

# A Study on the Characterization of Shashi Deshpandey's Novels

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**Abstract – By the anthropological and sociological point of view 'identity' is correlated with status, age, sex, family, profession and nationality. Loss of spiritualism and bonding with materialism are the two polarities in which every human is caught and suspended. This paper is the study of the crux of women characters between social responsibility and desired self.**

**Keywords: Marriage, Relationship, Innate, Trauma, Complexity**

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## INTRODUCTION

The protagonist's struggle is essential to understand their characters and search for meaningful existence. All of them explore nature of the human freedom and tensions between the individual's need for self and society. The characters move in their own real world. They re-enter into the world with awareness of self through the suffering and pain they gain insight into the truth of life. All her characters establish Deshpande as a sculptor of 'a new womanhood'. By delving deep into psychological complexities of her characters, Deshpande invents new lives, seeking self affirmation within the context of their own culture. The woman in her novels believes that a woman's personality is determined by her innate, and intrinsic qualities and if these qualities are in conflict with the roles which society expects from the individual to play the inevitable result will be suffering. Deshpande is always a participant than a detached observer as she says, Her concern is more with woman's suffering in marital relationship, family, and expose the mental trauma she undergoes. In all her writings all her characters are the woman who have developed true strength within themselves and who no longer need to compete with anyone, and in order to feel accomplished, no need to indulge in the neurotic need to be protected.

In most of her writings Deshpande deals with the woman's question in terms of marital relationships, familial bonds and trauma of violence on the female body. Deshpande's strength lies in the characters she created. Through her characters she demonstrates the difficulty women have finding in a relationship in which they can explore all the aspects of self. Her portrayal of mother is based upon acute observation and a quite but incisive irony. Women in her stories belong to the

middleclass but they are convincingly alive. Her major attempt is to capture moments of sensibility in order to reveal the inner lives of her characters. They are rebels but they are also victims in so far as they strive for meaning outside the self. But this victimization is not a destructive process which annihilates the heroine; it becomes ironically the mode of self-realization and self-regeneration. The concept of individual self is only accepted if it is in accordance with the status ascribed by the society. The protagonists of Deshpande's novels are modern, educated, independent women, lie between the age of 30-35 years. Their search for freedom and self-identity within marriage is a recurring theme. They are mother, daughter, wives, all belong to the middleclass tradition bound joint families, due to rebellious nature they get away from family and to assert their identity live in a nuclear family after marriage. By some or other incident in their life they are alienated for some time and are caught in mental trauma. Childhood experiences, their marriage, their relations with the other family members and career help them to develop their character at the fullest. Each of them is trying to live according to her own philosophy of life but fail. All her characters are facing the very dilemma of having a choice between modernity and tradition. After going through the process of introspection all her protagonists emerge as more confident, more in control of themselves, and significantly more hopeful. Men are absent in Shashi Deshpande's novels, she does create male characters but she herself admits her inability to bring forth rounded male characters. They have a very little role to play, but they influence the thematic structure through patriarchal system. She does not blame men, nor does she claim that women are good and men are bad. Deshpande does

not idealize her protagonist. She presents women from everyday life.

### I. The Dark Holds No Terror

The Dark Holds No Terrors(1980) explains the myth of man's superiority by portraying a career woman whose marriage is on the rocks. Sarita, known as Saru, is a "two-in-one-woman" who is a "terrified trapped animal" in the hands of her husband Manohar, "who in the daytime wore a white coat and air of confidence and knowing, and at night became a terrified trapped animal."It is about Saru, the protagonist who is a doctor, economically independent, middle-class wife who lacks love in her relation with her parents and undergoes a strained relationship with her husband that leads her to a painful search for her own self. All the phases of Sarita's life childhood, youth, and adulthood, which she holds in high spirit are dealt. Her husband Manohar is an English teacher in college, she has two children, but she is not happy with her married life. The novel opens with Saru's return to her parent's house after fifteen years, the house she had left with a vow never to return.

### II. If I Die Today

If I Die Today (1982), Shashi Deshpande's second novel reflects her special and unique vision of the philosophy of life. Deshpande in this novel deals with the theme of fear and violence generated due to the knowledge of death, parallel to this runs the theme of suffering and the quest for self-identity, which remains Deshpande's favourite theme throughout her fictional work.

Manju, the narrator, is a lecturer in Bombay and has come to stay with her Pathologist husband Vijay on the medical campus, as she is due to have her second child. She is on her mental journey in the search for peace and stability. Shashi Deshpande's major concern is to depict the anger and conflict of the modern educated Indian woman caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand and self-expression, individuality and independence for the women on the other. Manju's life is smooth and content superficially but deep within lies marital discord. She comes to live with her husband on the medical campus for the birth of her second child. Isolated on the medical campus she becomes a detached observer, seeing the life of other people, their pains, their happiness and comparison to self, makes her realize her status as an individual. Deshpande's primary concern is with Manju's psychological struggle in which all values are insuspect and all attempts made to achieve identity.

### III. Roots and Shadows

Roots and Shadows depict explicitly the human relationships between man-woman and close family relations. The protagonist Indu, who is an educated

and an intelligent woman and is brought up in a traditional Brahmin family, which is controlled by "Akka" a senior family member. She struggles for her liberation and fulfillment through education and career. She leaves home at the age of eighteen to pursue her education and later marries Jayant, a man from outside her caste. Shashi Deshpande in her essay "The writing of a Novel" writes about emergence of Indu's character: "Indu sprang out of the claustrophobic world with a courage I admired. She was free. But often to be free is to be lonely. I shared this bleak thought with Indu." Twenty nine years old Indu realizes, "We flatter ourselves that we've escaped from the compulsions of the past; but we are still ignored to it by little things"

### IV. Come Up and Be Dead

*Come Up and Be Dead* published in 1983 is a mystery thriller. It is totally different from the other novels of Shashi Deshpande as it presents the world of evil, squalor, and vice dealing with death and tragedy, with mystery. It was first serially published in *Eves Weekly*; the novel particularly has the detective ingredient. Although the protagonist of the story is Ms Kshama Rao, the new headmistress of the girls' school, but the narrative shifts to Devayani her cousin and back to Ms Kshama Rao. Ms Rao is young and competent, also incorporates the usual conceived traits of successful women which include being reserved, aloof to the point of cruelty. One realizes the extent of her insensitiveness when she doesn't hesitate from asking her psychologically ill brother to leave the school to save her career as the headmistress. However, the other story teller is Devi, her cousin sister who is invited to come and look after Kshama's house and brother, which she does rather successfully. She also manages to befriend Kshama's brother Pratap and realizes that he is not as mentally weak as portrayed.

### V. That Long Silence

Shashi Deshpande has won the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for her fifth novel, *That Long Silence* published in 1989. She uses first person narrative to register women's protest against the male dominated society in the novel. Her protagonist is an educated, middle class woman who becomes a helpless victim in the marriage and its responsibilities. Her women protagonists are in constant search for their 'Selves'. The novel opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting back into the old Dadar flat in Bombay from their lavish big house at Churchgate. Their two children Rahul and Rati are away on a long tour with their family friends.

### VI. The Binding Vine

*The Binding Vine* gives an insight into the psychological suffering of the women characters. Deshpande in one of her interviews given

to Veena Mathews, published in The Times of India under the title "Demystifying Womanhood." She says: "A writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides, only a woman could write my books- they are written from the inside, as it were." *The Binding Vine* is essentially the story that revolves around Urmila, and the death of her baby girl. The novel opens with a personal loss of protagonist Urmila, often referred as Urmi in the novel, who is a lecturer.

## VII. A Matter Of Time

Shashi Deshpande's fiction takes the form of redefining women's identity and culture in the Indian context. 'A Matter of Time' explores the intricate relationship within an extended family. It traces the history and reason of transformation of the philosophy of life. Four generations of women have four different forms of ideology within the same family, drawing the change in the course of social history and ideology through their individual experience. Deshpande's women attempt to reassert their place in their family on the basis of equality and their individuality. The novel starts with the mental journey of Sumi and ends with Aru's realization of self. Past memories, experiences and roots of her ancestors help Aru to find her own identity. For the first time Deshpande has tried to give voice to a male character Gopal who is searching for meaningfulness in his existence. But finally she shifts to female characters those who are dealt more prominently.

## VIII. Small Remedies

In 'Small Remedies' Shashi Deshpande portrays the world of women, all of them represent the modern women, who do not believe that women are inferior beings and must remain passive and submissive, instead they are asserting their identity. They have formed a new concept of morality. Savitribai and Leela represent modern women who are ambitious and courageous and they establish themselves through music and politics, in male dominated society. In narrating the stories of Savitribai, Leela and Munni, protagonist Madhu discovers her own moral and physical self, just being our self not being somebody for others. Bai and Leela had great faith in themselves they had the courage to face the consequences of the decision taken by them. Two aggressive characters are Savitribai and Leela, and two submissive characters are Madhu, the narrator and Muni. The novel begins with the description of the small town Bhavanipur village where Madhu the narrator comes to write the biography of Savitribai, "the grand lady of the Gwalior Gharana." Character of Savitribai is an epitome of strength and courage.

## IX. Moving On

Deshpande in her novel 'Moving On' shows how to move on cutting across the pain in life, how to reconstruct one's life. It is a "A novel in two voices", in which the characters manage to let go of past betrayals, hurts and courageously break the chains of traditional norms imposed upon them by the society. Her characters - both male (father) and female (Daughter) are alive, human beings who analyze minutest details of life. At her stay in her ancestral house Manjiri (Jiji) discovers her Baba's diary. Though reluctant to read at first as she is afraid of pain she says, "I'd been reluctant at first to read them. I knew I would get nothing but pain from reading my father's words from visiting the past. But she reads and finds it therapeutic. The novel consists of chapters framed according to the protagonist's thoughts moves on, specific title is given to each chapter, -

1. Baba's diary. 2. Mr. Bones. 3. Family stories. 4. Baba's diary. 5. A happy Utopia. 6. Following our destinies. 7. Baba's diary. 8. My mother was a writer. 9. Property matters. 10. The Ampersand. 11. In control. 12. Love and marriage. 13. Baba's diary. 14. New directions. 15. Baba's diary. 16. The dream. 17. The sea. 18. Revelations. 19. Baba's diary. 20. Good fairies and bad. 21. The flowering. 22. Baba's diary. 23. The right world.

## X. In the Country of Deceit

Shashi Deshpande's 'In The Country Of Deceit', is a story about the adult love, a relationship between Devayani and Ashok which forms the crux of the story. Deshpande frankly admits in an online interview: "It seems odd, doesn't it? But, when you think of what love does to people and the things love makes them do... My novel explores the slippery, treacherous terrain that love takes people into" The Protagonist Devayani undergoes a process of mental speculation regarding her relation with Ashok and the rooted moral and ethical Indian values in which she has to prove herself. As Devayani sheds of the traditional norm in search of satisfaction, it then becomes her quest for an authentic selfhood. Towards the end of the novel she faces the existential problems of life.

The narrative of the novel has been divided into four segments entitled "Ground Zero", "Epiphany", "In the Country of Deceit" and "Unspooning" The two voices in the novel are Devi and Sindhu's, that contribute to the pace of the novel. The quality Deshpande attributes to her character is symbolic in the name given to her. "That was my mother's choice. She named me Devyani" (I stressed the vowels) 'because she wanted another brave woman's name.' The novelist contextualizes the character of Devayani Mudhol with the mythical Devayani of

Mahabharata. In this story, though Devayani was the queen of king Yayati but it was Sharmishtha, the other woman who enjoyed king Yayati's love. Yayati's Devayani allegorically presents a woman "who never got what she wanted, who never understood what love meant" (In country 36) Devayani Mudhol and Ashok Chinnapa, the author re-tells this story from the perspective of the protagonist Devayani in the first person.

## WORK-CITED

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