

Paradigm of the Ideal Women Characters In ShashiDeshpande's Select Novels
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Abstract

*A Feministic study is a comprehensive literacy study of Indian fiction in English, produced by Indian women writers. Indian society reflected in the literature of this age is passing through a distinct period change. Not anything seems to carry for a long time. Feminism means the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes both in the family as well as in society. It challenges patriarchic perception in society. Feminism is over and over again described as a struggle against all forms of patriarchal sexist oppression. It has also intended to support the most powerful movement aims at providing a complete awareness of a women's role in the modern complex world, to explore and to find a new social, political, legal, economic, personal and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men. Feminist women writers have created a literature of their own, placing women in these contexts of the changing social scenario. ShashiDeshpande is a prose rhapsodist of feelings, sentiments, and emotions passing through the human consciousness, like Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen. Their attention is focused also on feminine suffering in the complex cultural stresses and strains of Indian society. A new generation of women emerged, embracing the changed values in which women have a voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. An attempt has been made in the present study to identify the concept of domestic relationships concerning three novels of ShashiDeshpande namely *The Dark Holds No terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *That Long Silence* (1988)*

Keywords: *Sentiments and emotions emerged, domestic relationships, Feminism, Feministic Perspective, Indian English fictions, Women in Society, Social Injustice, and Artistic sensibility.*

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Introduction

The present study is an effort to assign women their due place in society, which till now has been as second class citizens. This study presents a picture of the impact of education on women, her new status in society and her assertion of individuality. ShashiDeshpande, in her novels, mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology. Her writings raise a voice against mute miseries and helplessness of millions of married women tormented by existentialist problems and predicaments. ShashiDeshpande, in her novels, raises a voice against the social and cultural oppression of women. Though she does not carry the revolt against tradition and patriarchal values to finality, in fact, her main concern in her novels is to explore the inner world of her women protagonist and to reveal how through introspection they achieve integration of their fragmented selves. The female characters are the exemplars whose hidden power enables them to overcome hardships in their lives

ShashiDeshpande a feminist novelist is a writer of seventies and eighties supporting primarily the manifesto of the feminist movement. Her novels are concerned to reflect the plight and crises of the modern Indian women. She portrays a realistic picture of the contemporary middle class educated urban women who suffer indescribably even in the 20th century. She has analyzed the life of her women characters and has given bole voice to the disappointment and frustration of women in spite of her vehement denial of being feminist. ShashiDeshpande's protagonists are not exemplary feminist heroines, but women struggling to find their voices in the changing social environment. She has laid the subtle processes of the suppression and gender differentiation operating within the family and male-centered Indian society. She defines freedom for the protagonists of her novels who are always modern, educated and independent women. Her feminism does expose the different ideological elements that shape her and tries to expose women's submissive position in the family and her restricted sexuality in her novels, it is noticed that the plot begins with an unconventional marriage and then deals with the problems of adjustment and conflict in the minds of the female protagonists and finally portrays their endeavor to submit to the traditional roles. In her novels, she deals with the physical, psychological and emotional distress syndrome of women who are modern, educated and career-oriented middle-class women and are sensitive to the changing time and situation. ShashiDeshpande has written several books and novels, some of them are "The Dark Holds No Terrors", "That Long Silence", "The Binding Vine", "A Matter of Time", "Roots and the Shadows" and "Come up and Be Dead". Her novels reveal

how poignantly she expresses the frustration and disappointment women experience in social or cultural oppression in the male-dominated society.

Protagonist Saru: An icon of Strength

Long preserved notions of mother-daughter closeness, glorification of woman's power of tolerance and her silence over private issues got dissipated in the fictional works of ShashiDeshpande. In her novel titled 'The Dark Holds No Terror,' she makes her female protagonist Saru, a doctor by profession, share her mental agony for the sadistic sexual behavior of her husband, with her father as she comes to meet him after the death of her mother. Unlike the conventionally held image of the mother-daughter closeness, Saur's mother had never loved her daughter and had never forgiven her for the childhood incident regarding the drowning of her younger brother in the village pond on the day she accompanied him. Saru comes back home to negotiate with the guilt, fear and emotional turmoil she has been undergoing as a daughter and the wife of a person called Manu, whose unexpected brutish behavior during the nights that seems to be the projection of his insecurity as a male at the better social and professional placing of his wife, has left her confounded and traumatic. Saru's physical distance from her husband and sharing her grief with her father at her parental home ease down her mental and emotional anxiety, cleanse her vision and help her emerge stronger and more confident to face life back home. The stereotype of the sexual frigidity in women has always been treated in ambiguous terms by society. The control over one's sexual desires and the avoidance of any overt display had been the hallmark features of an Indian woman. Paeans have been written and sung in praise of women in literature and entertainment media to glorify such traits in them. However, ironically, sexual reticence on part of a woman in a relationship with her husband offers enough basis for the justification of the male deviation on the ground of the wife's inability to please him. Indian literature in English has recognized such false and unjust images and sought to rectify them through the portrayal of real women with real physical desires, she has every right to express and fulfill like any other free individual. Another extramarital relationship of Saru is with Padmakar, often called as Padma. He was her classmate in medical college, whom she meets years later, but after a few incidents, she dissuades him from doing so as she wants to bring an end to their relationship. This relationship is neither soothing nor comforting to her.

"And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. (P-133)

Deshpande returns often in her essays to the isolation of the female English-language writer in India: “there was nothing, nobody I could model myself on . . . I could only tell myself, I don’t want to write like this, not like this, not like this” (“The Dilemma of the Woman Writer” 229). Out of her solitary sojourn into the English alphabet, Deshpande has devised her very own rulebook, which may well be summarized by the title of one of her essays, “Masks and Disguises.” In the essay, she writes: It was the need to express what was within me that had made me begin writing. But Draupadi ‘s junction [sic] of “Be silent about what The Modernism of ShashiDeshpande you think,” applies not just to women writers, it is meant for all women which means that women have to remain silent even about the small world that is theirs. In other words, women writers are doubly confined; for them, both as women and as writers, it is only this little space of domestic life that is available. And their words have to remain confined within that space as well. (182)

ShashiDeshpande takes up this theme in her novel *Roots and Shadows* where Indu, as she comes to her share her claim over the family house after the death of her great aunt Akka, ponders over the futility of her married life with Jayant that has crushed her individuality. It is at this point that she learns to claim right over her body and her desires as she enters into a relationship with Naren, a distant relation. Even in the novel, *That Long Silence*, the questioning of the limiting effect on marriage on women is dealt with through the character of Jaya.

Deshpande’s Protagonists – brave Warriors

Deshpande’s women protagonists emerge from a male-dominated middle-class conservative society which is conservative in its outlook of life. Women characters, especially the protagonists, in ShashiDeshpande’s novels find themselves in conflict with their domestic and social environment. As they struggle against the changed realities of their lives, they experience conflicts psychic of personal origin their milieu acts both as a physical reality outside and as a psychic agent within. At a particular point of time in their life, the stress of their mental conflicts becomes so great that they find it difficult to keep their feelings in control. The situation leads to the fragmentation of their self and they suffer from temporary phases of neurosis. However, their neurotic ailment produces a sobering effect on them as they make important discoveries about themselves in the course of their neurotic sufferings. Reevaluation of life and their relationship with others gives them insight into the significance of life and leads to the integration of their fragmented self. Through the sensitive portrayal of the psychic conflicts of her fictional characters, ShashiDeshpande lays bare the oppressive and anti-human values system of society. She seems to suggest the need for subverting the anti-human socio-cultural values

and replacing them by such values as may be conducive to human happiness and well-being. **Ginger Rogers** rightly says:

“You know, there’s nothing damnable about being a strong woman. The world needs strong women.

There are a lot of strong women you do not mind who are guiding, helping, mothering strong men?

They want to remain unseen. It’s kind of nice to be able to play a strong woman who is seen.”

ShashiDeshpande’s novels are remarkable portrayals of the conflicts of human motives and the psychological fragmentation that such conflict causes. However, her novels end on a positive note, for all the leading characters in her novels grow aware of their negative attitudes and gain fresh insight into the significance of life by reaching out to the other human beings. This idea is well expressed in the words of **Karen Hawkins**:_____

“I’ve often thought it unfair that women are expected to stay at home when there’s a fight to be won. If a woman has the strength to bear a child, she can swing a sword as well as any man.”

The same concept is highlighted in the sayings of **Carly Simon**, who says,

“A really strong woman accepts the war she went through and is ennobled by her scars.”

Thus ShashiDeshpande’s protagonists do face predicaments as brave warriors on the battlefield. It is their scars of sufferings that prove their strength in finding their identities.

ShashiDeshpande’s real contribution lays in the portrayal of plights and problems, trials and tribulation of the middle-class Indian woman especially those who are educated and have chosen a career for themselves. ShashiDeshpande knows this segment of Indian society. ShashiDeshpande deals with one of the important aspects of life, in her novels, and that is marriage. Contrary to the traditional view which holds marriage as the sum mum bonum of a women’s life, she presents marriage as a weapon in the hands of a patriarchal society to coerce and subjugate women. In *The Binding Vine*, Urmila compares the bent neck of a bride on the wedding night to a lamb’s neck awaiting the butcher’s knife to fall upon it. In ‘*The Dark Holds No Terrors*’, Saru views herself as a desperate animal caught in the trap of marriage. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya sees herself and her husband as a pair of bullocks joined together who cannot move in opposite directions for fear of pain. The plight of

Jaya's mother-in-law is even worse. She silently endures the sexual onslaughts of her husband and dies in a pathetic condition when she tries to rid herself of the birth of an unwanted baby. The novelist realistically presents the hypocrisy of married life which is widespread in society. In spite of her economic independence, the woman is considered inferior to man and is coerced to suppress her longings and her individuality. Although ShashiDeshpande's novels reflect the harsh realities of a woman's life, the final impression of her works is not gloomy. Her protagonists discover meaning in life and achieve a sense of balance. They realize the significance of human relationship which helps them synthesize their different roles into a unity. Women characters, especially the protagonists, in ShashiDeshpande's novels find themselves in conflict with their domestic and social environment.

Conclusion

Literature, as a part of the culture, revises and rewrites values in consonance with the changing times of society. Unfortunately, despite all the benefits of constitutional rights in our country and scientific and ideological advancement at global and national levels, women still, in large numbers, occupy peripheral space in the socio-cultural and political arena. The problem lies in the fixed mindset fuelled by the desire to control and age-old beliefs and biases tearing the social fabric of our culture. Fiction, which is the most read and popular of all genres and Indian Fiction in English specifically for the growing love and usage of English, by shattering the stereotypes around women lend a great service in providing space for the real women to grow and utilize their full potentiality. ShashiDeshpande, one of the accomplished novelists has proved to expose women's potentiality through her novels. Her women protagonists, though silent while suffering has proved their strength in enduring the predicaments just for the sake of their family's happiness through which they would seek their identity. However, the relationship described by ShashiDeshpande is not happy and healthy relationships. What are the reasons behind these unhappy relationships? Why the characters of her novels could not get healthy development of their personalities. Most of the major characters have a near neurotic quality. They are constantly disturbed by familial ties that they find uncomfortable and with these familial ties they cannot reconcile their unique values. ShashiDeshpande's insight into the complex texture of Indian (Hindu) society is clear from her novels. She notes the existence of two simultaneous trends that were prevalent in the Indian society since the days of the Puranas. There is a long tradition of worshipping goddesses, and also the tradition of denying human status to women. Again, women are not treated equally under the same roof. In a family, the mother figure may be all-powerful while her daughter – in – law is tortured and humiliated. Such keen

observation of reality enabled Deshpande to develop an unbiased view of the situation. The novels expose her belief that the women themselves are not less responsible than men for the sufferings of women. Both men and women in India have to broaden their consciousness first and to criticize their feelings and attitude to give equal status to women. Thus, we can say that a conducive, free and understanding husband-wife relationship is the fulcrum on which social equilibrium depends. I am reminded of Darius Rucker's word whose saying reads thus:

"I'm lucky my wife is a strong woman. She's one of the stronger people I've ever met. It's hard for me to be away, but I know my home life is fine because my wife is there." Thus a woman is the full circle. Within her is the ability to create, nurture and transform. The paradigm of the ideal women characters has been well proved by the courageous protagonists of ShashiDeshpande.

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