



FEMINISIM IN THE NOVELS OF SASHI DESHPANDE

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ABSTRACT

One of the most prominent Indian authors writing in English is Shashi Deshpande. Her works center on the experiences of oppressed women living in a patriarchal society. In India, women have been oppressed by a male-dominated social order for centuries. Both the idea of man's supremacy and the concept of woman as paragon of all virtues are shattered by Shashi Deshpande's unique heroines. Characters are the starting point for each story. She writes books where women play important roles. She uses real-life experiences to inspire believable protagonists, and she takes great care to avoid the use of cardboard cutouts in her quest to realise her ambition. The author's depiction of female protagonists is particularly strong. She disagrees with the concept of the superwoman and has no interest in idealizing such a figure.

Keywords: Recognizable, Authentic, Peripheral, Glorifying, Stereotypical.

INTRODUCTION

Author Shashi Deshpande is often held up as a role model for women in her nation. So far, she has authored 10 books in which she tries to portray the plight of women in her culture. Most of her book's center on issues that women face and how they deal with them, hence they are often classified as feminist fiction. Her stories include female heroes who face modern challenges. She investigates the internal struggle a woman has and how she adapts to a world that is not in accordance with her ideals. She discusses the ways in which women in current middle-class Indian society combine traditional and contemporary values. Deshpande's presentation of womanhood within the current societal framework demonstrates how patriarchal rules and values restrict women and strip them of agency and independence. Feminism, in her view, should not be anti-men since women have to adapt their lives to patriarchal norms.

The protagonist in Shashi Deshpande's works is a woman who is struggling to maintain her own sense of who she is, not only as a wife, mother, or human. Novelist Shashi Deshpande objects to the label "feminist" since she does not see gender as the central concern in her work. She acted out the plight of the modern Indian woman living in a culture controlled by men and steeped in tradition. Being female herself, she has a natural affinity towards females and a healthy fear of interpersonal connections. Women account for half of mankind and are, without a doubt, just as vital to the smooth functioning of the cosmos. Although it seems clear that men and women should be treated equally, this has not been the case historically. It has always been a struggle for society to recognize and respect both genders equally. Both parts are equally vital to the whole, with the designer deciding simply to differentiate them by the tasks they're tasked with doing. But their male colleagues grabbed authority via brute force, demoting women to supporting roles. Women were expected to stay at home and care for their children. Women's subservience in society's economic system also contributed to their exploitation.

In 1980, Shashi Deshpande released his first book, titled *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The story gives a realistic portrayal of the situation of Indian women today. Feminine behavior and outlook in upper-middle class Indian households are investigated. Numerous languages, including Spanish and many varieties of Russian, have

adapted this tale. The women the author depicts are middle-class, contemporary, and career-focused, yet they are also aware of and concerned about the world's fast transformation. To find their place in the world, these women are fully aware of the oppression they face at the hands of men; they are prepared to rebel against males in order to do so; and yet, they eventually find themselves unable to change the deeply ingrained norms of society.

Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, is on a quest for enlightenment. The tale opens with a woman's lonesome realizations and the profound inquiry into her life's ultimate meaning in the context of her family relationship. The tale follows a character as they struggle with gender norms on their quest to find themselves. It shows the hardships endured by a woman for the sake of her family. Women still need marriage for financial stability, and men need it for social status. Earlier in their marriage, Jaya had deferred to her husband's authority. The confinement in Dadar's apartment forces her to reevaluate the priorities she had set for herself based solely on her husband's requirements. Fortunately, Jaya is able to channel her frustrations via her artistic pursuits. Faith is restored in the novel's last chapter. A step in the right road was taken when Jaya decided to end the radio silence and pursue a life of harmony and contentment. A woman may reach her full potential if she accepts and embraces her uniqueness and uses it to the fullest extent feasible.

The ladies in *The Binding Vine* are similarly denied of love and happiness by the male-dominated society. Both Mira and Kalpana, who refuse to marry their respective husbands, experience rape in the novel's first-person narrative. In the narrative, women's natural development is stifled mostly by economic hardship and rape. Shashi Deshpande uses this setting to dramatize the struggles of her late mother-in-law, Mira, and her heroine Urmila who rise to the challenge. The story is, thus, about a smart, ambitious woman's quest to figure out her place in the shifting roles of a strange new world. The author fights for freedom, equality, and women's rights while writing this work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

B, Evangeline. (2018). One of the authors that has addressed the topic of women's liberation is Shashi Deshpande. Among modern Indian novels, she stands head and shoulders above the others for the depth with which she depicts the struggles of Indian women in the face of both tradition and progress. The issue of women's oppression and stereotypes became a focus for a growing number of female authors. One of India's most influential authors is Shashi Deshpande. Heavily lauded by critics and readers alike, she is considered a top stylist and one of the most inventive authors of her time. Consequently, we need to pursue a detailed examination of Shashi Deshpande's novels as an authentic representation of feminism, since they provide a new angle from which to examine the connections between literature and the actual world.

Pardeep Kumar (2019) There has been a fight for women's liberation since the beginning of civilisation. As a result of persistent patriarchal bias, women's writing has historically been underappreciated. Resentment at the unfair treatment of any woman is at the heart of feminism. Whenever a literary method places emphasis on female experience as its primary focus, we say that it is feminism. The legal, economic, and social restrictions on women's fundamental rights against which feminists have raised their voice of protest may be traced back throughout history. Feminism derives from the Latin word *lemina*, meaning "woman," through the French word *l'émancipation*. It's the fight for women's rights, equal pay, and political representation on the basis of sex equality. To put it another way, it has to do with the idea that women ought to be afforded the same legal protections and opportunities in all spheres of life as males. The study's overarching goal is to determine whether or not the women in Shashi Deshpande's works really express themselves or, rather, compromise their assertion in the sake of longevity. All of her books were taken into account for this analysis, although the focus is on three of her most important works: *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence*. These three books have been translated into several languages and have received numerous honours.

Aayushi Sharma, Dr. Rakesh Gupta, Lalit Kishore Sharma. (2021). Patriarchal culture causes women psychological anguish from the moment they are born. However, some women manage to beat the odds while others do not make it. Many women who have experienced trauma are either mentally sick or disregard their cultural values. The purpose of this article is to analyse the strong female protagonists in a few books by Shashi Deshpande. To this day, Shashi Deshpande is one of the most widely read and published Indian women writers working today. The struggles of modern women in a patriarchal culture are front and center in her work. There are essentially three sections to this article. The first part is an illustration of women's resiliency and self-control in the face of a stereotypically asymmetrical patriarchal framework, and it also provides an overview of

thinkers and authors whose beliefs and ideas helped women persevere despite unjust conditions. The second part provides a high-level introduction to Shashi Deshpande and her impact on Indian English writing. The final part discusses how her books address issues of female empowerment, resiliency, and resistance. Three of Shashi Deshpande's novels—"The Dark Holds No Terrors," "Roots and Shadows," and "That Long Silence"—were evaluated for this analysis. Her female protagonists are entangled in the web of societal norms and the chains of patriarchy. As a result of living in a society dominated by males, they experience discrimination, hardship, and extreme emotional and psychological pain. The article, however, is interested in the resilience and determination that allowed these women to recover and thrive once again.

Sambharwal, S.O. & Yadav, N.(2022). When it comes to the projection of a female sensibility in Indian English Literature, no other woman author compares to Shashi Deshpande. Her investigation of the feminine mind is widely praised by readers and the subject of heated debate among academics and literary critics. Shashi Deshpande focuses on the female mind in her stories so that readers may identify with their desires and frustrations. Her heroines wear their support for 'A Room of One's Own' as a badge of honour. She shows how the characters' desires, wants, drives, and hopes are met with hostility by the society they live in. And thus they act in diverse ways, revealing distinctive personalities. Their personalities change dramatically and they grow in positive ways as people. In this study analysis, the writers undertake an in-depth examination of the different feminist concerns represented in her works via the characters of the major protagonists, namely Indu from *Roots and Shadows*, Jaya from *That Long Silence*, and Saru from *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

P. RAJYA LAKSHMI, Dr.N.ARVINDA (2017) The study's overarching goal is to determine whether or not the women in Shashi Deshpande's works really express themselves or, rather, compromise their assertion in the sake of longevity. All of her books were taken into account for this analysis, although the focus is on three of her most important works: *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence*. These three books have been translated into several languages and have received numerous honors. Therefore, this dissertation makes an effort to analyse Shashi Deshpande's female characters, as shown in her books, in an effort to comprehend and respect their struggles in the face of the tension between tradition and modernity. It evaluates how they've adjusted to their new circumstances and how well those adjustments mesh with modern life. The research examines the difficulties faced by the novel's characters rather than delving into the author's own beliefs about how best to approach the many issues presented.

HEROINES OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande is mostly concerned with portraying the internal turmoil of a contemporary educated Indian woman torn between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self-expression, individuality, and freedom for women on the other. The female protagonists in her works are all on a quest to find their own identities outside of the stereotypical female roles of daughter, wife, and mother. Novelist Shashi Deshpande's female heroines develop in the same ways as the plots of her books. All five of her female protagonists—Indus (*Roots and Shadows*), Saru (*The Dark Holds No Terror*), Jaya (*That Long Silence*), Urmila (*The Binding Vine*), and Sumi (*A Matter of Time*)—start off the book in a state of bewilderment. As the story progresses, they gradually begin to question their assumptions, analyse their actions, and come to terms with who they really are. They come from it feeling stronger in themselves, more in charge of their lives, and with much more optimism and hope for the future.

Deshpande shows us modern Indian women who are neither docile goddesses nor raging superwomen. She developed interesting and compelling characters while depicting the darkness and death of a mysterious world. They are at risk because of the inflexibility of tradition, despite being educated middle-class women. They go on living, but now they speak for themselves and see the world through their own unique perspective. Motivated by the need to create order out of disorder, it strives to build a civilized society.

That Long Silence's Jaya is also fighting back against the way women are treated in our society. When searching for a woman's authentic self, middle-class respectability is not the place to look. She has great insight into herself, empathy for others, and natural ability. Psychically speaking, she's well on her way to being her best self. Because she has had to repress her uniqueness for so long, she is now nervous and insane. Questions regarding the rights of Indian women and the state of gender equality are a kind of protest.

In any case, she's trying to give us a view of the past from a female viewpoint. Again, in *A Matter of Time* Shashi Deshpande discusses rape, death, and rot. Over the course of three generations, we see what marriage

and married life are like now compared to their pristine, harmonious beginnings. Aru, our protagonist, questions the traditional roles of men and women in society.

The climax of tradition and modernity, as we perceive it now, can be traced back to Deshpande. Aru stands in the transitional period between the old and the modern. By doing so, Shashi Deshpande is dismantling patriarchal norms and giving women a stronger, more unified voice. She is deracinating the image produced by men, and she is also channeling her anger and resentment toward a positive goal.

CAREER ORIENTED FEMALE CHARACTERS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande's characters are upper-middle-class women in their 30s and 35s who are progressive, intelligent, and ambitious. She depicted modern middle-class women with uncommon skill, and she gave a nuanced treatment to many standard Indian topics. A recurrent topic is the couple's quest for individuality and independence within the confines of their marriage. The women of her civilization are aware of the cultural and social deficits to which they are obligated due to the preponderance of males in her society. In their quest for independence and recognition, they defy their male guardians, only to face the formidable force of societal convention. They want things to be different, but they want to do it within the confines of accepted cultural practices, so they don't try to reinterpret those practices so much as bring them to life with honour and pride. Shashi Deshpande's works provide a voice to this group of newly empowered women. Her writings also have a strong undercurrent of protest against the continued oppression of women.

FEMISIM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande is a prominent feminist author who vigorously promotes her own style of feminism while maintaining a wide humanistic perspective. Deshpande has shown herself to be a superb writer who is really concerned with women's difficulties and fears thanks to her creative skill and beliefs. Strong and brave, her characters create their own role models in response to the needs of their society. She excels at writing female protagonists who are resilient in the face of adversity and whose stories inspire us to do the same. Her books, which she has written with tremendous aesthetic skill and amazing creativity, often represent the difficult lives of modern Indian women. Her books have an enduring significance for the positive eloquence of their message for women and for all of mankind because of her commendably realistic portrayal of the present Indian women's plight and the pragmatic solution she puts out. She has looked at several everyday crises that lead people to start looking. Deshpande feels more strongly and empathetically about the female characters. The author delicately bares the numerous layers of oppression, especially sexual oppression, that women in our society face while portraying the woman's battle to gain self-respect and self-identity for herself. Women's voices, silenced for generations, were finally heard by a new generation of women who embraced the new principles. Women of the new generation of authors are represented as strong, independent, and capable of making their own decisions without having to rely on the preferences of males.

AUTHENTIC FEMALE CHARACTERS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

In his core, Shashi Deshpande is a realist. The female characters she has crafted seem real, like real people. She gives the reader a tale that makes sense, with real people and not just vague stereotypes. She is committed to showing the world as it is, rather than as she thinks it should be. Many books written in India focus on female protagonists and their struggles. However, the focus is usually elsewhere, and the stories end up celebrating Indian women's stereotyped traits like patience, devotion, and abject acceptance of whatever is meted out to them. Both the idea of man's supremacy and the concept of woman as paragon of all virtues are shattered by Shashi Deshpande's unique heroines. Characters are the starting point for each story. She writes books where women play important roles. She uses real-life experiences to inspire believable protagonists, and she takes great care to avoid the use of cardboard cutouts in her quest to realise her ambition. The author's depiction of female protagonists is particularly strong. She disagrees with the concept of the superwoman and has no interest in idealizing such a figure. She even said so to a reporter: "My characters go their own routes." Some have argued that it would be beneficial to include powerful female protagonists. But what I write about is women in their natural state. (11) Deshpande's female protagonists have their own internal fortitude, and they never buckle under the weight of the book's many obstacles and antagonists. Each of her novels' protagonists opposes traditional practices seen as relics of the past. They have given up on the tulsi plant and other pointless rituals like circumambulation because they see no point in it. Neither Indu (Roots and Shadows) nor Saru (The Dark Holds No Terror) will participate in ceremonies designed to prolong their husbands' lives. The fact that they

were able to reject you shows how autonomous they are and how they see the world. She argues that a woman is more than a sum of these parts. She deserves an evaluation of her potential on par with that of a man.

WOMEN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

As a result, women's rights and advantages have been marginalized for many years, if not centuries. This stunted their personal growth, which in turn contributed to the widespread culture of blamelessness throughout the world. Gender discrimination based on the patriarchal construction of high and low, superiority and inferiority, self and other, etc. has kept them subjugated and marginalized, and they have been considered as a class of downtrodden people whose issues and voices have been ignored. As a rule, in a patriarchal culture, the quiet pain of women is more concrete than abstract. The only reason they're still considered a "second sex" is because of the restrictions that males have placed on them. Men are weakened by centuries of persecution; therefore, they seldom engage in overt social protest. Women in contemporary India are stuck between custom and nature, complicating an already difficult situation. Despite advancements in society, women are still expected to conform to norms and expectations that have been set by males. They face oppression on many fronts, including the political, economic, sexual, cultural, and psychological, and are the targets of social exploitation and gender discrimination. Whether it's the oppression of women as a gender class or the other emancipated women, Shashi Deshpande makes a tireless effort to explain the plight of women in her works.

It's true that Indian women face discrimination and subjugation due to their gender and the patriarchal society in which they live. Therefore, women's subversive ideology emerges to challenge male-centered beliefs and a gender-based society on social, political, sexual, and economic levels. This turns out to be a complicated problem. All women's lives are hampered by the societal construct of gender, which treats men and women as diametrically opposed groups with different social values. It's not always a reflection of biological differences between the sexes; rather, it's a politically imposed norm with a wide variety of ways for one sex to impose its will on the other. And males dominate women in this power structure. He is the "self," while she is the "other." A lot of what Showalter has to say can go unnoticed:

...gender is not a question of difference, but which assumes that the sexes are separate and equal; but of power since in looking at the history of gender relations we find gender asymmetry, inequality, and male dominance in every known society.

Therefore, women's demands for fair legislation and for women's empowerment pose a danger to the current power structures. Therefore, women must resist men's tendency to categorize them and step up their campaign for equal rights, including the right to life and the right to be treated with respect. There's a chance that PATIVRATA NARI (named after her husband) is on the way out in the modern United States. However, males still hold most positions of power, and extreme feminist ideals from the West might be difficult for Indian women to adopt. Marriage is highly valued and the husband-wife relationship is appreciated as a whole. But women vehemently resent any attempts to treat them as if they were a lesser species. Women in India deserve respect and dignity as human beings, not to mention sexual equality. This is why Shashi Deshpande makes these observations on an interview conducted by Geeta Gangadharan:

. I have a strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been look upon as 'breeding animals'. They had no other roles in life; I have a strong objection to treating any human being in the names....

Evidence from the past demonstrates that female subjugation lasted for a considerable length of time. Women's rights were explicitly written out of the social and cultural rules that governed society. Until the early 19th century, Sati was practiced legally in various regions of India. Women were unable to express satisfaction with their accomplishments or joy over their goals being met. Until the Indian Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who led a revolutionary reform for women, a role in society had not been established for women. Later, in the guise of religion, the Roy that drives away 'Sati' advocates for widowhood as a religious observance. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar then came along and began a campaign to get divorced women back into marriage and educate women. He challenges not just the orthodox arguments for child marriage, polygamy, and purdah, but also Roy's earlier claim that widows should lead a religious and renunciatory lifestyle. And despite the fact that the remarriage legislation was signed into law in the middle of the 1950s, it had little impact. When it came to education, women still lagged far behind. In small groups, largely from the higher classes, females made their way to the little school. After millennia of confinement, the feminine body has yet to make its triumphant

return. And denounce the domineering guy by making her preference known and taking responsibility of her own life.

SASHI DESHPANDE AND HER WOMEN PROTAGONISTS

Shashi Deshpande has revealed the unheard-of and hopeless plight of Indian women whose human rights are denied by traditional culture. Since women are expected to be submissive in traditional culture, their individuality and sense of self are routinely downplayed. Legal and social emancipation of women are both central to Shashi Deshpande's feminism. Until women are treated as equals in society, they will never be able to overcome the effects of centuries of oppression. True, even self-sufficient women in terms of money find themselves torn asunder by competing values of traditionalism and progress. Being Indian herself, Shashi Deshpande has meticulously and incisively exposed the norms and expectations placed on women in Indian society.

She has portrayed educated, middle-class Indian women in need of reestablishing familial connections and working on their own sense of self-identity. The characters of all of her books—always women—find themselves caught in the web of complicated relationships and marriage. A strong drive exists inside them to make sense of the complexity of their life. Many different kinds of women have been portrayed by Shashi Deshpande. Some of the first female protagonists in her books, such as Saru from "The Dark Holds No Terros" and Sunitha, Cynthia, Shantha, and Meera from "If I Die Today," are mild, distant, amiable, and weak. During a conversation with Vanamala Viswanatha, Shashi Deshpande discusses the ladies in her works by saying: "The people in my stories have their own peculiar customs. I've overheard people stating it's important to have strong female protagonists. However, my work focuses on female characters who are exactly who they seem to be. Most of the ladies I know are like that; they have little say in the matter. They are people who say one thing but do another because they are overly protected. (235)" In her works, Shashi Deshpande emphasizes the paradox that modern women, who are more confident and surer of themselves, yet shackled by the restrictions of every profession they are given.

Deshpande goes deep into the problems that affect modern women. Deshpande views feminism as a positive force that, in a patriarchal society, may liberate women from their inferior status without threatening the stability of interpersonal relationships and familial ties. Her feminist worldview advocates for women's empowerment in many ways, including the recognition of one's own potential and the rejection of any need to succumb to man-centered oppression. For the progressive, working-class Indian women who are fighting to break out of their inferior status in India's male-ruled society, she has written books that foretell their struggles. Her female characters have an optimistic outlook on life and overcome adversity because they believe a better day is in store for them. Family values are not undermined by these ideas. They maintain their roles as wives, mothers, and women but assert their autonomy and identity as they see fit.

Deshpande may or may not identify as a feminist in the strict sense, but her story is authentically feminine and has feminist potential. This book is obviously written by a woman about a woman's experience in India. The novel is both a psychoanalysis of the protagonist and a flashback in an attempt to help her answer the question posed by the book. George Eliot, Sylvia Plath, Margaret Atwood, Dorris Lessing, Anitha Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Dalip Kaur Tiwana, Bharati Mukherjee, Shobhaa De, and countless others, as well as a few male writers like Thomas Hardy, Mulk Raj Anand, and R.k. Narayan, have all written extensively about women's minds, inner turmoil, lifestyles, and context-specific issues

Shashi Deshpande's debut book, published in 1983, is titled "Roots and Shadows." The fighter, Indu, addresses the smart, working-class ladies. The book tells the story of a hero who faces many challenges before he can seize an opportunity. She tries to look inside to confirm her individuality while living in a strict male-ag and custom-bound society. "...the renegade Indu often craved freedom and extravagance. This pits her against ladies of a more traditional age and establishes her as a role model".

She does this via her portrayal of the Indian middle-class lady. Deshpande advocates for modern Indian women to strike a balance between tradition and progress, demonstrating a feminist understanding of masculine traits. When she talks about convention, she's referring to the norms of stability and harmony that characterize Indian culture, whereas innovation refers, at its core, to the assertion of an independent, unique self. Her heroes, at the outset of their quest, passively accept the roles they have been assigned by society. Deshpande argues that a woman may only get respect if she is true to her own values. Expectations of a woman's sacrifice and

respectability are a stereotype that serves only to stifle and devalue women. The woman must go outside the bounds of her family unit in order to realise her full potential and give voice to her inner world. But in the meanwhile, she doesn't have to lie about her husband and kids.

Both Deshpande's female characters before and after marriage fall victim to this persistent gross sexual orientation division. They are well aware of the extreme societal inequality and betrayal directed in their direction, and they fight against the sexist and discriminatory norms and principles that restrict their potential as a partner and husband. Chained to domestic responsibilities, they challenge the inferior position society has assigned women. All of her works exhibit her genuine concern for women and the difficult role they play.

CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande aspires, in her stories, to represent strong, rational women. Women, like their male counterparts, deserve complete independence, with all of its methods and recognition. They fight for women's rights in all spheres of society including in politics. They highlight the public's high opinion of women. Just a cursory reading of the works of Shashi Deshpande demonstrates that she elevates the status of women. She is a firm believer in the equality of the sexes. She thinks a harmonious society in which men and women coexist is essential to the flourishing of both sexes and the success of the country as a whole.

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