

A FEMINIST STYLISTIC STUDY OF SELECTED NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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By

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Elizabeth Jackson, in her acclaimed book, *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women's Writing* observes: "Feminist literary theory has been controversial, not the least because there have been a number of scholars who have argued that there is no apparent link between feminist politics and the formal aspects of women's writing, and that it is content alone which determines the 'feminist' quality of any particular text." (141) Whether or not this argument is true, it is undeniable that the meaning of a literary text is of course created through the language used in the text. Therefore, any investigation of the feminist concerns of a text has to include an analysis of the language of the text. It is to be noted in the passing that feminist interest in language springs from the notion that language is crucial to the organization and maintenance of human societies and in order to fight the oppression of women, it is important to understand the workings of language. As Cameron observes, "[l]anguage is a part of patriarchy. If it plays a crucial part in social organization, it is instrumental in maintaining male power, and feminists must study its working carefully" (3).

According to Talbot, "[f]eminism is a form of politics dedicated to bringing about social changes, and ultimately to arresting the reproduction of systematic inequalities between men and women. Feminist interest in language and gender resides in the complex part language plays, alongside other social practices and institutions, in reflecting, creating and sustaining gender divisions in society" (16).

The thesis has tried to shoe the possible connections between Shashi Deshpande's feminist concerns in her novels and her language choice. The analysis

has revealed that Deshpande is conscious of the language choices she is making so as to avoid sexism in her language use. Her avoidance of generic nouns and pronouns, derogatory words for male and female; her criticism of ready-made phrases and commonly used gender-biased metaphor; her avoidance of jokes and humour; her criticism of gender roles; disregard for fragmentation, all point to the fact that her feminist consciousness is reflected in her use of language. This thesis, however limited in its scope, has tried to demonstrate that the feminist stylistic methodology can be fruitfully applied to the reading of a novel.

In her conclusion to her book *Feminist Stylistics*, Mills notes:

Feminist Stylistics has suggested ways in which those concerned with the representation of gender relations might draw on linguistic and language analysis to develop a set of tools which could expose the workings of gender at a range of different levels in texts. Because of the nature of feminist analysis, it has been necessary to question the seemingly self-evident boundaries of the text itself, arguing that the text is permeated by discourses and ideologies, and that the distinction between textual and extra-textual cannot really be held to. That is not to say like Derrida ‘Il n’y a pas d’hors texte’, there is nothing but textuality—there is nothing but text—there is nothing outside the text; but rather to say almost the opposite. Texts are invaded by sociocultural norms, by ideologies, by history, by economic forces, by fashions, by gender and racial stereotyping, and so on. That is not to say that authors have no control whatsoever about what they write, but that authors themselves are also subject to interpellation and interaction with these discursive forces. (157)

It is hoped that this thesis shall contribute to the existing research on Shashi Deshpande and also show a direction towards further possibilities of research in the application of the methodology of feminist stylistics to the reading of English novels by Indian women novelists, which remains till date a rather unexplored territory.
