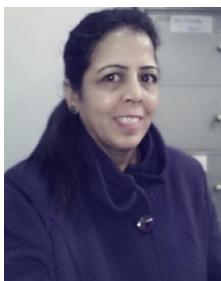




SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *SMALL REMEDIES*: A SAGA OF FEMINISTIC CONCERNS

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ABSTRACT

It is normally assumed that literature is the mirror of society. If the women suffer in society and the loss of society becomes their anguish, it will become the serious duty of women writers to present the conditions in which the women are living. This is what Shashi Deshpande has produced through her novel *Small Remedies* which has the genuine images of three women. Shashi Deshpande reviews that women are always treated as subordinates to men. They have second-rate position in society because of male domination. Her protagonists are presented in conflict as Shashi Deshpande was aware of their inner turmoil and their dilemma. It is shown that, in reality, they have not yet emotionally come out from patriarchal impositions. The next interesting thing is that the women are usually presented with their mental as well as physical voice. This paper is a humble attempt to show that women are not born feminine but they are made. So, they try to bring something new in their lives and, in this way, they have to bear the contradictory attitude of society. Her protagonists fight with the society and establish a new world for them.

Key words: Patriarchy, Suffering, Turmoil, Dilemma, Feminine, Concern

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India which is considered as a land on which Durga terminated the fear of demons from the minds of all but women, here, are suffering from a fear within. Even more than two thousand years ago, men formed some social and moral codes for women as *Manu Smriti* defines a woman's identity and status as: "During childhood, a female must depend upon her father, during youth, upon her husband; her husband being dead, upon her sons; if she has no sons, upon the near kinsman of her husband..... a woman must never govern herself as she likes" (Singh11). Shashi Deshpande, in this regard, is a remarkable novelist who shows the direct and clear position of women in our society i.e. how they try to break all the fetters in which they live. This tragedy of women comes in the novels of

Shashi Deshpande through the world of male domination. Shashi Deshpande's novels are about women, taking or losing spaces. In such critical situation, women not only fight with men for the injustice but with women as well. The women are not merely shown as the domestic wives who cook food, bear child and wash the stains from the clothes; they keep a good place in society though it come after a great struggle.

Shashi Deshpande, one of the eminent writers in Indo-English literature has tried to present her protagonists who fight for their rights and achieve their goal with their efforts. Her novels present a new consciousness, new values and a new way of thinking for women. This feature has provided Indo-English fiction a new dimension.

Shashi Deshpande has shown the reality of urban middle class woman which is insightful. Through generations, big cities or small cities, all are demonstrated in a way that their complexity is revealed. Shashi Deshpande has shown the female psyche from the women's point of view. *Small Remedies* provides the remedies which are small and everybody can get them. Women are able to achieve the good and respectable positions in our society but efforts are essential. Remedies are here and there, the only need is to search for them.

Small Remedies is not a simple novel but a complex one with its complex protagonists. In *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande has shown her protagonists belonging to the urban strata of society. First, no one can think that it is the story of a middle-aged woman because it looks like the story of Madhu Saptarishi who is the narrator of the novel. Later, the reader came to know that the novel is linked with the lives of two women Savitribai and Leela. Here, Savitribai and Leela fight for their own rights. They want to relish life, they want to attain supremacy in life, they are thirsty for name and fame and that's why they are full of vigour. Their efforts do not go in vain but bring them laurels. It is very difficult for anybody to judge the inside personality of such a woman (Savitribai) who looks like very soft from inside. Gradually we come to know that the situations and circumstances in Savitribai's life make her bold and perfect. Madhu notices, in the starting of the novel, her cool expressions as she shows by giving directions to Madhu. Madhu has come to her bungalow for an interview. Savitribai is not an ordinary woman but a woman who was born into an orthodox Hindu family, elopes with her Muslim lover to pursue a career in music. Madhu is interested in her life and that's the main reason of her visiting Bhavanipur to write a biography of Bai.

Here, Shashi Deshpande has shown a sense of escapism where Madhu is also full of despair because she has lost her only son. Both the protagonists are portrayed in the same situation but they are not weak. On the contrary, they find a way to be with the world and, in this way, they keep themselves busy.

Savitribai Indorekar is not merely a woman in love; she sets examples for other women after getting her goal. She is educated and career-oriented woman who has colorful dreams in her eyes. Madhu's narrative also includes the saga of another remarkable woman, her aunt Leela who was, "ahead not only of her generation, but the next one as well" (Deshpande94).

Leela is an independent woman who strongly believed in the communist ideology. Though she had participated in the 'Quit India Movement' but was against Gandhiji's principles of Ahimsa and Satyagrah and thought that it was absurd to allow oneself to be beaten up. She is a courageous woman who resigns from her party when she feels that the party is no more appropriate. Leela is financially independent and can support herself. Leela's husband, Basanth, dies and she takes up a job. It is her good quality that she educates her brothers-in-law. She also works for the welfare of the women affiliated with tuberculosis. Her unstirred efforts prove beneficial to her sooner when she meets a doctor namely Joe who is also in the favour of the poor and disease-stricken. Leela finds all the qualities in Joe and selects him as her husband. Even Madhu cannot understand their love because there is so much difference in their personalities.

Savitribai is a renowned personality in music and Leela does not know anything about music. Even Leela's husband, Joe, is fond of music and literature but Leela has a deaf ear for these forms of art. That Leela lacks the emotions in her life, is very clear from the incident when after watching the film 'Devdas', She remains silent and Madhu guesses that she might be thinking of her dead husband. But it is a great surprise to Madhu when Leela says, "Now I know why that Poor man drank so much. He had nothing to do, he didn't have any work at all.... if an intelligent man like him remains idle, what else can he do but take to drink?"(Deshpande96).

Leela cannot speak English like her husband but it does not mean that it makes any difference in their relationship. Deshpande is not presenting that the different taste stand between the husband and wife. Leela's second marriage links her with

Savitribai Indorekar who opts her lover as her husband. Both the women have thought of their own choice, they do not bother about society. Madhu is in the search of the true identity of Bai and questions:

"The Pampered child, the young girl who discovered what her life was going to be? The young woman, who gave her secure and respectable married life, abandoned her child and eloped with her lover? The woman who in search of her genius, of her destiny? The great musician, the successful... Savitribai Indorekar" (Despande283).

Madhu finds the answers after a long struggle. She notices both the women are not different to each other as they have gained the present position after paying the heavy price. Madhu notices that Bai and Leela have obtained what they desired but it was not an easy cake to eat, they have to fight with society and its rigid norms. That's why Madhu sees parallels between the lives of these two women she thinks, "that both were courageous woman, that both were women who worked for and got the measure of freedom they needed, that both were ready to accept wholly the consequences of their action" (Despande284).

It is necessary for any person whether a male or female to have tolerance power. The consequences can vary according to the action, and if the person is ready to face the challenges, it is not difficult to overcome the obstacles in life. Bai and Leela have the capacity to bear the results. They are not weak women, they are educated and refined who can think about the welfare of themselves as of others.

It is an ill-luck of Bai that her daughter is a complete reverse personality to her mother's. She is too much linked with society that she is in no mood to accept Bai as her mother. Munni is completely different; she is not ready to accept that Muslim tabla player, her father.

Deshpande does not mirror the single aspect in her novel *Small Remedies*. Women are of many types—some are bold enough to take the decisions like Bai and Leela and, on the other hand, weak like all the minor woman characters under the

direction of society. Women are responsible for their treatment in society themselves, they can shape-up their lives. Outer factors become futile and irrelevant if energy within is solid and full of passion. Bai has a passion for music and this is the main reason of her cutting her off the social norms. Leela is a communist and everytime thinks of the welfare of others. Madhu, being a writer, wants to probe into the realities of life. All the women have set their goals as they have devoted themselves fully and obviously to get the rewards.

Deshpande's women are always in the journey to find a place of their own. They feel the need of self-discovery. Madhu is in the search of self-discovery. Madhu has taken the task of writing a biography for Bai and Leela. She gradually comes to know the reality that a person should have the courage to face the entire situation. The world goes on; it does not show any effect. Though everybody is bearing pain and sufferings in life, nothing is affected. Life has simply to be lived. It does not matter what happens. Earlier Madhu was sorrow-stricken on the death of her son, Aditya in a bomb blast but slowly as she witnesses the lives around her, this philosophy enlightens her mind and soul. She thinks, "So many of us (are) walking this earth with our pain, our sorrow concealed within ourselves. So many of us, hiding our suffering, going about as if all is well.... So many of us surviving our loss, our grief, it's a miracle" (Despande315).

It is noticed that these three women are living life with the gradual exploration; the bitterness of life is everywhere. Bai is gifted with a talent and she tries to reach the upper level using her talent, she becomes a diva in classical music and brightens the Gwalior Gharana. The same society which gives her name and fame, had earlier criticized her elopement with a Muslim tabla player. That Good and evil reside in this society has been cleared by Deshpande with the presentation of these three women. Bai's elopement is not appropriate, Leela's remarriage is unfair and Madhu recognizes that it is only the hope and determination which provide a meaning to life. A woman living in a four walled room cannot understand this. She has her limited scope of life. *Small Remedies* provides the women who can walk

into those places which make them popular as well as satisfied.

Our society does not accept a woman who has pre-marital relationship, so women are always looked at with doubtful eyes. Bai's elopement, in the novel, is not accepted by the society. Even Madhu reveals the darkest secret that she has slept with a man when she was merely fifteen to her husband Som who is not able to accept this of his wife. Som had been a good husband to Madhu but after the revelation becomes indifferent towards her. It is another matter that he had also a pre-marital relationship with a woman. Madhu, actually, was not willing in that act. She was forced to do but how can a male understand this: "But it's the single act of sex that Som holds on to, it's this feel that he can't let go off, as it's been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, an intact hymen – these are the things Som is thinking of; these are the truths that matter" (Despande262). But these truths matter to women only. Every man, in this society, expects his wife to be pure and virgin, what if he himself has so many relations with other women. A woman has to maintain her virginity.

Deshpande has presented this bitter reality of the world. It happens because it is the patriarchal society in which we live. Madhu thinks, "that he could, perhaps, have borne: that I had been raped, forced into the act, that I was a victim, not a participant" (Despande262). These words present the tragedy of all women. Women are never willing in this mean deed, they are violently forced into this act and that's why they are the victims. Once in her life, Madhu was raped physically but later on when she depicts her misery to her life partner, she gets shocked that it is difficult for a male to feel the woes of a woman.

Deshpande has inculcated in all her women –the thirst for self-discovery. It is the self-discovery by all the women in the novel, they get their philosophy. It gives them true meaning of life. Gradually, they become independent and human beings.

Thus, it is clear that all these women start thinking that they are first human beings; they can walk easily along with men. All the women, in this novel, have sensed this demand of the situation and

become successful. They go against society but within the limits. They do not want to be dictators; they simply choose their lives according to their will and, in this way, prove successful in their attempts. Thus, they are open-minded and public-spirited. We may conclude with the remarks of G.S.Amur:

"Women's struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and, most important of all as human being is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer" (Amur10).

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