

## Research Article

# Tradition and Modernity in the Select Novels on Shashi Deshpande

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## Abstract

Shashi Deshpande displays the possible ways, through which the women can escape from the stern nature of tradition. Jaya does that more effectively than Indu. She takes upper hand immediately after her husband's losing the prosperous job. This fact comes into being when she refuses to handover the key of the new apartment, but she does not dominate him too much. As a cunning modern woman, she knows that her too much of domination upon him will be dangerous to her survival in the family. At the same time she cannot hide the intention of being autonomous and having a respectable identity. This inner motive is common in both the protagonists. At the last part of the novels, they decide to quite the conjugal life as it seems to be the real obstacle for their emancipation. But they do not find in the attempts. Their separation from their respective husbands do not provide enough room to enter in to her aspired life. At last they discover the basic fact that familial relationships are the roots of every woman.

**Keywords:** Tradition, Modernity, Relationships, Survival

## Introduction

Shashi Deshpande's father played an important role in molding her mind and intellect. In her early life she cultivated the habit of reading and having the opportunity to read some of the best-known works. Her autobiographical comment proves this fact. She states: Shashi Deshpande provides a glimpse into the female psyche and deals with the full range of experience in her writing. She deals with the struggles and adjustment of the middle-class Indian woman who represent the overwhelming majority of Indian women. Her primary focus on the world of women, is the struggle of women in the context of modern Indian society. Shashi Deshpande, a modern feminist voice, has been celebrated for her realistic depiction of the Indian social ambience. As a feminist, she looks into women's lives and their predicaments. She is of the opinion that the contemporary Indian women struggle a lot due to the prevailing traditional concepts. Of them, marriage proves to be destructive in the lives of the modern Indian women, who are given good education for the last four decades. After the Britisher's political colonialism, a lot number of girls have been sent to many countries all over the world to obtain quality education. Further, the Indian universities are also preoccupied with providing good education to women. As a result of this, the women of the recent times begin to question the existing traditional values, which are not easy to break. A kind of tension is created when the rigid nature of society and the modern thoughts of the new Indian women collide with each other. The literary products, being the reflective tools, exhibit the existing conflict. The objective of this study is to expose the conflict between tradition and modernity in the Shashi

Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows*. Jaya and Indu, the respective protagonists of *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows* share a few common traits. Both of them have possessed good skill and they have hailed from a middle class family; they aspire to produce creative writings; they face a lot number of problems owing to the institution of marriage; they do not get proper emotional support from their respective husbands; they try to come out from the conjugal life; finally they realize the fact that the Indian women are destined to find happiness within the familial frameworks. Above all these the protagonists' constant clash with the rigid structures of the Indian tradition.

Shashi Deshpande portrays women who are sensitive and aware of social shortcomings of patriarchal society and they raise voice against their husband for freedom and independence. The author purposely portrays her heroines ideologically and economically independent because she is aware of the condition of economically dependent women on their men. She presents the women conflict between their family and professional life and finds them at a crossroad of tradition. Her women look for changes within the traditional and cultural norms and do not wish to re-define them. They want to make life possible to live with self-respect and dignity. Her women seek security in marriage and found it a substitute to slavery imposed by the parents. Her protagonists caught them between the duty to oneself and the family to the traditional role of a wife and do not accepts that they are dealt as an object of satisfaction. They fight and raise voice against their victimization and find a new place which is equal and balanced between the sexes. They believe in conventionality and compromise for the domestic harmony rather than revolt which became the reason of disturbance of the family relationship but Deshpande's heroines come out from this and express her problem and frustration.

*That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows* disseminate the typical behaviour of the modern thoughts of women, which are seemingly radical. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, is not able to be comfortable after her marriage with Mohan. Her life, according to her, is totally broken due to the institution of marriage, from which no woman in India can escape. She could predict her servitude even before her marriage. Still, she enters into it as she knows the reality. If a woman negates the institution of marriage, she will be considered trivial. The protagonist, being intimidated by the danger of the society's behaviour enters into the conjugal life, which is not constructive to her future, for the very concept of conjugal life reinforces the power of patriarchy and aggravates the mere survival of the second sex. Chandra Nisha Singh observes the prevailing danger of marriage for women:

The institution of marriage is the most glorified and sacrosanct pattern of existence socially, religiously and sexually; hence, it is treated as an ideal form for a civilized social organization and for the propagation of the species... The phallogocentric hold on the institution determines her code of behaviour and the boundaries of her space, exclusion and invisibility become strategic devices for patriarchy to foreground the image of ideal feminist. Patriarchy permits no alternatives to marriage and holds in pity and contempt those who attempt to thwart it.

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the fact that the Indian women's mental framework is not similar. As an unmarried girl, Jaya knows the real danger of marriage. Hence, she is hesitant for entering into the conjugal life. On the other hand, Indu, the protagonists of *Roots and Shadows*, assumes that her self – arranged love marriage will provide her liberty, but her marital life with Jayant does not fulfil her expectation. She offers love and service to him, but she is not able to get any kind of emotional support from him. Hence, mere disappointment prevails in her life. Both of the protagonists are peeved by the existing gender partiality. Their inner thoughts are replete with

modern thoughts, which urge them to move away from the conjugal life. At the meantime, they are intimidated by the stern nature of the traditional values.

The twentieth century women are given enough skills through their education. They want to exhibit the skill for getting enough popularity and economy, which can assert one's individual identity. Jaya and Indu manifest this typical behaviour of the twentieth century Indian women. These two are able to receive fame through their creative writings and their writing prompts them as professionals. Their earnings excel that of their men. They are proud of being the women of good economic status. Mohan and Jayant, being their conservative husbands, are peeved by the women's great success as professionals. So that they begin to chide the women whenever they get opportunities. Knowing the behavioural framework of their men, the two women tend to please their men as much as possible in many possible ways, but they are not able to continue it after a certain extent. They reveal their decision of quitting their jobs, for they know the ultimate reality of the Indian environment that the tradition will always overpower modernity and the tradition will never like a woman's surpassing their husband. Hence, the protagonists' quitting the jobs can be viewed as their meek acceptance of the notions of the tradition.

Shashi Deshpande is indignant that the men are not willing to give up the social status, which has come through their women's economic prosperity. On the other hand, they want to sustain the male – superiority concept in the familial structures. They are able to be successful in doing that for some extent, because the women's thoughts are replete with the stereotyped concepts of the society, which ensures the domination of men. This betokens the modern women's hesitation in questioning the tradition, which tends to protect patriarchy. Jaya plays second fiddle to her husband ignoring her education and economic status, for the society has taught her certain values. She dares not to transgress the border of women. She herself says, "I had learnt it at last – no questions, no retorts. Only silence". By using the third person narration the novelist informs the environment of her society: "She had grown up in the atmosphere where, it is taught that a husband is like a sheltering tree".

The protagonists of *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows* develop humility against the male – dominated society though they do not exhibit it categorically. Due to the unsatisfied existence with their respective husbands, Jaya and Indu find reassurance through some other men. Jaya's friendship with Kamat helps her to come up as a great writer. She likes the encouraging words of him. She remembers the words even after his death. His usual advice to her is, "Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, don't let it escape... take yourself seriously, woman". Indu goes a step further. She develops extra – marital relationship with Naren as she does not receive the expected love from Jayant, her husband. The interesting thing in her part is that she celebrates the extra – marital relationship instead of feeling sorry for it. She does not bother about the tradition, which will consider her act as trivial. On the contrary, she is not willing to wipe out the memory of her relationship with Naren. She feels, "I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought, and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately I went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don't need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado".

This passage asserts a modern woman's typical radical thoughts. Jaya and Indu, in the early part of the novels, tend to showcase their passive revolt without going beyond the familiar surroundings. These two women are indignant that Mohan and Jayant love the bodies of their respective wives and they never bother about the emotional sides of the women. Hence, Jaya and

Indu could feel only the physical intimacy with them and they regret the absence of emotional touch. Jaya explains the way, where in that happens between Mohan and her:

### **Conclusion**

Finally it must be said that the tradition and modernity are not always contrarian values as the self-proclaimed custodians of Indian culture would have us believe. While tradition has typically been the grounds to sustain the subordinate position of woman, economic modernization has ridden on the backs of women's body and their labor. It is in our ability to recognize and combat these covert forms of violence in both tradition and modernity that rests the freedom and dignity of women. The aggressive nature of Jaya and Indu is exhibited in the middle part of the novel. They try to repair the impact of the protest in the latter parts of the novels. Shashi Deshpande does not aspire her gender to be separated from their men, but she expects harmonious union of the two opposite genders. She manifests the ultimate reality that women do not receive fair treatment and their education and prosperous economy are not respected though they decorate their families in many aspects. As a feminist, Shashi Deshpande displays the possible ways, through which the women can escape from the stern nature of tradition. Jaya does that more effectively than Indu. She takes upper hand immediately after her husband's losing the prosperous job. This fact comes into being when she refuses to handover the key of the new apartment, but she does not dominate him too much. As a cunning modern woman, she knows that her too much of domination upon him will be dangerous to her survival in the family. At the same time she cannot hide the intention of being autonomous and having a respectable identity. This inner motive is common in both the protagonists. At the last part of the novels, they decide to quite the conjugal life as it seems to be the real obstacle for their emancipation. But they do not find in the attempts. Their separation from their respective husbands do not provide enough room to enter in to her aspired life. At last they discover the basic fact that familial relationships are the roots of every woman. Bhatnagar observes Shashi Deshpande's usual concept of reconciliation: "The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but harmony and understanding between two opposing ideas and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude". Thus the novels *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* display the novelist's realistic explications of husband – wife relationship.

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