

RESEARCH ARTICLE**THE DIALECTS OF EMOTION AND REASON IN THE WORKS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE DARK HOLDS NO TERROR**

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Abstract

Emotion and reason play a climacteric role in the novels of Shashi Deshpande, both in terms of theme and characterization. Her strong focus on the “woman question” may sometimes give the impression that she prioritizes women’s issues while side-lining men, but this is a misunderstanding. Her intention is not to diminish the male perspective, but rather to highlight the challenges and emotional depth of women’s lives. This paper seeks to examine how sense and sensibility, emotion and reason are reflected in various aspects of life as depicted in her works. From a biblical perspective, humanity was created in the image of God first man, then woman suggesting a sequential order that has often been interpreted as hierarchical. Meanwhile, Indian mythology presents varying and often contradictory views on the status of women, further complicating their societal role. The objective of this study is to analyse how gender is portrayed in Deshpande’s fiction and to question the stereotype that women are irrational or overly emotional. Her characters’ reveal that such assumptions are unfounded. To fully grasp her portrayal of feminine issues, one must consider the social, historical, cultural, and religious backdrop of Indian society, which deeply influences women’s experiences of fear, insecurity, and pain. Although Indian tradition often idealizes women as divine beings, in reality, society frequently fails to recognize them as equal human beings. Deshpande’s novels confront this contradiction and attempt to reframe the understanding of a woman’s place in both the private and public spheres.

Keywords: Sense, sensibility, tradition, Culture, women.**Introduction**

The marginalization of women and the persistent belief in their emotional and intellectual inferiority have remained critical issues in Indian society. These problems are not merely contemporary but are embedded deeply within cultural, religious, and social structures. Indian author Shashi Deshpande has been instrumental in challenging these constructs through her fiction. Her narratives provide women with a space to articulate their personal struggles and to assert themselves as individuals with agency. Deshpande's characters often confront oppressive traditions and question the roles assigned to them, thereby highlighting the silent suffering and resilience of women. For generations, Indian women have been socially and emotionally side-lined. This marginalization is not confined to social practices but is also embedded in the very language and communication systems we use. Language, as a vehicle of thought and culture, inherently

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carries social codes that reflect existing power structures. According to Aitchison and Wardaugh:

“linguistic patterns are influenced by variables such as gender, class, race, and culture. This influence contributes to the perpetuation of gender hierarchies, where women's voices are often silenced or devalued”. (Aitchison and Wardaugh, 1987).

Although both sexes form the foundation of human society, equality remains an unfulfilled promise. In settings where equality is presumed to be the norm, women are still treated as subordinate. Gender inequality is widespread and often normalized. Cultural conditioning and stereotypical expectations significantly shape communication patterns, with research showing that men and women use language differently due to societal expectations and role assignments (Heilman, 2012; Mahmud, 2015; Philips, 2005). These patterns serve to reinforce existing gender roles, further marginalizing women in both public and private spaces. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all citizens, irrespective of gender. However, in practice, a majority of women do not experience these rights. Patriarchal attitudes continue to dominate, with gender-based discrimination being widespread across all strata of society. There is a stark contrast between the ideals enshrined in legal documents and the everyday experiences of women. Society often adopts a hypocritical stance while it venerates women as divine in myth and ritual, it simultaneously condones their exploitation and suppression in real life. One of the more nuanced and complex forms of discrimination is the underestimation of women's intellectual capabilities. This form of neglect is deeply rooted in gender constructs. While the terms "sex" and "gender" are often used interchangeably in casual discourse, they refer to distinct concepts in academic literature. “Sex is a biological construct, determined by hormonal, genetic, and anatomical differences between males and females”. (Lindsey, 1997). “Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct, it refers to the meanings and roles that societies and individuals attach to the categories of male and female” (Eagly, 1987). Gender roles, as opposed to biological sex roles, are learned behaviours and attitudes deemed appropriate for individuals based on their perceived gender. These roles are not innate but are shaped by cultural, psychological, and social influences. According to Lipman-Blumen:

“gender roles encompass psychological traits, self-concepts, family expectations, professional responsibilities, and political participation. These socially constructed roles often restrict women's potential by confining them to narrowly defined spheres of action and influence”. (Lipman-Blumen, 1984).

To better understand the origins and perpetuation of gender roles, scholars have developed various theoretical models. Six predominant schools of thought biological, structural, functional, social learning, cognitive development, gender schema, and symbolic interactionist theories offer insights into the gender dynamics within societies. The biological theory argues that behavioural differences between men and women stem from innate biological differences (Cristen, 1995; Dobson, 1995; Maccony, 1966). This perspective, however, has been critiqued for ignoring the significant role of environment and socialization. The structural-functional approach suggests that gender-specific roles are essential for maintaining societal order and efficiency. According to theorists such as Eagly (1987), Parsons (1960), and Parsons and Bales (1955), assigning distinct roles to men and women helps preserve the social system. While this theory may explain traditional gender divisions, it often justifies and perpetuates inequality by treating these roles as natural and unchangeable. Other perspectives challenge this deterministic view. The social learning theory (Bandura,

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1977; Mischel, 1966) and the cognitive development theory (Baldwin, 1971; Kohlberg, 1966) argue that gender roles are not innate but learned through social interactions and reinforcements. These roles are established in childhood through processes of observation, imitation, and reward for gender-appropriate behaviour. Although both theories focus on developmental processes, they differ in their explanations of how gender identity is formed and internalized. Gender schema theory (Bem, 1988) combines aspects of both cognitive and social learning theories. It posits that individuals develop internalized frameworks or "schemas" that guide their understanding of gender-related information. These schemas shape not only behaviour but also perceptions of self and others, reinforcing gender stereotypes over time. The symbolic interactionist perspective offers perhaps the most dynamic understanding of gender. According to theorists such as Blumer (1969), Lipman (1984), and Mead (1964), gender is not a fixed identity but a social construction that evolves through interaction and interpretation. This theory argues that society continually reproduces and legitimizes gender roles through everyday practices and institutional mechanisms. Crucially, it also allows for the possibility of change, emphasizing that individuals' understanding of gender roles can shift based on new experiences and social contexts.

When literature and media are viewed as cultural mirrors, the representation of male and female characters becomes a site for reinforcing or challenging societal norms. These portrayals play a significant role in shaping public perception about gender. Religious ideologies have also played a significant part in institutionalizing gender roles. For instance, the ancient Hindu lawgiver Manu wrote that a woman should always remain under male supervision, first her father's, then her husband's, and finally her son's in old age. He denied women any right to independent existence. This ideology has contributed to the deep-rooted belief that women should be dependent and submissive, and it continues to influence gender roles across religious communities in India. Contemporary Indian women writers have played a vital role in exposing and critiquing these contradictions. Authors such as Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Gita Mehta, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, Manju Kapur, and Arundhati Roy have focused on women's issues, highlighting their psychological, social, and cultural struggles. Their literary works challenge the traditional narratives of femininity and offer nuanced portrayals of women's lives in contemporary Indian society. These writers not only illuminate the everyday challenges faced by women but also advocate for their recognition, equality, and empowerment.

Sense and Sensibility

This paper investigates a wide spectrum of feminist English literature, with particular emphasis on the works of Shashi Deshpande. Her writing is examined within the context of feminist thought and the ongoing evolution of women's roles in literature. Although female authors played a significant role in the development of modernism, the movement has often been perceived as male-dominated. As Dekavan notes:

“Despite the powerful presence of women writers in the founding of modernism and throughout its history, and despite their near-obsessive preoccupation with femininity in all modernists writing, the reactive misogyny so apparent in much male-authored modernism continues in many quarters to produce a sense of modernism as a masculine movement”.
(Devakan, 1999).

While women had long appeared as characters in plays, their presence as serious playwrights were largely absent until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Case, 1988). However, by the 1960s,

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women began gaining recognition in the field of playwriting. The emergence of second-wave feminism further amplified this visibility by reigniting focus on women's social and political roles. As Kachur observes, this feminist revival "reopened artistic avenues for women and redefined both the nature and artistic expressions of women's experiences" (Kachur,1991). Shashi Deshpande, is one such novelist associated with the feminist literature. In an interview with The Times of India dated July 22, 2001, she stated,

"I am a human being and write about other human beings who happen to be women. My narratives focus on the human condition, interpersonal dynamics, and the challenges individuals face in understanding their place within society".

Deshpande's fiction, rooted in realism, often explores the personal and social problems confronting women deemed with emotions and reality. Her stories deal with themes such as sexual violence within marriage, desire, rebellion against conventional norms, and the constraints of cultural stereotypes. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, she presents a vivid portrayal of the everyday struggles faced by Indian women. The protagonist, Sarita (Saru), is raised in a strict, traditional Hindu household, where she is subjected to a rigid framework of do's and don'ts from an early age. Deshpande has expressed her emotional connection to this novel, stating, "The Dark Holds No Terrors is, of all my novels, the one dearest to me." The novel addresses the emotional and psychological violence women face, particularly the suppression of their individuality and autonomy. The title metaphorically suggests the fear of the unknown, where darkness represents mystery and hidden trauma. Yet, as the narrative progresses, Saru gradually comes to realize that the real fear does not lie in darkness itself, but in her conditioned response to it. She eventually understands that the darkness she feared is not inherently terrifying. Through her exploration of such issues, Deshpande gives voice to the silent suffering of Indian women and critiques the societal norms that seek to confine them. Her work blurs the line between humanist and feminist literature, offering insight into gendered oppression while also emphasizing universal themes of identity, self-discovery, and emotional resilience. The protagonist of the fiction, Sarita, is a dignified and successful doctor in her professional world but a terrified and trapped animal in the patriarchal society. Saru is a humble, modest and educated girl but tamed and lacks confidence like a middle class woman who is cuffed with patriarchy. She has been at first discriminated by her mother on being the 'inferior' gender and then by her husband, Manohar (Manu) who is an English teacher in a small college. She turns out to be an anti-matriarch and yearns for her freedom by asserting her rigid dichotomy between father and mother. The setting of the plot also reflects the condition of individuals and environment, Deshpande paints it as: "The yard was bare as always, the ground beaten down to a smooth hardness, in which nothing grew, not even weeds. There had never been an attempt to grow anything, either" (Deshpande,1990, 1). Women and nature are taken merely as a tool in the hands of patriarchy for their own use. The Indian tradition believes that if a woman dies before her husband, she is fortunate to get the direct path of heaven. This myth is constructed to maintain the supremacy of patriarchy. In the opening chapter Deshpande delineates cultural ecofeminism as she quotes: "The tulsi had been the only spot of green. But that had gone as well. Of course, it had served its purpose. She had died before her husband. Wasn't that what all women prayed to the tulsi for" (1). "In Warren's own words, the boundary conditions specify that a feminist ethic must be an anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-naturist, and opposed to any 'ism' that presupposes or advances a logic of domination" (Warren,2000). Saru holds within her the consequences of gender discrimination, which come as a reaction to the patriarchal construct of society at large and her mother in particular. Her mother always reminds her

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that she is a dark-complexioned ugly girl. This creates an inferiority complex and bitterness in her. God has created the universe without any discrimination but man has structured the society with the establishment of binary oppositions to assert his superior role in society for exploiting the 'other'. These binary oppositions are: rich and poor, ugly and beautiful, fair and dark, white and black, man and woman. This internalized hatred and the cultural construction of beauty play a crucial role in the novel. Deshpande uses the natural element of 'sunlight' to reveal how nature and women are compared and cast into a negative role that could be noticed in the following quote, in an argument between Saru and her mother: "Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker. Who cares? We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married. I don't want to get married. Will you live with us all your life? Why not? You can't. And Dhruva? He's different. He's a boy" (45). Karla Armbruster rightly endorses Vera Norwood's views on feminism and explains that the ecofeminists who share the view of cultural and radical feminists "focus on women's 'physical' connection with the earth as a result of their menstrual cycle, pregnancy and childbirth" (Karla, 2010) to assert the connection and closeness of women to nature. Growing up and being beautiful have been synonymous for Sarita and she always dreams of it. But she feels disillusioned after experiencing her first puberty. Deshpande delineates the interconnection to draw focus on the far cry of oppression of women and nature: "Soon after my periods began...too frightful to be revealed to anyone, specially her...she told me what had happened and that I would bleed like this for years and years and years" (62). Adrienne Rich in *Woman Born* maintains the association of women with nature by critically analysing the birth and further development of a girl. She writes in this context: "...first knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, sensuality, mutuality" (Rich, 1995), taking origin from the mother and that this "earliest entrapment of one female body with another" (Rich, 102) forms the basis of girl's connection to the physical world. When Saru feels the strange sensation of first period she is frightful to tell her mother. The mother should have stood by her to console her mood swings and to make her accept the biological features of this stage but this is denied to Saru. She gives an abrupt and vague knowledge, only largely mixed with the sense of detachment, shame, rejection and taboo which brings forth her rage, guilt and hatred against the Indian patriarchy. During the days of her period she is behaved as the 'other', marginalized and inferior. Desai describes the socio-cultural structure of India and the psyche of woman through Saru:

"It was a torture. Not just the three days when I couldn't enter the kitchen or the puja room. Not just the sleeping on a straw mat covered with a thin sheet. Not just the feeling of being pariah, with my special cup and plate by my side in which I was served from a distance, for my touch was, it seemed, pollution. No, it was something different, much worse. A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same as my mother". (62)

One of the drawings of Renu, the daughter of Saru, in the novel has been unforgettable for Sarthe protagonist. She has drawn a painting with black crayons, sketching tall, straight and almost towering trees. It was a picture of thick forest with scarcely any gap between them and in the foreground a child is smirking. This piece of art perplexed Saru because a child at this stage is supposed to paint colourful flowers, sunny gardens and playing children. This painting could be decoded in multiple ways. On one hand, the girl in the picture could be inferred as Renu and thus she is smiling. The towering trees are her family members who used to be stubborn and busy in their profession and darkness makes them invisible, helping her to ignore her

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expectations from them. On the other hand, it could also mean that the family members are standing so close that they do not allow any space for individual members, creating frightening confinement and eventually the withdrawal and retreat make the child happy. Renu is the child who is unaware about the suffering of her mother in the dark so she is seen smiling in the picture. On the other hand, Saru can be inferred to be that child. She is smiling because the darkness allows her to escape from her past which keeps on haunting her. The trees are her parents and Dhruva and they are as tall as her life-long anguish and trauma, her smile in album and smirking child in painting are quiet similar. The trees could also be taken as a metaphor of her family, where the darkness is hovering over her. Renu sometimes stare at her critically observing her mother with a cold, objective and shrewd look. Saru is relieved that she knows nothing about what happens in the darkness of the night and so she is a smirking child in the painting. Thus the dark holds mysteries, horror of something unknown and inability to see things clearly from outside but it never inherits any literal terror in itself. Darkness in fact triggers to search for clear visibility. The novel displays the darkness of mind of all female characters due to patriarchy which loses its terror when Saru accepts the reality. "The failure of male stream eco-Marxist analysis has been its concentration on the internal contradictions of capitalism and the state to the exclusion of the other structures of oppression that interlock with them" (Mellor, 1997). Saru's successful decision to take admission in Medical College and be economically independent can be taken as her first attempt to revolt against her mother's callous attitude and prove her worth of living, defying the powerful patriarchal system. This attempt to attain autonomy and secure the love she was deprived of happens to be marriage. Manu seems to be the epitome of the ideal romantic hero and saviour, "It's my painful middle-class inhibitions making marriage open sesame of all enjoyment for me. It was insatiable, not for sex, but for love, of my being loved. Of my being wanted" (40). The initial years of her marriage resembled heaven on earth, in spite of smelling corridors, sealed-in odours, women with unfriendly eyes and men with lascivious stares. But this happiness was so evanescent that nothing was left except the darkness. The cause of this sudden tragic change in her life is not due to any tragic flaw of her but the success of Saru. One-day factory explosion poured in burnt mutilated bodies. The immensity of the catastrophe creates the horror and meaninglessness of feelings. Saru treated the affected patients. Soon her popularity and busy schedule started troubling her family. Deshpande exhibits ecofeminism by comparing the explosion of factory with the tragic turn of Saru's marital status that explores the true picture of patriarchy. The sexual sadism in her marriage again leads her to mental anguish and though her success has brought comfort and ease to her family, it creates a situation where Manohar feels as if he was almost ignored and others were jealous of her. His bitterness, jealousy and inferiority complex lead him to sexually harass Saru and she became a trapped and terrified animal in the hands of her saviour. Saru put her view of patriarchy:

"And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband a+b they told us in mathematics is equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible" (42).

Deshpande suggests fighting against all odds at the very early stage. Women should protest against dominancy at its very first attempt and not be silent about it. This silence is one of the major causes of suffering and subordination of women in the patriarchal system of India. Deshpande pens down her thought and observation and writes about Saru's conscience: I should have spoken about it the very first day. But I didn't.

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And each time it happens and I don't speak. I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. Maybe one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death. Perhaps the process has already begun and what I am is a creature only half alive. And it seems I can do nothing to save myself. (96) Saru's life with her children is consistently conditioned by her past. She has reminiscences about her childhood when she goes to her parents' house. She remembers the little needs of her children like seeing Renu off to school every morning and covering Abhi with a blanket every night. She takes the opportunity to be wanted, to make them realize her importance and in the process reinforce her indispensable identity. The frustration and depression in search of her identity force her to deny and forget all the bonds with her husband and children. It was the outcome of her past, reading the novel further unfolds Saru's subconscious mind. While participating in Madhav-Father talk, Saru feels 'disinherited', she couldn't believe her father is a sensitive man, "To her, he had always been a negative man, incapable of strong feeling" (30). Ammu's parents discriminated between the education of their son and daughter. Orthodoxy is so deep-rooted in Indian patriarchy and can be seen through Saru's observation also when her father and Madhav interact about his college: "He never took any interest in my school or college. He had left it all to her. And she never really cared. Not after Dhruva's death...I died long before I left home" (32). The pursuit of maintaining her identity on both the levels, professional as well as family, Saru embarks on a psychological journey which Deshpande describes as 'self-alienation' to 'self-assertion'.

Through effective characterization, Shashi Deshpande's novels show the changing status of women as they move from the periphery to the centre, emerging as the 'New Woman'. This new woman seems to be educated, independent, economically powerful and revolting against all the prejudices of gender constructions. By the end of the novel, Saru emerged as a self-assertive and courageous woman, "And, oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait, I'll be back as soon as I can" (221). Saru used to imagine a symbiotic relationship between her parents. Her father is seen as a silent, passive, reserved and withdrawn being but she interpreted him rightly as being content with a semblance of emptiness. She feels totally 'deserted' by looking at her home's bare yard where nothing has tried to be cultivated and appears as uninhabited. The darkness brings forth terror but also hope also for a new morning which connotes that the dark actually holds no terror. She had 'frozen' herself into an isolated suffering but she commits to break her silence and talk to Baba. Deshpande unveils Saru's psyche of 'To be or not to be' by maintaining the analogy between women and nature. It is interesting that she chooses Madhav over her Baba for sharing her pain because he seems to be affectionate with plants. He always wished to plant flowers but his father never allowed him because being a patriarch, he only liked to plant the vegetables which could be used in cooking. When Madhav gives her some seeds to identify them her observation draws our attention towards parallelism between the two who are discreetly hiding their identity, "She peered at the small dark seeds, almost as pathetic as new-borns, with microscopic bits of fluff on them. How could she guess? They were stubbornly discreet, hiding their identity from her" (45). The image of a 'new woman' searching for her identity in post-colonial India slowly emerges, but patriarchy is not at ease to accept this gradual change of the traditional roles of a husband and wife in a marital relationship. This anxiety and frustration is evident in Manu when he executes sadistic pressure over his wife. Saru recalls the conversation between Manu and his colleague's wife: "Yes, we're having a small holiday. Where? Down south. Ooty for few days, Bangalore and Mysore on the way. Lucky fellow. We've been dreaming of Matheran for years. Can't afford even that. If you had married a doctor the wife said tartly, You'd gone to Ooty too. Ooty? I'd go further... London. Paris. Rome. Geneva. We aren't in that class as yet.

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The man laughed, his wife laughed and the two of us laughed as well. And no mirth in any of us” (111). This incident infuriated Manu’s ego. That night Saru woke up to darkness, pain and panic. It was the second time she was feeling the monstrous assault of the horribly familiar body with hurting hands, savage teeth. Complete bewilderment paralyzed her. Like many other Indian mothers, she endures the repeated rape only for the sake of her children. She cannot let her children know the terror behind the darkness. Ironically marital rape or sexual assault on one’s wife, where she has been exploited both physically and mentally, is not considered as a crime in India. In the 1600s there was a statement on marital rape exemption by the Chief Justice in England who wrote, “a husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract, the wife hath given herself in kind unto the husband, whom she cannot retract” (Rath, 2008). In the 1970s women activists in America raised their voice against marital rape exemption clause and equal protection to women. Advancing well into the timeline, marital rape is still not an offence in India. Marriage is taken as an option to protect girls. This makes clear the execution of law which is either obscure or dependent on the interpretation of patriarchy. Education and economic independence are still a dream for most of the Indian girls because this gives them the strength to be heard, to maintain their dignity and respectability. However, it is craftily portrayed by Deshpande in the present novel to show this stigma is deep-rooted and affects both the educated and uneducated girl in the same manner. Saru recalls her grandmother while contemplating divorce. She had been deserted by her husband after a few years of marriage, leaving the young woman with two little daughters dependent on her father. She bears the burden of being unwanted and dependent but passively endures it believing that it was written on her forehead. Her grandmother resembles Nimi but Saru is not ready to accept this frame of mind. According to her, human nature should be changed with the passage of time which reminds us about the way of thinking of Ammu, “It was so much easier for women in those days to accept, not to struggle, because they believed there was nothing else for them. And they called that Fate. If only I could say that Will that help me to accept, to passively endure” (70). The novel suggests a counter-balance to the Indian woman by permitting her husband to wait until she arrives instead of slamming the door as by Ibsen’s Nora. Though critics would call Saru’s father ‘an old-fashioned’, traditional, stereotype, Deshpande has portrayed him as a realist. She advises that being an escapist is not a solution to a problem as one should realize one’s identity, accept it and follow the middle path whether it is patriarchal society or the stereotypical, blind-traditional prejudiced form of post-colonial India. The epigraph of the novel implies that Saru has to realize that she cannot always depend on someone or some institution for her happiness. Marriage is about understanding and mutual respect. The heroine is neither overtly traditional nor completely radical. She (essence of Indian women) finds a middle-path solution. She also negotiates her identity with her friends Smitha (home maker) and Nalu (independent) with proper sense and sensibility. Thus, she does not strictly adhere to conventional roles or societal expectations typically assigned to women, such as passive obedience or complete dedication to family and domestic life. At the same time, she is not entirely rebellious or revolutionary in her outlook; she does not reject all norms or seek to overturn the system entirely. Instead, she navigates a middle path embracing certain values from tradition while also asserting her individuality and independence. This kind of heroine is thoughtful and discerning, choosing which aspects of culture and progress align with her personal beliefs. Her strength lies in her ability to think critically and act authentically, making her relatable and realistic rather than an exaggerated symbol of either conformity or rebellion.

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Shashi Deshpande's novels offer a powerful exploration of the gendered realities women face in a patriarchal society. Through her female protagonists, she brings to light the psychological conflicts, sense and sensibility, societal pressures, and silent resistances that define women's everyday lives. Deshpande does not present her characters as perfect heroines or revolutionaries; rather, she portrays them as ordinary women engaged in an extraordinary struggle to assert their identity, dignity, and independence in a world that often seeks to silence or diminish them. Her work critiques the deeply ingrained gender stereotypes that confine women to domestic roles, restrict their professional growth, and judge their worth through the lens of traditional femininity. By highlighting these imbalances and the emotional and moral dilemmas that result from them, Deshpande compels readers to confront the injustices women endure not only at the hands of men but also through the expectations set by society at large. While her novels do not always offer solutions, they serve as essential interventions in the ongoing conversation about gender equality. They challenge readers to re-evaluate cultural norms, reimagine gender roles, and recognize the importance of giving women the space and freedom to live fully as human beings. In this way, Deshpande's literary contributions remain vital to feminist discourse and continue to inspire deeper reflections on the position of women in contemporary India.

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