

PURSUIT OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION AMONG WOMEN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S CHOSEN LITERARY WORKS

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Abstract

The current study examines a few of Shashi Deshpande's notable publications on feminist theory. Shashi Deshpande championed the cause of women who, in addition to being housewives, mothers, or daughters, continue to live at home and actively pursue their own interests. In practically all of Shashi Deshpande's works, a woman's psyche is exposed as she struggles valiantly to escape the confines placed upon her. The works of Shashi Deshpande are about a woman's search for herself, an investigation into the feminine mind, and coming to terms with the mysteries of life and the protagonist's role in it.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, Quest for self, feminism, self-confidence, patriarchy.

Shashi Deshpande's account of personal life

Shashi Deshpande is a well acclaimed author who has penned eleven novels and five collections of short tales. She is the daughter of renowned Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar Adya Rangachar Sriranga. Her dad is said to be "the George Bernard Shaw (Irish playwright) of the Kannada Theatre." In 1990, she received the famous "Sahitya Akademi Award" (India's equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize in literature) for her works, joining her father in receiving other honors including the "Thirumathi Rangammal Prize" and other honors. For her significant work as a writer, she also received the "Padma Shri" award (contribution in many domains of activity) in 2009. Additionally, she penned the script for the Hindi film "Drishti." She graduated from Mysore University in Karnataka with a masters degree in English literature. She and her spouse traveled to England after their 1962 nuptials. Later, once she had returned, she began writing short tales that included accounts of events from her private life.

Shashi Deshpande is renowned for inventing modern woman characters. The main female characters in Deshpande's works suffer from the usual heinous gender prejudice, first as daughters and then as brides. They are aware of the extreme social inequity and injustice that has been done to them, and they fight back against the oppressive and unfair character of the societal norms and standards that place restrictions on their ability to be a wife and their very existence. They challenge the inferior position that society has assigned to them since they are constrained by their obligations in the family. Her sympathetic and accurate portrayal of Indian middle-class women has garnered her works a great deal of praise from the critics. All of her books and short tales are significantly influenced by her genuine care for women and their precarious situation.

The Sahitya Academy Award-winning author Shashi Deshpande is interested in portraying the sorrows and sufferings, affliction and predicament, agony and anguish, as well as the exploitation and oppression of middle-class Indian women who fall victim to Indian patriarchy. She expresses concern for women who are upset due to conventional and established norms, beliefs, practices, and conventions that have their roots in Indian

patriarchy. She cries out in protest against the mistreatment of women committed in the name of gender inequality. She desires for her ladies to be liberated from male ego and dominance. She wants children to reject beliefs, laws, and regulations created by humans. She wants them to stand out by making independent choices.

Introduction

The books of Shashi Deshpande are tense with a woman's search for herself, an exploration of the feminine intellect, and a knowledge of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's role in them. Indian women's unique and lonely situation, in which their rights as human beings are denied by the traditional culture, has been revealed by Shashi Deshpande. The orthodox culture views women as vassals, therefore their sense of self and uniqueness are constantly marginalized. In Shashi Deshpande's feminism, women are regarded as being emancipated both legally and socially. Women won't be able to overcome their deprivation unless they are treated as fellow humans in society. Even economically independent women experience conflict between traditionalism and modernization in their daily lives. Shashi Deshpande, an Indian, has methodically and movingly described the Indian social structure and the traditional rules created for its women.

Quest For Self In "That Long Silence"

The Sahitya Academy Award-winning book "That Long Silence" by Shashi Deshpande narrates the harrowing tale of how Jaya, who is dissatisfied with her marriage and her life, rediscovers herself. So who is Jaya? She is married to Mohan. She is the mother of Rati and Rahul. She was a writer who had given up writing seriously in favor of publishing a weekly piece on Seeta, a chubby, dimwitted yet cunning and treacherous lady. Deshpande's Jaya was a woman who refrained from asking questions because she had been taught from an early age that when women asked questions, especially ones like, "Why, why this injustice?" they would simply linger in the air and refuse to go away, raising eyebrows at her audacity in doing so. Jaya was connected to crazy Kusum, who committed suicide by leaping into a well. Kusum didn't drown since there was no water in the well; instead, she shattered her neck.

As long as Kusum had survived, Jaya felt confident in her sanity because if Kusum was crazy, Jaya had to be "normal." Jaya has lost all identity after Kusum committed suicide. Is she just Mohan's wife who chopped off the parts of herself that had refused to be Mohan's wife? Is she like the sparrow in the children's bedtime tale of the smart sparrow and the dumb crow? This is how the tale unfolds: A stupid crow constructed his home out of dung, whereas a prudent sparrow constructed hers out of wax. In contrast to the crow's home, which washed away when it rained, the wax house stayed fast. As Sister Sparrow makes up justifications, the naive innocent crow continues to wait outside in the rain pleading to be let inside. Up until that point, she would just remark, "Come in, you're all wet aren't you, poor fellow?" And she gestures toward the pan in which she just finished preparing the chapatties. "Warm yourself there," she instructs. The foolish bird then climbs on it and gets burned to death. Deshpande masterfully depicts the life of a lady like Jaya in this tale by using it as his canvas. She claims that their way of life may be summed up as follows: "Stay at home, take care of your babies, and stay away from the rest of the world, and you're safe." She was another woman and mother whose life revolved solely on her family and her house, despite the fact that her husband had a high position and they had two children, a boy and a girl.

This book's Jaya character is a brilliant invention. Deshpande has done a masterful job of

capturing the loneliness of a lady who is trapped in the cage of marriage. For the readers, Jaya's narrative is revealed. It is a movie where the suffering that permeates the different facets of the plot cannot be blamed on any one particular character. If there is any responsibility, it belongs to the whole cast of characters, including Jaya's husband, children, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and most importantly, Jaya herself. This silence permeates Jaya's life. This book stands out among other works with a similar topic because of the way it ends. Unexpectedly, Jaya does not leave her marriage after receiving her new understanding. Instead, she presses on with newfound vigor to give it new life. Finding oneself, in Jaya's opinion, does not entail seclusion from the outside world. Through this book, Deshpande argues that solving relationship issues doesn't involve breaking up with someone; rather, it involves rebuilding connections in a manner that leaves little room for issues to arise.

Quest For Self In "The Binding Vine"

In 1992, Penguin released *The Binding Vine* in India (it was reissued in 1998), and almost ten years later, the Feminist Press published it in the USA. The story of Urmi is told in *The Binding Vine*. Urmi, the grieving mother who just lost her infant daughter, Urmi, Vanaa's childhood friend (and sister-in-law), Urmi, the lovely Inni's daughter and Baiajji's granddaughter, and Urmi, the only solace in Shakutai's life. The smart, witty Urmi, who is lamenting the loss of her infant daughter, serves as the book's narrator.

After the infant daughter of Anu (Urmi) died, the book starts. Everyone tries to assist Urmi, but no one is sure how. Her best friend Vanaa, who has always been at her side, continuously brings up various instances from their shared history in an effort to lift Urmi out of her gloom. Vanaa does not believe that reminding Urmi of her bravery when she fell off a bike would give Urmi the strength she needs to cope with Anu's death. Vanaa wants to assist Urmi since she is also in need. In actuality, Urmi's healing process starts with Vanaa's memories of Mira. Urmi pulls Mira's poetry from the trunk that had been collecting dust in the attic for years and begins reading them. When Urmi reads those poems by Mira, a college student who was wed off to a guy she did not love, she becomes aware of the numerous types of sorrow that many women must often endure in silence. Usually with no other choice.

When Urmi unintentionally runs across Shakutai at the hospital where Vanaa works as a medical social worker, the healing process that starts with reading Mira's poetry continues. Kalpana, the oldest daughter of Shakutai, was severely beaten and raped before being taken to the hospital. Urmi is driven to assist Shakutai, to pay attention to her, and to keep her company. During the lengthy wait while Kalpana is in a coma, Urmi says something audacious, contemporary, and eminently humane in an effort to persuade Shakutai that Kalpana is the one who is truly victimized and that she did nothing wrong, despite dressing up and having her lips and nails painted. For a long time, Urmi has struggled to comprehend why she has to visit Shakutai and sit with him when their worlds are so unlike.

When Shakutai continuously asks her, "What shall I do, Urmila?" Urmi thinks of the incredible bravery of the few who strove to discover a solution to such problems, matching her own tortured scream of how she would endure Anu's death. She believes that phrases like separation, love, brotherhood, and non-violence are simply that—words. Our primary drive is to survive since we are mired in the everyday grind of life. In addition, as Mira once stated, "Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be." Humans' primary drive is to survive, and in order to do so, they are constantly

on the lookout for the source of life, love, and support from other people.

The Binding Vine is primarily the tale of Urmi, but it is also the tale of Mira and Shakutai. The Mira is what connects Urmi and Vanaa. First wife of Vanaa's father, who passed away while giving birth to Kishore, Urmi's husband. Mira used poetry as a form of protest against the way society functions as well as a method to find solace in her life. Mira protests the loss of her individuality when, during the marriage, her name is changed to Nirmala. Additionally, Mira serves as a global representation of the bond between moms and daughters. "Mother, why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?" she longed to ask her mother, but she never had the chance.

The novel's secondary storyline follows that. Shakutai, a school employee, is parenting her three kids by herself. Kalpana, her older daughter, was raped, severely beaten, and is now in a coma in the hospital. Shakutai is caught between her maternal love for Kalpana and her concern for the family's reputation as a result of this tragedy. She once utters the words, "My Kalpana was a good girl; she was a good girl, I swear to you." Other times, she speaks as if the girl is to fault for what transpired. She is to blame for what happened to her because she was obstinate, strong-willed, dressed up, and painted her lips and nails. Shakutai is a reflection of the millions of Indian mothers who struggle to balance their love for their children with the constant scepter of family honor.

Urmila makes society aware of her protest, which makes trying to alter established norms and attitudes less painful. At the book's conclusion, Urmila is shown thinking back on the romantic ties that serve as the "Springs of Life" for people. She doesn't challenge the system because she thinks things are slowly but surely getting better. Say, for instance, that Mira's poetry contains just the following four lines: But tell me, buddy, did Laxmi also wrap brocade tassels around her fingers and shiver in terror of the approaching dark-clouded, devouring night? Deshpande not only provides access to a vast universe of Indian customs and mythology, but she also depicts the agony felt by a reluctant woman who is aware of what the approaching of the night would surely mean for her.

Quest For Self In "The Dark Holds No Terrors"

Like previous shashi deshpane heroines, Sarita experiences a similar ordeal in The Dark Holds No Terrors. After facing reality, Sarita comes to the conclusion that there are no genuine dangers in the darkness she had dreaded. Saru is a "two-in-one woman," acting as both a captive animal at night and a doctor during the day. She desires independence and a unique personality. She is eager to depart from the strict conventional rules. Despite the fact that she despises her home, Saru visits her father for the first time in the book after a fifteen-year absence. Saru wants to travel to her father's home, which she had left when she was a young lady, after learning from a friend of her mother's passing a month ago. resisted her parents' wishes to wed Manohar, the guy she loved. Now that she was a successful doctor and the mother of two kids, she went back to it more out of a desire to escape the hellish life she was living. She gives off the impression of being lost, despondent, uninteresting, and nearly uncaring.

Years later, Sarita can still hear her mother's furious words that she shouted after failing to prevent her younger brother from drowning when she was a little child. Now that her mother has passed away, Sarita moves back in with her family, ostensibly to help take care of her father but really to get away from the nightmare abuse her husband metes out to her every

night. Sarita muses on her life's experiences while spending time with her elderly father. She recalls her stifling small-town upbringing, her controlling mother, her marriage to the charismatic young poet Manohar (who becomes vengeful when he realizes his career is failing and that his wife has outpaced him in the workplace), her children, etc. Sarita eventually comes to the realization that life is more than being dependent on marriage, parents, and other institutions as she battles her emotions and concerns. She then makes the decision to utilize her newfound knowledge to improve herself.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is a profoundly moving account of one woman's struggle for survival in a setting devoid of hope. In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Saru carries scars from his early years. Because of how much she despises her mother, she declares, "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one." The way Saru's mother treats her daughter and son, Dhruva, demonstrates a gender disparity. "He's unique. These words introduce the typical Indian mother against whom Saru must struggle her whole life: "He's a boy." She feels guilty that she is to blame for her brother's death because of the childhood memory of witnessing him drown and sink. It is made worse by her mother's remark, "You killed your brother...why didn't you die?" Saru develops a hatred for her mother as a result.

Saru disobeys her mother by moving to Mumbai to get a medical degree. Living at a hostel is like having a "rebirth" into a whole other universe where you don't have to go outdoors for "those three days, you are no longer a 'untouchable'; you can even talk about it;" Saru again breaks her mother's rules when she falls in love with Manohar, a lad from a lower caste. Saru's marriage is a method for her to leave her mother and her house behind. The heroine's separation from her mother is the first step toward autonomy since she was initially taught the limitations placed on women by her mother.

Saru returns and sees male clothing hanging on the wall in her room, which makes her realize she doesn't have a space of her own. The protagonist aspires to break free from the sensation of containment that is connected to the mother's home. The idea of the closed-off walls conveys a sense of suffocation. Saru experiences both their parents houses and the dwellings she has selected as a haven.

The book is divided into four sections, and even in the first, all the crucial topics—bitterness toward the mother, Manu's insecurity, Saru's connection with Manu and the kids, and Dhruva's passing—are covered. The last three sections further explore Saru's reflection on and response to various topics covered in the first. Shashi Deshpande deals with a shaky universe that errs on the side of realism and fantasy. It is a thing that exists in this space between reality and unreality that Saru was Dhruva's murderer, Manu was the predator, and Saru was the victim. The ambiguous region is further defined by the italics account of Saru's terrifying yet surreal experience when she gradually realizes the predator is really her own husband.

The turmoil within Saru that has a lot to do with the past is shown in The Dark Holds No Terrors. Thus, narrative uses clever "quick cuts" to subtly move between the past and the present. The work is a little bit too wordy because of Shashi Deshpande's perspective on human existence, sadness, happiness, agony, man's loneliness, and other situations. She never leaves anything out to encourage deep inferences. In the story that deals with a woman's standing and the contradiction inside her psyche, several Indian elements—such as the significance of the son in the family, the emphasis given to females exclusively during haldi-

kumkums, and a lady who is possessed by Devi—find a natural place.

Quest For Self In “Ships that pass”

The primary character of the book *Ships that Pass*, Radhika, stands in for the group of young girls who were raised in a modernist environment and who were influenced by contemporary women. As a result, she faces a moral problem while selecting a life partner in accordance with the wishes of her family: "Oh hell! I'd began thinking like the self-sacrificing heroine of a B grade tearjerker, willing to do everything for the family... Even with modernity and the globalization of education, women continue to be seen as objects that the male-oriented society may employ. Since her early years, a girl has experienced the difference in lifestyle between boys and girls. She is urged to adhere to ingrained social mores and given restrictions on a number of activities. Despite being youthful and intelligent, Radhika still has an outdated way of thinking and is constrained in what she can achieve. Modernity and education may also be seen in the media's influence today, where women are given enough exposure yet are still treated like commodities.

The protagonist of *Ships that Pass* is Radhika, who after graduating decides to get married before deciding what she wants to do with her life, including whether to pursue further education, a career, or anything else. Radhika is forced to realize the error of her ways when she visits the home of her once-beautiful sister Tara and observes how their marriage, which had been founded on deep love, had crumbled. This might be seen as a narrative of a young lady facing life's challenges, giving up simple getaways, and realizing and pursuing what matters most in life. All of this takes place against the backdrop of Tara and Shantanu's miserable marriage. Shantanu's suggestion to Radhika that Tara is unhappy and has made two suicide attempts carries a whiff of criminality.

When Tara expresses her desire to live emphatically, Radhika is perplexed. When Radhika gets an intuition while watching a movie with her nephew Abhi, she flees home, leaving him at the cinema with his friends, making the dilemma of who is correct even more crucial to resolve. She discovers the home to be completely dark, and there was a strong gas leak odor. Tara, who she saves, admits that she never turned on the gas. The evidence indicates that Shantanu was the one who made Tara a cup of tea that evening after returning home. Was it he who turned on the gas? Was he the one who disconnected the fuse's line, causing the home to go dark?

Even with the assistance of Ram Mohan, a former neighbor who is now a doctor in the same location and has become a friend of Tara, Tara is unable to discover answers to these issues. Soon after Tara declares her desire in life, in reality one day later, she is discovered dead. Sedative overdose is the cause of death. In Shantanu's closet, an empty bottle of the sedatives is discovered. Despite being detained by the police, Ram Mohan and Radhika assist in freeing him by providing a letter that was probably authored by Tara. The narrative supports the idea that the living are more important than the dead. Finding out if Tara really committed suicide or whether Shantanu accidentally gave her a sedative overdose is not crucial. Clarifying why Shantanu informed Radhika that Tara had attempted suicide despite Tara having no such intents is not necessary. It is also not necessary to identify who tampered with the fuse and who opened the gas. Any reason? The only thing that counts is that the living be valued over the dead. According to Shashi Deshpande, the mystery of the human mind is more intriguing than the question of who committed the crime.

Conclusion

In his works, Shashi Deshpande realistically captures the suffering and turmoil of contemporary educated middle-class women. caught between tradition, patriarchy, and self-expression on the one hand, and freedom, individualism, and self-expression on the other. Deshpande mostly has compassion and care for the lady. She has accurately described her worries, pain, disappointments, and frustrations. The author revealed the woman's battle for self-respect and self-identity while also exposing the many forms of oppression, including sexual oppression.

Although Shashi Deshpande's books mostly focused on middle class women, she also took into account the issues of lower class women. Shashi Deshpande has set out on a quest by making women the heroes of her books. It is a challenging and heartbreaking road since it entails accurately portraying women's issues without emphasizing them so that the books may provide an unbiased portrayal of their struggles.

She puts the current situation in India in the proper context. Shashi Deshpande succeeds in conveying the suffering of Indian women by being loyal to her beliefs. Shashi Deshpande's motivation for exposing the schemes of patriarchal systems designed to enslave women suggests that she has a deep-seated desire for women to be awakened. In the end, Shashi Deshpande hopes to take the ladies out of their oppressive cages and into liberated areas where freedom is supreme.

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