



## A THEMATIC STUDY OF THE SELECT NOVELS WRITTEN BY SHASHI DESHPANDE

---

**Neha Sharma,**

Research Scholar, Department of English,  
Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal University

**Dr. Rajnesh Kumar,**

Assistant Professor, Department of English,  
Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal University

---

### ABSTRACT

Today, women have made significant progress in all spheres of life. However, they face several challenges and go through sufferings and struggles in one form or another. Even though society has a skeptical attitude about modern women's newly obtained economic independence and self-confidence, these women do their best to carve out their own life. Indian women are emerging from their stereotypical positions as a result of the media, education, career possibilities, and awareness among Indian women. In India, where women have been held under many taboos and prohibitions, they have lost their voice. Shashi Deshpande, a well-known female novelist, makes her fair share of contributions. In the literature of Indian English; Shashi Deshpande holds a special place. Her writing is an accurate reflection of Indian society. Her fictional universe is based on the conception of women in India. The traumatized state of a woman and the struggle for self-identity among women in India's patriarchal society are made clear by a close reading of her works. For instance, Indu tries to examine her inner self in *Roots and Shadows* in order to claim her individuality. Savitribai and Leela attempt to discover their own identities in *Small Remedies* by pursuing diverse careers in music and politics. Deshpande is a representation of the middle-class Indian female mind as well as the genuine Indian social structure. She expresses empathy for oppression victims, man-woman relationships, and the forbidden topic of extramarital partnerships between the sexes in particular. Additionally, she depicts the middle-class Indian lady, feminist insights into patriarchal ideals, and a harmony between tradition and modernity

**KEY WORDS:** *Novels, Shashi Deshpande, Postcolonial Literature and Women.*

### INTRODUCTION

**POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURE AND WOMEN**

In terms of how age, sexual orientation, class, race, and disability affect women's experiences, there is some variation. In addition to these, the framework for feminist analysis also needs to take into account other elements including historical context and physical location. More subtly (feminine) methods of (re)naming and (re)affirming women writers' identities have become common. By reconstructing their past, creating accurate representations of the present, and predicting their ambiguous future, they have attempted to reveal the mechanisms underlying their misrepresentation. Essays discussing the "double colonization" of women by colonialism and patriarchy began to appear as early as 1986. In the latter few decades of the 20th century saw a rise in the prominence of gender and sexuality as literary themes. The majority of post-colonial countries' literary traditions have emphasized works by men. Women's texts and narratives are consequently either excluded or classified as "domestic fiction," placing them in a less privileged position and guaranteeing that the political viewpoints expressed in these tales are never taken seriously.

Gender has, however, been "intrinsic to national imagination," as Elleke Boehmer notes. This is where, in Nayar's opinion, the importance of women's narratives, their observations on subjects like patriarchy, community, and spiritualism, comes into play. In particular, the oppression that predated and persists after colonialism, as well as practices like dowries, bride prices, and polygamy, are addressed in their texts and are frequently contested, as Ketu Katrak notes. Women authors address issues like the increase of prostitution in cities and women's marginalization<sup>16</sup> that are associated with the burden of female roles in metropolitan surroundings.

It has taken generations for women to escape the confines of the repressive patriarchy. To assert her rights and position as an individual and an entity in society, she must engage in constant combat. Even in the twenty-first century, women still face many limitations, but owing to the expansion of knowledge and a vigilant media, they can now take a break. In a time of estrangement and identity crises, the Indian woman cannot be easily disregarded.

Many literary works over the years have centered on women. Women's writing is important and valid for numerous reasons. In addition to reflecting the observations, circumstances, reactions, and difficulties of half of humanity, it also represents a gender-based consciousness. On another level, it occasionally challenges beliefs and frameworks that were previously taken for granted. It focuses on how freedom and creativity are defined and occasionally raises a host of issues pertaining to colonization and oppression. It has aided in the development and expression of the

notion of a feminine "self" as well as the deconstruction of the all-encompassing "I."

Women are in the process of learning about and discovering themselves as they navigate radical revolutions, quiet transformations, legal, political, and psychological obstacles; nevertheless, not all women's writing is necessarily feminist. It is important to acknowledge that, in addition to identification and equation, feminist interpretations can also arise through absence and negation. Such work might yield fresh and novel insights when analyzed from the perspective of a feminist critic employing a totally other set of questions. Annette Kolodny<sup>1</sup> made the following assertion in her article:

**All that the feminist is asserting, then, is her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts; and, at the same time, her right to choose which features of a text she takes as relevant because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it.**

One of the most influential and well-liked literary genres nowadays is fiction. The more than 200-year-old form has continuously and thoroughly portrayed the narrative of human actions and experiences, rich and various, emerging ideas and sentiments, hopes and desires, down the ages. As said by Sundarsingh:

**A fiction 'represents' the real world which is filled with people. Though the characters in the fiction are not 'real', they reflect the characteristics of the people of the world<sup>1</sup>.**

A similar viewpoint is presented by Hari Mohan Prasad. Due to its vitality, it occupies a prominent position in today's thriving literary scene. Srinivas Iyengar takes up the cause of authors, saying:

**The novelist is a man and an artist: and hence what he writes can comprehend all that comprises man's life and exploit all the graces and freedom of art<sup>3</sup>.**

## INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

A good number of novelists have brought credit to the Indian English fiction as a distinctive force in the world fiction<sup>4</sup>. Tracing the origins of Indian Literature in English up to 1980s Jaidip sing opines:

**The journey of Indian English Fiction in India emerged out of almost six decades of intellectual and literary gestation that had begun in 1930s with the triumvirate of R. K Narayan, MulkRaj Anand and Raja Rao. They were followed by anew crop of writers in the 1980s who dealt with various subjects in a language of irreverence marked with skeptical rigour. In short, Indian Writing in English is one of the voices in which India speaks<sup>5</sup>.**

It "has received great interest, both in India and internationally" in recent years. 6. It is now acknowledged that Indian English literature plays a "major relevance in the World literature," in addition to being a component of Commonwealth literature. 7. According to S. Subrahmanya Sarma<sup>8</sup>, Indian-English literature has developed a new identity on par with that of American and Austrian literature, both of which are obviously very different from Indian English.

### **THE NOVELIST SHASHI DESHPANDE**

Women writers from all over the world document their experiences in light of a specific social, political, religious, and cultural context. The underprivileged, including women, children, the destitute, and members of the middle class, are the group in Indian society that is most impacted by the changes taking place. With clarity, Shashi Deshpande captures the plight of these groups in her writings. In her varied roles as a daughter, wife, grandmother, and family earner, she shows a wide range of contemporary Indian women belonging to diverse ages, classes, and spheres with her trademark compassion and sensibility.

Shashi Deshpande's novels highlight how Indian women are starting to progress toward self-perception, self-expression, and self-determination while yet being bound by familial obligations. The Indian family system, which is built on sharing and accommodation, would be challenged and destroyed by the western ideas of equality, individual rights, and free

choice.

Deshpande addresses issues faced by educated, working women who are conflicted between tradition and modernity. The fragmentation of the modern Indian woman's psyche is the result of her awareness of the changing times on the one hand, and the sociocultural mores and values that have given them a certain function on the other. The modern woman, in contrast to her counterpart in the past, is acutely conscious of her social and familial position: They must redefine themselves and their place in the family and society since they are caught between tradition and modernity. Although the issues they face are not wholly gender-specific, the situations that trap the majority of them result from the roles that women are expected to play in the traditional Indian environment.

Edwin Ardener<sup>39</sup> referred to women as being part of the "muted group," despite the fact that they participate in culture and society and live there. Deshpande, however, does a good job of expressing the woman's desire to rebel against the stereotypical roles that have been placed upon her. Her protagonists are victims of self-denial or the suppression of their true selves since they have been socialized within an Indian cultural milieu. Denial, however, does not mean that feelings stop being; even when they are unconscious, feelings continue to have an impact on behavior in numerous ways. The interpolated and fictitious conscious values and the real unconscious ones will thus be at odds with one another.

### **SELECTED NOVELS BY SHASHI DESHPANDE**

The Dark Holds No Terrors; That Long Silence; Small Remedies; In the Country of Deceit; and Ships that Pass by Shashi Deshpande are the books selected for this study. Her works represent Indian realities in a more vivid and accurate manner. Her main characters are eager to rebel against the stereotypical positions that society has given them. They are at odds with their inner selves because they suppress their own emotions, which make them the initial victims of self-denial. According to Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey's Theories of Personality,

The path of a modern woman toward financial independence, emotional equilibrium, and social acceptance is portrayed by Sarita in The Dark Holds No Terrors. She is a contemporary perfectionist who "challenges societal traditions by utilizing Boozie to progress her career, defies her own mother to become a doctor, and defies her caste to marry outside" (10). She is self-assured, competent, and highly aware of her own work and standing in

society, which is a stark contrast to Jaya. She resists giving in to the pressure of a society that is predominately masculine. She dislikes how her uniqueness and identity are being attacked.

Sam's mother and Saru's husband, Manohar, are the two primary antagonists. Sam is the female protagonist. They both stand for the standards and beliefs that a patriarchal society imposes. When compared to her brother, Saru's place in the family is devalued; later, she is blamed for Dhruva's passing. Because the shame is so deeply ingrained in her mind, she is still plagued by guilt years later. When Saru becomes financially independent and marries Manohar, a man of her choosing, she further displays her rebellion. Sam's first move toward independence at this point in the story is his rejection of his home and family.

Saru decides to leave her home a second time after a journalist who came to interview her said something that caused sadness in her and Manohar's sexual interaction. When she gets to her father's house, she lets him into her mind. Her father advises her to return to her family and dissuades her from harboring animosity toward Manohar. The novel "The Dark Holds No Terrors" represents a turn toward self-realization following the eradication of the horror and guilt feelings. After letting go of her lifelong guilt and emerging from the agonizing recollections of her past through new enlightenment, Sarita finds liberation from despair. As a result, her nights would no longer fear her because the dark no longer carried any terrors for her.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru experiences alienation in the maternal household and suffers as a result of the mother's indifference and the father's silence. Later, she endures a marriage to Manu, who has an inferiority problem. She bravely implements her right to free choice by leaving her family home to marry Manu, working as a doctor later, and then moving back to her parents' house to be with her husband and kids. Numerous other characters in this book provide solid justification for each of the ideas outlined in the thesis.

This conflict is symbolized in her book *That Long Silence* by the enormous traditional mansion with its joint-family structure, the female protagonist's love-hate relationship with this house, as well as the power that is connected to this house. Her works all reflect her beliefs in the equality of women. However, none of her characters adopt an anti-male position. Through the perspectives of sympathetic but unromantic protagonists, this peculiar blending of inner and outer reality is conveyed. Shashi Deshpande is unique in striking this uncommon equilibrium.

Even though she makes a valiant effort to appear to be a decent housewife on the outside, Jaya experiences intense mental conflict and pain in this tale. She becomes a puppet in the process of masking her actual personality and trying to fit in with her callous husband. When looking for her identity, Jaya is perplexed by the

fact that her husband renamed her Suhasini on the day of their wedding. Her sense of who she is, though, is never certain. She struggles with balancing her roles as Jaya and Suhasini, the nice wife; as a writer and as a wife and mother; and as Jaya. Jaya receives advice for the future by mentally replaying the events of the past. She makes the decision to end her lengthy silence of seventeen years and stop being Mohan's passive and quiet companion. She makes the decision to stand up for herself both as an individual and as a woman, wife, or mother. Even though she opts to stay with the family, things have changed for her. She has emerged from the constricting roles that patriarchal society had assigned to her. Jaya gets past the cultural norms with the solid belief that "life has always to be made feasible" because she is confident in her uniqueness and hopes that Mohan's attitude will change (193).

The researcher once more supports all four themes used to support the thesis through the character of Jaya in *That Long Silence*. Jaya's exercise of free will to not change her name during the marriage, her alienation by her husband Mohan and later by her children, and her identity as a writer all justify the theme of alienation. She also endures Mohan's chauvinistic attitude, which he inherited from his father.

*Small Remedies* is a remarkable illustration of free will because the girl carries out her choice to learn music and to elope with the Muslim music teacher throughout the entire book. She isolates herself from everyone in an effort to conceal her true identity and become a popular singer. Even worse, she disrupts her entire life and leaves her only child behind. Through the characters of Savitribai, Madhu, Leela, and Munni, among others, all the themes of the thesis are convincingly supported. According to Ruby Milhotra's 11 article, "Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies: A Woman's Quest for Refuge: A Reappraisal*," the author of the novel is primarily interested in presenting women's perspectives in the conflict between tradition and modernity. Her books depict a social milieu with several intricate relationships. The process of recreating and rediscovering their own roles, positions, and relationships within the current social world is particularly difficult for women. The article also discovers that Shashi Deshpande's writings depict the unbalanced man-woman interaction in Indian middle-class families.

Two further works by Deshpande, *In the Country of Deceit* and *Ships that Pass*, are quite distinct from the typical characters and subjects. Here, the story is about adolescent love and the effects the protagonist's attraction to a married person had on her after some introspection. The other is a thriller book where Tara, the main character, voluntarily suffers both physically and emotionally before dying a tragic death. She separates herself from her own family and from who she is.

In the Country of Deceit's Devayani figure, the researcher argues for all four themes—alienation, marriage and familial ties, free will, and masculine chauvinism. She acts on her free choice to have a relationship with a married individual, disobeying the advice and caution of her loved ones. Later, as a sign of self-reflection, she alienates herself. She is harmed by her parents' dysfunctional marriage. So she decides against getting married. Her father, who has a superiority complex, has an uncaring and chauvinistic attitude toward his family.

The two sisters Tara and Radhika's characters in "Ships that Pass" provide support for the ideas raised in the thesis since one enjoys the freedom to die mysteriously while the other has the freedom to achieve in life. Everyone is troubled by Tara's isolation from her husband and herself. Their men's Chauvinistic mindset harms them both. While Radhika creates a fresh and successful marriage, Tara disrupts her own family life.

A three-generational novel, *Shadow Play*, was released in 2013 as a follow-up to Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*. A female lineage represents each of the three generations. Kalyani, the grandmother, is the generation's representative; Sumi, the mother, is the generation's representative; and Arundhati, the daughter, is the generation's representative. The story opens with a family document that describes Kalyani's history and, to some extent, describes how Kalyani's parents, Vithalrao and Manorama, were sonless. And given that it describes the worries Manorama endured as a result of not having a son, this story continues the family document. She arranges Kalyani's marriage to Shripati, her brother. Through Kalyani and Shripati to the protagonists, Sumi and Gopal, who are from the second generation, the family continues to be without a son.

Deshpande's stories feature a woman who, for the first time, accepts that she can be apart from her spouse and seizes the chance to engage in creative writing. Aside from considering having a job close to her family and friends, she also considers doing so.

When Sumi passes away, the round topic of life and death replaces the novel's circular plot toward the conclusion. The recurring plots in the book depict time as being circular. This idea of cyclic time is typically coupled with the presumption that there is no room for change. However, Romila Thapar (12) contends in *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India* that the Indian conception of time never totally excluded different forms of linear time. Change was likewise a part of this dual existence of cyclic and linear time. These repeated forms are unique to Deshpande because of his dubious attitude toward time.

The purpose of world history, culture, tradition, and myth is to devalue women. The reason why men have a sexual monopoly over women is now attributed to cultures and myths. Males are projected as being productive,

political, public, and rational, whereas women are seen as being non-political, non-productive, private, and emotional. In this patriarchal society, the man wants to control his wife and he is valued, yet this patriarchal system doesn't comprehend the psychology of women, her desires, or her thoughts.

Deshpande described an extramarital affair between Indu and Naren in *Roots and Shadows*. In *Small Remedies*, Savitribai, a Brahmin woman with a passion for music, eloped with a Muslim man. And Leela, a widow, wedded Joe. The women of Shashi Deshpande are the result of a difficult period of social change where they bear a larger burden. They have taken better care of themselves than their male counterpart. Despite their extraordinary success, the general perception of women has not altered in line. Despite a clear western influence, the institution of marriage in Indian society still follows the long-standing guidelines for acceptable husband and wife behavior. The quest for identification of an Indian woman is the subject of Deshpande's works. At every level, the Indian woman finds herself a victim of injustice.

Shakuntala suffered from male dominance in the book *The Binding Vine*, while Mira and Kalpana were victims of marital rape. The schoolgirl from *Come Up and Be Dead*, Mridula, was raped. The Indian woman has no control over her body in any way. Nearly all periods of her existence involve complete obedience on her part. She is a victim of gender prejudice because she is a daughter. From an early age, she is taught to repress her will and ambition. She is instructed to imitate Seeta and Savitri in order to become the ideal wife. She has no own identity beyond being a wife and mother. Women are viewed as sexual objects in the male culture. Her entire being is focused on pleasing her spouse and getting pregnant for him. As a result, her main characters embark on a difficult journey to learn about themselves. Deshpande shows women in a variety of positions, including that of wife, mother, daughter, and autonomous individuals.

Deshpande defines the characteristics of her female characters in light of their aspirations, anxieties, and hopes. Saru (Sarita) in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is similar to Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1980). These women are conscious of their abilities and limitations, but they encounter resistance and pressure from a culture that is predominately patriarchally minded. She draws attention to their subpar standing and the ensuing degradation in a society dominated by men. Her main characters' quest for identification is greatly emphasized by the frustrating events that result from the restrictive nature of the patriarchal society in India. She maintains her stories focussed on women and offers a close-up look at the minds of Indian women in middle class who experience oppression and social exclusion as a result of their patriarchal upbringing.

In *A Matter of Time*, Kalyani experiences an unsuitable arranged marriage. Additionally, Shashi Deshpande expands the definition of a woman's life by offering new standards for a better man-woman interaction. In her works, she not only offers a feminist critique of patriarchal norms but also recommends a working philosophy for the modern woman that strikes a balance between tradition and modernity. Aru and Charu are self-identified modern working women in "*A Matter of Time*." In her works, Deshpande makes an effort to comprehend and realize the true predicament faced by educated middle-class women. Deshpande did not attempt to make the women in her fictional works more powerful than they are in reality, comparable to Madhu from *Small Remedies*. The more sexual freedom and independence that educated women desire, the more uncertain they are about what to do with that freedom, which causes them to feel bitterly confused, anxious, and tense. Their mindset is still firmly rooted in the past. Although they have begun to see the need for change, many nevertheless hold on to the outdated beliefs because they were bred and raised with them.

## CONCLUSION

Deshpande has presented a realistic portrait of the Indian patriarchal system in order to highlight the vulnerability of women and the way in which they are exploited and degraded for sex. Her purpose is to be sacrificed as a sex object, a tool of reproduction, and a mother. She is only recognized and known through her interaction with men; an autonomous identity is not required of woman. Even though women in contemporary Indian society have attained economic independence and excellent academic levels, they are still seen as less than men. Despite holding a responsible professional position and significantly increasing the family's income, women's labor is undervalued. She still has to be a fantastic cook and housekeeper despite working outside the home. Her dedication to her job is seen as a departure from the socially prescribed roles of mother and wife. Her career is frequently viewed as merely a way to supplement her income. The man still rules the house as the owner. Because she is torn between social expectations and the drive to realize her potential, a woman in such a position frequently experiences horrible mental struggle as a result of her suppression. This dilemma is explored by Deshpande in her book *The Dark Holds No Terror*.

It's not that Deshpande purposefully centered women in all of her writings. She actually intended for her writings to represent the entirety of society, but when the characters came to life, it seemed that the female ones were more compelling. Being a woman, she had more empathy for women and was better able to comprehend the daily realities and the intricate structure of the man-woman connection. This is the world she is more familiar with. But she is adamant that everyone should follow the rules of partnerships.

This is an effort to comprehend the read-and-reel conundrum faced by middle class Indian women who, unlike other fictional characters, submit to conflicts not for the worst-case scenarios to arise but for the good and progressive society paradigm, therefore fitting herself fit and fixed into it.

## CONCLUSION

1. S. Subrahmanya Sarma. "Indian English Literature: In Search of a Name". *The Indian Review of World Literature in English*, Vol. 1, No. I – Jan, 2005
2. Debjani Chatterjee "In the Presence of History: The Representation of past and present India in Bharati Mukharjee's Fiction." *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives*. By Emmanuel S. Nelson (ed). New York: Garland Publishing, 1993, p.161.
3. Peggy Ochoa. "The Historical Moments of Post-Colonial Writing: Beyond Colonialism's Binary". *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol.15, No.2, 1996, pp. 221-29.
4. W.S. Kottiswari. *Postmodern Feminist Writers*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2008, p.87
5. Peterson, Kirsten, Holst and Anna Rutherford (Eds). *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post Colonial Women's Writing*. Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo, 1986.
6. Pramod K. Nayar. *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* New Delhi. Pearson Longman, 2008, p. 116
7. BochmerElleke. *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*. Manchester: Manchester University press 2005, p.5
8. Pramod K. Nayarop.cit
9. Ketu H. Katrak. "Decolonising Culture: Toward a Theory of Postcolonial Women's Texts." *Modern Fiction studies* Vol.35, 1989, p. 173.
10. Marx, T. "The Changing Image of Women in Indian Writing in English: A Study of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*". *Language in India* Volume 10:6 June 2010, p. 169
11. Jasbir Jain, *Feminizing Political Discourse*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1997, p. 83
12. Uma Chakvarthi, "Retrieving Women's Voices – Contexts, Issues and Implications". *Indian Review of Books*, 8:5 (1999) 5.
13. *ibid*, 6.
14. Ardener, Edwin. "The Problem Revisited." *Perceiving Women*. By Shirley Ardener (ed). New York: Halsted Press, 1975, pp. 19-27.
15. Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey. *Theories of Personality*. New Delhi: Wiley, 1985, p. 289