

## Psychological Effects: Women Characters in Shashi Despande's Selected Novels

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### Abstract

This present study Psychological Effects: Women Characters in Shashi Despande's Selected Novels. In this women protagonists find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by the society, attempt to assert the individuality, sensitive to the changing times and situations, they revolt against the traditions in their search for freedom. They succeed in achieving self – identity and independence and choose their partners in life to live within pursuance of their felt need to lead a family life. Standing at a cross road of tradition, they do seek a change, but within the cultural norms so as to enable themselves to live with dignity and self-respect.

**KEYWORDS:** Psychological, Women, Society, Tradition, Self-respect

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### Introduction:

In spite of India's reputation for respecting women, to an extent to treating woman as a goddess, history tells us that women were ill-treated or neglected in various spheres of life across religions, regions, and communities. Except for a few revolutionary movements, the situation remained more or less the same in the ancient, medieval, and early modern times. Women are seen as nurturers and the providers of emotional caretaking, while men are considered providers of economic support. As a girl develops, unknowingly, In Shashi Despande's novel mention the lines of Manu-Smriti, "by a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independent, even in her own house," gets incorporated in her mind. Girls inherit their mother's domestic chores and adopt stereotypical gender roles. Low self-esteem and self-worth are common. After marriage, her husband and in-laws control her life. Consequently, the girls enter a state of silence.

The practice of "sati" or "widow immolation" and young widowhood were the rule once, but vanished gradually because of the constant efforts and movements by a few pro female leaders. However, discrimination of a girl child, child marriage, dowry system, etc., continued to exist even after independence. The Government of India has been intervening and introducing laws to combat these issues.

In India, violence within the home is universal across culture, religion, class, and ethnicity. Girls face violence at the hands of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and uncles in their homes. The abuse is generally overlooked by social custom and considered a part and parcel of marital life. It may also include rape and sexual abuse. Psychological violence includes verbal abuse, harassment, confinement, and

deprivation of physical, financial, and personal resources. They are often caught in a vicious circle of economic dependence, fear for their children's lives as well as their own, ignorance of their legal rights, lack of confidence in themselves, and social pressures. These factors effectively force women to a life of recurrent mistreatment from which they often do not have the means to escape. The sanctity of privacy within the family also makes authorities reluctant to intervene, often leading women to deny that they are being abused. This is equally common in the higher as well as in the lower segments of the society. Domestic violence has devastating repercussions on the family. Mothers are unable to care for their children properly. Often they transmit to them their own feelings of low self-esteem, helplessness, and inadequacy.

Psychologists are unanimous in stressing the importance of childhood experience and environment in the evolution of personality. Dominating, over – protective, intimidating, partial or indifferent elders endanger a child's free emotional growth and also curtail his sense of self- esteem and self –confidence. The psychologist R.D Laing contents that the family is responsible for the sanity of its members. He says “It is not simply an individual's bad luck in the genetic card game that leads to his madness, but the tricks of the other players that drive him crazy”

We see innocent world of children often permanently damaged by the apathy and insensitivity of the adults. The wounded young psyche cannot mature into a wholesome character and all along they suffer as the possessors of a battered childhood, incapable of facing the vagaries of life. Deshpande draws telling picture of women who had traumatic experiences in their childhood.

Shashi Deshpande portrays the inner world of the Indian woman in the realistic manner. A woman and her desires, efforts and failures in the traditional Indian society is the main theme of this novel. One of the best examples of it is the famous psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, who based his theory of sexuality on the possession of the phallus / pennies. A man is a man because he possesses the phallus. So, a woman is simply not a man. Therefore, a woman is a lack, a negative. This lack of female self can also be reflected in art and literature where women frequently appeal as objects of men's desires. Women are always associated with the passive body and men with the active mind and this idea is in the centre of this novel.

From childhood, women are always taught the concept of male superiority and are conditioned to co - operate in their own subordination. Unlike women in many western countries, Indian women are denied equal opportunities for working with men in many spheres of life. Women's powerlessness stems from this unequal gender relations. With Sita and Savitri as predominant models of reference, Indian women are expected to be pure and faithful as wives, though husbands are not required to be so. In most cases, they generally do not have the freedom to decide when they should marry, whom they should marry, how many children they should have or how the children should be brought up. When a woman is married off, in most cases, in her new home, she is often made to act the part of an unpaid domestic servant with a marginally superior status.

Is to be a feminist to want to be like a man? I don't think so. On the contrary, to me it has meant an acceptance of my womanhood as a positive thing not as a lack. An understanding that I am different, not inferior. And how can feminism be anti – men when it is really working for a better, a more meaningful and companionable relationship between men and women, instead

of the uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed?( Deshpande : 2003 , 83 – 84 ).

From the above statement, a reader can understand that Shashi Deshpande's writing comes out of her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what is to be a woman in our society. Her writing comes out of her consciousness of the conflict between her idea of herself as a human being and the idea that society has of her as a woman. Shashi Deshpande moves further and catches on the subtle psychological complexities of the individual mind.

Kalyani in **A Matter of Time** (1996) is also an example of an unwanted child whose mother's attitude towards Kalyani for not being a son creates wounded psyche in her. Though she suffers a lot, Kalyani emerges as one of the most powerful characters in the novel. Hers is a pitiable story with deep endurance and strength. She seems to have an endless capacity to bear pain. Even Kalyani's mother Manorama lives in constant fear that her husband might marry again as she is not able to give him a son. Kalyani is intelligent and good in study. But because of her mother's insecurities, she is not allowed to complete her education. So women like Kalyani in India live in suppression and do not even get chance to develop their individuality.

Thus, these female characters because of the scared relationship of the family members and upbringing as an unwanted and unloved child create inner turmoil in them which creates a lifelong gap in their personality. Only some of the characters like Sarita in **The Dark Holds No Terrors** (1980) with their strong will power and determination are able to come out from that wounded psyche and establish their identity.

In the Indian culture, the parents' extreme insistence of the male heir sometimes creates injustice towards the female child. They forget that female child also needs love and proper upbringing. But the parents' partial attitude towards them leads them to inner turmoil which moulds their personality incomplete. But only with their strong determination, they establish their individuality in their own house and society which is an important characteristic of the study clearly reflected in Shashi Deshpande's novels.

Even in the case of Jaya in **That Long Silence** (1988), the question "Who am I?" (24) haunts her so much obsessively that she fails to find herself and her identity. In such a suffocating patriarchal set – up, she finds her female identity effected. Deshpande reveals the consciousness of Jaya, through an exposition of her mind in the process of thinking, feeling and reacting to the stimuli of the moment and situation. In doing so, she goes on to assert the feminine psyche of the protagonist. At the end, Shashi Deshpande portrays Jaya's emerging individuality.

Since her early childhood, Jaya had designed her life according to the desires of the members of the family. She had neither courage nor will to justify her own choice and this was the beginning of her predicament. Writing about such persons, Alfred Moller observes:

The more they become restricted, the more they rebelled, (and) hence the guilt complex, and inferiority generated in the ( Moller : 1979 , 22 ).

Struggling with the threats to her freedom and her integrity, Jaya desperately needs to

protect herself from dissipating and sinking in the crumbling world around her. Jaya is caught in the dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife to her husband and secondly struggling to express the emotions of women's experience, but seldom expressing them in a male dominated chauvinistic society. Jaya knows that their relationship is spoiled by incompatibility and lack of communication. If she suffers, she suffers it in silence, if she revolts, it is also in silence. When silence fails as a protective cover, hysteria becomes the only shield. Jaya says:

I must not laugh. I must not laugh ... even in the midst of my rising hysteria, a warning bell sounded loud and clear. I had no control over myself, I had to cork in this laughter. But it was too late I could not hold it any longer. Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly ( Deshpande : 1988 , 122 )

Jaya keeps telling herself considering the gravity of the situation. She is able to regain her sanity only after she decides to break her silence and record her story.

In Shashi Deshpande's novels, there is a conscious attempt to represent the suppressed emotions of women and to assert their quest for independence in a concrete manner. Her women characters represent the cosmopolitan feminine struggle to live life completely as human beings.

A woman can be a wife, a mother, a friend, a companion and still Be Herself – be independent, be capable of having an energy which erases her conditioning and frees her from her psychic fears and the bondage of centuries.

The woman has to realize her position and uplift herself. There is no one else to give her a helping hand. She has to help herself, express herself and find a firm footing for herself in the family and the society. The change in woman as important member of the family directly influences the life of the family both physically and morally. Thus, as we say that "An educated mother makes her family and society also change". Change will come about only if women themselves acknowledge and articulate the desire and need for change, actively seek to bring about change and honestly and openly engage with her demands such change imposes.

Shashi Deshpande highlights that her novels could have been written only for women:

As 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 ( Deshpande : 1991, 31 ).

In short, Shashi Deshpande's novels are an epitome of women's culture which narrates the grave experiences of women and their social pressure to live into the four walls of the house, which is completely true for most women even today. The women readers understand and appreciate a woman's writing fully because all have common experiences of the male dominated culture. Shashi Deshpande in an interview said:

I find a lot of men unsympathetic to my writing and a lot of women extremely sympathetic. This is because the world is viewed in different ways by men and women. Women see a mirror image and men see, perhaps a deformed image of themselves ( Carvalho: 1990, 15 ).

## CONCLUSION:

Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by the society, attempt to assert the individuality, sensitive to the changing times and situations, they revolt against the traditions in their search for freedom. They succeed in achieving self – identity and independence and choose their partners in life to live within pursuance of their felt need to lead a family life. Standing at a cross road of tradition, they do seek a change, but within the cultural norms so as to enable themselves to live with dignity and self – respect. So they are caught between a traditional upbringing and the longing for freedom in the modern sense.

India has one of the fastest growing youth populations in the world. Girls below 19 years of age comprise one-quarter of India's rapidly growing population. Unfortunately, the majorities are out of school and have limited choices available for the future. They are caught in the cycle of early marriage, repeated pregnancy, and poverty. Industrialization, liberalization, and urbanization, and female feticide have brought about some obvious changes in stereotyped concepts of masculinity and femininity, affecting household composition, residence patterns, specific kinship relationships, and male and female attitudes and behavior. Family and society together can lead girls toward the positive psychology of increasing optimism, strong social connections, and healthy self-confidence.

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