



The Evolution Of Gender Roles: A Study Of Shashi Deshpande's Novels On Indian Family Life

1st Author: Mr. Nakibur Rahman

Research Scholar, Humanities and Social Sciences, Assam Down Town University, Gauhati.

Email: nakibrn@gmail.com, Contact No: 9435067715

2nd Author: Dr. Sagarika Mahanta Das

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, adtu

Email: sagarika.mahanta@adtu.in, Contact No: 8134857329

Citation: Mr. Nakibur Rahman & Dr. Sagarika Mahanta Das, (2024), The Evolution Of Gender Roles: A Study Of Shashi Deshpande's Novels On Indian Family Life, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(1), 1310-1314
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.6204

ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is a renowned Indian novelist known for her insightful depictions of Indian culture and family life in most of her novels. Her works often explore the complexities of familial relationships, the status of women in Indian society, and the interplay between tradition and modernity. Deshpande's novels often explore the intricacies of family life in India, including the high expectations placed on individuals by their families. Conflicts arise when individuals struggle to balance personal aspirations with familial duties and traditions. Her female characters navigate the traditional roles assigned to them in Indian families. They face challenges related to societal expectations, gender discrimination, and the conflict between personal desires and familial responsibilities. Deshpande incorporates various cultural traditions and customs into her narratives, providing readers with insights into Indian rituals, festivals, and customs. These elements add depth to the cultural backdrop of her stories. Through her nuanced characters and compelling narratives, Deshpande offers readers a deep understanding of the intricacies of Indian society and family structures.

This qualitative study examines several facets of Indian culture and family in the works of well-known Indian author Shashi Deshpande. The study addresses the subjects of Indian culture, gender roles, and relationships in Indian families, as well as the effects of societal standards and cultural values on individuals. The study also highlights how women are portrayed and how they struggle against cultural norms and traditional roles of Indian society.

Key Words: Shashi Deshpande, Indian Culture, Family, Relationship etc.

1. Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is a prominent Indian author who is known for her deep exploration of Indian culture, especially the lives of Indian women, in her novels. Through her works, she provides a nuanced portrayal of the complexities within Indian society, highlighting the themes like tradition, gender roles, family dynamics, and societal expectations. Deshpande often explore the clash between traditional Indian values and modern influences. Her characters, especially women, grapple with societal expectations rooted in tradition while trying to navigate the changing dynamics of the modern world. This conflict between traditionalism and modernity is a recurring theme in her novels. In most of her novels, Deshpande's works extensively explore the roles and expectations placed upon women in Indian society. She portrays the challenges faced by women as they try to assert their independence, pursue education, and make choices beyond the confines of traditional gender roles. Her female characters are often strong-willed individuals who challenge societal norms. Many of Deshpande's characters undergo a crisis of identity, questioning their roles in society, their purpose, and their sense of self. This existential exploration adds depth to her portrayal of Indian culture, showcasing the internal struggles faced by individuals in a rapidly changing world. Deshpande's novels are often grounded in specific cultural contexts, depicting the language, customs, and traditions of the regions in which her stories are set. Her novels offer a rich and multifaceted depiction of Indian culture, capturing the

intricacies of societal norms, family dynamics, and individual struggles within the context of a changing India. Her work continues to be celebrated for its deep understanding of human emotions and the cultural milieu in which her characters exist.

Shashi Deshpande, an acclaimed Indian novelist, has often explored the intricacies of family life in her works. Her novels often portray the traditional roles of women within families. She examines how societal expectations and familial obligations shape a woman's identity. Her female protagonists struggle with balancing their personal aspirations and societal expectations, showcasing the challenges faced by many women in traditional Indian families. Deshpande explores the clash between generations, highlighting the differences in attitudes, values, and beliefs between older and younger family members. These conflicts often arise due to changing social norms and evolving worldviews, creating tension and misunderstandings within the family. Marital relationships are a central theme in many of Deshpande's novels. She delves into the complexities of marriages, portraying the struggles, compromises, and emotional complexities experienced by couples. Deshpande's characters often grapple with issues such as communication breakdown, infidelity, and the changing dynamics of love and companionship over the years. The relationships between parents and children are a rich source of exploration in Deshpande's works. She portrays the expectations parents have from their children and the pressure children feel to fulfil these expectations. These relationships are often depicted as a source of both support and conflict, showcasing the intricate emotional bonds within families. Deshpande frequently addresses the tension between traditional values and modern aspirations within families. Her characters navigate the fine line between preserving cultural traditions and embracing progressive ideas. This conflict often leads to internal and external challenges, highlighting the struggle to find a balance between tradition and modernity. Deshpande's novels are known for their deep emotional resonance. She skilfully portrays the emotional struggles faced by individuals within families, including themes of loss, grief, loneliness, and the search for emotional fulfilment. Many of Deshpande's female protagonists seek independence and autonomy within the confines of their families. They aspire to pursue their passions, education, or careers, often facing resistance from traditional family members. Deshpande explores the challenges these women encounter while striving for personal freedom and self-expression. Shashi Deshpande's novels provide nuanced insights into the dynamics of family life in India. Through her characters and their experiences, she offers a realistic portrayal of the joys, sorrows, conflicts, and resolutions that are a part of every family's journey.

1.1 Scope and Significance of the Study

The present research work "The Evolution of Gender Roles: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Novels on Indian Family Life" highlights on the exploration of the Indian culture and tradition in the novels of Deshpande. The selected novels of the author project the family life of Indian society, position and dignity of women, and a male dominating society in which the women have to struggle for existence. The study is very much useful for a society where women are kept aside and are treated as responsible for creating conflicts and breaking family bonds. The study would take into consideration the women characters and their role in families that keep silent and try to maintain family relationships intact. Many research scholars have tried to highlight, explore, and investigate the Indian culture and family dynamics in Shashi Deshpande's novels and attempted to make a thematic analysis still no one has taken into consideration the contribution of female characters to keep the family bond sustaining and resolving the conflict. There seems a gap in previous research on the themes of Shashi Deshpande which the researcher highlighted in this paper.

1.2 Limitation of the Study

The present research work "The Evolution of Gender Roles: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Novels on Indian Family Life" tries to evaluate Shashi Deshpande's a few selected novels. This study neither allows the inclusion of other literary genres nor studies the other novelists of Indian Literature in English. Only the selected novelist has been taken for the analysis and the study does not deal with any other issue/s in the selected novel apart from the perspective taken for research. The novels of Shashi Deshpande explore distinct ideologies and perspectives on Indian culture and family life that is highlighted in the study.

1.3 Review of Literature

A Lot of research work and studies have been conducted on the thematic, feminist, psychological, culture and familial components of Shashi Deshpande's works, but the previous study reveals that there are still many facets of Indian culture, family life and bonding that have not been covered and investigated. Certain topics are still untouched, despite the fact that some research works are highly significant since they broaden their perspective and take the initiative to include numerous themes on Indian culture and family life. As a result, the review of the subsequent works reveals that there is still a gap in the previously research conducted on the works of Shashi Deshpande.

Manpreet J. Singh's collection of essays *Male Image, Female Gaze: Men in Shashi Deshpande's Fiction* (2012) attempts to show how relationships need to be made more workable from a woman's point of view, by involving men in the process. According to Manpreet J. Singh, Deshpande's protagonists analyse the

destructive potential of inflexible male attitudes and therefore call for a mutual understanding on the foundation of love and respect.

Postcolonial aspects are probed in the novels of Deshpande by Mrinalini Sebastian in her book *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande in Postcolonial Arguments: the Enterprise of Reading Differently* (2000) in which the scholar conveniently ignores male characters and their views and says that the women characters of Deshpande make the hard struggle for their recognition as human beings.

While outlining the women in fictional works, Mukta Atrey and Vinay Kirpal, the authors of the book, *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of her Fiction* (2011), portray Deshpande's female characters as wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and others. The authors analyse various phases in the lives of Deshpande's female characters and try to probe into the fact that in patriarchal terms sexual violence against women is a means of subjugating or 'taming' the women into passivity.

N. Sethuraman in his article, "Silence, Surrender and Compromise?: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*" (2004), attempts to analyse female characters in the novel. He states that Deshpande's females prove them free from the social customs and traditions. They are independent of the restrictions imposed upon them by society, culture, nature, and family.

Nalinabh Tripathi in an article entitled "Gender Identity and Inner Space in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*" which appeared in *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande* (ed.) R S Pathak (1998) projects the deconstruction as well as reconstruction of gender roles. According to him, Deshpande's novels depict the post-modern dilemma of a woman who intends to abhor the attack on her individuality and identity.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Indian literature is known for its famed novelists like Shashi Deshpande. Many researchers have explored her works from the standpoint of topic and feminist concerns. Even though there has been a lot of research on Indian culture and family institutions, much more has to be done from other angles. The researcher believed it was crucial to have a complete understanding of the themes of family life, domestic issues, and the links that bind Indian culture in the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande because there is ample scope to explore a variety of themes related to Indian culture and family dynamics in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Very little research has been done on the contribution of major and minor characters in maintaining family unity. The reasons for keeping the family are revealed. It has been observed that the protagonists repeatedly come into conflict with their counterparts. This research tries to find out the Indian culture, family life and various household conflicts, the roles of the characters in them and the reasons behind the conflicts and how to resolve them to live a friendly life while maintaining family ties. The study would also discover how and why distressed women reconcile and keep the family bond intact despite various troubling experiences.

1.5 Hypothesis

Through an analysis of Shashi Deshpande's novels, this paper hypothesizes that the portrayal of gender roles in Indian family life has evolved over time, reflecting shifting societal norms, cultural influences, and individual agency. It proposes that Deshpande's narratives provide insights into the complexities of gender dynamics, illustrating how characters negotiate traditional expectations with modern aspirations, and how these negotiations contribute to the evolving landscape of gender roles in contemporary India.

2. Objectives of the Study

The researcher set out the following objectives of the study

- i. To examine the portrayal of gender roles in Shashi Deshpande's novels and analyze how they have evolved over time
- ii. To explore the cultural, social, and historical contexts within which Deshpande's characters navigate gender expectations in Indian family life
- iii. To investigate the impact of patriarchy, tradition, and modernity on the construction and negotiation of gender roles in Deshpande's works

3. Methodology

The novels of Shashi Deshpande often explore the lives of women in Indian society, their struggles, and their aspirations. When conducting research on Shashi Deshpande's novels, a systematic and structured methodology is crucial to ensure the study is comprehensive and insightful. The Study is qualitative research in its approach, as it allows for in-depth exploration of themes, characters, and contexts in Deshpande's novels. Both primary and secondary sources are used for conducting the research. Primary sources such as Deshpande's novels, interviews, and speeches. Secondary sources like critical essays, articles, and literary analyses.

3.1 Data Collection:

- Textual Analysis: Selected the novels of Shashi Deshpande and focused on her themes, characters, narrative techniques, and socio-cultural contexts.
- Interviews: Conducted interviews with research scholars, literary critics, or readers familiar with her works to gain unique insights.

3.2 Theoretical Framework:

Shashi Deshpande's works often explore the roles, challenges, and identities of women in Indian society. Feminist literary theory can help dissect the portrayal of female characters, their agency, and societal expectations related to gender. Considering the colonial history of India, Deshpande's novels can be analysed through a postcolonial lens. Psychoanalytic theories, particularly those of Freud and Lacan, can provide insights into the psychological motivations of Deshpande's characters. Her writing often reflects the socio-economic realities of contemporary India. Analysed her novels using the social realist framework, focusing on how she portrays the lives of ordinary people, social injustices, and class disparities.

4. Findings:

The seminar paper on "The Evolution of Gender Roles: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's Novels on Indian Family Life" reveals a rich tapestry of findings regarding the portrayal and evolution of gender roles in Indian society as depicted through Deshpande's narratives. Through an analysis of her novels, it becomes evident that there is a palpable shift from traditional to more modern gender roles, with female characters increasingly asserting their agency and challenging patriarchal norms. This evolution is not unilateral; it is accompanied by nuanced depictions of male characters navigating changing notions of masculinity. Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender with other social categories such as class, caste, and religion adds layers of complexity to characters' experiences and opportunities. Deshpande's narratives also highlight the impact of modernity and urbanization on gender dynamics, underscoring the relevance of her works for understanding contemporary Indian society. Despite strides towards more egalitarian roles, the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and the challenges women face in negotiating their identities within the family and society remain evident. Overall, Deshpande's novels offer profound insights into the complexities of gender dynamics and serve as poignant reflections on the evolving landscape of Indian family life.

a. Exploration of Indian Culture: Deshpande's novels are often deeply rooted in Indian culture, exploring the traditional values, customs, and societal expectations prevalent in Indian society. Her narratives provide a window into the intricacies of Indian family structures, rituals, and the dynamics between generations. In her novel "A Matter of Time", (1996) Deshpande exposes the reality of Indian culture in Indian families. She also describes the importance of culture followed by Indian women. Her novels emphasize the natural depiction of Indians and the culture of Indian life. In the novel, she used the Indian names and also the role of Indian middle class women through the character called Sumi. Deshpande's novel "The Dark Holds No Terror" (1980) also paints a realistic picture of the position of women in traditional Indian households. The work features a wide range of female characters and demonstrates their sufferings and enslavement as a result of being women in our society. In her novel "Roots and Shadows" (1983), Deshpande depicts Indian women are entangled in a contradictory situation like Indu's. Women are expected to stay silent in traditional societies; they are not allowed to speak up, move around freely, or consider dominance or victory. The women have to follow the traditional societal rules and regulations.

b. Familial Relationships: Family life and conflict is one of the dominating theme in Deshpande's novels. She portrays the nuances of relationships within families, highlighting the conflicts, misunderstandings, and emotional intricacies that often characterize Indian familial bonds. Deshpande's characters are well-developed and relatable, making her exploration of family life deeply empathetic. In almost all her novels, Deshpande explores the theme of family life their household conflicts and the societal norms that the women have to follow. Deshpande's novel "Dark Hold no Terrors" (1980) clearly showed that family institution began to disintegrate when a woman achieved greater economic or social status than her husband. The problem faced by Saru was the problem of many learned and professional women of our society. Indian society was still bound by tradition and superstitions.

c. Women's Issues and Empowerment: Deshpande is known for her strong female characters who navigate the challenges posed by societal norms and gender expectations. Her novels often focus on women's issues, including their roles in the family, their struggles for independence, and their quest for self-identity. Deshpande's portrayal of women reflects the changing roles of women in Indian society. Modern educated middle-class women who are focused on their careers and attentive to the shifting social and political climate are portrayed by Shashi Deshpande. She shows women advocating for themselves while playing the roles of wife, mother, and daughter. Taking care of a male and a female child is how Sarita depicts societal discrimination in Deshpande's "The Dark Holds No Terrors". She also paints a picture of spousal abuse and

the inferiority complex many men have when their wives succeed in college and the workforce. The novel explores the complex relationship between a mother and daughter, highlighting themes of identity, freedom, and the struggle for self-empowerment. The protagonist, Sarita, battles against the shadows of her past and societal expectations to assert her independence and identity. In "That Long Silence", Deshpande addresses the issues of marital discord, identity crisis, and the quest for self-discovery. The novel portrays the challenges faced by the female protagonist, Jaya, as she grapples with her role as a wife and mother while seeking fulfillment and empowerment beyond traditional family expectations. Indu in "Roots and Shadows" left her home in an effort to live independently, but she soon encountered the harsh realities of life. Despite being aware of her true identity, she cannot do anything about her family commitments. Indu takes on every situation with confidence, yet her fury cannot keep her from submitting to patriarchy. Most women don't even identify their own enslavement, thus Deshpande's characters stand out because they are able to comprehend it. They are conscious of their inner sorrows and strive to go past all obstacles. Sarita and Indu both make an effort to resist masculinity, but they ultimately come to the conclusion that this centuries-old custom can only be ended with the establishment of enlightened souls.

d. Critique of Patriarchy: Many of Deshpande's works critically examine the patriarchal structures within families and society. She questions traditional gender roles and highlights the limitations and constraints faced by women in a male-dominated society. Through her characters, Deshpande offers a critique of these power imbalances. Her novels provide a nuanced critique of patriarchy in Indian society. Through her characters and their experiences, she challenges traditional gender roles, societal expectations, and the limitations imposed on women. Her work contributes significantly to the feminist discourse by shedding light on the struggles of women in patriarchal societies and advocating for their empowerment and agency. Marriage is a central theme in many of Deshpande's works. She critiques the institution of marriage, often portraying it as a source of confinement for women. Traditional gender roles and expectations within marriages restrict women's freedom, leading to their subjugation. Deshpande questions these roles, portraying the emotional and psychological toll they take on her female characters.

5. Conclusion

This study of Shashi Deshpande's novels has shed light on the intricate evolution of gender roles within the context of Indian family life. One of the central themes that emerge from Deshpande's work is the tension between tradition and modernity. She skillfully navigates these opposing forces, illustrating how they shape and influence individuals within the familial setting. Through characters like Sarita, Jaya, and others, Deshpande highlights the struggles and aspirations of Indian women as they navigate changing social landscapes and confront patriarchal structures. Overall, this study underscores the significance of Deshpande's contribution to Indian literature, particularly in her exploration of gender roles and family dynamics. Her novels act as a social mirror, encouraging readers to consider the intricacies of gendered perspectives as well as the continuous struggle for empowerment and equality.

REFERENCES

1. Deshpande, Shashi. *The Dark Holds No Terror*. Vikas Publishing Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1980.
2. Deshpande, Shashi. *Roots and Shadows*. Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 1983.
3. Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*. New Delhi, Penguin, 1989.
4. Atrey, Mukta and Vinay Kirpal. *Shashi Deshpande: A Feminist Study of her Fiction*. B R Publishing House, Delhi. 1998.
5. Bala, Suman. *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. Khosla Publishing House, New Delhi, 2001, PP. 9-17.
6. Kamini, Dinesh. "Moving Out of the Cloistered Self: Shashi Deshpande's Protagonists." Jain and Amin, 1995, PP.196-20. Print.
7. Mala, R. "Sexual Predicament and Shashi Deshpande's Women." *Indian Women Novelists*, 1991, PP.50-59. Print.
8. Singh, Manpreet J. *Male Image, Female Gaze: Men in Shashi Deshpande's Fiction*. Jaipur, Rawat Publication, 2012.
9. Swain, S.P. "Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's Novels," *Contemporary Indian writing in English Critical Perceptions*, NDR Chandra (Ed.), Sarup & Sons, New Delhi, 2005.
10. Tripathi, Nalinabh. "Gender Identity and Inner Space in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*." New Delhi: The Creative Books, 1998.