



PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE LITERARY WORKS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Abstract

One of the most well-known Indian English authors is Shashi Deshpande. Her articles mostly concern the plight of women living in patriarchal societies. Since ancient times, women in India have suffered because of the society's male-dominated social structure. They experience pain on a physical, mental, financial, and privilege level, yet they are unable to get their rights as males. Numerous obstacles and limitations are emerging, both socially and in their various ways of existence.

But as time went on, women began to see the light of knowledge. They have now begun to struggle and fight for their rights as they raise their voices against the oppressive societal structure. Despite their education and ability to support themselves, women are nonetheless controlled in some manner by the mostly male Indian culture. This subject has guided the study's analysis of Shashi Deshpande's portrayal of women's lives in her books.

Introduction

Women in Shashi Deshpande's novels

Women have been denied their rights and privileges for generations because they have not been granted an appropriate home of their own. Due of this, they were unable to fully grow as individuals, which in most cultures results in a lack of accountability. Because of gender discrimination based on the patriarchal construction of high and low, superior and inferior, self and other, and other concepts, they have been considered as a class of oppressed people whose issues and voices have gone ignored while they remain subjugated and marginalized.

In a patriarchal culture, women's quiet pain often becomes physical rather than spiritual. They continue to be seen as a second sex and can only exist as a result of male demands. Men have been oppressed for a long time, which weakens them and prevents them from openly opposing society. In contemporary India, where women are sandwiched between tradition and nature, the situation is more problematic. Despite the benefits that contemporary society has provided for women, these notions and presumptions are still mostly held by males. Thus, they are the targets of gender discrimination and social exploitation, which take many different forms of oppression, including social, political, economic, sexual, cultural, and psychological oppression. In her books, Shashi Deshpande works tirelessly to explain this condition of women in all of its many facets, with a focus on the prejudice against women as a gender class and/or other free women.

It is true that under patriarchal structures and gender inequality, Indian women are viewed as a different group of underprivileged and oppressed people. As a consequence, gender-based society and male-centered views are challenged by women's subversive ideology on a social, political, sexual, and economic level. This develops into a complex problem for us. Every woman in society has obstacles to her existence and way of living because of gender, the social construct that separates men and women into opposing categories with uneven social



worth. It is a collection of politically imposed laws with multiple means for one sex to express itself and impose itself on the other, but it is not necessarily symptomatic of the sexual distinctions between male and female. And in this power struggle, males dominate women. He is the "self," and she is the "other." It's important to remember what Showalter says: "Gender is not a question of difference, which assumes that the sexes are separate and equal; but of power," as gender asymmetry, inequality, and male domination can be seen throughout history in connection to gender relations.

Therefore, the entrenched positions of power are threatened by women's demands for fair legislation and for women's empowerment. Women must thus fight back against this schematization by males and step up their battle for their fundamental rights to life and self-respect. It could be true that PATIVRATA NARI's (committed to her husband) days are numbered in our nation today. But the reality is that males still hold sway, and Indian women find it challenging to adopt more extreme western feminist beliefs. In general, a tremendous deal of respect is shown towards the traditional husband-wife relationship. However, women fiercely object to any depiction of them as subhuman creatures. Women in India should be entitled to sexual equality and equal treatment as a matter of birthright. In response to an interview by Geeta Gangadharan, Shashi Deshpande says: "I have a strong feeling that women in our society have been viewed as 'breeding animals' until very recently." They had no other responsibilities in life, and I strongly oppose treating people according to their names.

History demonstrates that women have been oppressed for a substantial amount of time. Social and cultural norms were created with the express purpose of stifling women. In many regions of India, such as Rajasthan, Sati was not outlawed until the early 19th century. Women were unable to express their dreams and objectives or celebrate their accomplishments. The first step in establishing women's role in society was only taken by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the Indian who was responsible for the revolutionary reform for women. In the guise of religion, Roy, who drives out "Sati," subsequently taught austere widowhood for women. Then Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar appeared, starting a campaign for female literacy and the remarriage of widows. In addition to opposing the dogmatic conservative arguments in support of child marriage, polygamy, and purdah, he also disputes Roy's earlier claim that widows should lead a life of piety and renunciation. The remarriage legislation, which was approved in the middle of the 1950s, had little impact. Education for women was still a long way off. The few schools for females received a trickle of students, largely from the upper strata of society. The feminine body has not yet broken free from centuries of confinement. Declare her own desire, reject the oppressive man, and take control of her own life.

The reform movement led by Roy and Vidyasagar hadn't yet reached the people. Additionally, they had yet to have an impact on the intelligentsia and encourage it to see women as human beings. To give her a voice, it required a visionary. to dispel the long-held notion that was created to benefit father, spouse, son, and other family members. Furthermore, it depicts a future scenario in which she may fall in love and, once again, disregard all established rules and morals.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was a trailblazing dramatist, poet, and the first Indian woman. In line with his "campaign of the underdog," he took it upon himself to defend the most

downtrodden and backward segment of society, and he did so. Dedicated to Vidyasagar, the famous campaign for female literacy and widow remarriage, Dutt's "Berangana Kabya" (1860) was written. One of the earliest books to appreciate women was this one. The term alone signaled the development of the female voice—women who dared to challenge their husbands and defy convention.

Heroism in the conventional sense does not include daring defiance of social norms and restrictions. It was one thing to advocate for women's freedom; the intelligentsia was in charge of this movement. To imagine her as a real, living person, though, was something another.

One who wasn't daily beaten to the point of losing all self-awareness may express her own skepticism. 'Seeta Banarbas' Seeta was hardly a Renaissance woman. The ladies continue to adore their spouse without reservation. Their accusations are unrelated to the normal variations in domesticity. Instead, these ladies stage a confrontation in front of spectators. They openly share their innermost thoughts and experiences. They expressed their requests for their rights as well as their dissatisfaction.

Following in their footsteps, many feminist Indian women spoke out about the difficulties they faced. It is appropriate to include authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Athia Hossain, Shashi Deshpande, and Shantha Rama Rau, among others, whose writing and thinking represent the struggles and issues faced by Indian women. This prompted R.S. Pathak to remark as follows: Their main contribution consists of their exploration of the techniques, mental conundrums, and effects of their female characters, as well as their attempts to deal with the difficulties and reach a new harmony of relationships with themselves and their environment.

In order to be explicit, Shashi Deshpande addresses modern Indian writers with an open mind while showing the lives of middle-class Indian women who are educated and have a keen sense of reality. The light of knowledge most likely inspired her female characters to fight for freedom.

India's Karnataka state is where Shashi Deshpande was born. Adya Rangachar, also known as Sriranga, was a well-known author and Sanskrit scholar who gave birth to her. He was a writer who produced a lot of thought plays. Shashi Deshpande is a smart individual who has earned degrees in journalism, economics, law, and English. She inherited her father's intelligence and academic mind since he enjoys reading, writing, and producing plays and poetry. She also received support from her spouse, a Commonwealth researcher.

Despite not being a part of any section or group of authors, Deshpande's works attracted the attention and praise of the reading public, making her a well-read individual. She read a lot of novels, but she was particularly drawn to the writings of Leo Tolstoy, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Somerset Maugham. The Bronte Sisters, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, and Erica Jong all had an impact on her writing. Simone de Beauvoir and Germaine Greer served as her literary inspiration and influence. Shashi Deshpande might be considered a writer in her own right, despite the fact that she drew heavily on Victorian and Modern literature. For the first time, she obtained permission from her father to have her writings published in the "Deccan Herald."

After that, she began releasing her writings, including The Legacy, a collection of short tales. It Was Dark, The Miracle, It Was the Nightingale, and The Intrusion and Other Stories is

another collection of her short stories. She began exploring the lives of women, their issues, and their futures in these short tales. She portrays middle-class life in modern India, where women struggle to maintain their identities as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters—and ultimately as people.

The Dark Holds No Terror (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Come Up and Be Dead (1983), Roots and Shadows (1983), A Matter of Time (1992), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1992), and A matter of Time (1996) were the next works of literature she touched. Shashi Deshpande has authored a number of additional children's books, and he continues to write and publish books today, making a significant contribution to both social change and the world's readers. For her work Roots and Shadows, she received the Thirumathi Rangammal Best Indian work Award for the years 1982 to 1983. In 1991, she begs for the Sahitya Academy Award for her story That Long Silence. She is still looking for new pastures since she is not quite content with her writing to this point.

When compared to other female characters written about women, Shashi Deshpande's flesh-and-blood female characters are not as severe. Her female characters are strong individuals who stand up to patriarchal culture and society's hostility. They possess strong personalities that the domineering patriarchy cannot stifle or destroy.

Through her books, Shashi Deshpande provides a vivid perspective of women's struggle and accomplishment. Her works provide a clear vision for how to unleash women's struggle for equality and emancipation in opposition to conventional voices and various presumptions about women. Her works are primarily concerned with the representations of oppressed women found in patriarchal Indian culture and, on the other side, the emergence of new, liberated women who are cognizant and capable of choosing their own fate and exercising self-determination. Shashi Deshpande is interested in women as individuals based on their potential. Women therefore have to fight to expose their identity and significance in this patriarchal environment by challenging the socially prescribed gender norms.

With Saru as the primary heroine against the patriarchal structure, she addresses the societal taboo of women, their idea of having a lesser position, and women's economic freedom in The Dark Holds No Terror. By going against the desires of her traditional parents, Saru deconstructs the conventional educational system and pursues a career in medicine. She battles against her early obsession with her sibling. By being married to a member of a lower caste, Manu (Manohar), she even encourages inter-caste unions.

Once again, the writer highlights the difficulties women have when they join the matrimonial home, which is run by the husband's rigid patriarchal control. As a result, Saru (Sarita), a successful doctor outside of the house, suffers at the hands of her husband within. As a result, the author prefers to be seen as a person rather than a lady with a strong social identity. Thus, the book effectively challenges societal norms and patriarchal ideology that place males above women in the family, the church, politics, the economy, society, the law, and the arts, which hinders the socialization of women.

'If I Die Today' is a reflection on the state of women in married and domestic life. There is a portrayal of the broken marriage relationships that happened when motherhood, economic independence, and education upset the equilibrium. The image of the typical Hindu man who yearns for a son—the lone heir to the family and the home—is there. Even the well-educated Dr. Kulkarni discreetly torments his wife in his attempt to have a son, becoming her

completely reliant on him.

It's true that *Come Up and Be Dead* depicts women's activities along with the challenges and dangers that come with being a member of the feminine sex in society. The use of murder as a tool of oppression against women by males has been exposed as violence against women. In addition, the book depicts women suffering at the hands of parents who value tradition. Deshpande fights for women's liberation from the bastion of female dominance via *Kshama*, achieving economic independence, breaking away from the marital system, and paving the road for women's complete subjugation to males.

In *Roots and Shadows*, "Indu" is seen opposing the dominant positions that are allocated to women in order to further the interests of males. She is on a mission to dismantle sexual and gender boundaries in order to challenge the conventional male autonomy upheld by the macho culture. Her battles and protests are directed against the unfair treatment of women under biologism and essentialism. Deshpande's character Indu is the only one who has the strength and support to stand up against patriarchy without fear.

Similar to like she did in *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the heroine, serves as the author's vehicle for condemning the way women are treated in our society. Her quest to discover who she really is as a woman within the confines and constraints of respectable middle-class society is fruitless. She is compassionate, artistic, and self-aware. She is on a psychological journey of introspection toward self-actualization. But because of the terrible consequences and prolonged repression of her individuality, she becomes neurotic, psychotic, and mentally unwell. Thus, the protest takes the shape of inquiries about gender problems and the status of Indian women. Additionally, it is the character's effort to provide a different account of history from the perspective of women.

Similarly, the author of *The Binding Vine* depicts women who are denied love and pleasure in a world where males predominate. The book presents a firsthand description of rape both within and outside of marriage, with Kalpana being raped by her uncle for refusing to marry him and Mira suffering from marital rape. The major tools employed in the story to stop women's natural development are economic hardship and rape.

Here, Shashi Deshpande introduces the main character Urmila (Urmi), who recreates the events of her late mother-in-law Mira in order to struggle against such oppressions. A career-conscious, educated woman searches for new roles in this unusual society as a result of shifting events in the narrative. In order to combat female oppression, the author fights for equality, freedom, and equal rights.

Shashi Deshpande again brings up rape, death, and decay in his book *A Matter of Time*. Here, three generations are used to contrast the initial holiness and suitability of marriage with the bitterness of marriage and married life. Aru is the main character in this story, and she battles against the disparities that exist in male-female interactions. Deshpande's use of her serves to mirror the current period, which serves as the nexus of tradition and modernity. The link between the ancient and the modern is Aru herself. Shashi Deshpande is tearing down this oppressive tradition in this way, uniting the voices of the women to resist. In addition to leveraging her rage and resentment for good, she is deromanticizing the picture that men build of women.

While addressing women's issues in the Indian context, Shashi Deshpande differs from hard-core feminists like Simone de Beauvoir or Kate Millette in moving toward feminism theory.

Feminist heroin is said to have originated with Jane Austen and progressed via Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millette, and Elaine Showalter. However, since feminism varies depending on culture and civilization, it is difficult to define precisely. It is a settled subject in western nations, yet there remains debate and contention in third-world nations. This led Chaman Nahal to state that feminism is a way of life in which women are liberated from the father-husband dependency syndrome as well as from social, religious, and political communities.

Everyone will be equal once individuals are liberated from the reliance syndrome. In addition, feminism promotes sexism, sexual liberty, and equal chances for men and women. The fight to end sexual repression is political. Women suffer as a result of patriarchy, which links them to the group of aware parents. Feminism is now a literary philosophy as a result. In this way, Shashi Deshpande, a writer, exposes the lives of women who suffer because of the strict patriarchal laws, particularly Indian women in general. In order to give women's repressive lives a voice in her stories, the author developed female characters who rebuild women's experiences. She is working hard to break free from her limitations and release the ladies from the prison of the feminine mentality. Hers is an image of feminine dominance and a rejection of patriarchal ideals.

The feminism of Shashi Deshpande is characterized by the projection of the struggles and identity-related issues of middle-class women. In the end, she could have Urmito and Kalpana support Kalpana and embody the concept of femininity via love and women's freedom. It was created in a manner that demonstrates the desire of the new woman to proclaim her individuality and the fulfillment of her sexual needs.

With the characters in Shashi Deshpande's works, there is a change from the previous observation of sex to maintain the man-woman connection to the contemporary empowerment of women via sex. Indeed, every one of her works is about a woman. The transformation is an examination of borders in the history of women and an explanation of the many differences and wants of women. In actuality, Shashi Deshpande's fight for women's suffrage, freedom in all spheres of politics, society, education, and economy has succeeded in making this reality in contemporary India.

Shashi Deshpande gets the intended impact by contrasting her intelligent, independent, inquisitive, and career-focused heroes with a large cast of self-deprecating, "feminine" characters. We watch the development of the feminine psyche through the stages of restriction, protest, and self-discovery as a result of the main characters' personal experience with the acquired information that leads to self-analysis.

Shashi Deshpande highlights contemporary Indian women who are neither demi-goddesses nor superhumanly courageous. She created an awful universe filled with murder, intrigue, and mischief, and her characters were strong and compelling. They are middle-class women with education, but because of an unbreakable link with tradition, they are weak. They go on with their lives, returning to society with a sense of accomplishment, self-realization, and their own voice. Out of the confusion in the environment, there emerges a tremendous desire to build an organized society.

Her works are evidence of her thorough comprehension of Indian women's realities and struggle at the grassroots level. She also raises concerns related to gender and women's status within the framework of respectability for the middle class. Her main characters live a



middle-path lifestyle, allowing others to live and letting themselves live on their own. She does not oppose women who want to be independent and speak out for themselves. Beyond the endless suffering, agony, and grief, she enables the ladies to rise beyond any misconceptions, as well as their own feeling of loss and despair.

Without hesitation, Deshpande ignites a significant change in the history of women by contrasting the contemporary educated young lady in her books with centuries of enslavement, pain, and repression. This new, transformed lady is now aware of where they are going. She achieved her goal of freeing herself from the oppressive taboos and traditions that male authority had imposed on her. She has been able to let go of the long-standing anxiety that had been stalking her for years—the fear of being unloved, misunderstood, misjudged, and failing. In this way, Shashi Deshpande successfully awakens the lady to her own rights, obligations, suffering, and goal.

Besides The ladies of Shashi Deshpande refused to submit to violent male dominance and be crushed or destroyed. Her ladies revolt against the sexism and challenge the man's dual morals and double standards. She is fighting sexist ideals of male power in order to win liberation from them not only in the social and economic realms but also in their emotions, body, and mind. All of her books emphasize how patriarchy promotes male use of physical force and female sexual servitude. She investigates rape, which has been used to physically, emotionally, and mentally deplete women from the dawn of time, and deconstructs it. Through her writings, she makes it clear that rape in a marriage is illegal and outlines ways to stop women's natural development.

As a result, Shashi Deshpande is reevaluating women's roles in society and searching for her identity. A sensitive soul is engaged in an existential fight with the male-chauvinistic society's repressive dual standards. Her ladies openly declare their regard for themselves, objecting to treatment that involves intimidating and demeaning them. Her female characters stood up for themselves and refused to submit to masculine power. Deshpande's feminine sensitivity and reflection are such that they provide women throughout the globe a personal touch and psychological depth.

Her women are individuals who work to express themselves and find satisfaction in their own lives while adhering to the rules of their own communities. Even while she cannot be compared to the hard core western feminist, her thorough analysis of the existential battle of these overly sensitive and very independent women clearly indicates her feminist idea and as a feminist writer.

Undoubtedly, her works show how the ladies are going through a change in their lives. Her facial expression in the book *Roots and Shadows* conveys a message to contemporary women that says, "Assert yourself. Don't try to stop it. No matter how many things it ruins in the process, let it go and prosper.(115). She goes on to suggest that love, respect, understanding, and the eradication of inflated egos are more effective ways to achieve equality and liberty in man-woman relationships than the constitution and the law alone.

Deshpande continued by pointing out how amazing it is because gender is merely an idea of power. Man and woman are separated into two groups by a societal construct that views man as superior and woman as the "other" as well as man as the subject and woman as the object. The author of this story affirms and demonstrates that the split is artificial since the difference is solely biological.

The ladies have typically transformed mentally and emotionally because of the newly recognized regulations and forms. She gave her characters a space to become cognizant and understand themselves, forcing them out of their state of disillusionment. As a result, this transforms their home and everything else related to their way of life. As a result, it is largely men who need to adapt, leaving women to handle the other issues.

The gender roles of today have been significantly inverted. It is reversing and justifying sexist stereotypes of masculine anger and destruction as expressions of our social behavior rather than fighting and dispelling them. Generational shifts lead to abrupt and significant social, political, economic, and psychological upheavals. It serves as a symbol of opposition to centuries-old oppressions of men. In addition to establishing a fair man-woman relationship, it also aims to free women.

Shashi Deshpande is an Indian woman author who portrays Indian life, culture, and tradition. She also works to further women's emancipation via her writing. Her writings provide a realistic perspective on the inter-personal connections, perception, and personality development of women. She is exploring the lives of Indian women who are juggling the demands of tradition and modernization, the weight of the past, and the hopes for the future.

Conclusion

She portrays females as having their own sensitivities and unbridled faith in the capacity of human intellect to bring about equality and order in the conundrum-ridden environment of the orthodox Indian heritage. Shashi Deshpande was able to successfully facilitate the woman's catharsis process, allowing her to emerge with a subtly growing sense of confidence and self-assertion.

Compared to a generation before, more women work now, more girls attend school, and more of them are seen demonstrating in public places like streets and squares as well as at home. While their appearance hasn't altered, their behavior has. They now have names, both individually and collectively. Their new power wasn't thrust upon them; rather, it was already there, contained by barriers.

Now that their distinctive personalities have gained fresh vigor, power has been brought into the open. They leave a restricted world and enter a vaster, more varied, more mobile one. Women are no longer the weak, reserved, subdued, or delicate-toned threads that crossed and recrossed to form the backdrop tapestry of her life. Instead, they are bold, assertive hues. Thus, the myriad subtle kinds of violence against women and their responses to it are shown in her works by the violent and aggressive language. Her books portray the treasured values of women's mental freedom and incorruptibility.

Even while it is difficult to overcome the societal and cultural conditioning that needs women to be passive victims and men to be victimizers, it can be done, and their silence can be broken. She is mobilizing the general public to take action against violence.

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