

### Study of Characters of the Novels of Shashi Deshpande Anjali Mishra

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Ram Singh Mahavidyalaya, Nagla Sikandar, Tundla, Firozabad, Uttar Pradesh (India)

**Corresponding author Email:** [anjalmishra1089@gmail.com](mailto:anjalmishra1089@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Shashi Deshpande's writing style is distinguished by its clarity, simplicity, and the depth with which it explores the human condition, particularly concerning women. Her narratives are character-centric, immersing readers in the inner lives and experiences of her well-developed characters. Many of her works possess a strong feminist undercurrent, skillfully weaving themes related to gender dynamics, women's struggles, and empowerment. Shashi Deshpande is a well known name in the field of Indian literature. She was born in 1938 in Dharwad in Karnataka as the daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist as well as a great Sanskrit scholar Sriranga. She pursued her education in Dharwad, Bombay and Bangalore. She presently lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband. Shashi Deshpande emerged on the Indian fictional scene in the 1970s. She has nevertheless created a place for herself in the galaxy of Indian women novelists in English. She excels in projecting a realistic picture of the middle class educated woman who, although financially independent, is still facing the problems of adjustment between idealism and pragmatism. She is almost incomparable for her portrayal of Indian middle class women with their turmoils, convulsions, frustrations, endurance and 'that long silence' which has been their lot for many centuries. Her novels are mainly based on the lives of women and their problems particularly in the Indian context. For this reason she has been labelled a 'feminist'. She explored the realities behind the silence of women. She raised her voice against torment on women and also created mass awareness in the matter through her writings. Her books are translated into several Indian languages. Her novels are deeply rooted in India; the character settings and the conflicts are inherently Indian.

[Mishra, A. **Study of Characters of the Novels of Shashi Deshpande**. *The International Journal of Interpretation, Observation and Analysis*, 2024; Volume 2, Issue 1:28-32 (April-June). ISSN 2349-0713, Peer-reviewed (online/offline), Refereed, Indexed and International Journal (Since 2013), Global Impact Factor: 5.776

**Keywords:** Existentialism, works, SHASHI DESHPANDE.

**Introduction:** The body of literature produced by Shashi Deshpande, one of India's most celebrated contemporary authors, has consistently and incisively delved into the lives, struggles, and aspirations of women in Indian society. Shashi Deshpande's novels are characterized by their profound exploration of the female psyche, their intricate portrayal of the complex dynamics of family and relationships, and their nuanced reflection of the evolving socio-cultural landscape in India. Through her masterful storytelling and empathetic narratives, Deshpande has not only given voice to the women whose stories often remain untold but has also carved a distinctive niche within the realm of Indian English literature. Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, Karnataka. She is the daughter of the renowned Kannada writer (dramatist) and Sanskrit scholar, Shriranga. At the age of fifteen she went to Bombay. Having graduated in Economics, she then moved to Bangalore where she gained a degree in Law. She has post-graduate degree in English and a diploma in Journalism as well. The early years of her marriage were largely given over to the care of her two young sons, but she took a course in journalism and for a time worked on a magazine.

Her writing career began after the birth of her two sons in 1970, initially with short stories of which several volumes have been published. She wrote many novels such as:

The Dark Holds No Terrors, Narayanpur Incident, The Binding Vine, That Long Silence, A Matter of Time, Small Remedies, Come up and Be Dead, Roots and Shadows, Moving On etc. Her other works are The Instruction and Other stories and Writing from the Margin and Other stories. Among them, Moving On is her latest novel. She is the author of four children's books. The best known of which are The Dark Holds No Terrors and Roots and Shadows which received major awards That Long Silence and The Binding Vine received the Sahitya Akademi Award. Her novels are deeply rooted in India: the characters, settings and the conflicts, inherently Indian. Above all, she is a storyteller.

Her short stories have been widely anthologized. Her short stories have been translated into a number of Indian and foreign languages. Now, she lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband. However, the other 19th century novelists were

following the prevailing literature of romance, gothic or conventional patterns, Deshpande partly deviated herself from it and adopted more realistic Indian characters, Hindu culture, rules and regulations of conventional society where males always get victory over females. They are guided by misconception of superiority. Mostly, Deshpande's female characters are life-like whose condition is very much pathetic and deserted. In Indian society, males dominate their wives and treat them as puppets and domestic slaves. They take them as a child breeding machine who should sacrifice themselves during the giving birth of their children. So, her novels are centered on female characters who play a vital role to establish social harmony and prosperity.

The Binding Vine deals with the middle class educated Indian woman. The story recounts her childhood and marriage including the death of her infant daughter. She becomes caught up in the discovery of her long-dead mother-in-law, a poet who was the victim of an unfortunate arranged marriage, and of a poor woman whose daughter, Kalpana is raped by her relative and hanging between life and death in a hospital ward. There are recurring things all of which are connected to each other and which are about the life of Indian women who are victimized by the male dominated society where males are always getting success and females are suppressing their desire and losing their identity but they cannot protest their victimizers. They have always traditional bondage from where they cannot come out. They are compelled to follow the rules and regulations.

Every female thinks that they have to walk every step of the way however difficult or painful it is. They can avoid nothing. Every male thinks that female should be silent even if they are talented. So, in this novel also, Mira Urmi's mother-in-law is a poet but nobody knows her ability because she can never show her capacity in front of the family members and society. She writes at night after all of the family members have gone to bed. She does not have her personal room. During the lifetime nobody knows her as a poet but long after her death, Urmi finds all poems in a dusty storage trunk. Her journals and poetry reveal the pain of a vibrant young woman trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage. Kalpana, the survivor of a brutal rape and a young woman has also been silent. In this novel, males are exploiting the females physically as well as mentally.

Whole novel is strictly based on conventional male dominated Indian society, Hindu culture and daily life activities of especially females who are only inside the boundary of man-made society. Even Urmi, an educated woman is not happy with her husband after the death of her daughter. She is haunted by that incident frequently. She cannot go beyond her grief. She finds her path difficult to tolerate. She is drawn into the lives of three very different women. The first woman, Urmi, is drawn to her long-dead mother-in-law Mira who exists only on the notebooks. Second, woman is drawn to Kalpana who is raped by her own relatives and left brain-damaged in a hospital. Third woman is drawn to Shakutai, Kalpana's mother, who blames her own daughter for the cause of that incident. She is very afraid of the society and its culture where everybody gives a space only for the virginal young girls and there is no space for the impure girls.

They can never exist in the society and are always thrown away from the people. It not only hampers those girls but also affects the remaining sisters. Because of that incident their sisters cannot get married. In addition, Shashi Deshpande has presented the Indian Hindu society as conventional one. Most of her novels deal with the similar subject matter. Like many American and European women, Deshpande's characters find it difficult to be accepted as intellectual equals of men. The Binding Vine presents the patriarchal exemplifying the spirit of hierarchy and assumption of male supremacy over female characters. For instance Mira, Kalpana, and Urmila are dominated by the males. Deshpande presents the courageous male characters who are getting more chance of freedom despite being criminals.

One of the male victimizers named Pravakar rapes his own relative Kalpana who loses her memory power and goes into a coma. In order to get severe punishment from the society he gets scot-free. Due to this incident, his wife Sulu commits a suicide because she cannot face her shameful condition in the society. On the other hand, Mira, mother-in-law of the narrator dies during the delivery. It proves that males like Pravakar and Mira's husband are living happily and getting more advantage from the innocent women like Kalpana, Sulu and Mira.

Shashi Deshpande, one of the prominent Indian women writers, deals with —the inner world of Indian women in almost all her fictional writings

(Arvind 137). The focal point of her fiction is on a general observation that women mostly suffer injustice or social front. With advancing modernism and growth in education levels, the injustices are increased and not depleted. Shashi Deshpande's approach lays focus on exploring how women groom notwithstanding the problems they are compelled to face. Generations after generations pass, situations and scenarios change but position of a woman is not that strengthened as expected. Through her efficiency and dexterity in portraying human beings, Deshpande holds a mirror to the society. His imaginary characters appear to us as our next-door neighbours. The researcher has used a word 'Waltz' as a metaphor. Females are doubly suppressed physically as well as mentally by their own life partners and their own relatives. They are living in pathetic condition. One of the victims Mira dies during the child birth, Kishor (son). Due to the forceful relationship she becomes a victim. But her husband does not regret. There is not good relationship between husband and wife. But she is compelled to do things unwillingly. In the conventional society, males get victory over the females. Instead of giving severe punishment they are getting chance of freedom. Hence, Deshpande has presented the deep rooted conventional Hindu society where female's condition is very much pathetic. She has focused on male's power that has always marginalized women since long. In the name of culture and society females are always suppressing their desire and keeping themselves silent.

#### **Family relationship:**

The greatness of an author has little to do with the subject matter itself, only with how much the subject matter touches the author'. This statement by the Russian writer Boris Pasternak applies to Shashi Deshpande, for as a writer she is deeply involved in and committed to what she writes. Undeniably, she is a master storyteller and her about stories, like her novels, focus on the domestic spaces. Family and relationships within the family, its traditions, faiths, beliefs and histories emerge as dominant motifs in her short stories. She explores the individual, psychological and emotional bonds and occasional conflicts which are invariably a remarkable feature of the middle-class Indian family. Within the bounds of the limited space of such families, sometimes problems in relationships cause difficulties and dilemmas but they are sooner or later resolved. However, Deshpande's choice of the family

and its configuration in her stories does in no way belittle her authorial stature.

With a keen sense of perception and sensitivity to the people and her surroundings, Deshpande has accomplished a microscopic scrutiny of Indian middle-class family, focusing particularly on women. She has emphatically asserted the role of a writer with reference to great literature. Shashi Deshpande has shaped families and homes as the suitable space and site for women in her novels. Despite the unparalleled growth of education in an age of globalization and liberal economy, women are shown as have a subordinate role in the family and in the society as well. The middle-classwomen are struggling with their present predicament or reliving their sorrowful experience of the past. During these moments of anguish and suffering, women share their unhappy memories and experiences preferably with another woman, more after a member of their household, a blood relation or even a cousin. On such occasions, the natural empathy evolves into sympathy, culminating into what may be called female bonding.

But this female bonding is not a universal or general feature of her fiction. In her novels and short stories, the relationship between mother and daughter, for instance, is not invariably necessarily marked by sympathy and mutual understanding. Hence, the concept of motherhood appears as problematic. This is so because Deshpande seldom deviates from the line of sanity and rarely slips into any idealization or glorification of women either as mothers, grandmothers or daughters. In other words, Deshpande desists from creating and a romantic vision of Indian family and the women in it. But she underscores the fact that families are made up of relationships, blood ties, of felt emotions and claims. Commenting on the major themes in Deshpande's stories, Jasbir Jain remarks:

The concerns which are mirrored in the stories are either the early formation of the themes she was later to develop in novels or explorations of alternative views on the same subject. Family, marriage and bereavement are some of the dominant concerns. Social issues like female infanticide or feticide and rape also feature in some of the stories. Cultural and political attitudes which have evolved over a period of time are critiqued. Sex and sexuality, aberrations, extramarital involvements, even lesbianism find a place here.

The family has a significant stage in the works of Shashi Deshpande. In a family, women have various roles. They make a struggle for free life while making an effort to identify their place as individuals in the society. She portrays women within the ambit of family. In Short Stories, she depicts the changing the middle-class Indian family life. In the story, 'The Boy' in which, Shashi Deshpande portrays joint family. She depicts the overall fabric of a traditional middleclass family. Some of her stories portray the mother-daughter relationship. She tries to reach to the barrier of daughters. In the story, 'A Liberated Woman', she has portrayed such a mother in it, she is unable to forgive her daughter, for marrying against parents will. Instead of supporting her daughter, for her decision, she shows resentment towards daughter's decision.

Shashi Deshpande depicts 'the parent-child relation' in her writing. She highlights the family issues related to women. She has pointed out the daughters whose choice of life is restricted in the hands of a parent. She presents in her writing that how daughters of modern India revolt against the male-dominated society. Shashi Deshpande's novel 'That Long Silence' comes relatively close to real life experience. This novel achieved greater credibility from the fact that Jaya, the protagonist. The novel 'That Long Silence' depicts the conflict in the mind of the narrator between the writer and housewife. For seventeen long years, Jaya manages to suppress her feelings, thinking that it is more important to be a good wife than a good writer. She would have remained under the shadow of her husband it would not have received constructed the edifice of her family. The writer has mainly focused on family relations.

### **Man - Woman Relationship:**

When nature made human beings, she assigned the multiple roles. The relationship of Man - woman has been a principal concern in literature as well as in society. Shashi Deshpande has discovered the various aspects of the manwoman relationship in both her short stories and novels. In her stories, she has taken the beauty and ugliness of the relationship in its subtle shades and nuances. According to her, men and women relate to one another in two distinct ways: acknowledged and unacknowledged. The familiar and acknowledged form of man-woman relationship is the social institution called marriage. On the other hand, romantic love or extramarital love and sex are the unacknowledged forms of

relationship. Within the acknowledged frame of relationship marriage, there are arranged and love marriages.

An arranged marriage is socially sanctioned and ensures a world of fulfilment. Marriage in the arranged category is based on social reality where caste, status, puberty, economic wealth and security are held in importance. Again, marriage is not a plain and simple contract, but it is a part of the larger human relationship, which traverses through attraction, love, sex, sexuality, living together and a lot of other phases such as parenthood.

A man-woman relationship outside marriage may lead either to a love-marriage or it may degenerate into what society disapproves of as adultery. Shashi Deshpande is concerned with the subordinate role of women in marriage and society, their emotional and psychological deprivation brought into force by the criticisms of patriarchy. She shows Indian traditional society is biased against a woman she realizes that it is very often particularly to a woman, a woman in the role matriarchs the doctrine of male hegemony. The main characters of her short stories and novels are modern, educated and independent women. Their fight for freedom and self-identity within marriage is a recurring theme. As women in her stories and novels are self-conscious and ambitious, they seek to fulfil their ambition, in the process; they often fall within the conflict zone of men. This is the reason that man-woman relationship becomes the focus of attention in the short fiction and novels as well. The major them of her works is women empowerment.

She has mainly highlighted the weak points of women which make them weak. She reveals in her novels that through education we can empower the women. Shashi Deshpande has depicted Man-Woman Relationship with various hues and shades. In her short stories and novels, there is an under-current of discontented sex for various facts, like thesided decision of celibacy, uneven pitch of passion and physical relations as a dull habitual routine. She brings home the fact that sex is a crucial strand in a man-woman relationship but emotional and psychological fulfilmentis no less important. A balance between the body and mind can make a healthy relationship.

### **Multiple Concerns:**

Shashi Deshpande has written multiple issues related to the life of women in India in middle-class society. The novels and short stories of Shashi Deshpande deal with issues like rape, inter-caste marriage, abortion, female feticide, preference to male child, widowhood, remarriage of widows, domestic violence by the husband against the wife, infidelity in marriage, the pain and suffering of childbirth, the plight of girl child, suicide due to neurosis by emotionally deprived women, lesbian relations and of course, political and historical issues or concerns. It is noteworthy that the writer allows her main protagonist to grow on their own, and rarely does she indulge in any kind of indoctrination. Women have to face numerous obstacles in their way of self-realization. She has created some female protagonist in her stories and novels who are equipped with a sense of dignity and self-respect in their lives. In dealing with women issues, she has shifted the emphasis from the external world. 'It was

Dark' is a story which deals with the serious issues of rape. Rape is certainly the worst and most terrible violence against the body of the woman, but in the process, the women suffer at a psychic level than at the physical level. It is also the worst form of humiliation inflicted on the woman. It is evident from the writings of writer that she has discovered a long range of themes which are largely woman centred. So, Shashi Deshpande dealt with multiple issues.

The plight of the Indian women is aptly captured by Kamla Bhasian in the above mentioned poem. The existing disparities in the demographic, economic, and social indicators between males and females are a testimony to the consequences of gender inequality faced by the Indian women of the region. Being influenced by western feminist writers, the post independence Indian women writers have engaged themselves in devising verbal strategy for rejecting 'male cold' literary conventions historically accepted as 'standards'. Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent contemporary women writers in India writing in English. She has created ripples in the society of male domination by taking women as women seriously in her novels. She takes us inside the consciousness of her women characters to present their plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions. Shashi Deshpande is a well known name in the field of Indian literature. She was born in 1938 in Dharwad in Karnataka as the daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist as well as a great Sanskrit scholar Sriranga. She pursued her education

in Dharwad, Bombay and Bangalore. She presently lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband.

## References

- [1]. Agrwal, B.R. and M.P. Sinha (2003). Major Trends in the Post-Independence Indian English Fiction. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2003.
- [2]. Agarwal, Malti ed. (2007). New Perspectives on Indian English Writings. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd., 2007. Print.
- [3]. Digambar S. Kulkarni (2016). —Social Realism: Representation of Problems of Youth and Fraudulent Society in Chetan Bhagat's Revolution 2020I, IJOIS, Vol. 1, Issue 2.
- [4]. Bharati, Shivram (2010). —Gendering the Past: The Changing Face of Women in Indian Literature. Women in Indian Literature. New Delhi: DPS Publishing House, 2010: pp. 1-11. Print.
- [5]. Deshpande, Shashi (2003). Writing from the Margin and other Essays. New Delhi: Penguin.
- [6]. Deshpande, Shashi (2003). —Why I am a Feminist." Writing from the Margin: And Other Essays. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2003: pp. 80-91. Print.
- [7]. Jaidev, Problematising Feminism, Feminism and Recent Fiction in English, ed. Sushila Singh (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991) 57.
- [8]. Sue Dickman, An Interview with Shashi Deshpande, ARTEL, 19 January, 1998, 129-35. [
- 9]. Chandra Holm, A Writer of Substance, Interview, Indian Review of Books, 16 May-15 June, 2000, 5-9.
- [10]. Shashi Deshpande, Who's the Heaviest of Them All? The Times of India, 11 August, 1996.