

# Shashi Deshpande's Novels: Protagonism for Women Emancipation

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**Abstract:** Shashi Deshpande is one of the most important contemporary women novelists of India. Her novels are a veritable mirror of the situations of urban middle-class Indian women. They are mainly concerned with their feelings, desires, sufferings and comprises. Shashi Deshpande nailed her impression as a widely acclaimed novelist in this era. She neither believes in the concept that her woman characters should go out of their way, shouting slogans, protesting and revolting against men nor blaming men as the sole cause of women's subordination and suffering. Her writings reflect delicate issues like marriage, gender disparities and other various problems faced by woman in a male-dominated society. The argument she raised is the empowerment of women. Breaking up of joint families, the empowerment of suppressed and more and more liberation are some of major changes. Deshpande depicts the emancipation of suppressed sections and the emergence of modern, secular values such as egalitarianism.

**Keyword:** veritable, gender disparities, subordination, empowerment, suppressed, egalitarianism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Shashi Deshpande occupies a place of honor among writers of Indian English fiction. She is the author of the 70's, 80's, and 90's and so she is able to reflect a realistic picture of the feelings and attitudes of contemporary middle class Indian women, in terms of various situations which are clearly depicted in her novels. The famous Indian woman novelist, projects in her writing about the lives and problems from the perspective of a woman. In her writing she attempts to deconstruct man-made ideas, rules and systems. Men of all ages, consciously or unconsciously conspire to relegate and privilege at the centre. Because of the social and traditional factors, women's exploitation is multilayered. She attempted to study the awareness of women's problems and predicaments, their uttered and unuttered thoughts and feelings, their dilemmas and hopes, the frustrations and suppressed desires which are reflected in her novels. As a woman writer, she especially tries the belongingness of the middle class women, who are bounded between the tightrope of tradition and modernity. Sometimes these ladies are highly aware in different stages of customs and traditions, cultures and modernity. As a result sometimes they live in an ambivalent and self contradictory life. Their inner conflict and battle within that creates a lot of tension, confusion and frustration that force them to live a life of suppression and alienation.

## 2. Deshpande's feminism:

So far, she has written ten novels based on women's various problems. Her protagonists are always female and she depicts contemporary problems and dilemmas. Houses play a vital role in several of her novels. Deshpande's heroines are well aware of the exploitation of women at various levels and the prevailing double standard social, moral, cultural and religious codes that work against women as a group. They strongly condemn the oppressive system of patriarchy that binds them, carving their rights as individuals. In the culture of male supremacy, craving for male child still continues. From time immemorial, women have been denied the basic rights, sometimes even the right to exist. In her first novel **The Dark Holds No Terrors**, Sarita was exposed to such unequal treatment of boys and girls at very early age. She felt neglected when her mother showered all her love and attention upon her young brother, Dhruva. She was taught that being a girl, she had to accept everything in her home.

Shashi Deshpande challenges the prevailing double standard code of conduct of the society that has different scales for men and women. For instance, when a married man keeps a mistress or has more than one wife, society accepts it as a normal thing, but the same society condemns the same thing if a woman does it. In another novel **Small Remedies**, Leela, a widow, is looked down upon by society and even discarded by her own family. In the same novel, Ghulam Saab who had lived another woman for years was warmly welcome, with open arms by her abandoned wife and family. Even in the religious books, maintain another woman is not discarded by the society. The ancient scriptures like Manu Smriti laid the foundation of such inequalities are observed.

### 3. Deshpande's journey towards womanhood:

Deshpande tries to explore the women characters in her novels against the socio-cultural context of Indian society. Her writings reflect various genuine problems overlooked as ordinary little things. Deshpande seems to present these seeming 'ordinary little things' as the basic tools fashioned and designed by patriarchy in the name of culture, religion and tradition to assure male supremacy and women subordination. Women have been trained right from their childhood to follow these man-made concepts and to perpetuate them among themselves. The novelist also exposes that it is not only men but also women who are responsible for the condition and their position in the society as second 'sex'. In her novels, Deshpande seems to reflect the struggles of women protagonists against such patriarchal systems.

As a creative writer Deshpande does not create characters larger than life. Her woman characters believe in presenting them as they are. In fact, they are ordinary woman caught in certain situations that make them view and review their past life. By doing so, perhaps the most important truth of their life is symbolized in their pains, sufferings and frustrations. Jaya in **That Long Silence**, Saru in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** and others had been blaming the society and the patriarchal culture. All the years, they internationalized the patriarchal norms and so-called conditioned themselves. They have been so blinded to see that in this life there are many crossroads, so many choices.

Deshpande seems to reflect what Virginia Woolf has observed:

"Imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband."

Deshpande concerns about the present position of women in general and educated women in particular. She attempts to expose the root cause of women's problems and subordination. Through her novels, she is consciously trying to put women on centre stage, pulling them out from the backstage where they had been pushed for many centuries. She tries to establish the dilemma of modern women who have been struggling and enduring all forms of inequalities and injustices right from the day when they were born in total silence much against their will.

Deshpande in her essay **Literature and Morality** confesses that for an example:

"In my novel **A Matter of Time**, a character Sumi dies at a point to the close end of the novel. Through Sumi's character it has been depicted that a woman who had deserted by her husband, was just learning to cope, to carve out a new life for herself, since she was on the brink of shaping an independent existence for herself, the idea was that her death was a betrayal of what was right, the cause of feminism which was assumed to be my purpose. I should have let my character that was growing out of victimhood into an independent human being alive. Her struggle to learn the truth of her condition as a human being was what mattered [...]. The death of a good character is not the defeat for morality."

Deshpande's novels project the Indian ethics--- as her women characters are purely Indian. The changing psychology of women is breaking down the age-old barriers. A gradual development in women's personality from reticent naïve partner to self-realization and independence is visible. She portrays the struggle of her women from being dependent to independent persons. Her novels and with a new beginning for the protagonists to lead the kind of life they always wish to live. Society expects a woman to be an obedient daughter, loving and dutiful wife and caring mother only, and provides no room for personal growth and development. It is not only men but also women who need to fulfill their hopes and aspirations. Deshpande's new awakening idea is a following the middle path that works for a better relationship of men and women.

On the other hand, she tries to point out the specific problems faced by lower section of women who are not educated. Their suffering is double as they are colonized twice because of their own sex and secondly, because of the class they belong to. Somewhere there are certain problems faced by certain women at a certain time that are purely personal and have nothing to do with problems faced by women in general. But when Jiji the maid servant of Jaya in **That Long Silence** revolts to her drunken husband that her salary is her own money and there is no right to anybody to claim her money. It seems that the revolution in Indian society has also have been started in lower level.

One new problem Deshpande shows that is the importance of economic emancipation to attain women's liberation. Both positive and negative influences of financial independence in the power struggle within the family are taken into account with reference to the socio-cultural scenario of Indian society. In western countries, economic independence is often considered as the answer, and the solution to the question of women's liberations from the dependence syndrome. In our society too, economic independence works positively as a means towards women's emancipation in some cases but the deeply rooted culture and tradition of Indian society overshadows the light of economic independence. In **The Dark Holds No Terrors**, Saru is a successful medical practitioner and earns than Manu, her husband. Both of them suffer as it is against the scale of the society.

Shashi Deshpande's concerns about the conditions and positions of women as reflected in her position of women as reflected in her novels. Somewhere her heroines are march past for financial liberty on the other side, somewhere they are facing the identity crisis.

In **Small Remedies**, Savitribai Indorekar, the famous musical doyenne eliminates the existence of her daughter from her life to keep the good name and identity intact. She is guilt-ridden and is now ashamed of her past indiscretions and wants to wipe off the memory of such acts from her mind. She leads the life of an abandoned life. She dissociates herself from Ghulam Saab and later does the same to her mother. Desperately she is asking for a new identity and cuts off herself from her past. She refuses to go back her path of life. Unlike her mother she is a conformist seeking the approval of society.

## CONCLUSION :

Shashi Deshpande has successfully captured in her writings the intricate emotions and the dilemmas and conflicts of the modern Indian woman. She wants to prove that in different segments of life women are trying to fit them in different kind of roles. Her concern shows about the conditions and position of women as reflected in her novels. Besides being a daughter, a wife and a mother, according to the novelist, women should try to prove their worth in other arenas also. In an interview, she told that if half of the world's population remains in the shadow behind the remaining half, the world's progress would retard by half. Women should not confine themselves playing the allotted roles and following are not superior or inferior to one another but are different and should respect these differences in order to bring a harmonious and androgynous society. Her journey towards womanhood especially suited to Indian sensibility and favorable to Indian soil, yet it has universal appeal too. She explores the inner conflict existing in woman and how she adjusts to the surroundings, which are not according to her wishes. She deals with how the women in today's middle class Indian society try to make a fusion of the traditional and the modern. It is within the existing social framework that Deshpande depicts the reality of women lives. She shows that patriarchal norms and values confine women, taking away their autonomy and freedom. They have to shape their lives according to the requirements of patriarchal constructs. She believes that women should get equal rights with men. Men and women should co-operate in all fields of life.

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