acquiring at that price."

The Stone Women

The Stone Women is Shashi Deshpande's most remarkable work. It is a collection of eight stories. The female characters are drawn from the Indian mythology but they are represented in the context of the modern assertive woman. They are incarnations of feminine submissiveness, love, beauty, sweetness, obedience, self-sacrifice and tolerance. But they as well make an effort to assert them and revolt against their exploitation by the male partners. Sita, Draupadi, Amba, Savithri, Kunti, all are resentful of their ill-treatment and unjust portrayal by the male-dominated norms of society^[8]. In a way, their protest gives voice to the entire women folk against age-old male-dominance. Here, I would like to refer to Nirmala Prakash's article "From Feminine to Feminist Consciousness: Shashi Deshpande's *The Stone Women*" This article occurs in the book, *Shashi Deshpande – A Critical Spectrum*, edited by Indra Moha^[9].

Shashi Deshpande bemoans the popular media-generated cultural climate which presents only "weepy women". This is a retrograde step. Since by such portrayals "all the complexities (that women possess) have been lost." Her latest book, *The Stone Women* is a sincere attempt at discovering these complexities. While probing into the minds of her characters she probes into her own self as she says in discovering other women, I have discovered myself.

The Stone Women is a departure from her earlier fictional works in more than one respect. To call it a novel will rather be wrong. It can, at best, be called a novella, or a collection of stories strung together. The common thread that runs through these stories is, as evident from the title, the centrality of women protagonists' in almost all the stories^[10]. Again, unlike her other fictional works the setting is mythological. The readers are transported into the mythological world of the Mahabharata. On her choice of the stories from the *Mahabharata*, she says, "The Mahabharata stories have an important place in all of our lives, but is getting less and less known."² In most of the stories the reader is face to face with the celebrated women characters of the great Indian epic. These women namely, Sita, Draupadi, Kunti, Amba, Gandhari and so on are illustrious icons of Indian mythology.

The Stone Women is a book of reminiscence. By adopting refreshingly new approach, the author relates the past to find its meaning in the present. This is she does by approximating the myths to the contemporary women's experiences and thus

by reinterpreting them. In her approach she thus moves from femininity to feminism. While doing so, she, on the one hand foregrounds the immense influence that myths wield on Indian life and on the other, makes the characters credible through the authenticity of the mythical context. Commenting on the importance of myths and the purpose they serve in real life Shashi Deshpande writes in the 'Afterword' to the book. (Nirmala Prakash: "From Feminine to Feminist Consciousness: Shashi Deshpande's *The Stone Woman*" ed. Inder Mohan, New Delhi, Atlantic, 2004).

Myths are still important to us. We do not want to demolish them, we need them to live by; they have shaped our ideas for a great many years, they embody our dreams. To destroy them would be to leave a large dent in the fabric of our culture. On the other hand, if we are not able to make them meaningful to our lives, they will cease to survive. In India, especially myths have an extraordinary vitality, continuing to give people some truths about themselves, about the human condition. What women writers are doing today is not a rejection of the myths, but a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of them^[11]. We are looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today.

The Stone Women is a mosaic comprising eight stories. Literally speaking, the book takes its title from the first story, which centers round the female figures carved out in the stone edifice of the temple. The images assimilate the entire female community—belonging to the past as well as the present. Though deified the women protagonists of these stories are complex characters. On the one hand, they evince formidable forbearance, on the other; they command strong will for self-assertion. These are the qualities, which relate these mythological figures to the contemporary women. In other words the book demonstrates a shift from the feminine to feminist consciousness.

The opening story, titled *The Stone Women* is resonant with this idea. This is how the narrator of the story describes the temple carvings, "They're Women, lush-bodied, high breasted, women carved on rectangular stone panels, leaving provocatively out of them, towards us, it seems. Women in all kinds of poses-looking into the mirror, doing their hair, playing on musical instruments, dancing hunting, I walk along, looking at them as if mesmerized"(11). The story sets the tone for the other stories. Presentation of women in their voluptuous forms serves as a concrete display of male perception of women. The marvelous sculpting skills, notwithstanding, the female narrator of the story feels aghast at "the joyous, playful, narcissistic existence of these women" (11). The story juxtaposes the past and the present. If in the past male imagination visualized women as a romantic sport the present too views woman as an inferior being. The husband's repeated rhetoric; "you've lost" and "you'll never win" reverberates throughout the story as a signifier of male authority. The woman even today needs to be on her guard to assert her individual existence. The narrator of the story can safeguard her wifely space only if she is able to rid herself of her "silly jingles" of Hindi film lines (one is reminded of Jaya's similar obsession in *That Long Silence*) or else, she runs the risk of being one of the stone women, "a woman frozen for all time into a pose she has been willed into by her creator." (15). Protagonists of the other stories of the book are

Sita, Draupadi and Kunti. They are docile figures of tolerance, lack of protest, faithfulness and subjugation. But Deshpande values female self-assertion as well. She presents a woman's picture of woman. She brings to surface the protesting and defiant aspect of their character. The contexts, figures and situations are mythological but the responses and reactions of her protagonists are akin to those of contemporary women. Deshpande deconstructs the ideal male-devised mythological models to search and create what Chaman Nahal calls "replacement models". Chaman Nahal writes:

"It is very difficult to construct a replacement model. One cannot escape the myth—the conditioning myth with which one has grown up. Unless we construct new myths, we cannot construct replacement model. We all revere Sita and Savitri; they did something out of loyalty, out of dedication. We may not like it today, but can we disown them? We cannot escape the myths. So, the replacement models are to be constructed in the context of the myths. So, the replacement models are to be constructed in the context of the myths we already have."

The Inner Rooms depicts the plight of Amba and her two sisters, Ambika and Ambalika. The abduction of these three sisters by authoritative Bheeshma foregrounds the principle of patriarchal authority. The rules of the game are formulated by the mighty like Bheeshma to overpower the Ambas of the World. But Amba, unlike her sisters, understands the game plan of Bheeshma. She declines to marry Vichitravirya. She reveals her love for Salva in the open court to free herself from the snare of Bheeshma. She has the courage to assert herself at the most crucial moment as she announces, "I cannot marry this man. I had already chosen Salva, king of Saubha, before I was brought here. I had promised myself to him". We hear the echoes of Simone De Beauvoir in Deshpande when she shows how a woman's pleas fail to evoke any response from patriarchy. "She was only a woman, she was to be disregarded and ignored; her will, her emotions had to be set aside as nothing because she was a woman". That a woman is to be neglected is the message women have been receiving since time immemorial. Amba feels crestfallen when Salva refuses to accept her as his wife as he says, "Bheeshma defeated me, you now belong to him, I will be dishonoured if I take you for my wife". This marks the turning point of the story. Amba is transformed; a new woman emerges, a woman who is capable of thinking, capable of questioning; "Honour, dishonour, right, wrong—what are these but words used by man to cover their real emotions? Bheeshma was angry; Vichitravirya humiliated and now Salva is ashamed, where is honour here? Or the dishonour". The feminine in Amba rises as a feminist once again seeking answer to these questions. The story reflects the tortured sensibility of a woman who is not prepared to compromise with male domination. Instead of living a life of humiliation, she prefers to embrace death.

The story *and what has been decided?* Deals with the vexation and anguish of Draupadi after having been humiliated by the Kauravas in the open court. The Pandavas do nothing to retrieve her honour. Therefore, she herself rises to assert her self-respect. Her protest has its roots in her realization that a woman's insult is treated so lightly. Through defiance, she shifts from femininity to feminism. Similarly, Sita's protest regarding Rama's order her exile in the story entitled *The Day*

of the Golden Deer and Kunti's outpourings in *Hear Me, Sanjay* centre round the theme of defiance. All these women form a bend. They yearn for self-assertion. Their protest subsumes the protest of the entire women race against centuries of subjugation and suppression.

Conclusion

The above excerpt from one of the essays by the author herself truly portrays Shashi Deshpande, a name well known in literary circles for depicting the quotidian life of the average Indian Women. Deshpande is quite clear that for her finding her own voice meant not first a women's voice but a literary voice of her own. No magic realism, no concessions to "Marketability", no themes or situations that cater to so called western audience, no adapting her style to what a target readership might prefer, without the air of exotic element brewed in her style is marked by an absence of flamboyance or literary finish. She has been for the last three decades writing quietly about human predicament. Playing out the lives of ordinary people who we might encounter on streets, bringing into sharp focus the meaning of life itself. Though her writing is very Indian, the themes honour no borders. It is true indeed that Deshpande writes about women, but its human beings that link behind her characters. Her novels also reveal one very striking chord that human being is often a lonely one though not alone. Deshpande's protagonists, myriad and specific at the same time provide insight into the feminist. Perspective - ready to take up the challenges bravely, is introspecting their very essence of individuality, and probing the reasons for their state of misery finally emerging as fine, stronger and balanced personalities who are ready to face the world once again with renewed energy and confidence.

It is needed true that most of her female characters have an incredible inner strength, which empowers them along their way through conflicts, turmoil's and even absence conditions. Women in Shashi Deshpande's novels seem to be hiding their own strength, their own capability probably to smoothen up their home-because the other believes that women's strengths weaken man. Shashi Deshpande has always been interested in the women artist, the women creator. From Indu, the journalist writer to Jaya, the writer who tried to silence herself and Mira the poet who was silenced by society and to Savitri Bai the writer has very emphatically focused on the falling away of the caste boundaries in *Small Remedies*, depicting that however these boundaries are, they can be easily broken. Shashi Deshpande's novels endorse a liberal feminist position/approach.

Shashi Deshpande in her talk on "The Indian Women-Stereo types, Image and Realities" on October 30th October, 1997 in Zurich, began it by discussing her visit to Channakeshava Temple in Bihar. Most of the striking sculptures in this temple are the figures of women-playful, joyous, narcissistic creatures, pictures, far removed from the picture of women in daily living "And as I thought of this, it came to me-but these are women created by men. They are male fantasies which they have worked out into stone."(Shashi Deshpande)

My study undertakes a study of the Feminist Element in the works of Shashi Deshpande. The women in Shashi Deshpande's work are professional, married, most often

outside their community yet unable to break free from the traditional bonds during moments of choice and crisis. The female characters in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande are torn between old and new world values. They question the nature of their lives and their roles are mother, wives, daughters and professionals. Their awareness leads them to rethink of the whole issue of their own lives as women, and instills in them the confidence and strength to forge ahead.

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