

**WOMEN AS OVERCOMERS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SHASHI
DESHPANDE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper focus on the women characters' emergence as overcomers in Shashi Deshpande novels and their attitude in dealing with struggles in this patriarchal society. Shashi Deshpande is a bold Indian woman writer who shows the transition of women characters in her novels from submissive, to independent individuals. The writer depicts the real-life situations of middle-class Indian families and her women characters realize their suffering and their search for identity. To make them adapt to modern society, her women characters critically examine their position and they learn to react to new situations in life. The novelist's characters have to deal with the specified conditions existing in society, the challenges that arise in the husband and wife relationship and the inner turmoil of women while overcoming male dominance. The women in these select novels assert liberty, economic independence, and space for self and identity to become overcomers that would serve as the best solution to come across various sorts of challenges.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchal society, oppression, society, Identity, Overcomers

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is a consistent writer and respect receives many accolades and respect even from her contemporaries because of her fiction. She has clarity on her stories and all her characters are all well sketched to the minutest level. Her novels depict the transition in the role of female characters and bring life to fiction. The contemporary society and societal norms at that time vary from time to time and this change is observed in her characters and every novel. Shashi Deshpande portrays the inner thoughts of women and her desire for individuality, identity echoes in all her work. Women are heart and soul of house during Rig Vedic times. Both are equal and have freedom to move without any restrictions. . Man and woman were viewed as "two wheels pulling the same chariot." Girls of elite groups have chance to select their husbands through swayamvara and Gandharva Vivah. Wives are considered as "ardhangini". Their situation deteriorated throughout time, particularly following the Muslim invasion

She focuses on the hardships of the woman where culture and tradition play a major role in shaping the woman's life. She boldly discusses issues like child marriage, forced marital sex, rape, and sex-role stereotyping and the daily struggle of women in managing the household as daughters-in-law, wives, and mothers. In addition, there is constant conflict and struggle over the relationship between men and women throughout the entirety of her body of work. She asserts, however, in her essay "Why I Am a Feminist" that "Women are neither inferior nor subordinate Human Beings, but One Half of the Human Race" (Deshpande, 83). From a



feministic perspective, Shashi Deshpande's novels one has to go through to study her female characters. All her female characters are urban Indian ladies, modern in thinking, middle-class background, educated and reflect the contemporary women from the 1970s and 1980s. She makes us realize there is little change and improvement in the condition of women in the present century. Shashi Deshpande denies as a feminist and made a courageous attempt to give voice to the sufferings and frustration of women through her writings. There are readers for all over world for Deshpande books. These novels speak on existing conditions and cultural boundaries present in India at different times. Most of her protagonists are comparable because of their middle-class background as their gender, place and education are same. She discusses the dominance of society and marginalization of women and the actions of oppressor and sufferings of oppressed and the treatment of women during Vedic times. The women must make an effort to change themselves after realization for the need for space and identity and it results into change in their way of dealing situations and their living. They should deal with matters concerning the difficulties in the society and to balance their own desires, and justify their position in their families and communities. Women must be aware and importance of personal freedom and what it actually entails. In this world, society and people expect women to dedicate and sacrifice to home and make concessions on what to give up at what cost. Nearly all the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's works feature the turmoil in relationships that swing back and forth between pleasant and worst situations. The women must change their way of living. They must deal with issues concerning the difficulties of balancing their own demands with the needs of their families and communities. Women must acquire the knowledge of what personal freedom actually entails. In this world, women must make concessions and decide what to give up. Nearly all of Shashi Deshpande's works feature relationships that swing back and forth between pleasant and bad sensations. Even though there isn't a formal school of feminism or a comprehensive theory of feminism in India, writers like Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Nayanthara Sahgel, Kamla Markandaya, Shobha De, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapoor, Shashi Deshpande, etc. have used their writing to express their opinions about Indian women. Indian English literature contains numerous manifestations of this protest. Men as well as women have written about the persecuted state of womanhood, including Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar, etc. The Legacy and Other Stories (1978), The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), and Come Up and Be Dead (1983) are some of Shashi De Shpande's best-known works Roots and Shadows(1983)s. 1989 film That Long Silence. A Matter of Time (1999), The Intrusion and Other Stories (1993). Writing from the Margin and Other Essays, Small Remedies, The Binding Vine, The Narayanpur Incident, Moving On, and In the Country of Deceit are some of the books mentioned. Shashi Deshpande through her works readers came to know about husband-wife roles in contemporary society, contemporary feminine difficulties and female problems, expectations of modern society and its demands, problems of modern working women, and the causes of the problems and searching for solutions. A



variety of articles on female problems written in the works of Shashi Deshpande's books are published in news publications both in India and overseas. The present study focuses on the three select novels of Shashi Deshpande That Long Silence (1988), Moving On (2004), and In the Country of Deceit (2008).

In the novel That Long Silence we can notice the social and cultural changes that affect the women's identities and their behaviour when they assume the roles of "wives" and "mothers". The protagonist Jaya and Mohan's marriage is under the shadow of a patriarchal society and in these circumstances being a wife to a man a woman has to experience the psychological, emotional and social consequences of that time. This novel speaks about a woman's journey and a variety of female issues, their struggle, difficulties, disappointments and harassment. Most of the women characters like Kusum, Vanitamani, Jeeja, Jaya's grandmother, Vimala and Mohan's mother in this novel are conventionally tied to tradition and culture of the society as they think it is normal to accept their husband's dominance and to maintain the silence and bear the oppression. In That Long Silence, a book gives us a chance to peek into the life of every girl child, with restrictions on everything like people will say "Wait till you get married. Hold off until your hubby arrives. Attend till you get to your in-laws' house. When you have children, wait... No more holding your breath, worrying, or having anxieties. p. 30 (That Long Silence, Pg. 30) When Jaya learns in her Dadar flat that her husband Mohan was made to leave his job due to a lapse in business and he was found guilty, her entire world turns upside down and there was chaos in their life. Jaya waits patiently and becomes the earner of the family as she starts writing articles as the writer in the magazines to support the family till Mohan clears himself of the accusations through his confession, he starts depending on her, and his gaze follows her every move. Jaya becomes the main support system for Mohan and she remains silent while Mohan expresses his grief: "The fact was that I did not know what to say, how to express it". She feels that her silence speaks a lot in between what is stated. Jaya's financial independence and the dependence of Mohan on her make her realize the importance of identity and freedom. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande discusses two important characters and their relationship as husband and wife and the equation between them. She compares the relationship in marriage with a bullock cart where two bullocks are tied together as a pair. Even though the bullocks share a single cart they do not know there is love and affection between them. It is a compulsion for the animals, whereas between husband and wife love and affection are a must. Jaya and Mohan's seventeen years of marriage has two kids and this relationship requires lots of perseverance. To retain this bond the two-person involvement and sharing the household burden is important and the two must support each other instead of each one going in their direction and it creates turbulence in the family. It ultimately results in a burdensome relationship which results in pain. Even after being married for so long, Jaya and Mohan remain strangers to one another. Deshpande examines the four main types of women in her book That Long Silence: the illiterate women of the lower classes, the educated modern women of the middle



classes, the traditional women of the middle classes, and the legendary women. Jaya is a traditional middle-class woman. She loses her identity as a freelance writer after getting married. Her life consists of Mohan's needs. Mohan always wants his rice fresh and hot, from an untouched vessel. She has just finished cooking and serves the entire family members. Then she finishes the second cooking and also waits for Mohan hoping that he won't be too late, and as for lighting the fire again, that is unthinkable for Jaya. Jaya believes she is content. She acknowledges that she needs to let go of that delusion. It is shedding light on how silence benefits men in retaining power and undermines women in society. Even after she has cooked for a third time, God, Mohan still comments to her! She was harsh—modern women are tough. 36) (Deshpande). Even if Jaya had tried to communicate how she feels about herself, it would have been in vain. From an early age, Jaya's character has effectively conveyed the idea of questioning and of not being bound by conventions. They have disagreements because Mohan rules her life in the manner of a contemporary lady. Mohan calls her a rebel following this occurrence. Being a writer, Jaya subsequently receives recognition for her work when her story is published in a magazine. The episode severely degrades Mohan, who complains, "How could you write these things. They will all know, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us" (Deshpande: 12). He interprets it as an insult and forbids her from expressing herself freely on feminist articles in Women's magazine. He always values writing in a structured, conventional manner.

She could feel herself gasping for air and drowning in the darkness as she experienced violent, frantic moments that were lowering her into the abyss. This is how life is now for her. Jaya is in excruciating mental anguish and confusion. She experiences intense emotional distress during this procedure. She loses emotional equilibrium and uneasiness due to the conflict between her self-hood and identity as a writer and her complete submission to her husband. Nevertheless, she has consistently managed well. The mute sufferer Jaya is the complete antithesis of the wise being introduced at the start of the book *That Long Silence*. Jaya allows her family to control her body and soul for seventeen long years while living a meaningless life. To make sense of her life Jaya tries to change the circumstances, Jaya attempts to shatter the stigma of maintaining submissiveness and "this long silence" in her life. She finds consolation in the Sanskrit word "Yathechhasitatha Kuru". p. 192: "Do as you please". The "All Well" telegraph from Mohan prompts Jaya to remark, "I shall have to erase the quiet... Life has to be made feasible at all times" (pp. 192–193). Shashi Deshpande reaches the core of life and gives voice to Jaya type of female subjectivity who refuses to reconcile to the circumstances after realizing the importance of freedom and identity that connect with a patriarchal and male-dominated society. The protagonist makes a conscious effort to raise her voice as she struggles to express her feministic views and breaks seventeen years-long silence. She notices what injustice she incurred because of her long silence and decides to break her shackles to become an overcomer that marital polarizations



restrict individual potential and happiness. In the end, it is sufficient to say that the modern woman needs courage rather than escape. She gathers the scatters of her life and the guts to stand up for what she believes to be right and to do it tenaciously and firmly. Jaya's retrospection leads to breaking down the silence and starting a new life with clarity and determination to move forward as an Overcomer.

Moving On(2004) is the story of families interwoven and realistic. The husband-wife relationship, which is the family's foundation and base and where many new relationships begin to take shape and develop, is the focus of the survey of her novels. Other aspects and dimensions of familial relationships include those between mother and daughter, father and daughter, and brothers and sisters with in-laws. The joint family of characters is full of numerous other connections, including maternal and paternal uncle-aunt links, their offspring and affiliations with them, and grandkids' connections to their grandparents, among other things. Although not always cheerful, these relationships in this novel have been depicted in a very honest and open way. They are also full of sadness. A family must experience both happiness and sadness since it is unavoidable, no one can avoid it, and who knows what kind of effects it will have. Shashi Deshpande challenges our familiar beliefs about family ties in this work, this is a game about different mentalities and perspectives of the mind. Manjari, the protagonist is the narrator, and Baba, her father Mr. Bones, are heard as two different and independent voices. Baba's diary, which Manjari discovers in her home after his passing, helps her to find out about the past. In the retroactive context of Baba's self-disclosures, Manjari considers the past interfere with the present as she struggles as an individual with a difficult present. While Deshpande succeeds in giving voices to Manjari and her father effortlessly in dividing the past from the present situations. Moving on is a great illustration of the expansive memory and all realistic fictional elements sum up. The diary speaks volumes on the lives of lovers, fighting couples, schemers, and haters. Mr. Bones as a father and doctor enjoys and has the secrets, passion, knowledge and wisdom that a human body possesses. Manjari's mother ruthlessly exerts her power as a mother and exercises love in the same way. Both her sisters are estranged when they are kids and their brother is involved in life-and-death games as a criminal in Bombay. These passions create splits in the family of Manjari's mother. Manjari as a young woman sets out to explore her sexuality and make sense in the wider world. Shashi Deshpande in Moving On portrays Manjari the protagonist challenges the patriarchal stigmas and decides to live life on her terms. As a student, she decides to pursue medical courses and gets admission into the medical college. After the appearance of Shyam in the life of Manjari, for love, she shows immense strength and determination to marry Shyam against the wishes of her parents and even decides to forgo the medical course, which she joins with a lot of interest. It was a tough time for her after the marriage as Shyams doesn't have stable work and her sister is pregnant with Shyam's child. This revelation is a big blow for Manjari and Malu passes away after giving birth to Sachi. Shyam could not withstand the financial struggles and his infidelity towards Manjari pushed



him to commit suicide. It was a testing time for her to stand and face the pressure of not taking help from parents and has to struggle for livelihood and the pressure of society. Manjari learns to drive the car and runs it as a taxi and sets up a computer at home to monitor and to type manuscripts for other people as a source of self-employment. This decision of Manjari shocks Raja because of her self-assertiveness. Raja wants to support and protect her and she rejects the help of Raja even when she receives threats from the mafia underworld. Manjari overcomes the psychological pressure of selling the ancestral home to the gangsters. She says: "I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else's. I don't want a shared control; I should have sole control.[8] She tells the driver to leave, saying, "I'm quite capable of looking after myself." [9] Manjari becomes an overcomer when she rejects the financial help from her parents when in dire need to feed her kid. She works as an ayah, manuscript writer, clerk to be financially independent and brings her two children without any support from outside. Manjari felt independence and freedom is very important for a woman. She poses a challenge to patriarchy as she rejects the marriage proposal of Raja and her dealing with Rajan, the mafia makes her an Overcomer.

In the Country of Deceit(2006) gives a glimpse of human relationships and it is common in our country to marry their daughters when they attain a certain age. The continuous gaze of Shashi Deshpande follows the agony and escape from truth will eat away their consciences as the individuals are caught in traps because of their deeds. Deshpande designs Devayani with a new perception of life to make her more empathetic and liberal of human weakness. Devayani challenges the pieces of advice of all her dear and dear ones regarding marriage and to happily.

Devayani and Savi both sisters welcome the idea of a new house and it was built in the place of their childhood home which is a very spacious and light-filled one. Here in this novel dark represents gloominess. It is painful to see the end of their old house but neither of them is traumatic as they welcome their dream house. According to Devayani, "this was not the conclusion, but a beginning. a new beginning. Naturally, this is followed by the idea of a fresh start and a season of renewal (Deshpande Deceit.3). Devayani. The story is about a twenty-nine-year-old spinster who lives on her own in a small town called Rajnur and is just beginning to recover from the loss of her mother who has passed away after a protracted illness. The architect-sister is behind the design of their new home to ensure that Devayani, the main female character, feels happy and develops an attachment to the home. She says, "I felt as if I was waiting for the curtain to go up, waiting for something to happen (Deshpande Deceit.8)".

Devayani moves into a new home with all modern amenities and with a new perspective towards life leaving behind her conservativeness. She gets acquainted with Rani, a retired actress and gets a chance to meet a police officer Ashok at a party. Savi shifts to New Delhi



along with her doctor husband and children. Devayani accepts the death of her mother and moves on to new life in a new home with open hands and declares

"... For her, this was a fresh start. Suddenly, she was keeping an eye on her life and everything else she had given up when Arjun was born. You have to take your eyes off the timer when someone is born or dies. The hands of the clock stop spinning as the time comes to a complete stop. For me, it was my mother's passing, whereas, for Savi, it was the birth of her two children. I did nothing but watch her fight to breathe for two years because I was afraid she might stop breathing at any time and everything would end. For both of us, time had started to move once more at this point (Deshpande Deceit.5).

In this novel, Shashi Deshpande boldly discusses the issues of pre-marital sex and an extramarital affair. The protagonist Devayani falls in love and enters into a pre-marital relationship with a married man without any regrets. Both of them knew there was no future in this relationship and Ashok clearly explained to her at the beginning of their relationship that no entanglements, Devayani too does not want to get married either and knowledge of this relationship in which she is a whore and there is no further future. Savi and her husband want Devayani to get married and they think marriage is more respectable in society than a pre-marital relationship. The morals and ethics inculcated make her end up her relationship with Ashok and she wants to continue to work with the lawyer as an assistant. She decides not to get married and willingly takes the decision to leave Ashok and does not listen to his words to compromise on certain issues and she emerges as an overcomer.

. Shashi Deshpande's novel deals with the theme of the quest for female identity. The complexities of man-woman relationship especially in the context of marriage, the trauma of a disturbed adolescence. The Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferer. While she has played different roles as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her individuality. Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with the women belonging to Indian middle class. She deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels. She realistically portrays her heroines. The author's goal is to expose the ideologies that teach women how to act out their subordinate roles in society. Her books subtly suggest the postmodern method of dismantling patriarchal society and traditions to show that they are artificial constructs. The protagonists in these select novels move forward in their lives and emerge as overcomers.

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