

Subjugation to Celebration in the select novels of Shoba De and Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract:

Indian fiction in English has been enhanced by a few proficient women writers, including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayanatara Sahyagal, Attain Hosain, Santharamarau, Shashi Deshpande, and Shobha De. They encompass a women's point of view on society. They have illustrated Indian women, their battle, their misery, and their awkward position, keeping in view their picture and job, which the general public has made. Their central devotion comprises investigating the ethical quality of women characters and their battle with difficulties in making their personalities. Since the start of civilization, that has been a great effort to emancipate women from male oppression. In the past, the work of women authors has consistently been underestimated because of some patriarchal assumptions. Feminism is an expression of unjust treatment meted out to any woman. This research paper has thrown light on the realistic characters of the novelists Jaya and Karuna from *That Long Silence* and *Socialite Evenings*, respectively. It has shown the broad light on how they self-articulated themselves after a decade of silence.

Keywords: Feminism, Marital clutch, extramarital affairs, self-identity, rigid men, self-identity.

Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande:

Shashi Deshpande is an award-winning Indian Novelist. She is the second daughter of Shriranga. She was born in Karnataka and educated in Bombay and Bangalore. She published her first short stories in 1978 and her first novel, *The Dark Held No Terrors*, in 1980. She is a victor of the Sahitya Akademi Award. Her novels present a social world of many relationships. In her novels, men and women live together, journeying across life in different age groups, classes, and gendered roles.

Deshpande's deep instinctive insight into women's problems and dilemmas helps her draw a realistic portrait of a contemporary woman. She explores and interprets women's emotional reactions, spiritual responses, and predicaments with understanding. The chief supporter in her novels is female characters who constantly

search for meaning and value in life. In her novels, she presents a struggle of a woman who denies flowing along the current and refuses to submit herself. The woman emerging from such a situation is a defeated individual undergoing pain and suffering. Such characters exhibit a sense of diffidence due to their traumatic experiences, the collapse of one value system, and the absence of living values.

Shoba De:

Shobha De is one of the most absorbing novelists whose works are a shocking revelation of the film world. Her work *Socialite Evenings* (1989) examines how women break traditional norms and how society is westernized in the context of changing social values and customs. She has attracted much attention and recognition not only in India but all over the world as well. She has been regarded as "the high priestess of gossip and innuendo." She began her advent in the literary scene in 1989 with *Socialite Evenings*, *Starry Nights* (1991), *Sisters*, *Strange Obsession* (1992), *Sultry Days*, *Snapshots* (1994), and many more works which have created further in the Indian literary scene. She attempts to turn the pattern of displacement and marginalization upside down through her works. De raises a voice of protest against male dominance and constantly tries to shatter the patriarchal hegemony. She strives to undo the distorted image of a woman who cries for freedom and equality, which goes unheard in the patriarchal world; for this, she explores the world of urban women in India.

These two vibrant feminist writers have brought about many remarkable changes through their writing to society. Their characterization creates a clear image of women portrayed in their respective novels, bringing those laurels and labels as good feminist writers. Deshpande and De have brought in the women protagonists' proximity to their partners and the toxic beliefs they build within their relationship. Amidst their routine household chores, these protagonists have searched for the identities they lost after marriage, which results in the devastation of selfhood.

That Long Silence and Socialite Evenings

Jaya represents a modern young woman who is educated and aware, nevertheless unable to break free from the stranglehold of tradition. She is confronted with the fundamental problem of fixing her identity of recovering the 'self' from the role of daughter, wife, and mother. She offers us a glimpse into the lives of ostensibly content homemakers who are suppressed under the weight of male dominance. The novel *That Long Silence* is also self-centredness, the critical insight that Deshpande imparts through the protagonist, Jaya, is that women should accept their responsibility for what they are and see how much they have contributed to their victimization instead of blaming others. Only through self-analysis and self-understanding, vigilance, and courage; can they begin to change their lives.

The relationship between Jaya and Mohan:

It is conventional in Maharashtra to change the bride's name when she gets married, which means a change of identity.

Their name identifies one, and changing that name means changing their identity. When a magazine asked for the appraisal of Jaya, the protagonist, she could give only a few lines as her profile when she except what she thought were irrelevant facts. "Finally, when I had refined what I had thought were irrelevant facts, only these had remained: I was born. My Father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and did not let the third life." (43)

Even when she faces the problem of being a homemaker devoted to her husband and being a writer, she maintains herself by saying that she was the one who decided to stop with the two children. The mediocrity shown by her husband to her was a systematic process. He never minds showing interest in anything of no concern to him. Though they have been married for seventeen years with two children, they ought to have understood the couple for the outsiders. However, in reality, they were distinct persons. "A family somewhat like the one apprehended and conserved for posterity by the marketing visuals I so loved. But the actuality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman." (52)

Her exasperation at being neglected is reflected when she says, "Reconciled to failure?" However, she quickly says, "That seems cruel, but it is true" (101). Mohan, the husband of Jaya, has the slightest worry for the family. However, he presents himself that he is the perfect husband. He wants to offer his children what he did not get. He is intelligible about himself. "He

was a devoted son; he is a dutiful father, husband, brother" (79). Jaya gets defeated when he says, "It was for you and the children that I did this. I wanted you to have an ethical life. I wanted the children to have all those things I never had." (98)

Jaya's husband, Mohan, was that type of man, and he married her for his social improvement. Jaya had lost her patriarch at fifteen, and her brother regarded her as a burden, leading her to marry Mohan. Before her marriage, Jaya had been educated about the significance of the husband in a woman's life. Vanitamami tells her that their husband is a sheltering tree. Ramu kaka reminds her of the thing that the happiness of her husband and home depends entirely on her. When Jaya leaves her home after marriage, Dada advises her to "be good to Mohan." Jaya's brother brought Mohan money and gave him to Jaya, and she tried to be superior to him. This was the origination of Jaya's lifeless kind of married life.

Relationship between Jaya and Kamat:

Jaya and Mohan's sexual relationship is very mechanical, without any affection. Mohan's indifferent attitude towards her desire fills her with a sense of loneliness and disillusion. "But, lying there, my body still warm and throbbing from the contact with his, it had come to me in one awful moment- that I was alone. The contact, the coming together, had been not only momentary but wholly illusory. We had never come together; only our bodies had done that. I had begun to cry then, despairingly, silently, scared that I would

wake Mohan up, trying desperately to calm myself" (98). Their physical relationship always ends with Mohan questioning whether he has hurt her. She keeps quiet and cries silently. Her frustration is visible through her words. "We lived together, but there had been only emptiness between us" (185).

Jaya is attached to Kamat, a widower, who is Jaya's neighbor in Dadar. Kamat is an advertiser and lives alone above the apartment at Dadar. Their relationship cannot be stamped as an extramarital affair, but they share a fruitful relationship. "My relationships with this man...rejected to take any shape at all; it just slipped about, frighteningly fluid". (151). Jaya feels awkward when she sees Kamat cooking, but he does not. He has no reservations about doing "unmanly" things like cooking. In his presence, Jaya sheds the crippling silence she imposed on herself. She feels confident and comfortable in his company.

Consequently, she confides in his things. She would never dare mention it to Mohan. She gets from Kamat the best of her Father's concern and reassurance for her. With this man, I had not been a woman. I had been just me –Jaya. She acknowledged there had been a relief in our relationship I had never known in any other (153). Jaya leaves him at the time when he is dying. The best part of Mr. Kamat is that he sees her as an equal. He is altogether different from Mohan. While Mohan discourages Jaya from writing, Mr. Kamat introduces her to her lost self. Jaya sheds

her restraints in Kamat's presence, who gives her reassurance and comfort in a fatherly way. He advises Jaya to be honest with herself and realize her faults. When Jaya feels sad about her Father's death, she finds solace in Kamat's company. At that moment, she wants to respond to him with her body, but she immediately restrains herself so that she can safeguard her married life. She shares an intimate relationship with him; she responds to his touch, kiss, and embrace. He makes her acknowledge that it is a part of life. He says, "The relation of man to woman is so natural of one person to another" (153).

Thus, in the novel, Deshpande has conferred not as a woman who rises openly in the inception and later on reconciles to the situation but as a kind of woman who wants to revolt but ultimately does not. Her internal turmoil is so bitter that she cannot speak out and remains silent to avoid being frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her action in society. She is unable to unfold the truth. Her image becomes like a bird with wings; she realizes it can wing but does not. In the same way, Jaya is conscious of her abilities and knows that she can reveal them openly, but somehow, she does not. She always ensures silence, indicating that women's traditional roles still have primacy over all the newly acquired professional roles.

Socialite Evenings

Karuna, the main character and storyteller of Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings*, is not concerned with many women. *Socialite Evenings* is her first novel. Karuna, the protagonist, "born in a

dusty clinic in Satara, a remote village in Maharashtra" (9), finds her middle-class life mundane and longs for an exciting life. This longing takes root in her when the family migrates to Bombay. Bombay is mind-boggling, but to Karuna, it is a perfect city that suits her extravagant life. Though the family members hate the city for the inconvenience, Karuna happily ventures to discover the city in its extravaganza.

Karuna's marriage fails since it is loveless, joyless, and bridgeless. She hates the stand-offish and cruel behavior of the husbands who often kept themselves busy in drab, monotonous activities like reading the business pages of a newspaper. Karuna's dislike for middle-class society and her desire to live an extravagant life like the rich make her problematic and disobedient both at home and school. She does not want to be an ordinary middle-class girl. At home, she shows her rebellion by not jumping at the sound of her Father's voice, not putting her stuff away after school, leaving a dirty plate on the dining table, whistling in the bathroom, backcombing and teasing her hair, refusing to fetch trays of tea for boring visitors, being cheeky with relatives and mainly not cowering in the presence of elders.

Karuna's Relationship with Men:

When Karuna undergoes her college studies, she gets into contact with a socialite named Anjali. Since Anjali is the portal of the world to which she longs, Karuna cannot take Anjali away from her life. Anjali becomes her role model. Karuna and Anjali have similar reasons for choosing a

rich man as their life partner. Anjali, a half-Jain and half-Hindu, goes to the extent of changing her religion and marrying a wealthy Muslim, Abe, years older, only to realize her wishes to be on her own, be independent, see the world, meet people, buy lovely clothes and perfumes. Karuna cancels her engagement with Bunty, a management trainee in a multinational firm "whose only disqualification was his ordinariness" (56), and marries the man, an heir to a hundred-year-old export-import firm, an 'acceptable' male who "would not take no for an answer" (58). She feels her life would be different in the fashion world, which can bring a life leading to wealth, freedom, status, and mainly the fulfillment of her desires. Later she finds her husband to be "an average Indian husband" (65). She is utterly bewildered and disappointed because she is made to live a subordinate life like her mother. Her modeling stops, and she becomes a dutiful wife listening to her husband's plans for the firm. He brainwashes her and makes her feel inferior and worthless. Karuna becomes very submissive and tries to accustom herself to her husband, like not arguing with him when he is unhappy and doing things the way he wants.

Karuna becomes disgusted by her husband's compulsive socializing, horrifying safari suits, and the gum he constantly chewed. She tried to sidetrack herself with her books besides losing herself in fantasies, crosswords, newspapers, and chess. Karuna's marriage lacked the vivacity that she had anticipated. She soon found that her world was quite

different from that of her husband. As a result, Karuna fails to get the required emotional support from her husband and decides to separate from him. She tells her husband:

I think our wedding was over the day our awful honeymoon started, and we had nothing going. I do not love- never have. As for you-I do not know to this day why you choose to marry me. I do not think you even know whom you married. You do not have a clue what sort of woman I am. I am tired of your smugness, irritating mannerisms, and the way you take me for granted and anticipated me to fall into your overall scheme of things- I was another one for your well-calculated deals. (185)

She understands herself as one locked up in a delicate marital knot and leading a life of emotional frostiness. All meaningful communication between the partners was gradually coming to a standstill. There is not a smile, laughter, free exchange of thought and ideas, or queries but only silence. All attempts to break this boredom were futile: It was not that I never attempted, but there was no query that my husband and I settled on different planets (68). Karuna's marriage ends with failure, as it was loveless trapped marriage. Her husband to her was a typical Indian male, 'unexciting, uninspiring, untutored. He was not made for introspection' (65).

Karuna's Relationship with Krish:

Karuna's husband treats her as a matter, a mere object subjected to his own will. There is no meaningful

communication between the partners. No smiles and laughter, no free exchange of thoughts and ideas, no queries and questions but silence. Karuna's humorously sarcastic approach to her problems in the patriarchal culture deconstructs the traditional gender hostility used to elaborate on the polarities of connubial ties. In the meantime, she finds her husband inactive and uninviting. Instead of suffering this pang, she takes delight in Krish, her husband's friend. Karuna undermines male superiority: I love this friend of yours and want to be with him in Venice. There is a good chance that I will feel thoroughly disillusioned after that. Maybe he will have some genuinely nasty personal habits that will disenchant me. In this case, it will be *A Death in Venice*. You know by now that I am not the flighty sort. I do not flirt at random like my other friends. I am steady and grounded. It is the Taurean in me that is surfacing these days. Please treat this as a short-term mania that will wear itself out. (186)

Girish, the filmmaker, who is impressed by Karuna's acting skill and performance, plans to give her the central character role Shakuntala in his film 'Shakuntala,' a contemporary version of the Kalidasa classic. Apart from Girish's script, the firm Karuna worked for bags the Ad club award for the Best Ad of the year, and Karuna gets an individual citation as Copywriter of the year. She is even invited to the Outlooks anniversary party, which is considered more honorable. She graduates from writing to making ad films and is asked to script a major TV serial sponsored

by a soft drink company. She is interviewed by 'The Washington Times' an American paper. Slowly she is raised to the pinnacle of fame. Having realized that living alone can also give happiness, Karuna refuses their ex-husband, even though he grovels at her feet to return to him. She refuses the proposal of Girish. She does not want marriage to be an obstacle in her career.

The sacredness of marriage and childbearing, which was conventionally considered the prerequisites of wifely duties, becomes most insignificant. She decides to separate from him and quits. In the beginning, she lives as a paying guest but later returns to her parent's home as Deshpande's characters Saru, Indu, Jaya, and Sumi do. Karuna imagines that her mother may not entertain her arrival at home. However, she notices a change in her mother's attitude. She was more than delighted to see Karuna. And so was her Father; for when her Father returned, all he said was, 'Let me say that our doors are always open to our children (184).

The institution of marriage no more carries with it traditional security. When did Karuna argue that why security rests with a man? She feels confident that she can look after herself. She is earning as much money as many men. She has a roof over her head. She does not have any responsibilities. She is at peace with herself. Now she is not answerable to anyone and makes any sacrifices. After her divorce, Karuna tells Anjali that she did not bring anything with her from her husband's 'home' because nothing belonged to her. Anjali is

flabbergasted. She admonishes Karuna, 'This is not the time for false dignity and pride... Do not be a fool. You are entitled to your things' (217).

She further elaborates that it was wrong to come out of marriage empty-handed because she needed money. She was not suggesting robbing the guy. However, she is entitled to compensation. She has invested all these years in her marriage, and it is her right to claim something from that family; otherwise, "they will cut you off without a dime" (217-18). When her husband comes to bring her back, she refuses to go back with him, realizing that a life full of responsibilities is worth living rather than the sorrowful emptiness of matrimony. Karuna, an emancipated woman, is enraged when her husband comes to her with the proposal of a re-marriage, 'And you waited all this while to tell me. Just get the hell out of my house and life. I do not ever want to see you again. I let you in this time but never again. I will call the cops if you try and invade my home in the future. You are even more a worm than I thought (50). While her mother continued to worry about her single status, Karuna felt self-satisfied. She is self-confident and self-reliant without a husband to boss around. She is liberated, educated, and self-assured. She is economically independent and enterprising, bold and innovative, and ready to acknowledge the challenges that forefront her in the future.

Jaya and Karuna have dealt with the same conjugal contradictions and earned

self-identity. There are several similarities between both them. To begin with, their marital relationship not as satisfactory as they expected, and they kept extramarital relationships but did not maintain them, feared moral conduct and social ethics. The only thing that distinguishes them is Jaya, at last, who goes back with Mohan and does not break up the nuptial bond with her husband. However, she has realized the reality and is ready to confront it with her powerful writing. Karuna, despite her husband's invitation, does not go with him. Instead seeks financial independence from the marital relationship and earns her selfhood.

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