



04

**THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND TRADITION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S
NOVELS: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AND SPACE**

Ms. Archana R.

Research Scholar

Al-Ameen Research Center

University of Mysore, KS, India

&

Dr. Thammaiah R. B.

Professor & Research Supervisor

Al-Ameen Research Center

University of Mysore, KS, India

Abstract:

Shashi Deshpande, a well-known Indian writer, has left behind a body of work that deftly balances the influences of family and tradition with the individual's need for independence and belonging. This abstract examines Deshpande's works as a potent narrative canvas, where people struggle with the nuances of their own identities while also negotiating the norms of their families and societies. To explore complex interpersonal relationships, generational tensions, and power struggles, her books often focus on the protagonist's own family as a microcosm of society at large. Deshpande's protagonists, who are frequently caught between societal expectations and their own dreams, highlight the difficulty of this balancing act. Women play key roles in these stories because of the influence that gendered roles inside the home have on their feeling of autonomy and independence. This issue is shown in "The Dark Holds No Terrors," which is regarded to be one of the most well-known pieces that Deshpande has produced. The story focuses on the protagonist, Sarita, and her efforts to fulfil the expectations of both her family and society. The trip Sarita takes is symbolic of the human struggle to find one's own voice while bound by custom and family ties. Deshpande's books provide a comprehensive examination of the complex relationships between family, tradition, identity, and place in modern India, as this abstract demonstrates. Readers are encouraged to dive deep into the complex storylines depicting the changing face of Indian culture and the ongoing struggles of people to forge their own identities while balancing the expectations of their families and communities. The books written by Shashi Deshpande are excellent literary reflections of these subjects, providing deep understandings of the human condition.

Keywords: *Negotiating; Space; Family; Tradition; Interpersonal Dynamic and Societal norms, etc.*

Shashi Deshpande is a well-known Indian female writer who writes in English. Her books provide an authentic and persuasive depiction of Indian women's position in society at large. Her books are a completely analytical study of how women are portrayed in connection to the changing social situations of the time. Her works feature protagonists that are guarded when it comes to showing the world their true selves. Deshpande has always denied identifying as a feminist, yet she has still made gender inequality and the repression of women her primary emphasis. The lives and complexity of women in a wide range of unsettling settings are at the heart of her works' themes and dilemmas. She



has systematically placed men and women in places from where studies of men's and society's problematic attitudes towards women's issues may be conducted. In reality, Deshpande has sought to speak out against the mistreatment of women by male creatures. In the current Indian middle-class situation depicted in her works, the female protagonists are shown as confined and striving against the traditional societal norms to which they have been used. Her stories' main and supporting characters' emotional breakdowns in the face of male-dominated, middle-class society is a barometer of the cataclysmic circumstances women face today. She has also stated that her books' female protagonists are not doomed to repeat the same cycle of oppression but have instead redefined their status by altering the most fundamental norms of patriarchal society. Betty Friedan, in her discussion of women's identity and the patriarchal system, argues that women are able to ignore the issue of who they are because of the idea of the feminine mystique. The myth also suggests that women may only respond to the question "Who are you related to?" by naming a male relative such as a father, husband, or father-in-law.

The majority of Deshpande's works are set in the modern environment of a society with a middle class, in which women are negotiating a social order that is in the process of moving fast. Most of her stories' characters eventually make their way back to the reimagined social contexts within which they first encountered success. When the laws of traditional society are modified to reflect the empowerment of women, it follows that women's capacities will also increase at the individual level. Betty Friedan, an influential American author and feminist, reportedly remarked, "A mother might tell her daughter, spell it out, Don't be just a housewife like me. If she receives the sense that her mother was too frustrated to enjoy the love of her husband and children, then it is possible that she would declare to herself, I will succeed where my mother failed, I will fulfil myself as a woman," rather than learning from her mother's mistakes and gaining wisdom from those mistakes (Beauvoir).

Deshpande's heroes have evolved with the shifting socioeconomic landscape. Her stories now carry the genuine beliefs of an everlasting female one. She rejects the idea that women should be relegated to a subordinate position since her characters have trained them to fight against the prevailing societal standards that hold that women have no place in positions of power. Deshpande disregards the male notions of morality, satisfaction, connection, dialect, etc., and instead emphasises women's legal status within the developing framework of traditional Indian culture.

Deshpande has taken a bold step towards realising her goal of giving every woman in traditional Indian culture a sense of identity and agency. She has empowered every woman to stand out for her needs and demands, which are often ignored by the patriarchy. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, "the true woman is an artificial product that civilization makes," (Beauvoir, 428) referring to the creation of eunuchs. Her 'instincts' for docility and coquetry, as well as a phallic pride in males, are instilled to her.

Deshpande has assumed that regular people of both sexes may be controlled by the society when it undergoes radical transformations. From ancient mythical frameworks to the postmodern world, women's roles have evolved throughout the centuries in response to shifting societal norms. Liberty, social basis, independence, repression, and other ideas have all undergone changes as time has gone on. Deshpande, via her fiction, has established this society of traditional ancient ladies. She describes her ancestors as the kind of ladies who would have been too traditional to embrace the chances presented by the modern world. However, in the current day, young women have made great strides in redefining what it means to call a place "home." The ladies in Deshpande's works are the focal points of a never-ending revolution against the oppressive social norms of sexism.

Two Famous Novel of Shashi Deshpande:



It is possible that just knowing the novel's title might be enough to identify it. From the sound of the title alone, it is easy to assume that all of the female protagonists in *That Long Silence* suffer from some kind of mental illness, the symptoms of which vary according to their social standing. The book's title references to the fact that the story's main female character is unable to carry on an effective conversation with the culture in which she finds herself. It is common for women to feel ignored since they tend to centre their attention on trivial matters like their own wants, desires, identities, etc. Shashi Deshpande adopts Jaya's character to question the rationale of a culture that denies women parity. Deshpande conceived of Jaya as a method of pushing back against the harsh social norms that place unachievable demands on all women. Jaya, who has been married for seventeen years, under intense peer pressure. Because of this, she believes she must challenge cultural norms in order to discover her own identity as a woman. The time she spent alone was well spent, as she prepared herself for the battle against the nonsensical behaviour of the culture around her. Jaya's life is consumed by her search for her identity. However, neither the outside world nor her own family supports her in becoming more feminine. Her marriage has radically altered not just her views on what it means to be a woman, but also her outlook on how one ought to go about living one's life. Like Deshpande's previous works, the heroine in *That Long Silence* is preoccupied with discovering who she is apart from other women. The majority of Deshpande's works include female characters who, in terms of their own material lives as well as the material lives of their societies, are shown as attempting to achieve increasing levels of self-sophistication. Each of the ladies has an own writing practice that.

The characters of all of Deshpande's novels are first shown as being stuck inside the harsh familial and societal environments. They are taught to see themselves as expendable resources for the sake of patriarchal society. All of Deshpande's books take place in India. However, by the novels' final chapters, it's clear that the protagonists have developed the ability to diagnose their feminine identities, and that they've used this insight to successfully navigate the complexities of their own minds in order to forge a new path for women everywhere. The books' endings provide evidence of this point. Deshpande has shown that each individual woman may shape her own life cycle into a meaningful pattern, relieving the pressure society puts on women to feel that their lives have no purpose. Women are typically seen as accomplished on the exterior but fall short when examined more closely on the inside. This is because they each possess a healthy dose of confidence in their own abilities, making them perfectly at home in any group situation. Indeed, the female form is portrayed as the embodiment of contradictory aspirations. No other kind of male animal in our society is capable of female cognitive processes. In different situations, women may think in different ways. In Deshpande's works, for instance, the projections of the female characters are remarkably distinct from one another, even if they all allude to the same background. All the female protagonists who are currently unattached are seen in different situations. Although they may have shared an experience of oppression at the hands of a patriarchal society, the means by which they overcame that oppression and achieved liberation could not be more unlike. The inflexible patriarchal framework may be used as a lens through which Jaya's identity can be methodically studied. Jaya has been through a lot, and as a result, she has to think about the implications of her gender in light of all she has been through. Jaya's real-life challenges are examined in more detail in the novels, especially her protracted absence from public conversation. Because she is unable to express herself verbally, Jaya has developed a wealth of wisdom. She is developed into a wise and capable lady not because of her chronological age but because of the lessons she's learned along the way (B. Kavya).

Jaya's growth as a person is shown against the backdrop of both ancient customs and contemporary norms. Jaya's marriage to Mohan means she has to conform to the mores of traditional culture. She has followed the rules of society in her behaviour. She has passively conformed to the



norms of society without questioning or challenging them. Deshpande has taken the same grounded positions typical of middle-class women in order to accurately portray the realities of her audience. Jaya's internal ideology and her capacity to recognise reality are destroyed by her life experiences, which are depicted in the story as frustrations, alienations, and emotional traumas. The tale opens with Jaya, the heroine, seemingly happy in her marriage to Mohan, a respected member of society. Jaya has, however, started to struggle against the obstacles that her middle-class upbringing has thrown in her path. She needs her lover so much that she cannot function properly if they are not around. Alternatively, to put it another way, she is in the type of situation where isolation is a constant companion in the quest for self-discovery. Jaya has obviously been through a lot of hardship not because of anything else in her life, but because of the person she chose to spend the rest of her days with when she got married. Despite his high social status and educated background, Mohan is a person with traditional views. There have been times where Jaya has no choice but to follow the established rules of the society as they now stand. She cannot take part in today's way of thinking because of her husband's personality.

This is because of her husband's personality. In reality, Mohan did not give Jaya a great lot of independence to work towards her own goals. Jaya has made extensive efforts, both mental and physical, to form a stronger connection with her spouse. Her husband and two children may appear like the perfect family on the outside, but she isn't happy with her life. This is because, ever since she accepted herself, she has felt lonely and unable to concentrate. Jaya's husband Mohan has never showed any interest in or made any attempt to understand the motivational feelings that drive her goals. In point of fact, she has been given the type of life that is always challenging and uninformed in every manner. The rest of the book chronicles Jaya's maturation into a strong, independent woman who has shown she is in charge of her own life and is ready to set and pursue ambitious objectives. Jaya has spent her whole life fighting against the deformities that are connected with the dominance of the patriarchal system. She denies having ever been Sita, Draupadi, or Savitri or any of the other great ladies of myth and folklore. The relationship she has with her spouse is like a couple of bullocks in her eyes, not something honest and polished. She has failed to see that the love she has for her spouse is genuine and sophisticated. Deshpande likens Jaya's dilemma to a worm making its way towards a hole because she has been sucked into the myth of the traditional house-building procedure. In spite of her status as a newly established writer, Jaya finds herself in the following predicament.

A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There is no room for anger in my life. There is only order and routine- today I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after clean the fridge. (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, 147-148)

In "The Dark Holds No Terror," her critically acclaimed novel, author Shashi Deshpande takes a close look at her protagonist, Sarita. "The Dark Holds No Terror" This book examines marriage through the lens of how women are seen and how they are treated in different cultural contexts. Readers are introduced to Sarita, the protagonist, who is a successful female doctor despite being continually thrown into the complexities of society just because she is another human being. No woman can come out and expose her true identity to the general public because the patriarchal framework is so ingrained in the way people see the world. Sarita's fragile position in life, with her challenges in both the private and public spheres, are shown throughout the narrative. During the day, she is a respected physician, but at night, her husband Manohar, an English professor at a nearby university, holds her imprisoned in their home. Sarita returns to the city of her father's birth after a fifteen-year hiatus, sparking the events of the novel. Indeed, she had resolved that she would not go to her father's house under any circumstances; however, the social and familial circumstances were so boring for some that she was unable to restrain herself and returned to her own house.



Sarita goes back to her husband in particular because she can't take the sexual abuse he's given her any longer. The book's storyline is built on a tangled mix of present-day events and historical recollections. After visiting her father's home, Sarita saw how she has been preparing herself to deal with the unfair treatment she expects to get in a world dominated by men. Sarita thought her life objectives were more worthwhile to pursue when she realised her individuality and the truth of the culture around her. She has concluded that a conventional education in the field of her choice is essential if she is to achieve her dreams and aspirations. Sarita has made it obvious that she plans to continue her studies after completing the prerequisites for her high school certificate. When Sarita completes her medical training, she will have done it with the highest honesty, earning the respect of her peers while also giving her the sense of self-worth she deserves. The day she arrived home from an accident scene wearing a bloody coat, her neighbours learned for the first time what she did for a living. She had just finished helping the victims of the attack. She has risen in the professional ranks to a higher status than that of her spouse Manohar. Sarita and Manohar both continue to stand by their respective viewpoints, although Manohar sees some differences between them. In fact, the pervasiveness of patriarchal society has made it difficult for Manohar to maintain the same level of order in his home with his wife as they had in the past. He has conquered many obstacles on his path to establishing his own egotistical niche in the world. The two of them had grown apart since Sarita began her medical career. The public's warped view of the marriage is only one more consequence of Sarita's sudden stardom.

Sense of the adulation received from Sarita's fans

When we walked out of our room; there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, 42). Marriage between a man and a woman is, from a more conventional perspective, expected to be based on cooperative practises that are loyal and conservative. No matter who she is or what she does, a woman has the responsibility to abide by the laws and standards that are mandated by the society in which she lives. In contrast, the traditional viewpoints of society do not adequately account for the nature of the connection that exists between Sarita and Manohar. In the instance of Sarita, the feminine potentialities seemed to become more apparent. Because of the work that she does, she is able to provide an image of flawlessness and authenticity to the public, which enables her to mask the difficulties in her personal life. Sarita is well-known and respected in the community thanks to the fact that her common neighbours have paid her several visits in recent times. Manohar has been found to be bothered by the uncertainties that have arisen as a consequence of Sarita's progressively enhancing lifestyle in public. The following claims, if true, will illustrate the complex nature of Sarita and Manohar's relationship and have been suggested by Sarita within this context. We've drawn the statement here.

But now I know that it was there it began.....this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this two.....that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, 137).

Shashi Deshpande has researched how society's expectations for women are limiting their freedom. The author of the piece has seen the truths of life that a well-educated lady like Sarita should not have to face. On the other hand, she is unable to freely manoeuvre her private life in the face of the intricate dynamics of the community. In the book, Sarita is shown as sending letters to the pupils at the school where her buddy Nalu teaches, such as —

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA. If he's 5'4" tall, you shouldn't be more than 5'3". If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more



than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. (The Dark Holds No Terror, P.137)

When it comes to establishing a woman's place in society, these words carry more weight than any others. When attempts are made to eradicate irrational beliefs from people's minds and hearts, the deeply ingrained patriarchal culture often rears its head to obstruct the progress being made towards women's equality.

To conclude, the novel's last chapters brilliantly bring Jaya's journey towards self-awareness into sharp relief. Deshpande has made the case that women would always choose to marry into a family that is politically progressive and not bound by the strict conservative norms of the community in which they live. Members of the family should regularly make reasonable, liberal suggestions to prominent women so that they may fulfil their roles effectively. The story was created with the intention of equipping women with the tools they need to fight the stereotypically female struggles of silence and isolation. Deshpande has argued that women should not give up their independence and become the victims of male supremacy because of traditional feminine notions. They need to be taught the skills to constantly challenge the patriarchy's harsh norms. Since they have been mistreated by traditionalist and conservative institutions, they need to rescue themselves by believing that they're entitled to a life of perfect serenity and pleasure.

According to Deshpande, the book is a critique of the status of women in India. Since the author is herself a woman, her depiction of women in Indian middle-class homes rings true. Sarita's mother is very critical of everything, while her father is mostly mute, if one were to examine the family's foundations. Without going too far into the world of non-fiction, Deshpande has brought attention to the psychological obstacles that working women encounter. The author has tried to show how a confident female protagonist's mind works when confronted with chaos. Sarita has learned what it means to be a woman in today's patriarchal world by learning to stand on her own two feet. Sarita has come to the same conclusion.

We each enter and exit this planet on our own. In between times are brief. All the relationships we hold dear and believe will endure forever are really no more permanent than a dewdrop. (The Dark Holds No Terror, page 208)

Deshpande's depiction of female characters like Sarita may be compared to Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique," which explores the social and moral consequences of female identities. One of the most prominent local conceptions of post-war American life and culture is exposed, dissected, and systematically indicted by Friedan in "The Feminine Mystique." This concept is the illusion of suburbia women's independent satisfaction, and it is "the feminine mystique." These two books explore similar topics, namely the place of women in patriarchal societies and the ways in which they are depicted in works of fiction, but in very different ways. By presenting evidence based on post-colonial ideology, Shashi Deshpande has discussed the predicament of women living inside the borders of the Indian subcontinent. One may argue that Betty Friedan has spoken to the issue of the feminine identity by referring to the women who make up American culture. On the other hand, Shashi Deshpande has detailed the predicament that Indian women find themselves in. Both works elevate the idea of difference, and the contemporary woman's sense of her own female identity has been thoroughly mapped out in terms of justifying the unique feminine potentials that have formed inside her own mind. Although the essay was written in the United States, it may be argued that its significance for women's emancipation extends beyond the American social platform and into the arena of the global literary platform, which includes the Indian literary platform. This is something that can be done by making the case that the essay has more relevance towards the emancipation of women in both contexts.



References

- B. Kavya (2012). *Articulating Gender in Shashi Deshpande's Fiction*. Sarup Book Publishers, New Delhi. Print.
- Beauvoir, Simon de. (1949) *The Second Sex translation*. by Parshley, H.M. Penguin Books. New Delhi. Print.
- Deshpande, Sahshi. (1989). *That Long Silence*. Penguin Books, New Delhi. Print.
- Deshpande, Shashi (1980) *.The Dark Holds No Terror*. Penguin, New Delhi. Print.



This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

To Cite the Article: R, Archana, R. B., Thammaiah. “The Role of Family and Tradition in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels: Negotiating Identity and Space”. *Literary Cognizance*, IV - 4 (March, 2024): 19-25. Web.