

Thematic Analysis of Female Characters in Selected Works of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract— Based on a selection of novels by Shashi Deshpande, this study examines the trauma of disturbed adolescence and the complexities of man-woman relationships, especially in the context of marriage. It makes reference to four of Deshpande's novels: *That Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Binding Vine That Long Silence*, *A Matter of Time and Shadows Remedies*, *Penguin India* (2000), and *On, Penguin*. She paints a picture of what occurs to men and women during and after marriage, illustrating who they were, how they developed, and what lies ahead for them. These four books explore the shifting nature of married relationships as well as the status changes that occur for both men and women after marriage. She focuses on marriage relationships in an effort to reveal the customs that teach women to fulfill their submissive roles in the home. The books written by Shashi Deshpande also demonstrate how well she captures the dissatisfaction and disillusionment that women feel in their marriages. It suggests that in order to have a mature and harmonious gender interaction, men and women must cooperate.

Index Terms— Women Identity, Confidence, Relationship Challenges, Women Freedom

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most influential cultural, social, and political trends in modern North America is feminism, which has challenged male stereotypes about the abilities and duties of women and grown to be a significant topic in philosophy. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminism had its second wave of growth. The 1980s saw the emergence of feminism as a school of thought centered on the fight for women's equality. The objective of equality with men for feminists has changed significantly in the last several years. The political and historical fight for equal rights has emphasized the worth of women for who they are. In their own unique ways, women have equal human worth. According to Linda Garden, "feminism is an analysis of human subjugation with the objective of figuring out how to change it". The women's liberation movement gave rise to feminist critique, which rebelled against the marginalization of women. The movement served as the catalyst for this criticism. This paper demonstrates how Shashi Deshpande beautifully captures the dissatisfaction and disillusionment that women feel in their marriages and suggests that in order to have a mature and harmonious gender interaction, men and women must cooperate.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Suman Bala (2001) argues that, Deshpande keeps up her commitment to the women's perseverance and belongs to a group of individuals. "Shashi Deshpande's novels depict the suffering, anguish, and conflict of the upper class, educating Indian women to understand man-centered society and customs from one viewpoint and self-expression, uniqueness, and independence from another," argues Suman Bala. Shashi Deshpande draws attention to the voluntary role that women play in society and the inevitable debasement of women in a

patriarchal culture. Her works' core topic is "human connections," with the female protagonist advocating for herself as a woman, mother, or husband in addition to being a person. A persistent topic has been the ongoing search for oneself and the confirmation of it as a free, integrated identity within the circle that may be referred to as one's own. Deshpande challenges the man-centric desire on a more philosophical level than just a small list of grievances. Her books expose the prevailing male-centric norms and the modern Indian woman who defies them, at least in part. She presents the societal realities that women face by using this viewpoint. She depicts, in a roundabout fashion, the world of dads, kids, and husbands in addition to the dynamic between individuals and women in order to portray the world of daughters, mothers, as well as spouses. The goal of her "center is to investigate typical instances of human interactions that follow the strict traditions of jobs related to sexual orientation." Possibilities for Indian women within the social value framework and setup are characterized by Deshpande throughout her body of work. She presented the Indian woman as facing the dilemma of choosing between tradition and progress.

Prasanna (2003) states that the process of searching for one's identity requires a fierce battle with tradition, culture, invention, expectations, and desires and the purpose of identity is a prominent subject that runs across Shashi Deshpande's books. Themes of human connections, such as a frustrated man and woman, a tense mother and daughter relationship, distance, depressive disorders, humiliation, mental anguish, and the social theme of male supremacy, as well as the inconvenient nature of customs, traditions, ceremonies that cause unrest and attacks on male culture in general, are some other minor supporting themes. The male-imposed notion of parenting limits the woman's quest for completeness. Parenting is associated with giving up, reaping

rewards, and being permanently wrecked. The literary works of Deshpande have an intense thematic and philosophical cohesion.

According to **Kukrethi (1998)** “In-between women” who defend their own feminine psyches are the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande’s female stories. Deshpande sees the characters through her own lens. She puts herself in their shoes in order to get to know and closely watch them. “Sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant, and creative” describe their characters. They rebel against the stereotypes that society has placed them in. Nonetheless, her topics are relevant to everyone. “Human relationships” is a common subject across all of these works. Her writing depicts observed and felt human interactions, such as the bond between a mother and a daughter, a father and a daughter, a husband and a wife, and so forth, rather than exact or fictitious objects. All told, women occupy the center stage, and the story is dramatically modified via her feminine sensibility. The books *Roots and Shadows*, *That Long Silence*, and *The Dark Has No Terrors* make this more apparent. Deshpande’s strength is her ability to capture the apprehensions and uncertainties of women who wish to make life possible but do not perceive themselves as heroic. She offers the following description of a human being’s predicament:

“You keep going despite the pain, suffering, and humiliations.”

Getting involved in the human situation” (*Roots and Shadows* 120)

Atrey and Kirpal (1991) argue that in the universe created by Shashi Deshpande, women are self-sacrificing, self-affecting, and always suffering; she is the perfect woman, and her place is beside her husband. She represents traditional Indian women in that, despite her suffering, she passes away without divorcing her spouse. *Roots and Shadows* deftly examines the emotional turmoil faced by Indians who are deeply engaged with society, addressing significant issues like as love, sex, marriage, settlement, and uniqueness. The story, which centers on a woman’s quest to claim her independence and uniqueness, shows how this puts her in conflict with her family, the male community, and society at large. Indians are created by Shashi Deshpande in her feminist philosophy of existence.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present paper is focused on the selected works of Shashi Deshpande, and carries out a thematic analysis of her literary works.

IV. SHASHI DESHPANDE AND HER WOMEN PROTAGONISTS

Indian women’s unique and hopeless situation, in which traditional culture denies them their human rights, has been brought to light by Shashi Deshpande. Traditional culture expects women to be subservient to males. Their individuality

and sense of self are continually marginalized in this way. The feminism of Shashi Deshpande addresses the legal and social freedom of women. Women won’t be able to recover from their marginalized status unless they are accepted as full members of society. In fact, even financially independent women find that conventionalism and progress tear apart their lives. Shashi Deshpande, an Indian, has penetratingly and meticulously revealed the Indian social structure and the customs that are meant for its women.

She has depicted intelligent, well-educated Indian women from the white-collar class who are trying to rediscover their identity and reconnect with their family. Her female heroines are enmeshed in the many difficulties of married life and the relationships they pursue in each of her works. They have a strong desire to understand the complexity of their life in a meaningful manner. Shashi Deshpande has portrayed a variety of female characters. In her first books, she portrayed mild, distant, pleasant, and weak ladies such as Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror* and Sunitha, Cynthia, Shantha, and Meera in *If I Die Today*. In a discussion with Vanamala Viswanatha, Shashi Deshpande said about her female characters, “My characters possess distinctive and specific manners.” It’s been suggested that we need strong female roles. Whatever the case, the subject of my work is women as they look. That’s how a lot of the ladies I know are; they make decisions for themselves. People who believe one thing and act another are those who are too secure. (235). In her works, Shashi Deshpande emphasizes how modern women are becoming more confident and self-assured, yet they are still unable to break free from the limitations imposed by the jobs that are assigned to them.

Deshpande’s book is really feminine and has the potential to be feminist, even if she is not a formal feminist. It is obvious that the work is by a woman about a woman’s life in India. It’s also an attempt to go back in time and psychoanalyze the woman until she has the self-knowledge required to enable her to respond to the question the book poses. In their many writings, a number of female writers, George Eliot, Sylvia Plath, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, Anitha Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Dalip Kaur Tiwana, Bharati Mukherjee, Shobhaa De, and many more, as well as a few male writers, Thomas Hardy, Mulk Raj Anand, and R. K. Narayan, have examined the female psyche, her way of life, her context-specific issues, and her mindset. They have also expressed the need for a shift in the long-standing negative perceptions held by the general public toward women.

The themes in Shashi Deshpande’s works include a woman’s quest for self-awareness, an exploration of the female psyche, and an understanding of the protagonist’s and life’s mysteries. The mission of a woman to herself is the focus of Shashi Deshpande’s works, which also explore the feminine psyche and the protagonist’s role in life’s puzzles. *Roots and Shadows* is Shashi Deshpande’s first full-length book (1983). The struggler *Indus* addresses educated working-class women. The story of the book tells the story of

the hero's effort to overcome many obstacles and seize chances. She tries to explore her inner identity in order to validate her individuality since she lives in a culture that is strongly dominated by men and customs. As a renegade, Indus often aspires to be extravagant and unrestrained. She is presented as an exemplary woman for older ladies in this manner.

An Indian returns to her ancestral home to attend Akka's burial, the elderly, wealthy family dictator. Though no one realizes it, the enormous family is about to undergo significant transformation, and India holds the secret to their future. India has always been a strong girl who aspired to freedom and self-reliance. However, she is suddenly faced with a number of inquiries that are confusing and perplexing her. She isn't sure if she has managed to escape the peculiar hold that her husband's love, which she feels isn't genuine love, has overtaken her. She came to the realization that she had taken Jayant to show her family that she was successful rather than out of love, as she had previously thought. Instead of finding the roots when she goes back to her parents' home, she discovers shadows. For her, it turns into a reckoning. She considers her personal life, professional background, romantic relationships, the conventional view of marriage, her own love-based marriage, etc. She figures out her family's and her own prospects after enlightening experiences with their diverse personalities. She makes the decision to return home.

The heroine of *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru, is a contemporary woman with goals and wants of her own. She wants to make up for a lack of backing in her life by studying and being financially independent. Her education awakens awareness and satisfies her need for self-identity, something that the previous generation was devoid of. She desires love and is in love. Despite having a very natural and essential need, she grows up in a typical environment but never experiences affection from her parents. The author paints a vivid image of gender prejudice that occurs in wealthy, educated households. Shashi Deshpande's works are always characterized by attention to gender. She presents the standard Indian middle-class social setup. She was raised in a conventional middle-class home and experienced prejudice based on her gender. Girls are seen as an unwelcome burden, whereas boys are valued more since they are seen as carrying on the family heritage. Dhruva, Saru's brother, is the center of attention and is consistently accorded more significance and affection. While many individuals desire to go back to their youth, Saru cannot even remember her childhood, which was characterized by tragedy, horror, and upheaval. As Saru remembers, Dhruva's birthday was always celebrated with a puja.

In the afternoon, there will be a festive lunch and anarti.

In the evening, my birthdays were almost identical
But there was no puja" (DHNT 169).

The patriarchal system created gender, which benefits men's need for dominance. A patriarchal social structure is predicated on oppression rather than reciprocity and adamantly maintains that males are superior to women. Girls were exclusively assigned home chores and were usually mistreated. Saru used to be a little child and was often overlooked. Her heart has been shattered by her mother's love and fondness for her brother as well as by her own stupidity. Saru is unhappy and feels that her mother is favoritism her, as Savabjit Sandhu accurately notes:

"The mother is very attached to her son. Her demeanor is typical.

One..... The male child is considered more important than a female child"

Because he was qualified to give to his deceased parents, he chose the girl. The soul of "The deal person would most likely be concerned about the fermentation" (PP 19-20). It is commendable that author Shashi Deshpande has so delicately brought attention to women's inner selves. She portrays Saru as a suffering and alienation-inducing victim of patriarchy. *The Dark Holds no Terrors* does a fantastic job at illustrating Saru's psychological issues and mental scars. Saru's refusal to discuss her sexual dilemma simply serves to emphasize how difficult it is for contemporary women. She is really reluctant to discuss the issue even though she is aware of its psychological aspect. "I can do nothing," she says. I'm never able to do anything. I just persevere (P 182). The Indian way of life still involves endurance. She comes to the realization that passion and lovers are only myths that have no bearing on her actual life. She first turned to love for solace. Then again, it turned into a trap. Regarding love marriage, Saru's mother had a conventional viewpoint:

"I know all these loving marriages. Its love for a cause"

After a few days, they start arguing all the time (P 62).

Saru believes that planned weddings and love are not sources of pleasure. The author emphasizes how women's status seems to be a combination of acceptance and rejection, suppleness and rigidity, imagination and reality, and, most importantly, rebellion and compromise. Saru has absorbed all of these traits into herself. Shashi Deshpande fails to elevate the misery of the ladies in the book. She manages to elicit enough pity for her heroine, but not because she is a woman experiencing hardship. According to Saru, "Something about male dominance by women wears down and eventually destroys something within of men. Is the sword of dominance only deadly when wielded by a woman over a man?" (P 77). Despite being a feminist celebration of female power, it also raises questions about how harmful women can be. Shashi Deshpande explores the globally important topics of human relationships with a woman at the center of the story. Consequently, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* does a good job of exposing a working woman's psychological issues. In contemporary India, Saru stands in for the middle class of working women. Although she makes an effort to avoid

reality, she is compelled to make concessions to the way things are. This is mostly because she is living through a period of change. She is gradually changing into the “New Woman” of today, one who can no longer tolerate being suppressed.

In *That Long Silence* (1988), Jaya experiences grief and offense as she assumes the responsibilities of a wife and mother in spite of her loss. The heroine is aware of her transgressions against both herself and her career as a writer. The protagonist’s quest for authenticity finds a creative expression in her refusal to submit to the dominant masculine power in society. Jaya is an unsatisfactory author. Her opposition to the male-centric power in the public demonstrates her creative drive and heroic imaginative selfhood in a superb way. Jaya is an unsatisfactory author. Her creative spirit and passion for the arts liberate her from her constrained social and local employment. She took action to publicly announce her uniqueness by breaking her lengthy quiet, which she had long repressed.

Fundamentally, Shashi Deshpande is a pragmatist. She has created real female characters who are both full-blooded and delicate with obvious limitations. She presents a plausible tale with real people, not murky calculations. She exudes confidence in presenting life as it really is, rather than how it should be. Numerous Indian books address concerns specific to women. However, the treatment is always unjust, and the books end up glorifying the stereotypical virtues of the Indian woman, such as devotion, tolerance, and obedient acceptance of whatever is given to her. Considering everything, the heroines of Shashi Deshpande are completely unexpected since they explode the myth of man’s dominance and the mythology of the woman as the model. Every book starts with a single person. In her works, female characters are prominently featured. She turns ordinary life into live characters and carefully refrains from creating wooden figures to feed her imagination. When it comes to how she portrays female characters, the author goes above and beyond. She opposes superwoman roles and their glorification, nevertheless. “My characters have their own distinct manners,” she said in response to a query. I’ve heard that our female characters need to be strong. Nevertheless, the subject of my work is women as they seem to be. Deshpande’s female characters possess a unique trait that allows them to persevere in the face of adversity and danger without breaking. Every brave lady in her book disapproves of the traditions that are clinging to the past. They discard useless traditions like walking around the Tulsi plant in their dismissal. Indus (*Roots and Shadows*) and Saru (*The Dark Holds No Terror*) both refuse to participate in these rituals, which are meant to lengthen their husbands’ lives. The fact that they were fired is evidence of their independence and self-governance. She argues that a woman is more than the sum of these abilities. Based on her potential, she must choose whether or not to live with her male spouse.

V. CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande tries to show feminine rationality in her works. Like their male counterparts, women need independence in all facets of their approach and validation in life. They battle for political and general equality for women’s rights. They stress how crucial it is to consider how the public views women. In addition to highlighting the essential connections that women have, Shashi Deshpande’s books portray the contemporary Indian women’s quest for these definitions of society and self. The voyage of a feminine identity serves as the basis for Shashi Deshpande’s inventive arrangements. The Indian woman has been a silent victim for a very long time. Despite having held a variety of roles as a wife, mother, sister, and young child, she has never been able to ensure her own freedom. Novelist Shashi Deshpande writes on working-class Indian women. In her works, she adeptly handles the inner lives of the Indian ladies. She presents her heroines in a realistic manner.

The passage above, taken from one of the author’s expositions, accurately captures the persona of Shashi Deshpande, a writer whose name is known in literary circles for capturing the everyday existence of an average Indian lady. Deshpande is certain that finding her own voice meant finding her own literary voice rather than a women’s voice. No pretense of authenticity, no compromises to “Attractiveness,” no situations or themes tailored to a presumed western readership, no modifying her style to suit the tastes of an objective readership, and no intriguing elements fermented in her style that are characterized by their lack of literary completion or flashiness. She had been writing in private on human pickles for the last thirty years. By highlighting the idea that “true modernism is only a refinement of tradition, and an expansion of its frontiers,” she has succeeded in creating an amalgam among tradition and modernity (Chand 99). Shashi Deshpande, to put it simply, is stuck between both modernity and tradition at a crossroads.

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