

# Contemporary Realities of Urban Women and the Standard Patterns of Indian Society: A Study from the Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De

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## **Abstract:**

A close study of the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha de portrays the fate of women protagonists. Shashi depicts the suffering and familial relationships which are the burning problems of women's identity that are authentic. Traditions have the values of harmony and co-existence that symbolize the Indian way of life. Her characters reconcile themselves to the harsh realities and return with enlightenment and maturity. Shobha De's protagonists' revolt and shape their destiny by living for themselves and leaving no stone unturned to reach success. Women still face significant obstacles that men do not. Overcoming those obstacles requires a feminist perspective and feminism continues to be still relevant. The researcher would like to focus on the protagonists who tried to break the traditional code of conduct to obtain joy and liberation. Most of the women characters stood indomitable against the hegemonic forces and paid a heavy price for transgressing the laws. This paper reveals the character of women protagonists and how they were torn between a society, deep-rooted in traditional boundaries and modernity which gave rise to conflicts and confusion with the existing Indian values.

**Keywords:** Transgressing the laws, traditional code of conduct, enlightenment, conflicts, confusions, modernity

## **Introduction:**

The current research paper is a study of the representation of women and their struggles in Indian English novels in contemporary society. This article presents the facts related to the depiction of women characters by much acclaimed Indian novelists

Indian women novelists have played a vital role in the development of Indian English Fiction by adding the women's perspective in their writings. Earlier the work by women is undervalued due to patriarchal domination which led to the decline of women's literature. During the 19th century women actively participated in the freedom movement and actively contributed on the freedom struggle. Western feminism has contributed to the development of women in India.

## **Feminism:**

The themes of feminism have been used by many the authors like Nayantara Sahgal, Rama Mehta, and others. Writers like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai focused on culture and traditional values whereas Chitra Benerjee used realism as her theme of novels. While Shoba De

focused on patriarchal hegemony, Shashi Deshpande wrote on the conflict between tradition and modernity.

Based on the Indian texts and ancient manuscripts the Vedas and the epics are the part of Hindu discourse, women were placed in a respectful position during early Vedic period. During Dravidian, culture women were revered as well as empowered. Women's right to education was fully withdrawn with Manu's codification of the laws governing society and has gradually deteriorated the status of women. Self-sacrifice and the observation of social rituals for the welfare of the male members of their family has become the duty of woman. Patriarchal dominance and the worship of male deities became dominant. Male ego acquired control and predominance. All social, economic, cultural setup has submitted women to the place of complete demotion. Many women novelists came into view to bring out the societal prejudice, superstitious attitudes, and depraved traditions in the name of religion.

Major development has taken place with a women-cantered approach which has given an opportunity to the writers to express their interpretation on feminine

consciousness. Many novelists have come up with female bias to establish an identity, by exploring different psychological aspects of women. Many women writers wrote extensively to exert a place in society by emphasizing on disappointment, and injustice in the existing patriarchal system. Their writings are a reaction of their feelings, desires and aspirations which have been restrained from years along.

The trend of the post-colonial writers is to show their existence in the society by creating a resistance mode to establish their own identity. Now they have chosen topics of their own which are real and existed in the real-life situations that takes place every day somewhere or the other area. They are not conventional nor influenced by any folk tales, myths, or epics.

### **Shashi Deshpande:**

She is one of the most distinguished contemporary writers won the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *The Dark Hold No terror* in 1980 and *That Long Silence* in 1990 and won Padma Shri award in 2009. She highlights in her novels about the secondary status of the women, how they lack strong willingness and courage to fight the age-old traditions. Her female protagonists don't embody the conventional Sita and Savitri but are defiant, courageous, and self-reliant as they are realistic and credible.

Shashi Deshpande writes about women her struggles and miseries, anxieties and irritants, pains, and sufferings. Shashi Deshpande depicts a genuine picture of the middle-class educated women who are economically independent and who represents a greater chunk in this modern Indian society. Her protagonists remind that acclimatising to the situations and living without complaining is the life of the common middle-class women in India. They are

sandwiched in a society where they cannot deny social conventions or traditional morality, and are entangled by desires and ambitions, expectations depressions, amidst hate, oppression, alienation, and male chauvinism.

The life of Saru in 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' constantly suffers even though she becomes a popular doctor and economically independent. From her childhood she experiences injustice in the treatment of boy child and girl child in her own family by her mother who taunts her to be confined to the four walls and denies her marriage with Manohar. The male pride in Saru's life made her a victim in the hands of Manu as he teases and tortures her. Manu enjoys the pride of Saru's name in the mornings and torture's her at night by displaying his sexual sadism. Though Saru seeks so many ways to get rid of it she realizes and tries to compromise with reality as she cannot cross the traditional norms irrespective of her desire to prove her identity.

In 'Roots and Shadows' Indu feels that attaining her goal is hampered in the custody of akka and marries Jayant of her own choice. But later she recognizes that she has lost her independence after her marriage with Jayant. She always thinks about what Jayant likes and what he wants while she dresses also. She realizes that she had slowly submitted herself to Jayant. She thinks that it's not love but a kind of adjustment to avoid disputes in married life. She feels a sense of existential insecurity, she even tells and shares the same with Jayant where he never acknowledges her feelings and says it's nonsense. This makes her understand the futility in their married life and moves away from him. She submits herself to Naren and later suffers of her sin and contemplates over the reasons for surrendering herself. She goes back to Jayant to live with him expecting things will change and comes out of her

emotional confusion and decides to lead a meaningful life with him.

Jaya is the protagonist in the novel 'That Long Silence'. Her grandmother taught Jaya to act conveniently and behave more civilized. She even taught her to be skilled in cooking and to keep quiet when she disagrees with anything and should develop good relationships with in-laws and their family members. Jaya couldn't find happiness and freedom in her married life. Kusum's death made Jaya numb she stopped questioning herself who she was. Jaya self-examines and criticizes herself and recollects her frustrations, memories, disappointments in her married life. Her failure torments her as she stops writing as Mohan expects to follow her without question. Jaya opines that marriage subjugates and enslaves women. Jaya accepts Mohan when he writes back that he arrives shortly. Most of the women protagonists like Saru, Indu and Jaya in Shashi's novels go out of their homes from their husbands, crosses Laxmana Rekha to attain peace and freedom. But, experiencing life in a disgusting society, made them to realize that leading their lives with the despotic husbands by adjusting is far better than living alone. The protagonists, reconcile themselves to the realities in life and comes back with hope to lead their lives with their husbands by compromising and adjusting.

Finally, there is only one option left to all the women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande one is to rebel and lead their own lives rejecting the society and bearing all the blame on them and feel satisfied in what they choose and do and the other is to fully compromise and accept what is given by compromising without questioning. Women don't have many options to choose their lives when they face any differences and difficulties in life, society couldn't see women as par with men and cannot accept them when trying to break the set customs and traditions

even though the proposed customs and traditions hinder the growth and development in women's personal and professional lives.

### **Shobha De's protagonists:**

They stood as daring and courageous in establishing extramarital affairs to satisfy their natural urge and they didn't even hesitate to use sex as calculated approach to achieve their social and financial benefit.

In 'Starry Nights' Asha Rani was forced by her own mother to the hell-like world to do porn films to back up her family. she is exploited to have a career in the Bollywood and is deceived by Kishenbhai who has sex with her at the age of 15. He also sends a young Asha Rani to sleep with various producers. The novel also highlights the role of women in deteriorating women's lives. It also speaks about the struggle and survival of women in the society.

'Socialite Evenings' speaks about of women's revolt against the patriarchal society and its characteristics. Women in India have an age-old history of agony women are adored till they admit exploitation and suffering but when they lose the capacity to bear silently and question the existing pattern, she becomes a rebel, deceitful and traitorous. Shobha De's 'Socialite Evenings' And 'Second Thoughts' portray the women protagonists like Karuna, Anjali, and Ritu who break the social norms and runs for liberty and identity in society. Karuna is rebellious from schooling, though her parents oppose modelling she chooses it as her career and succeeds in it. She marries her senior from her college who is authoritative and orthodox. Her husband makes her marital life empty, meaningless, and boring his thoughts about women are traditional which made him to take divorce from her. Karuna attains success fame in her profession, she receives many marriage proposals, but she simply refuses as her

significances have altered. “It wasn’t money or success she was looking forward to, but it is the freedom to do, what she wants.

Anjali, Karuna’s friend is not happy with her married life, her husband torments her a lot. She divorces her first husband Abe on account of a loveless and disappointed married life. Her second marriage to Kumar, a homosexual also is equally futile. Anjali finally seeks refuge in spirituality and faith to find respite from her tedious life. Moved away from two unsuccessful marriages, Ritu commits suicide it’s a lesson for all the generations who takes life for granted.

### **Conclusion:**

Shobha De’s protagonists who emerged as new women or Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists who continued their lives by enlightenment and adjustment whoever they are whether literates or illiterates, employed or housewives, upper caste, or lower caste the plight of the women remained the same. Initially, the society didn’t have the traditions and the gender inequalities, but they were framed by the ruling male authority and started executing for ages. Even though women break the rules and lead their lives according to their wishes and desires in an illusion of attaining equality par with men they could not survive in the male dominated society and have paid a heavy price for that. The patriarchal setup and their framed traditional society could not accept women who shattered the traditional principles as

men do. Society forbids, chastises, blames, ostracizes, condemns women for breaking the moral codes, and penalizes them. Their lives were torn between reality and illusion, tradition, and transition, and were in utter confusion admitting the social discrimination with sheer submission.

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