

**Gender Inequality in The Selected Novels of Shashi Deshpande**

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**Abstract:**

The present study deals with Gender Inequality in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. It is related to the theory of feminism. The approach of feminism is prominent in modern and post-modern literature. In these days the liberation of women is an important movement of reformation which primarily talks of the upliftment of women in society. Feminism is an ideology against oppression and exploitation of women in patriarchal system. Gone are the days when gender inequality was prevailed all over India. Women were always considered subservient to men. They were brutally humiliated, afflicted, silenced, tortured socially and economically. Now-a-days, Women have begun to see the world with their own eyes and not through the male gaze. They have started to show their presence in all walks of life. They started raising an inner revolution against the traditional customs and gender discrimination with a view to equalizing human rights. The women of the present age are doing every work what the males are doing. Sometimes modern women surpass the male members. The main purpose of the paper is to make an emphasis on the inequality for the women as articulated in Shashi Deshpande's immortal novels. It is very necessary to know the important facts of feminism so that women may get equal importance in comparison with men.

**Introduction**

**Key words:** Gender, Inequality, Feminism, Prominent, Discrimination, Comparison.

**Introduction:**

The study aims at Gender Inequality in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande. Gender Inequality has been a major problem for all the times in India. Several reformative steps have been taken by the government and social workers in different ways to make the lives of women better and better. Till this time women are struggling for equality and possession. Many Indian English writers have raised their strong voice through their writings for the betterment of women. Shashi Deshpande, too, wrote some immortal novels which tell the suffering of women in male dominated society and give remedy for the same. She undoubtedly, occupies a high position among the contemporary Indian feminist novelists. With her poignant, hypersensitive knowledge, erudition and inner psychological power

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concerning the natural and real everyday affairs of familial, societal, economic dealings are minutely impacted in her major novels. The novels of Deshpande also present the picture of universal feminism and the mysterious truth of human psychology.

Gender inequality shows that men and women are not equal. It refers to unequal treatment or perception of individuals wholly or partly due to their gender. According to English encyclopedia: -"Gender inequality is the difference in the status, power and prestige of women and men have in group collection and societies", so gender inequality is a concept related with men and women alike.

If we talk of origin of gender inequality, we must know that gender and sex are two different concepts. According to English Encyclopedia: - "Gender is a social expectations about behavior regarded as appropriate for the member of each sex, Gender does not refer to the physical attributes in terms of which men and women differ, but to social formed traits of masculinity and femininity." In short, we can say that the natural characteristic is 'sex' and man-made concept is 'gender'.

The survey of gender equality and discrimination shows that women have to struggle a lot for equal presence in comparison with men in various fields of life. The problem for women is present inside home and also in outside world. Such types of discrimination can be seen very easily in Indian society. In our society the root cause of gender inequality is patriarchal system. The ancient and religious beliefs have made this system a legal and valid one. In the words of K.M. Pandey (1998):- " The patriarchal ideology teaches the concepts of gender which are man-made." It is unquestionably to say that the people of the world look at women and their role as decided by society which distinguishes her as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. It is supposed that women are dependent on men. According to Manu Smriti: "Day and Night woman must be kept in subordination to the males of the family-In childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old to her sons even though the husband be destitute of virtue, and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as God"<sup>2</sup>

There are several religious books like the Vedas, The Bhagwad Gita, The Digambara Jains describe the subordination of women on men in society. The Muslims and the Christians have also the same view regarding the position of the women in society. All the religions create obstacles for equal position of women in society. In the words of Shantha Krishnaswamy:- She is a creature who, as a child, is sold off to a stranger 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 husband's funeral pyre to be acclaimed as 'Sati-Savitri' as an immortal"<sup>3</sup>

Shashi Deshpande has raised her voice as a protagonist for the suppressed women. She studied and experienced a lot and tells that a woman is not treated at par with man in any fields of human activity. She has been a constant sufferer from Post- Aryan age. A silent sufferer knows only suffering. She is habituated for the same.

The novel of Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, brings out the struggle of a woman in a family where a male child is preferred to a female child and the novel reveals how the insensitive attitude of the family towards a female can drive her into a schizophrenic state of mind. The protagonist of the novel is Saru (Sarita) who feels the lack of interest of her mother and her own guilt feeling. The guilt of forsaking her parents, the guilt of her mother's death her career as a physician, her marriage and her feeling about her husband and children. Moreover, she lived with the guilt of her brother Dhruva's untimely death. He is drowned at the age of seven. Her mother preferred her brother and she is always disregarded. For a long time, her mother's harsh words still bothered her, "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" (*The dark Holds No Terror*, 19). Such types of situations are often seen in most of the Indian households.

Deshpande also presents the picture of social evils where only male child can be authorized for ancestral property and to maintain the continuity of the family. These are the causes that the birth of a son is celebrated with great joy. Recalling her parents indifference and lack of Interest in her especially after Dhruva's death. Saru says:-

"He (ie, her father) never took any interest in my school or college. He left it all to her (i. e his mother) And she never really cared, Not after Dhruva's death. I just didn't exist for her. I died long before I left home"<sup>4</sup>

Here the conversation between mother daughter shows the inequality towards female child:-

Don't go out in the sun, you will get darker,

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva?

He is different. He is a boy (p.45)<sup>5</sup>.

Here the novelist wants to depict feminine sensibility and the inequality of men to the women. They (women) want liberation but it is beyond their limit due to male domination in society. The next novel of Deshpande's "*That long silence*" is a novel of

unavoidable silence of the Indian woman. That long silence is a realistic view of a true feminist on the condition of middle class women. It has been very well expressed and won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1990. That long silence is not an imaginary story but the story of every middle class woman in India. The Indian woman is born in an era where there is much awareness about her rights, her liberty to express ideas, freedom to enjoy finance and the chance to stand for a cause. But the silence still continues, Jaya, the protagonist is an educated middle-class woman who lives with her husband, Mohan and two children, Rahul and Rati. She is the typical Indian woman in the present century that is confined between her realizations and restrictions. Her father brought up Jaya as an 'individual' who has the rights as well as the gender in the society. But it is the same society that hesitates to accept the woman as an individual. Immediately after graduation she is married and steps into the role of a dutiful wife, affectionate mother "carefully being dutiful to her in-laws to Aai, Ajji, Kaka and all other relatives. Her husband Mohan also plays the role of the dutiful Indian husband and never looks up to consider any imperfections in life.

As time goes Jaya's dutiful behavior to Mohan and his family becomes routine. Like the mythological character Gandhari, she kept her eyes shut to her husband's illegal earning at office. Even her journalistic writings are circumscribed by her husband's likes and dislikes. Finally, she is able to evaluate her expectations of life. The novel is about Jaya's hopes, fears, aspirations, frustrations and later triumph in life.

Thus, we can say that Shashi Deshpande has presented the picture of the middle-class Indian women in society. The position of women is not good so she tries to raise a voice against male domination through her novels. Deshpande's novels deal with the theme of the quest for a female identity. Though the woman of India has played the role of a wife, mother, sister and daughter, they have been a silent sufferer for years. The great novelist talks of liberty and equality for women so that they may lead their lives in a happy and prosperous way.

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