
Examining Realism and Societal Dynamics in Selected Novels of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract

This research investigates the literary corpus of Shashi Deshpande, employing a qualitative and analytical approach. The primary focus lies on seven of her novels: "That Long Silence," "The Dark Holds No Terrors," "Roots and Shadows," "A Matter of Time," "The Binding Vine," "Little Remedies," and "Moving On." These works serve as the foundation for an examination of themes within contemporary Indian society, specifically with the aim of examining how her novels depict the interplay between literary realism, social dynamics, and the evolving nature of the family unit. The research is further enriched by consulting secondary sources, including scholarly articles and books, to provide a comprehensive context. Deshpande's portrayal extends beyond mere social critique. The study delves into how she addresses the challenges faced by women and children within the family structure, without advocating for its dismantling. By integrating Max Weber's perspectives on modernity within the Indian context, the research seeks to illuminate the internal struggles of her characters as they navigate the tensions between tradition and progress. The analysis reveals a critical exploration of persistent societal issues in India. Deshpande's characters serve as conduits to highlight often-overlooked societal problems, actively seeking solutions within a framework that acknowledges both cultural heritage and individual agency. Notably, a thematic shift is observed across Deshpande's works. Her earlier novels tend to focus on gender and the quest for personal autonomy, while her later tetralogy explores the transcendence of societal limitations by characters who strive to build strong and enduring familial foundations. By analyzing these trends, the study identifies common obstacles faced by urban middle-class families in India. Ultimately, it argues for the necessity of dismantling structures of injustice and oppression as a crucial step towards achieving a more just and equitable modern society. Furthermore, the research posits the creation of new social frameworks that dismantle traditional barriers and foster social cohesion as a potential path towards progress.

Keywords: Feminist Consciousness, Modernity, Patriarchy, Realism,

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Introduction

Shashi Deshpande's novels give a fascinating look into the minds of well-educated, middle-class Indian women who live in modern cities and find themselves at a crossroads between modernity and tradition. Her female protagonists want to change the way things are, but they do so within the current system. People are hesitant to change their traditional responsibilities. With the security of their marriages, all they want to do is live honourably and with pride. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, represents self-sacrifice driven by the need to create an identity valued by a patriarchal society. She tries very hard to be the ideal woman and mother, but the result is that she is lonely and isolated. Jaya is Weber's "modern man," who is always on his own but eventually grows weary of having so many options available to him. *Economics and Society* (1978) presents Weber's concept of social action, which connects the subject of modernization with the idea of tradition. Past, present, and future social actions may interact and have an effect on one another. Consequently, other people's actions have brought about this change. Participating in a social activity necessitates the presence of a second person and his response. As a result, acting alone is socially impossible. Consequently, there is the possibility of social action if there is another human being whose activity or behaviour is motivating the individual to act in a specific manner.

Max Weber, a prominent modern intellectual, associated the emergence of modernity with the advancement of scientific literacy and logical thinking and believes that present-day society is characterized by spontaneous interactions among its individuals rather than a conventional social framework. Consequently, the contemporary era has created space for a diverse array of human expression within the framework of interpersonal relationships. He perceived the modern era as providing "fresh possibilities for the manifestation of human subjectivity." Weber succinctly characterises the distinct array of issues in the current world as "rationality" (Rundell, 15). Weber contends that the concept of modernity is characterised by the belief that reason and scientific doctrine are capable of providing comprehensive explanations for all phenomena. Therefore, when viewed from the perspective of modernism, faith-based worldviews seem outdated and characterised by irrational beliefs.

Deshpande's protagonists typically struggle with an internal conflict between conforming to the status quo and breaking free. Ancient men regarded fate as inevitable, whereas contemporary men consider it to be a matter of chance or choice. According to Weber, the central idea of modernity is the conviction that scientific, political, and economic activities may revitalise the human situation. This necessitates rejecting the fatalistic perspective that

dictates the fate of all events in the world. Weber argues that bringing about change is possible, albeit complex and time-consuming. Borrowing from elsewhere can also benefit society. Author Shashi Deshpande has an intimate understanding of the complexities plaguing modern Indian society. The less fortunate in our society should not overlook the promise of modernity. Hence, some adjustments are necessary to fully appreciate the benefits of our modern age.

Shashi Deshpande paints a very standard picture of Hindu-Indian culture. The majority of her books share a common theme. Deshpande's female protagonists encounter the same obstacles as numerous women in the United States and Europe in their pursuit of intellectual equality with men. Patriarchy is on full display in *The Binding Vine*, with its emphasis on male superiority and strict social order. Men predominate in *Mira*, *Kalpana*, and *Urmila*, among other fields. Deshpande portrays resolute male protagonists who, despite their criminal pasts, are receiving increasingly more opportunities for freedom. Pravakar, one of the male abusers, rapes Kalpana, a relative of his own, causing her to lose her memories and fall into a coma. He gets off easy so that society can punish him severely. Their marriage ends in tragedy when Sulu, his wife, kills herself rather than face the stigma she feels she deserves because of the occurrence. However, Mira, the narrator's mother-in-law, passes away during labour and delivery. We can assure men like Pravakar and Mira's spouse that they are living well and greatly benefiting from the labours of women like Kalpana, Sulu, and Mira. The researcher has employed the term "Waltz" metaphorically.

When it comes to domestic violence, partners and family members often resort to both psychological and physical forms of abuse. The conditions in which they live are deplorable. In childbirth, Kishor loses Mira, one of the victims. Because of the relationship's controlling nature, she ends up on the receiving end of the abuse because of the controlling nature of the relationship. The man she married, though, had no such remorse. The husband and wife have a rocky relationship. Despite her reluctance, she feels compelled to do so. Generally speaking, males in traditional societies are privileged over their female counterparts. Instead of harsh punishment, they receive a second chance at life. Deshpande has thus depicted a traditional Hindu culture with a very bleak outlook on the status of women. She has zeroed in on male dominance, which has historically served to silence women. Women have always kept their feelings to themselves and remained silent for the sake of culture and society.

Shashi Deshpande explores the contemporary literary landscape, focusing on the internal conflicts that her protagonists face when navigating societal expectations. Her characters grapple with the tension between conformity and individual freedom throughout her work,

reflecting a broader shift away from fatalistic views of fate and towards a belief that changes and choices are possible in the modern era. She demonstrates an intimate understanding of the complexities within modern Indian society, emphasising that the promise of modernity should extend to all segments of society, including the less fortunate. In her portrayal of Deshpande's traditional Hindu culture, she emphasises the historical dominance of men and the silencing of women's voices for the sake of social norms.

Deshpande's narrative focus aims to question society's standards and enrich her literary discourse with a deep texture, therefore providing a more nuanced knowledge of the complexities of the feminine experience. Her literary contributions go beyond simple critical evaluation. They serve as channels for hope and resilience, presenting glimpses of promise that encourage the possibility of questioning and overturning established societal structures. Therefore, Deshpande's novels are significant contributions to the current Indian literary scene, providing essential insights into the complex realities of women's lives and pushing the conversation towards possible societal changes.

Research Methodology

The present study is a qualitative study that uses both primary and secondary sources of data to discuss and analyse Shashi Deshpande's novels. To ensure authenticity and logicity in our research, we used her original novels, available both online and offline, as our primary data sources. Additionally, a variety of analytical textbooks, journals, and periodicals, as well as critical research papers relating to the theme raised in this paper, have been used as secondary sources of data for this study, which is an extensive academic effort of interpreting and analysing ideas proposed by several scholars to verify the researcher's hypotheses, perceptions, and ideas. This research will rely on in-depth readings of Shashi Deshpande's novels, allowing for an acute interpretation that will delve deeper into the meaning and reality of her literary work. The study will also consider how the novelist's works represent modernity in Indian fiction writing in terms of feminism and male-female relationships. Research has identified the typical challenges faced by metropolitan middle-class families. To create a modern society, it is necessary to do away with all types of inequality and oppression. The research focuses on paving the way for a new social order by breaking down old barriers and encouraging mutual respect and understanding among people.

The Objective of the Study

This study will investigate modernity from the perspectives of history, society, and realism. We examine the barriers to social change in India and uncover the forces that promote or facilitate change. Shashi Deshpande's novels explore some of the societal issues that have arisen in modern times. There is an in-depth analysis of both Deshpande's solution and Indian society's response to it. The text provides an in-depth critical analysis of issues surrounding women's freedom and assertiveness. There is no shortage of obstacles that Indian women still confront in today's society. This research is naturally focused on the social perspective on women, particularly from a male perspective. This research provides a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of that mindset.

Review of Literature

Using Max Weber's theory of social connections and Friedric Jameson's concept of modernity, we can gain a fruitful understanding of Shashi Deshpande and her works. Deshpande's protagonists and antagonists often find themselves in peril because they dare to question established norms and beliefs. Yet, according to Friedric Jameson, modernity is merely the next cultural stage in history. Just like the best historical fiction, it unearths long-buried realities. Contemporary writers immerse themselves in their historical contexts, offering a unique viewpoint or crafting characters in reaction to specific events. Notwithstanding its ideological baggage, Jameson thinks the term "modernity" is useful as a cliché when applied just to the past in order to generate alternative historical narratives. While considering the present's ontological status, it is helpful to dismiss "the modern" as a two-dimensional notion with past and future connotations. As a result, a semantic force field that typically only refers to the pre-modern era steadily relegates the term "postmodern" to its confines, losing its predictive power. It is impossible to think of or even imagine radical alternatives or systematic alterations within the bounds of the "modern" conceptual framework (Jameson 214–215). Because of modernity, many people's worldviews have changed a lot from what they used to be. Also, it spreads a novel model of interpersonal interaction. It affects every facet of society, from the economy to politics. Modernity reinterprets the meaning of human beings. Jameson goes even further to say that modernity is not a philosophical term but rather a category of stories. Modernism, whether ultimately acknowledged or rejected, is a periodizing term that each modernist work of literature presents to us as both itself and an allegory of the modern as such (35).

Shashi Deshpande's novels demonstrate, in a sense, how she gets caught up in the larger historical circumstances. In *That Long Silence*, she discusses the impact of Gandhianism on her

life. Her tales' protagonists span three or four generations as they try to make a difference. Over time, each culture will undergo changes. There are new overlords in town, and they bring with them new laws and restrictions. Over the years, a growing number of schools have opened. Women are also benefiting from the rising tide of literacy and education. Many people now live in metropolitan areas as a direct result of industrialization, while rural areas are feeling the effects of population growth and land reforms. Both unemployment and the intense rivalry for available positions have recently emerged as serious issues. The people who are now in terrible conditions are making every effort to ensure their survival. After realising that nothing would change unless modern Indian women took action, they defied the patriarchal system and stepped out of their comfortable confines. They try to rethink their place in the family dynamic and traditional values, and they conclude that "new relationships replace old, that's all" (*Roots and Shadows*, 14). A new facet of modernity has emerged from this critical examination of the established social order. Shashi Deshpande's writings frequently focus on the difficulties of being a woman. In this respect, every one of Deshpande's protagonists is a rebel. People naturally take sides in societal conflicts or familial strife. They also reimagine their place in the world. In doing so, they give fresh significance to the lives of women beyond the traditional roles of daughter, wife, and mother.

Deshpande gives a subtle nod of respect to the institutions of religion and government that help maintain the status quo, most notably in her book, *A Matter of Time*. Gopal, the protagonist, scatters his wife Sumitra's ashes in the Alaknanda River, only one of many allusions to the Geeta, the Upanishads, Meerabai, Tukaram, etc. This is a really significant development, given that it came from a man who had just suddenly abandoned his wife.

Whereas the rebels in Shashi Deshpande's novels often waste their wealth, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* respects Akka's wishes by putting them to good use. She pays for Mini's wedding as Akka requested, as well as Vithal's and Atya's needs for food and shelter, and then she sets aside the remaining to maximize the profit from the sale of the old house. So she doesn't try to escape her responsibilities to her biological family. Even after Naren's death ends her adulterous affair, she persists in focusing on her marriage to Jayant. Sarita, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, does not hide from her spouse or try to close the door on him. Similarly, Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, is a well-educated writer who nonetheless feels the effects of the brainwashing that women face from a young age. Her upbringing emphasized the importance of her spouse and children's happiness. Also, she has a better understanding of what constitutes feminine behaviour. So, she attempts to act like her husband's wife, who supports her husband's decisions without inquiry or debate. When her spouse encounters difficulties due to

his questionable behaviour, she recognises her own mistakes. After much thought, she decides to stop taking her husband's side quietly and instead speak up more. The novels of Shashi Deshpande show the efforts of at least three or four generations to effect change. Every culture transforms over time. There are now new overlords who have instituted their own laws and regulations. There are now many more universities and other educational facilities available. Women are also benefiting from the rising tide of literacy and education. Industrialization has forced many individuals to move to cities, while population growth and land reforms are making rural areas more turbulent. The unemployment rate and the level of competitiveness for available positions have both increased recently. Those who are unfortunate enough to have to endure these conditions are doing everything they can to improve their lot in life.

Modern Indian women felt an urgency to alter patriarchal society; therefore, they abandoned the traditional confines of femininity. When they reevaluate their positions within the family and strive to reframe their relationship with tradition, they realise that "new bonds replace old, that's all." (Roots and Shadows, 14) The questioning of the traditional social order reveals another aspect of modernity. Author Shashi Deshpande has written frequently about the challenges women face. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu reveals the agony of being "female":

As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive (158).

Shashi Deshpande's women refuse to accept their role as victims and seek a new equilibrium in the power dynamic between the sexes. Of course, the Western concept of liberty is foreign to their way of thinking. In an effort to keep the peace at home, they would rather give in to their father's wishes. To keep the peace in the family, they encourage giving in rather than standing firm. Shashi Deshpande has highlighted the significance of the current era in relation to her new social standing. Since she identified so strongly with the female protagonists, she gave them greater screen time. She believes she understands women's emotions and the current climate in India. Her novels primarily draw their central themes and dilemmas from women trapped in the turmoil of a conventional society undergoing a radical transformation into an unorthodox one. She follows the stresses that the Indian lady faces as she navigates a changing society (Singh 50).

B.K. Das discusses the novel *That Long Silence* in light of the recent reader response in *Recent Indian Fiction*, edited by R.S. Pathaka. Similarly, in *Women in Marriage: Novels of Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande*, T. Ashoka Rani explores the central concepts of

Deshpande's novels and their literary significance, while the interviews featured in the volume provide insight into the novelist's thoughts and creative process. T. Ashoka Rani discusses the main ideas of Deshpande's novels and their literary value, while the interviews included in the volume shed light on the mind and art of the novelist in her own words. *The anthology Women and Literature (1995)* features brief mentions of *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* by G. D. Barche, M. Rajeshwar, and Seema Suneel. In the collection *Shifting Faces of Women in Indian Writing in English Literature*, edited by M.G. Khan and A.S. Khan (1995), Adesh Pal writes about the author's ego-self-crisis in Shashi Deshpande's first three novels.

In Shashi Deshpande's *Heroines: Prisoners by Choice?*, Khan (1998) argues that her heroines, unlike most male characters, are not well-adjusted because they are unable to accept reality through introspection and antagonistic thinking. Khan (1998) argues that, unlike most of the male characters, her heroines are not well-adjusted because they are unable to accept reality through introspection and antagonistic thinking. In her book *Three Famous Indian Women Novelists: Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, and Nityanandan (2000)*, she makes an effort to analyse the female protagonists of these three authors' works. It's a story in which women are no longer passive observers but active participants. Despite writing within the same time period, these three women novelists exhibit striking differences from each other. When they first showed up here, they had an uncanny knack for getting inside people's heads.

Ranganathan (2009), reflecting on Shashi Deshpande's three major novels, tries to show that Indian feminism, as shown in Indian fiction, is its own phenomenon, separate from and superior to western feminism. To this end, she has written a paper titled *Indian Woman at the Cross Roads: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Heroines*, in which she attempts to criticise the main female characters in three of Shashi Deshpande's novels: *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence*. All of Shashi Deshpande's novels objectify new feminine subjective experiences through a gynocentric perspective.

Deshpande demonstrates how puritans attempt to impede progressivism's advancement. By utilizing intertextuality, she sheds light on the underrepresented history of women. Arundhati Roy views intertextuality as a tool for highlighting a bleak and decaying reality. In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande expresses her views on women's liberation and individual liberty from the perspective of the story's narrator, Urmi. Deshpande, a well-respected realism author, has attempted to paint an accurate portrait of her modern patriarchal culture and its treatment of women. Urmi, despite her education, is dissatisfied with life in a patriarchal society where only men have liberties and women have none. Without basic rights, men force women to live in

substandard environments and perform tasks they desire. The men in their lives treat them like slaves, giving them little agency. Deshpande has skillfully demonstrated the traditional view of women in Indian Hindu society as inferior, subordinate, and submissive subjects of patriarchy who must be grateful to male power and abide within its limits. Traditional societies oppress and force women like Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai, Sulu, and even the intelligent Urmi to conform to male-created norms. Even now, they remain domestic slaves, bound to the confines of the home. A young girl named Kalpana attempts to defy the rules, but society's beatings render her comatose. She's going through mental and bodily anguish. Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law, has endured a great deal of hardship in her years on Earth. She gives up her life during labour in order to provide her loved ones with joy and success. When she needs to get her feelings out but can't find the words, she turns to poetry and journals. Writing is a form of self-expression for her. She possesses immense potential, yet her home and community stifle her.

Results

It is necessary to examine the myth of modernization from a practical perspective in order to bring about positive changes in society. So, some modifications are necessary to experience the thrill of modernity. In the novel "The Image of Woman", Sarabjit K. Sandhu makes a significant observation. Sarabjit K. Sandhu observes that Shashi Deshpande claims that she understands how women feel and India's temperament. Her novels' central conflicts and themes depict women caught in a society transitioning from the conventional to the unusual. She describes the struggles that Indian women confront in today's rapidly evolving society (Sandhu 13–15).

Shashi Deshpande has done something that no other novelist or short story writer has done: he has brought attention to a very important social problem. But the author's approach to social issues is shallow and not very original, and she doesn't offer any real solutions to the problems she brings up. Deshpande stresses that while the traditional generation gap still exists, there are signs that it is narrowing. The traditional bias towards having sons means that some families go to extreme measures when one of their sons dies. Some parents still try to impose their will on their children by setting strict guidelines for whom they should marry and what they should do for a living, despite the fact that they know the odds are stacked against them. Shashi Deshpande's canon is mostly made up of stories about middle-class women who have to balance traditional and modern roles. Women have done a lot of great things in higher education, learning languages, and professional fields like the media, academia, medicine, law, and so on. Several of them are also becoming singers, political leaders, and labour organizers. Women are exerting themselves in work and marital decisions as well.

Numerous characters in the works of Shashi Deshpande have married outside of their caste, language, and/or religion. Those with less intelligence, on the other hand, have little choice but to follow the norm. There are still numerous barriers in place that women must overcome. Many families still think it's best to put money aside for their son's college education while still planning for their daughter's dowry and wedding. Marriage within a person's caste, language, and religious group is still a requirement. Men often discourage women from pursuing certain careers. This is an example of a stumbling block for females who want to pursue careers in singing. Just a select few women are able to rise to the top of political parties and labour unions, notwithstanding their qualifications.

Deshpande's writings include female protagonists who challenge the norms of patriarchal society. They reject gender norms and challenge the traditional notion that men are superior. Therefore, they encounter significant challenges in their pursuit of securing their position in the world. The author shows how injustice and exploitation are still at the foundation of society, despite the rise of science and technology and the widespread adoption of democratic and socialist ideals. For Deshpande, there is no taboo around a discussion about women's sexuality. Deshpande's portrayals of independent women extend beyond the role of wives. Some women, like Indu, Madhu, and Jaya, don't believe in the possibility of loving only one man throughout their entire lives. Deshpande challenges the notion of gender equality. By avoiding settling down in a committed relationship, she has her female protagonists challenge conventional gender roles. She is challenging the unfairness of our society's double standards, which allow men to engage in extramarital affairs while viewing them as shameful for women. Men often find their wives' sexuality shocking and irritating, leading to the expectation that women should remain passive or project a passive image. For example, let's look at Jayant from *Roots and Shadows*. Despite the fact that she has gone to the extraordinary length of proposing, he finds his wife's outing as a lesbian repulsive. Because of this, she has to stifle her enthusiasm and keep a low profile. These kinds of events often lead women to feel ashamed of their sexuality and to resort to lying.

Shashi Deshpande's literary works provide a captivating examination of the complex social structures and their significant impact on the lives of women in modern-day India. Deshpande skillfully combines many themes, such as gender dynamics, socio-economic strata, and caste delineations, to provide a detailed portrayal of the complex obstacles faced by women within these societal structures. The careful examination of each character, along with their varied reactions to the challenges they face, adds a greater level of complexity to her analytical approach. This goes beyond making broad generalisations and allows for a more detailed understanding of the female experience.

Saikat Majumdar and Nancy Ellen Batty agree that Deshpande is a modernist writer. Majumdar sees a productive tension between Deshpande's social realism and modernism in the way she usually writes about the everyday things that happen in a family. This tension is shown by the way Deshpande breaks up the texture of her detached prose with fragmented expressions of subjectivity when she is under a lot of pressure. However, her metafiction has received inadequate attention from critics. Deshpande's feminist metanarratives bring together her long-held worries about women and her thoughts on how to write about them. This specific modernist trope, which usurps the (male) space of literature when discussing women's writing and allows the author to remain "masked and disguised" despite the full and public presentation of the female condition, still warrants recognition and further investigation.

Deshpande claims she is a staunch feminist. Each of her main characters is a mother juggling a career and raising a family. However, categorizing her feminism within the dominant western liberal tradition, which views the pursuit of economic parity as the benchmark for "progress," would be inappropriate. "It is not just absurd; it is a great injustice to all the activists in this country who, it sometimes seems, are the only people who care about dowry/rape/desertion/cruelty/slander victims," she writes, if feminism is about "forcing women to have careers, to be dissatisfied with being housewives, to desert husbands and families, and to rush for a divorce at the smallest pretext" ("Why I am a Feminist" 85). Yet, Deshpande seems more prepared to reveal the price paid than the price won when it comes to women's open and honest acknowledgement of sexual desire. The woman gives in to the man's mostly silent disapproval of her honest declaration of bodily desire in any situation where sex opens up a territory of prospective exploration and discovery for her. Emotions are acceptable, but when a woman expresses her desires, that's when a man sets boundaries. Having sexual fantasies outside of marriage and motherhood is punishable in these books. With just two examples, the point becomes quite clear. The first example is taken from *Little Remedies*. To her husband's question on their wedding night, "Are you afraid?" Madhu responds, "No." "It's OK, Som, really." "Yes, me too." These are the final words he hears before she sees "a look of remorse" on his face (230). Som's insistence that she admits to having sex with other men before they got married only made things worse. Mysteriously, Madhu seems to have enjoyed her first sexual experience. The stinging thrill remains in her mind long after a complete stranger tore her hymen.

Deshpande's feminist metanarratives focus extensively on retelling myths and folktales. It would be impossible to overestimate the significance of these myths and folktales, as well as their pervasive presence in traditional Indian culture. These are potent containment

methods used by the dominant (male, upper-caste) groups to maintain power, and they serve as vital locations of local knowledge in mass culture. Deshpande, the daughter of a famous Kannada writer who specialized in Sanskrit writings, is not only well-versed in the Vedas, epics, Puranas, and Upanishads, but also grasps the constitutive role of myths in regular Indian life. By rewriting these myths with women at the centre, we can counter the myths' idealised and static depiction of women and the patriarchy they uphold. As a result, Deshpande has several reimaginings of myth from a female perspective. The character of Mira in Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* is based on the sixteenth-century mystic poet and devotee of Lord Krishna, Mirabai; however, Deshpande's Mira is a real, flesh-and-blood person whose poetry deals with the material world rather than the spiritual. "According to the Buddha, desire is the root of all suffering, but cutting ties with love can be extremely difficult." A hidden fear lies at the core of its searing happiness" (136–37). Sumi, the protagonist of *A Matter of Time*, likes to imagine that Draupadi escaped her five husbands by disguising herself as a queen's maid. Deshpande's liberal humanist worldview, which would detect certain omissions and evasions in her research of the difficulties facing Indian women today, may have implications for radical feminism. We also need to critically analyse Deshpande's writings, in addition to these two examples.

Discussion

In Deshpande's novel *Roots and Shadows* "Roots" represents tradition, and "Shadows" represents culture on the edge. The main character, Indu, reflects on the mistreatment she and other women have experienced in this story. She's unhappy, stifled, and antsy inside, and she wants to break free emotionally. When her husband Naren questioned her about her constant struggle for womanhood, she thought back to the day she first recognized it and the harsh way society imposed this idea on her. The women leading roles in Deshpande are not stereotypical "Sita" figures (Prabhu & Shameem, 4569). They reject the norms set for them by their parents and decide to follow their own path. Every one of her novels delves into the mind of a woman or a girl. Apparently, she is eager to draw attention to the fact that women currently hold the position of second-in-command. Shashi Deshpande articulates her concept of the "new woman," one who has a renewed sense of self, brilliantly. Instead of running away, she fights to break out of her typical role as a wife and confront her husband head-on. Deshpande's writing frequently focuses on the bond between a father and a daughter. Indian society worships mothers as deities, but she does not place a high value on them. She shows several sides of the bond between a daughter and her mother.

Deshpande successfully conveys the mind and emotions of *Roots and Shadows*' main character, Indu. She's a revolutionary woman who seems to have been fighting authority ever since she was a little girl. She will not give in to Akka's bullying, even if he rules her house. Because she's married to Jayant, she has no intention of submitting to his will and treating him as a master puppeteer. The kind of life she's leading is beyond her comprehension. The protagonist's love-hate relationship in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* represents the tension between tradition and modernity. Although the novelist takes a more dispassionate view of the male-female dynamic, she does not hold men solely responsible for women's oppression. Deshpande, a realist author, relishes the opportunity to introduce fresh settings and broaden the narrative's scope, in which married couples enjoy a fulfilling and loving relationship. She embraces individuality and economic autonomy alongside traditional morals and up-to-date fashion. Deshpande argues that a quick transition to modernity could harm Indian women due to their fundamentally different culture and civilisation from those of the West. Deshpande is interested in the challenges, rights, and triumphs of women. Her "new women" have the courage to question and oppose the established norms. Her primary focus in life is equality between the sexes. Her protagonist is more fearless, independent, and defiant than the typical heroine. They have come to the conclusion that walking out will not resolve their issues.

All the women's silence is indicative of the despair and hopelessness they've come to experience. As a result of their inability to think critically and make decisions, they passively endure each day. This mentality, however, leads to their subordination and aids in the establishment of oppressive patriarchal tendencies. *That Long Silence* is a fictional examination of the internal and external conflicts faced by a contemporary Indian lady on her quest for independence, as well as the subsequent discovery of inner peace and acceptance that follow. It is an introspective look at the subtle oppression women face and the anguish of accepting one's identity, as seen through the novel's depiction of male-female relationships. Deshpande delves into the thoughts of modern middle-class women, contrasting egotism and emotional outbursts with forbearance and tolerance.

While Deshpande's novels focus mostly on female protagonists and their struggles for autonomy and recognition, they also explore the effects of the tension between traditional and modern values on interpersonal dynamics within families (Prabhu & Shameem, 4572). She has convincingly demonstrated that success in life depends on learning how to fit pieces together rather than merely accepting or rejecting what comes your way. Given the foundation of the family in shared values and traditions, the evolving status of women doesn't seem to pose a significant threat to this institution. Deshpande masterfully analyses the protagonist's

development from a rejection of tradition and attraction to modernity to a balanced embrace of both, demonstrating the power of shared values and beliefs to shape relationships across generations.

In *The Binding Vine*, female characters struggle against a patriarchal system that treats them unfairly. Shashi Deshpande has focused her writing on the problem of female anonymity in conservative societies. Modern Indian women still face subordination when it comes to the most fundamental aspects of human existence—love, marriage, and sex. The novelist aims to illuminate the road to fulfilment for the modern, liberated, educated, and shrewd working woman of the middle class. A woman's heightened sensitivity stands in stark contrast to her insensitive husband's cold pragmatism. You can interpret this book as a continuum of representations dealing with the binary opposition of men and women as objects. Culture and customs play a significant role in shaping individual identities. A woman has no independent identity; she exists solely in connection to a man (Rani, 125).

Deshpande's novels feature middle-class Indian women as protagonists, raised in a conservative society and engaged in an internal struggle for autonomy and self-determination. The novel *Roots and Shadows* portrays educated women as helpless against their conservative upbringing. Not just *Roots and Shadows*, but also other works by Shashi Deshpande, like *The Dark Holds No Tears* and *That Long Silence*, deal with the same issue; it is the root of all the prevalent difficulties of women. In *Roots and Shadows*, we get to know Indu, a woman who stands in for a group of contemporary educated women who are in close contact with society and struggling with pressing issues like love, sex, marriage, and personal resolutions. According to O.P. Bhatnagar, *Roots and Shadows* is about a woman's struggle to find her own identity and independence, which forces her into conflict with her family, the masculine world, and conventional society (27). In "Roots and Shadows," narrator Shashi Deshpande reflects on her own life through the eyes of the main character, Indu (Chugh, 35). The protagonist of Deshpande's second novel, *The Dark Holds No Tears*, is a successful professional lady who, through her quest to find herself, ends up discovering the latent power that is in all people. The work delves into both the myth of man's supremacy and the myth of woman as a paragon of morality. The novel follows Sarita, also known as Saru, as she confronts numerous challenges. In spite of her brother's objections, she matures and gets an education. As she progresses through her education, her capacity for reason and inquiry grows, and she matures into a sophisticated young woman.

In *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande, the narrator, a housewife and failed writer named Jaya, goes through a wide range of emotions, from moments of elation to periods of despair, from moments of being fully in the moment to moments of suppressing and hiding her feelings. Jaya's existence is depicted throughout the story as occurring in the background, beneath the surface of consciousness. She represents the archetypal urban middle-class lady who is exposed to liberal Western notions but nevertheless fights against the limits of male chauvinism. She's a writer who admires the idealized mythological heroines Sita and Draupadi, but who also finds inspiration in western and other modern ideals. She has persistently tried to make her home life with her husband more pleasant. She represents a modern woman, but she is just as deeply rooted in customs as Mohan, her traditional husband.

In *A Matter of Time*, Gopal abruptly and without explanation departs from his wife Sumi, leaving her to take care of their children and the household. After their attempts to bring Gopal back fail, she and her three young daughters bravely face the situation. In *Small Remedies*, Madhu, the mother of a teen-aged boy, suddenly recalls an incident of premarital sex she had when she was fifteen and relates it to her husband. Her husband does not take that lightly, so their relationship has become strained as a result. The loss of her only son adds to her suffering. Under the circumstances, Madhu cannot help but wait until time heals her wounds. The protagonist of *Moving On*, Rajani, is a widow in her early forties who is responsible for her own grown son and an adopted daughter. Her children pursue higher education elsewhere, leaving Madhu behind. Her friend Raja has proposed marriage for their future happiness and security. While neither of her kids object, she still chooses independence for herself and rejects their advances. Thus, her novels, except for two, *A Matter of Time* and *Moving On*, focus on reconciliation. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* implies that despite the husband's sadistic nature, he and his wife will reconcile once they discuss their issues. This is accomplished by implying that the husband is not the only one at fault. Both partners bear responsibility for issues in a marriage, and they must collaborate to find a solution.

Conclusion

The protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's novels exhibit numerous modernist characteristics and features, and the research work also argues that Deshpande discovers a form of agency that, although initially conceived to be a woman's bid for independence in a solitary setting, has a profound impact on society as a whole (Sharma, 207). Deshpande's novels provide an understanding of writing and art, as well as an exploration of the origins, manifestations, and subversions of the creative process in women. Her fictional works underscore the striking

contrast between traditional women, who prioritize marriage over career advancement, and modern women, who prioritize empowerment and personal opinion. In her works, women question the status quo of patriarchy. They reject categorization as stereotypical members of the male gender and challenge the dominant role that men are traditionally assumed to play. Hence, they have to fight all the time to prove their worth and find their place in the world. Deshpande demonstrates how inequality and exploitation persist in our society despite widespread claims of progress towards democracy and socialism. As its mediaeval forebear, capitalist society upholds patriarchy, or the idea that men are superior to women and women should be subservient to men. Such a culture expects women to keep a low profile. They should not make any audible expressions of speech or humor. They learn to be quiet and compliant, no matter what happens to them. Traditionally, a woman's shyness is one of her most endearing qualities. According to modern cultural norms, women have no place holding positions of authority, taking the lead, or even equaling or surpassing males.

Contemporary female protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's works grapple with the competing demands of tradition and progress. They have to struggle to balance their own desires with their responsibilities to their loved ones and the larger community. Her works focus on the emotional lives of women, their hopes and dreams, and their fight for equality in a patriarchal society. The rise of modern science, technology, nation-states, capitalism, and industrialism across societies signifies a paradigm change in human thinking and human relations that has led to unprecedented socio-economic-political conditions that have profoundly reorganised human life. To put it simply, modernity is the state of mind that has moved beyond tradition.

Middle-class women in urban environments face challenges in Shashi Deshpande's works, which underscore the enduring social constructs that restrict women's autonomy and decision-making power. Her novels point out that, despite the apparent modernity, the ultimate decision-making power regarding family planning still lies with the man, as illustrated by the example of Indu of *Roots and Shadows*, who desires a child but is unable to have one because of her husband's stance. In addition, her works demonstrate that challenges persist in their marital lives, indicating that the societal shift hasn't completely eradicated gender-related issues. Deshpande's novels explicitly confront and address societal issues, including the obstacles encountered by women in contemporary middle-class environments. Therefore, her literary works function as a thorough examination and evaluation of established social frameworks. Deshpande promotes a nuanced perspective on modernity, highlighting the importance of perceiving it as a chance for favourable transformation rather than a mere illusion. Furthermore, actively altering cultural norms is crucial to fully reap its benefits. In

addition, this paper examines Deshpande's exploration of social construct issues in her selected novels, concluding that these novels significantly contribute to our understanding of the current Indian literary scene.

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