



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

"Women Empowerment and Self Identity": A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Novels: "The Dark Holds No Terror" and "Small Remedies"

Monika Khurana¹

Associate Professor, S D (PG) College Panipat

Dr.Sunit Bhandari²

Associate Professor, K V A D A V College for Women Karnal

Article Received: 03/01/2025

Published Online: 02/02/2025

Article Accepted: 01/02/2025

DOI.:10.53413/IJTELL.2025.6101

Abstract

One of the most significant figures among modern female authors who focus on women's issues and identity exploration is Shashi Deshpande. Her portrayal of middle-class women who are read, educated, and professionally savvy has been extremely sensitive to the constantly shifting times and circumstances. Men-woman interactions, gender-biased discrimination, the struggle of women from tradition to modernity, and the potential of women's minds are all themes in Deshpande's works. Her heroines are caught between their societal obligations and personal wants, as well as between their job and family responsibilities.

Several feminist authors, including Simone de Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Mary Wolston Craft, and Elaine Showalter, have written on how women are suppressed, discriminated against, and oppressed in this male-chauvinistic society. Her heroines are caught between social expectations and personal wants, as well as between their positions in their families and careers. They have made note of the marginalization of women based on sex and gender in their writings. Women's difficulties have been accurately depicted in the books of Indian women writers like Shashi Deshpande, both physically and mentally. Her heroines are strong and unhurried. The "new woman" is what they are. They try to strike a balance.

Keywords: Study, women, gender-biased discrimination, suppressed, depicted



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

Introduction

One of the most significant figures among modern female authors who focus on women's issues and identity exploration is Shashi Deshpande. Because of her achievements and creative ability, Deshpande has proven herself to be a deserving contemporary and successor to authors like Anita Desai, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sehgal, and others. Her female protagonists are educated, contemporary young women who are repressed by a society that is both evil and tradition-bound. Given that she has candidly detailed their hardships, setbacks, and annoyances, her books are amenable to feminist interpretation. Empowerment is the process of making a person or group stronger on a social, political, spiritual, or economic level. It means making women financially and socially independent. Women use this approach to create their autonomy.

The process of strengthening an individual or group on a social, political, spiritual, or financial level is known as empowerment. It implies empowering women to be financially and socially independent. Women experience this process and make their own decisions. It aids women in their struggle against patriarchal ideology and male domination. Other women are inspired by powerful women. She inspires other women as well. She understands and exercises her rights in addition to her responsibilities. She can identify her goals and focus on taking the steps necessary to achieve them. In a patriarchal culture, empowerment helps to reduce gender-biased prejudice or, at the absolute least, achieve equality with males by dispelling misconceptions about women.

Traditionally, right from the ancient days, India has been a male-dominated culture. Indian women were concerned with many a thick, slack layer of prejudice, convention, ignorance, and silent suffering in literature as well as in life. The ancient Hindu law-giver Manu, whose philosophy occupies an eminent place in the mainstream of Hindu ideology and culture, proclaims :

"Pita rakshasi kumara bharta rakshati yauvane/ rakshanti sthavire putra na stri svatantrya marhati// (Manu 40)



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

Her father defends her in childhood; her husband defends her in old age. A woman is never able to have freedom. At this age, the woman was almost imprisoned in her house. There was an authoritarian control over women by controlling all that went to constitute or develop the self as well as identity. This was the condition of women in ancient India.

But today, an Indian woman is no longer a Danyanti; she is a Draupadi or a John of Arc. Social reformers - Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Political activists like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru gave her a new extension and directed her to a new ambition. Mahatma Gandhi freed women from positivity, servility, and domesticity. He realized and believed that men and women were partners, sharing equal duties in social life and equal rights in the political field.

In Indian English literature, Shashi Deshpande is a living, dynamic woman writer who has occupied a prominent position. She discussed typical Indian themes very tenderly and carefully and portrayed Indian middle-class women with rare proficiency. She was born in Dharwad in 1938. Her important novels are: "The Dark Holds No Terror," "If I Die Today," "Come Up and Be Dead," "Roots and Shadows," "That Long Silence," "The Binding Vine," "A Matter of Time" and "Small Remedies." Three of her novels have received "Sahitaya Academy Award" and "Thirumati Rangamal Award."

Her books are centered on the issues confronted by the ladies within society. She does not acknowledge the conventional representation of ladies as residential and meek. She has attempted to reason out for their sufferings and break the cliché pictures of ladies. Her ladies' characteristics are that they are generally freed, middle-class, advanced, and taught ladies. Shashi Deshpande does not allow a readymade arrangement for the issues confronted by her lady's characters. Amid this travel, they persevere through the traumatic mental experience. The lady's characters experience different battles and utilize numerous procedures to handle challenging circumstances. Eventually, they discover the arrangement to satisfy their trust and empower themselves. They are freed and battling to have a rise to opportunity with men within the space of instruction, work, marriage, and parenthood. Their individual accomplishments within the field of instruction and business are shadowed when it comes to marriage. Marriage is an imperative social institution, and numerous of them confront challenges. The oppression of ladies begins in marriage



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

The novel "The Dark Holds No Terror" uncovers the cruelty of gender-biased separation of a mother towards her young lady child. Saru, the heroine of the novel, returns to her father's house after fifteen a long time as she listens to the passing of her mother. She got the time to audit her relationship with her father, mother, brother, spouse, and children. She was continuously dismissed and disregarded in support of her brother (Dhuruva). The celebrations were done as they were for her brother, not for Saru. She expresses her anguish: "always a Puja on Dhuruva's birthday. A festival lunch in the afternoon and an aarthi in the evening... My birthdays were almost the same - but there was no Puja." (DHNT 168-169).

Although the darkness within her is not natural, it is forced upon her by her mother, who consistently holds her responsible for the death of Sarita's brother, Dhruva. What her mother says: "...Why didn't you die? Why are you alive when he's dead?" (DHNT 4)

Her husband's sexual sadism brings her back into darkness. She remembers that every cloud has a silver lining and that even if winter arrives, spring can still come. Is it much behind? She returns to her father's house to discuss her connection with her deceased mother, her father, and her husband, Manu. Acceptance is the guiding principle of her life. Accepting something as it is preferable to trying to alter it.

Women haven't always been oppressed by males. Even contemporary ladies are the worst sufferers. They are present at home, work, and other locations. She was a daughter when she was young. She is initially under the supervision of her father, then her brother as an adult, then her spouse after marriage, and finally her boys as she gets older. Males control her from the very first breath to the very last. Sarita is, therefore, not an exception. She is the perfect example of a typical Indian woman who always acts passively. Saru has become Shashi Deshpande's spokesperson. A narrative told by a victim leaves a deep impression on the reader's heart and intellect. Shashi Deshpande is not anti-male but pro-woman. This work explores the concepts of male dominance and female sacrifice.

One of the themes in this book is the quest for identity, and both Saru and Manu are passionately pursuing this goal. Saru obtains her identity by using her former instructor Boozy and dignity while Manu endures mental suffering. In Indian society, men who earn less and are less popular than their wives face significant disadvantages. Manu is afflicted with inferiority. He believes that in the daytime, he is unfit to sit and eat with Saru. That's



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

why he treats her like a bedtime animal. It fulfills his manly ego and provides fulfillment. Saru, on the other hand, gives herself over to circumstances. She is not afraid of the darkness in her life because she has learned to accept it and get used to it.

This novel also addresses the issue of women's career positions. In a male-dominated society, career women are viewed as a hindrance and a source of embarrassment for their male colleagues. This is what Saru encounters when she becomes a well-known physician in the community.

Saru was never given importance because she is a girl. To prove herself in front of her family as well as society, she took education as a tool to prove herself. While doing medicine she fell in love with Manohar of low caste and a temporary lecturer in a college. She proved herself as a 'Lady Doctor' and earned the recognition in the society. In due course of time, her husband turned into a tyrant because the wife earns more than the husband.

As Suman Bala comments: "In her husband's home sh, she was like a terrified and trapped animal. And even in her parent's home sh, she did not find the desired freedom" (Bala 23) to escape from the suffocating situation she went to her father's house. After the dialogue with her father, she knows that nobody can deliver peace or consolation to her, which lies inside her. She has to remove the fear and darkness and find the solution - the hope of resettlement. She revolts against the tradition but tries to compromise and live with reality.

In "Small Remedies," Shashi Deshpande portrays women who are eager to pursue careers and maintain their identities. According to Deshpande, honesty is a crucial instrument in the search for oneself. Munni and Bai were viewed as failures as they denied a certain aspect of their existence. Madhu and Leela are successful in their search because of their capacity to accept the realities of their lives. The narrative focuses on Bai, Munni, and Leela, but it is up to her to discover her identity and comprehend her existence.

The key to self-realization is understanding that one's self is the only place of shelter. Although self-reflection is difficult, it is not impossible. Shashi Deshpande's work, *Small Remedies*, showcases her exceptional writing abilities. Her heroine remains an urban, middle-aged, educated lady, but her scope has expanded to include individuals from many neighborhoods, occupations, and socioeconomic levels.



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

The narrative focuses on the interesting vocalist Savitribai Indorekar rather than the music itself. Even though Deshpande has consistently denied that she is a feminist author, she frequently produces characteristics that defy such claims. One such figure that the author has perfectly captured and given life to is Savitribai. She seems like a weak lady on the outside.

Nonetheless, she treats her maids, pupils, and even her biographer with arrogant manners, frequently giving her directions on how to conduct the interview. Being raised in an orthodox, traditional Brahmin household and becoming well-known in the classical music industry required a great deal of perseverance and resolve.

Madhu, the main character in the novel, frees herself from the customary restraints to cherish a spontaneous surge towards life. After her father's death, Madhu passes her days in a state of total loss of identity. After her graduation, she wants to be economically independent. She is determined to take up a job. This was a welcoming opportunity for her. Her job, in which she edited or rewrote most of the article, and the small room that Hamid Bai rented her all became symbols of her independence, empowerment, and bold identity. The appreciation and self-fulfillment that she receives after long years of alienation not only gives her pride and a sense of self-satisfaction but also makes her aware of her needs and aspire to fulfill them.

The novel focuses on the narrative of Madhu, the narrator. She is assigned to write Savitribai's biography. Since childhood, she had been fascinated by Bai's connection to Ghulam Saab and their daughter Munni.

The book focuses on the time in her life when she is mourning the loss of Aditya, her only child. By recalling and recounting the tales of Leela, Savitribai, and Munni, she highlights the stark gender disparities in our culture. Unfortunately, some of the victims are ignorant of the atrocities they have been subjected to. In some ways, Madhu is a victim, and the reader is only aware of it toward the book's conclusion. Despite being raised by her father and a male servant, she had no complaints about her upbringing. She felt sorry for the kids, though, since they appeared to be harassed by their moms all the time.

Deshpande presents a realistic portrayal of reality, avoiding stereotypes. This is especially evident in her portrayal of parenthood, which she does not glorify. Her heroine, Madhu, says:



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

I get some images of motherhood in the movies, and I see myself through the songs that speak of 'ma ka pyar.' But real life shows me something entirely different. Munni's mother, who ignored her daughter; Ketaki's mother, stem, dictatorial and so partial to her sons; Sunanda, sweetly devious and manipulating. Som's mother is so demanding - none of them conforms to the white-clad, sacrificing, sobbing mother of the movies. (SR 183).

So, Deshpande's women characters revolt against the social taboos and the old tradition. They struggle for their freedom and identity. When they identify themselves, they find fulfilment in their life. Thus, through self-identity women are like independent men. These women set themselves as a role model by creating awareness among the oppressed women.

Shashi Deshpande has voiced dissatisfaction with being labeled as a champion for disadvantaged women. It is a testament to her that some critics recognize her for who she is.

To summarize, Deshpande's feminine characters effectively portray woman psychology. Additionally, she discusses the psychology of men, particularly that of Hindu husbands. The novel effectively conveys emotions such as love, anger, passion, pleasure, agony, suffering, and desire. Shashi Deshpande wants to portray strong, sensible women in her novels. Like males, women should have full autonomy, including all of its means and acknowledgment. In politics, as well as other areas of society, they defend women's rights. They emphasize how well-liked women are by the general population. A quick look at Shashi Deshpande's writings shows that she has improved women's standing. She firmly believes that males and females are equal. She believes that both the development of the nation as a whole and the well-being of both sexes depend on a peaceful society where men and women stay together.

References:

- Bala, Suman: *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, New Delhi; Khosla Publishing House 2001, Page No. 23.
- Deshpande, Shashi: *The Dark Holds No Terror*, New Delhi; Penguin Books (1990), Page No. 168-169.



Blue Ava Ford Publications

International Journal of Trends in English Language and Literature (IJTELL)

An International Peer-Reviewed English Journal; ISSN:2582-8487

Impact Factor: 8.02 (SJIF); www.ijtell.com Volume-6, Issue-1; Jan-Mar (2025)

Smriti, Manu: *The Laws of Manu* ed. Wikipedia. org/wiki/manusmriti.web. Page No. 40.

Deshpande, Shashi: *Small Remedies*, New Delhi; Penguin Books (2000), Page No.

https://www.academia.edu/29166247/_EMPOWERMENT_OF_...