



Shashi Deshpande's Female Protagonists: An Analysis of the Urban Indian Psyche

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Abstract:

This study will investigate modernity on the Indian subcontinent from a modern feminist perspective, with a focus on the women authors who emerged during the post-colonial era, such as Shashi Deshpande. This study's thesis will focus only on how urbanization affects contemporary Indian women, or the "New Woman," as opposed to the centuries-old sexism and male hegemony. Since Deshpande's writings are grounded on an instinctive understanding of contemporary gender and womanhood within a patriarchal, orthodox Indian society, it is imperative that contemporary study get as close as possible to the urbanized feminine mind. Regarding career advancement, economic and sociocultural equality, and sexual exploration, there is freedom of thought and action. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine*, and *A Matter of Time* are notable books that will serve as key texts for this inquiry. Her other works and critical evaluations will serve as supplementary background reads. The authorship of Deshpande's writings will be examined using a women-centrism lens because of the daring narrative in these works. However, diversity in the thematic priorities in each of her novels will be examined to see how gendered politics manifest in various forms and how the free-spirited, urbanised Indian woman struggles. Additionally, diversity in her linguistic styles will be examined to illustrate the various psychological priorities given by her while understanding the modern Indian female psyche.

Keywords: Indian middle-class women, economic liberalisation, marginalised, self-revelation, modern femininity, education, patriarchy, new-women.

Introduction:

Urbanisation is the most noticeable shift in global human settlement patterns. The dynamics of urbanisation can be better understood by examining the increasing migration movements that occurred during the 20th and 21st century globalisation period. Every day, thousands of migrants from all over the world arrive in cities in quest of opportunities for a better life. The way people live and work is greatly impacted by the mass migration of people from rural to urban regions (Zhang, 1). The power structure of urban settlements and the spatial organisation of contemporary India may be traced back to the growth dynamics that characterised the colonial era, mostly in response to the demands of an imperialist administration. The city has long been controversial in literature, both as a setting for stories and as a readership. These towns' living archaeology, geometry, and history have all been utilised to illustrate how the tales and people of the cities have been embodied. In this vast historical "city," the urban setting in Indian literature has reached a turning point. This intervention calls for assessing these modifications subjectively, enhanced by subtle critical theorization, rather than as a simple set of rules. The Independence, Emergency, and ensuing economic reform finally caused writers

to start seeing metropolitan places as more than merely backdrops for their works.

Urbanisation and industrialization had an influence on the distribution of social classes as well as their living and working conditions. Indian English literature has always been the source of these changes. Indian English fiction authors have had success in their endeavours to present India's rural and urban areas in a distinctive light. In addition to discussing the numerous social, political, economic, and cultural problems that face contemporary society, they provide remedies in the form of fictional art. One may argue that the tremendous urbanisation of Indian society in recent years, the growing importance of institutionalised democracy, and the unsurpassed knowledge of human rights have resulted in a loss of community and a disregard for moral and social values. This type of literature focuses on the lives of the disadvantaged. The challenges that marginalised individuals deal with as a result of caste, gender, and ethnicity constraints are the focus of these essays. Shashi Deshpande still occupies a special place in this genre. Her writings delve into the turmoil, confusion, and terror experienced by Indian middle-class women. Shashi Deshpande's literary works contain important themes about the impact of urbanisation on communities. Because she is a

writer from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, her works vividly depict a variety of settings that really represent the ideas and actions of contemporary Indian middle-class urban women.

Objective - The aim of the article is to study about the psychological trauma faced by the female protagonists and their quest for self-exploration and self-identity, which would inspire the other common Indian women to attain their own female psyche and their struggle in the contemporary Indian society.

Introduction to the author:

Indian novelist Shashi Deshpande has won numerous accolades. She is the second child of a well-known writer and playwright from Kannada. Born in 1938 in Karnataka, she had her education at Bombay and Bangalore. In 1978, she released both her first book and her first collection of short tales. In 1980, there is no terror in the dark. She is the Sahitya Akademi Award recipient for her book "That Long Silence." She has written children's novels as well. The social milieu of Shashi Deshpande's works is one of several intricate relationships. Her stories depict a world where tradition and modernity coexist, leading to unexpected rifts and disturbances within the family unit. Women's comprehension is called into doubt when the conventional wisdom is no longer seen as appropriate. Since one cannot relate to others with any degree of conviction unless one is led by clarity regarding one's own image and function, these battles turn into severe quests for self-definition. Renowned novelist Shashi Deshpande has become known for his profound understanding of the feminine mind. Her female characters are aware of their rights and speak out against gender inequality and male dominance. She addresses a variety of topics about women and their place in human society in her novels.

The Effect of Urbanisation on the Mentality of Post-Colonial Indian Women:

Fundamental changes in people's attitudes, actions, and societal values are implied by urbanisation. This definition centers on Fair's concept of urbanization, which he defines as having two forms: the "social aspect of urbanisation as a way of life, which is, becoming urbanised in a psychological sense" and the "purely physical concentration of population and economic activities in towns and cities" (Melania, 2). India's past as a colony and present postcolonial culture make it a perfect place to study influence and intertextuality in great detail. India was the first nation to influence Western literature through the emergence of "Orientalism," a connection that was later totally reversed as a result of colonial involvement. Though some Indian critics have been all too ready to celebrate or criticize the impact of the West, Indian authors' astute reaction exposes more nuanced examples of both influence and intertextuality as

ways of reception. The emerging post-colonialism lacks basic criteria, and the intertext cannot in any sense be referred to as a simple text. The two primary "post-" discourses of our day have become entwined, and the post modern's perpetually postponed semantic and semiotic contingencies have afflicted the postcolonial's initial urgent oppositional political instinct to form a condition of hybrid identity that is perfect for the "translational transnational," or Third World migrant travelling to the First World. Furthermore, there is a dreadful theoretical order to nationalism in general and to the "good nation" in particular. The postcolonial world has become global after dissolving the previous, sinister dichotomy between the coloniser and the colonised. Most "postcolonial" writers seem to have migrated to the West and are currently writing (back?) from that cosy vicinity to the centre in the one global language, English (Trivedi, 10).

The renowned revolutionary philosopher Karl Marx once said, "The social position of the female sex can be used to measure social progress with precision." "The status of women is one of the best gauges of the spirit of a civilization, its excellencies and its limitations," writes A.S. Altekar in his book *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* (9). In particular, the situation of women in India is linked to the unique structure of Indian culture. In the early Vedic era and up until 300 B.C., women were regarded with reverence and respect. According to Ashok Kumar, women have consistently contributed much to their societies, but a patriarchal plot has kept this fact from being acknowledged. The establishment of recorded historical records, the fabrication of credible myths in society, and the generation of authoritative self-knowledge are all examples of male-dominated endeavours. (Kishore,2). From the ninth to the sixteenth century, devotional Hinduism grew throughout mediaeval India, offering a haven for women, outcasts, and people from lower castes. Women's faith in the paranormal and their capacity for artistic and musical expression gave them power when they were weak and silent in many facets of society. The fall in women's status has also been attributed to the Muslim invaders. The Mughal period saw the lowest point of women's status. Women's standing declined. The entrance of the British Raj in the nineteenth century woke the country from its slumber. The Indians' encounter with the West spurred them to action and self-realization, and several significant social and political events occurred, placing the issue of women's education front and centre. The idealised views of women that were created by Indian society's laws, social customs, and religion were mirrored in the writings of the few educated women.

Since women are remarkably complex beings, there is never-ending interest with them. The

perception of middle-class Indian women has drastically changed in the last few years. Indian women nowadays are better spoken, dress more professionally, and are more exposed to a wide range of academic disciplines. Indian women are widely represented in the public and professional spheres, ranging from agriculture to aviation. The basic roles and presumptions about the world of women are still the same, notwithstanding apparent change. In her well-known essay "A Room of One's Own," Virginia Woolf asks, "Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal (women) in the Universe?" (35). She notes that the most talked-about issue right now is women. Women have had both a centrifugal and centripetal role in the careers of many creative artists. In Indian art, literature, sculpture, and religion, they have experienced the greatest idealisation, adoration, and canonization. No artist has ever taken the time to explore and depict their innermost feelings or psychological states; instead, they have only ever exhibited their outward appearances. The first groups of authors to think about researching the feminine mind were the feminist movements of the twentieth century.

Following India's independence, the number of women writing fiction increased and their works became more complex. Between 1915 and 1950, no significant female writers came into being. Consequently, there existed an evident 35-year gulf between the writers of post-independence times and their ancestors. Following a three-decade break, the subsequent wave of female writers sought to portray women as the primary character and had more success in portraying the predicament of women. These female authors have contributed to a new perspective on women in the home and in society. They had effectively communicated their feelings, emotional involvement, emotional disturbances, difficulties, and perplexities in addition to their reactions and replies. In the literary world, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, and Nayantra Sahgal are the leading female writers of the second generation. Shobha De, Bharati Mukherji, Gita Hariharan, Rama Mehta, Meena Alexander, Arundhati Roy, Shanta Rama Rau, Namita Gokhale, Uma Vasudev, and Jai Nimbkar are some more well-known authors of today. By describing the themes and approaches used by the most well-known writers, we might gain an understanding of the present trend in Indian English writing.

This generation includes Shashi Deshpande. In his illustrations, Shashi Deshpande attempts to highlight the various problems that Indian women in urban middle class experience. She is a well-known writer and representative of her industry. In her writings, she portrays the problems and hardships that women confront. She also demonstrated how modern

women are reacting to the need for new equilibriums between time-honored traditions and cutting-edge pursuits. Because of this, she frequently depicts women in her literature who are conflicted between traditional and modern ideals.

The Women of Deshpande:

A closer examination of the urbanised feminine psyche, where there is freedom of thought and deed in terms of career advancement, economic and sociocultural equality, and sexual explorations, is imperative for modern research, as Deshpande's writings are grounded in an intuitive understanding of contemporary femininity and womanhood in a patriarchal, conservative Indian society. Shashi Deshpande focuses a lot of her fiction on the social aspects of metropolitan living. *The Dark* contains *Terrors*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine*, and *A Matter of Time* are some of the greatest works that examine the status of urban women from a slightly feminist perspective. She portrays the difficulties and dilemmas that contemporary women face. Shashi Deshpande's books are easily identifiable as feminist works since they focus mostly on the problems that women face and how they respond to different situations. She looks at a woman's inner struggle and coping mechanisms when faced with situations that don't suit her tastes. She believes that the rights of men and women should be equal. Men and women should collaborate in all facets of life. Feminists, in her opinion, shouldn't be against men. "Is to be a feminist to want to be like men?" she asks. Not in my opinion. Instead, it has meant that I now view being a woman as strength rather than a weakness. a realisation that I am unique, not inferior. And how can feminism be anti-male when it is really promoting a more harmonious, meaningful, and friendly connection between men and women as opposed to the tense one between oppressor and subjugated? (Deshpande, 83). She has been adept in portraying the nuanced feelings, moral dilemmas, and interpersonal conflicts of the modern Indian lady in her writings. Her first work, *Roots and Shadows* (1980), illustrates the conflict between tradition and modernity.

The focus of the narrative is a family and a house. The protagonist of the novel, Indu, is a modern, educated, and free-spirited representation of the contemporary Indian middle-class woman. On the other hand, the family's great-grandmother Akka is an older generation. She is a rich widow without children who maintains traditional beliefs, is autocratic, and has total control over her brother's children. Sarabjit Sandhu's commentary: "In the Indian setup, Shishi Deshpande has very creatively contrasted two groups of women. Akka, Narmada, Sumitra Kaki, Atya, and Sunanda Atya symbolise one set, while Indu represents the other (Bano, 213).

That Long Silence, which she published in 1988, is one of her best-known works. Jaya, the primary character, believes in it that self-discovery is a painful journey. The true self, the true picture, never shows itself. Seeking it might be as confusing as attempting to determine your true appearance. You see 10 distinct faces in ten separate mirrors (1). In a very honest way, the heroine of the book analyses her life and her difficulties with both her intellectual and emotional selves, demonstrating how a woman may examine how she interacts with other people. The main story centres around Jaya and Mohan's marriage. Mohan is upset and nervous after being let go from his job as a junior engineer in a government organisation, so he turns to his wife for support. Because Jaya was raised in an orthodox culture and is clever and perceptive, she cannot condemn her husband without also being unable to accept him. This paradox quiets her down. Mohan disappears from the flat after leaving. Jaya goes through a mental turmoil. She wails in pain, but there's nowhere for her to go. Jaya's experiences illustrate the predicament faced by women from well-educated and respectable urban neighbourhoods. "To become anything, to achieve anything, you have to be," she says.

Her critically acclaimed novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, delves into the inner struggle of a woman who believes she is to responsible for the misfortunes and catastrophes in her life while recounting the account of a marital rape. She believes that her brother died because she mistakenly turned her back on him, her mother died alone because she abandoned her, and her husband is a loser because she destroyed his masculinity. The topic of husbands and spouses' competition is also covered in this book. Sarita's lucrative career as a doctor and her husband's lower-paid status as a teacher are the causes of their miserable marriage. Two incidents of rape—one involving a married couple and the other involving a young girl being raped by one of her cousins—can be found in a different novel called *The Binding Vine*. The protagonist of the book is a woman named Urmila who is grieving the loss of her kid. Deshpande has raised a number of concerns about women's issues in this work. The book covers feminism, women's autonomy over their bodies, and the challenges faced by women in patriarchal cultures.

Gopal is a university history professor, and her sixth novel, *A Matter of Time*, is about her middle-class family. With this work, Shashi Deshpande tries her hand at writing a male protagonist for the first time. As Y.S. Sunita Reddy accurately notes, in her novel *A Matter of Time*, Shashi Deshpande—who has made a name for herself in her novels by eloquently capturing the bitterness and desolation of her female characters—enters a wider literary territory and tackles the

intricate theme of alienation for the first time (Bano, 215). This book narrates the stories of three generations of women in addition to Gopal. Arundhati, Sumi's daughter, also known as Aru, and Sumitra, also known as Sumi, represent the third generation, after grandmother Kalyani, who stands for the first generation. This book is different from her previous works in that it refers to both feminism and humanism. Her writings accurately depict Indian ladies from middle-class urban homes. They are primarily preoccupied with their feelings, desires, suffering, and concessions. In her writings, she has portrayed traits common to Indian culture ladies.

Deshpande's Narratives and Their Influence

Upon close inspection, Shashi Deshpande's unique methods are apparent in her works. She does not view women as less than human, but rather as equal members of the human race. The customs and conventions of the patriarchal society ought to alter. Through her writings, she has portrayed the position of women in her country. Many societies still limit women to the confines of the house and prevent them from pursuing higher education. In society, they are usually seen as showpieces or things devoid of identity. In Indian society, women are seen as kind, kind, devout, dependent, and submissive; they are also seen to be adaptable to any situation and ready to accept whatever that males put upon them. Upon close inspection, Shashi Deshpande's unique methods are apparent in her works. She does not view women as less than human, but rather as equal members of the human race. The customs and conventions of the patriarchal society ought to alter. Through her writings, she has portrayed the position of women in her country. Many societies still limit women to the confines of the house and prevent them from pursuing higher education. In society, they are usually seen as showpieces or things devoid of identity. In Indian society, women are seen as kind, kind, devout, dependent, and submissive; they are also seen to be adaptable to any situation and ready to accept whatever that males put upon them. In contrast to these groups, these women are really preferred.

Women are not welcome in even the most popular faiths in our society because they support pro-male rituals and behaviours. However, because of western education and influences, women are presently trying to change who they are of themselves. They want the long-standing oppressions against them to stop. Rather than staying inside the boundaries of their houses, they would want to have their own names and identities. In many societies, wives who forget to deliver their dowry are burnt at the stake, while girls are rarely honoured upon birth. Premature birth deaths of females are commonly referred to as female feticide. The guilty individual

in rape cases usually gets away with it. There are still a lot of evil acts that are prevalent in society, even though many reformers have tried to change cultural norms and circumstances and have, to some extent, been successful in their aims. The "New Woman," who finds inspiration in western education and culture, is striving to liberate herself from a host of ridiculous constraints. But men counter them with a range of tactics, and religion is one among them.

Conclusion:

India is seeing an acceleration in the urbanisation trend. It improves the awareness and development of underprivileged persons. Nonetheless, compared to rural areas, urban areas have seen substantial advancement and have a greater proportion of educated individuals. The rate of literacy is one factor influencing the quality of the people. An rise in life expectancy denotes a change in the nature of humanity, regardless of gender. Shashi Deshpande's works chronicle the aspirations and day-to-day hardships of urban India. Though they are usually motivated by passions and emotions—the "lower" and "irrational" aspects of the human psyche—all individuals are capable of using reason. Literary works disseminate ideas, but they accomplish it by making us feel things. After reading the works of Shashi Deshpande, we may accept this. She is a feminist writer whose writing captures the spirit of the new woman—one who is ready to speak out against injustice and the atrocities done to her and is reluctant to give in. The current state of societal inequities must be addressed in order for everyone to live in freedom and fairness. She writes to bring this type of reality closer to readers since she is a woman.

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