

From Resistance to Resilience: A Feminist Approach in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract: Patriarchal society makes women suffer mental traumas right from their birth. While few women endure the odds, others end up in losing their lives. Women who experience trauma are either mentally ill or neglect their traditional beliefs. This paper aims to study the resistance and resilience of women in select novels of Shashi Deshpande. Shashi Deshpande is one of the most prolific contemporary Indian Woman Writer. Her writing highlights the issues faced by women in the patriarchal society. This paper can be divided into three parts. The first section is intended to illustrate women's resilience and restraint in the face of a commonly assumed asymmetrical stereotypical patriarchal structure, as well as an outline of theorists and writers whose concepts and ideas aided women's resilience regardless of unfair structures. The second section gives a brief overview of Shashi Deshpande and her place in Indian English literature. The third section features the themes of resistance, resilience, and women empowerment in her novels. Three of Shashi Deshpande's novels were considered for this study specifically '*The Dark Holds No Terrors*', '*Roots and Shadows*', and '*That Long Silence*'. The women characters of her novels are the victims of patriarchy and are coiled in the ropes of traditional beliefs of the society. In the world of male dominance, they face struggles, injustice and are profoundly distressed physically and mentally. But the power and inner strength of these women to bounce back and regain their original state is what the paper aims to explore.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Stereotypes, Resilience, Resistance, Oppression

Women have historically been subjected to physical and psychological traumas from the moment they are born, thanks to patriarchy. Although few women die many more overcome adversities and show remarkable resilience in the face of inequity and oppression. Women have always been seen as a weak, voiceless, and marginalized group in society. Discrimination and inequality have been caused by patriarchal beliefs, which have prohibited

women from making their own choices in various spheres of life. Throughout the last four decades, the portrayal of women in literature has changed. Women's writers have shifted away from conventional depictions of powerful, selfless women and into contentious, women protagonists struggling for identity who are no longer defined solely by their victim status. Shashi Deshpande is a well-known Indian author whose work focuses on issues concerning rights of women in India. She has expressed her dissatisfaction with the conventional positioning of women in literature and has expressed considerable concern about the representation of women in literature. Shashi Deshpande, on the other hand, doesn't really accept that women are subservient who must be compliant and servile. Shashi Deshpande portrays this emergence of women's awareness in her novels, so I conducted an in-depth analysis of her select novels from a different perspective, evaluating it from the woman's vantage point.

Deshpande's novels are primarily concerned with women's representations and conflicts against patriarchal and social exploitation. Women are subjected to physical and psychological traumatic experiences by the patriarchy from the moment they are born. Although few women suffer, others faced challenges and show incredible resilience in contempt of inequities and atrocities. Deshpande's novels are one of the finest examples of all this, in which women are portrayed as strong and resilient in the face of oppressive social structures.

Deshpande's heroines follow a pattern of resistance and resilience that begins with them conceding to prevailing traditions and rules, but subsequently builds resistance to them and employs each conceivable form of resistance, resulting in resilient women. All of Deshpande's novels examined so far follow the same pattern. The protagonist gets married, either arranged or by will, and within a few years, heroine stumbles on the rocky surface of an unsatisfying marital relationship and is on the crisis point. She left home and moves to her personal house whereby she engages in extensive self-reflection. This modern woman undergoes a transition, indicating a shift from servitude to independence and self-confidence.

Shashi Deshpande's depiction of female characters is mostly psychoanalytical in nature. Deshpande's work isn't just about being a feminist; it's also about being a psychologist. Her goal is to strip her characters inner psyches naked, since they are split personalities.

Deshpande's acclaimed novel *'The Dark Holds No Terrors'* is a story of Sarita, her frustrations, her understanding of the issues, her recognition of the crisis in her life, and her

attempts to resolve it. The novel depicts Sarita's life, in which she is constantly forgotten and neglected in preference to her brother. She is treated as though she is unimportant, and she receives no parental affection, except not even on her birthdays. And contrastingly her brother's birthdays, are joyfully commemorated, along with religious ceremonies. When her brother drowns, she is held responsible. Her mother, in particular, constantly chastises her for being the cause of her son's demise: "You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead?" (TDHNT 173)

Sarita (Saru) is a compassionate and caring woman who is very responsive but devoid of belief in self. Being a middle-class educated woman, she is well conscious of her own weaknesses. Nonetheless, she yearns to get free from conventional social standards and embraces the role of anti-matriarch, desiring a new world free of her mother's control. She despises her parents' home, and her journey drives her to explore the secret strength within humans that can transform life into a more enjoyable and potential life.

For centuries, women have been protected by their parents, husbands, or children. Whereas this way of life made her life comfortable and simple, it also pushed her into an enormously difficult condition of oppression and dependency. The modern education eventually made her aware of the absurdity or hypocrisy of numerous long-held conceptions; taboos regarding women, and she began to oppose them. And she still feels betrayed by this crusade. Indu, the female protagonist of Shashi Deshpande's first published novel *Roots and Shadows*, is this modern woman Indu, a well-educated young lady, is extremely responsive. She begins to aspire to be self-sufficient and complete. She dismisses many of the society's traditional values and superstitions. As a motherless girl, she was cared for by the members of the joint family, who never failed to show her love and care. Old Uncle, Kaka, Atya, as well as other family members were always there to support her. However, she now sees the ruling Akka elder member and a mother replacement in the novel, even her family turns as a barrier to her achieving her target of freedom and perfectness. Indu has despised Akka since she was a child because of her intolerance. She dislikes her for refusing her to go to the hospital, claiming: "God knows what caste the nurses are...or the doctors. I couldn't drink a drop of water there?" (RNS 21)

Indu defies Akka's patriarchal authority and the authoritarian environment of the home, whereby women are forced to conform and accept their fate. The women in her family have

been instilling in Indu's mind since she was a child that she is a female and that she must adhere to the standard of behavior required of females, however Indu begrudges this:

“As a child, they had told me I must be obedient unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way; they said, for a female to live and survive.” (RNS 158)

Indu is not only a well-educated young woman, but she is also extremely receptive to her environment. She wants to be self-sufficient and perfect, but there are too many roadblocks in her path. She sees authoritative Akka and her family as a significant impediment to her acquiring her target of freedom and perfectness. Akka forbids her from meeting the boys and maintaining friendships with them while she is in college. As a result, Indu eventually left the house and marries Jayant, whom she likes. We discover that she moves from one house to another in order to be independent and perfect, but she easily understands the absurdity in her decision making: “Jayant and me. I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasize.” (RNS 14) As a result, she talks of her personal inadequacy:

“This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it. That was somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone.” (RNS 34)

In *‘That Long Silence’* the protagonist, Jaya, remains a victim throughout her childhood and adolescence. Shashi Deshpande depicted the paradox of a woman writer who is also an immature homemaker in her novel. She is expected to express her thoughts and beliefs to society as a writer, but she stays quiet digging into her history, battling with her present, and attempting to develop a relationship with her future. She is a feminist who feels graceless in a society that is dominated by men.

The novel begins with Jaya and her husband Mohan relocating from their cozy, well-established home to their old home in Dadar, Mumbai, in which they had stayed right after their wedding while their financial situation was precarious. They relocate to their old flat so as to flee the scene, as Mohan has been accused of company fraud and an investigation is underway. Jaya loses contact with her everyday routine and becomes an introvert in this small old apartment. She remains in deep thought, recalling her upbringing and attempting to

explore herself. As a result, her husband suffers reverses, and she loses her dignity and sense of self. Therefore, she realizes the following:

“Real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.” (TLS 1)

As shown by the above statement Jaya is clearly a fractured person with a tortured mind. She obviously has no idea who she is and doesn't value her own uniqueness. She considers herself to be somebody's daughter, wife, and mother, with no independent status. Thus, she declares:

“I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live.” (TLS 2)

Adele King in her critical assessment writes: “Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.”

In general, some people define the identity of a woman with regard to her relationship with men, such as being a daughter, a wife, a mother and many more. The dilemma of “what a woman does” has never really been posed, however “who she belongs to” is frequently considered carefully. She lacks a defined identity.

Deshpande's female protagonists like Jaya, Indu, and Sarita often experience and fight for social justice, anguish, and inequality in a patriarchal society. They make every effort to adapt and compromise with zeal and dedication. They make every attempt to adjust with a range of conditions and challenges in order to keep their social and personal lives intact, happy and healthy. However, since this does not meet their desires, they don't really fail to fight vehemently in order to carve out a path for themselves that offers self-respect, dignity, and significance to their personal lives as well as their role and status in the society. Jaya, Indu, Sarita, as well as other female characters concentrate on the struggles and hardships of modern social life, and also the isolation that forces every woman to rely on her own strength and assets. As a result, these liberated women are searching for innovative ways to live and holding on to life. They are undeniably overwhelmingly inspired by a broader principle of affection, compassion, pleasure, and gratitude.

Conclusion:

Women in Indian society are traditionally regarded as tender, frail, and subservient. Patriarchal cultures idealize and institutionalize representations of women as sensitive

mothers, loyal daughters, and faithful wives. Women have often been seen in the patriarchal system of society in the traditional positions assigned to them. This traditional representation of women is reflected in literature and mass media. In literature and the media, traditional female roles and morals such as modesty, love, fidelity, obedience, and gentleness are always lauded. Despite a woman's evolving attitude toward herself as well as society, the stereotypical woman remains in the forefront. In television serials and novels, the roles of sacrificing Sita and Savitri are popular. These representations of women also contribute to the revival of male dominance in society. Amid these representations, Indian women have continued to forge their own paths and pursue their own values, as circumstances of women and societal norms changes over time. In the Indian subcontinent, education has instilled in women a sense of identity, as well as a sense of awareness and understanding for their privileges. The positive reform causes women to awaken and fight for equal rights in a patriarchal society ruled by men. Women want to break free from the constraints of the veil and traditional roles that have been forced on them. Modern and empowered women no longer conform to the traditional female model. The modern woman unlike the enslaved bird of the past does not pursue a life of sacrifices wherein she must perform the roles of a diligent daughter, wife, and mother. She has her own voice, which is more essential than the traditional roles that society has attributed to her.

Shashi Deshpande takes it a step forward and makes quite powerful protagonists who are defiant, concealed initially, and thereafter figure out a way, in such a way that the protagonist fights defying the odds to discover their true selves. Deshpande's novels are truly appealing due to its versatile theme despite the fact that it is set in a specific place, social culture, society, and gender. She has portrayed a woman who tries to rebel but eventually does not, rather than a woman who explicitly protests at the outset and then accommodates oneself to the circumstance. Her inner upheavals are so intense that she is reluctant to express them and instead chooses to stay silent intending to avoid being upset and humiliated with the rejection of her behavior by the society. She can't seem to figure out what's going on. Her picture resembles that of a bird with wings and the ability to fly but for some reason, is unable to do so. Similarly, Jaya is conscious about her talents and is aware that she has the ability to freely display them, however she cannot. She is often deafeningly quiet, implying that conventional female roles take precedence over newly-constituted roles. Her true self has been revealed as a result of her modern education. As a consequence, she develops a desire for self-sufficiency and independence in life, and in attempt to accomplish this, she continues

to lose her shyness and reject utter submission to man's defensive cover. The modern, empowered young woman raises concerns about a man's complete disregard for a woman's desires, interests, and dislikes. Until the 1960s and 1970s, men were considered the primary earner and women were restricted to the indoor. In today's world, women acquire a livelihood on their own. She not only works and holds a job, but she also takes care of her domestic duties. Without a question, the modern, empowered young woman's fight against oppression, misery, and injustice is indeed a promising growth. However, the desire of a modern woman to be independent and free is also hampered by her complacency and apprehension. During the process of this campaign, she develops some flaws and delusions, which Indian women novelists have openly discussed. In the face of "disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity", their heroines are all eager to maintain their identity.

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