A Comparative Study of Shashi Deshpande’s and Anita Nair’s Feminism

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Abstracts: Shashi Deshpande is a contemporary Indo-English novelist who has presented the plight of middle-class Indian women, who are oscillating between traditional and modern roles. Shashi Deshpande’s works are based on purely Indian Setting. She has illustrated the subordinate position of women in the orthodox tradition-bound Indian society. These existing norms axe the rights of women and sideline their existence as human beings. She has taken up the issues of gender discrimination and social conditioning of the girl-child, husband – wife relationship: the aggressor and the suppressed, and the sexual exploitation of women within and outside the marital frame. Shashi Deshpande has assertively exhibited the plight of the girl-child who has to endure the trauma of gender-discrimination and social conditioning and is made to feel inferior to the progeny since her childhood. Social conditioning restricts the flowering of a girl’s personality as it lays stress on the inculcation of pre-defined feminine traits-self-abnegation, servility, endurance, patience and forgiveness. Marriage is set as an ultimate goal for girls. Women have to mould and transform themselves to suit the interests of their male counterparts and in this process suppress their self-identity. She states in an interview given to Lakshmi Holmstrom.

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“I am different 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 Indian people and the complexities of our lives. Our inner lives and our outer lives and the reconciliation between them” (1998: 248-249).

Dark Holds No Terrors (DHNT) exhibits the cruelty of undue gender discrimination of mothers inflicted on their girl-child. The protagonist of the novel, Saru, is acutely aware of her mother’s preference for her brother, Dhruba, even as a child. Saru cannot tolerate the preference which her mother gives to her brother, Dhruba, simply because he is a boy. Saru recalls that there was “always a puja on Dhruba’s birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening. My birthdays were almost the same - but there was no puja”(DHNT 168-69). Saru finds her mother’s inclination towards her brother Dhruba as humiliating because they were nullifying her existence as a human being in the family. Dhruba dies by drowning in water. Though Saru tried her best to save him yet all her effort went in vain. She recalls, “Dhruba was swiftly, silently going away from me” (DHNT 145). Saru was deprived of all the rights of a child after the death of Dhruba, her brother. Mourning envelops the family and Saru’s existence was not noticed. The reminiscence 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 adoring the earrings secretively, Saru feels a sense of superiority and importance. However, Saru resents the gift given to her by her mother because she becomes aware that the gift was to give her a flamboyant appearance as a young girl and was not a gesture 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 them, I don’t want to eat, I don’t want anything” (DHNT 171). Saru is never forgiven by her mother for the death of her brother, Dhruba.

Anita Nair is a popular Indian-English writer. She is considered as a bold and straightforward writer. Her novels depict the real life of her characters without hiding anything from her readers.

The other point that her novels reveal is the effect of social conditioning on women. Society uses many different means to propagate beliefs. We have literature as one of the means to carry these ideas further surrounded by such massages. The girls are reared in a conventional way which teaches them to self-evident truths or wisdom. This is the process of conditioning. Anita Nair has very beautifully portrayed this concept in her novels. Especially through Akhila in ladies Coupe.

The characters of Anita Nair’s novels commit adultery and sacrilege as depicted in Mistress. They break the leash of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries of women. Her female characters are bold and confident enough to fulfill their desires by going against the society. Many of character experience sex before entering the social institute of marriage or indulge in extra marital affairs that is strictly against the Indian society. So we can say that she break the chains of the society in portraying her women character which can lead to its fragmentation. She never
hesitates to tell the truth however bitter it is and simultaneously she forces us to think on the importance of removing adultery to save family life.

Anita Nair has portrayed some of her protagonists are economically independent women ut still they don’t have control over their own life even major decisions of their life are taken by others, she has very clearly brought this concept in the light that women in modern Indian may be educated and financially independent but still the rope their life is in the hands of others. Here we find some similarity between the protagonists learn to resists against such social atrocities by going beyond the family boundaries. In the *Mistress* the character of Radha is bold and dominating. Being dissatisfied with her husband she opts for an extra marital affair with Chris her husband Shyam tries his level best to bring her back to him, he is ready to forgive her for all her mistakes, he is ready to accept her at any cost

“I think of the other Radha. ..................to go back to him” (*Mistress* 247)

In many of her novels, Anita Nair has depicted husband-wife relationship. Her female characters are bold enough of fulfil their desires by negating family bond the go upto the extent of establishing physical gratification with other men. “Shyam’s call leaves me angrier than ever...............” (*Mistress* 206) She admits that in spite of being married some women are not satisfied with their marital life and they indulge in extra marital affairs. The faithfulness in husband-wife relationships lost which puts a big question on the existence of such relationship. Anita Nair’s feminism does not suit the Indian social system as it advocates that all human relationship should be restored. This article makes a comparative study of Shashi Deshpande’s and Anita Nair’s Feminism.

**Works Cited**

