



## IDENTITY CRISIS IN SHASHI DESPANDE'S THAT LONG SILENCE AND BINDING WINE

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### **Abstract:**

Shashi Deshpande is indeed considered as one of the most renowned of the contemporary Indian women novelists. She has well defined ethnic identities and a quest for eternal self, for something deeper in religion. She is a writer with specific urge to explore and define the areas of experiences of women, which have not been previously explored. Her stories are about a woman: her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common run of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, the middle-class women themselves are enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, marital discord and male chauvinism. The present paper is an attempt to study the Quest of Identity in the novels of Shashi Deshpande's Novels in special reference to That Long Silence and Binding Wine.

**Key Words:** Novel, Tensions, Suppression and oppression of Woman, Quest, Identity

### **Introduction:**

Today women writers are moving forward through their successful endeavor by adding their creative contribution to the Indian Writing in English. The Indian English novel by these women writers seems matching the pace of the world in display of incomparable genius. They have relied on their inventive skills in the use of English language as skilled craftsmen. Though during the preindependent era, the women writers have started writing in English.

The well-known women writers like Torru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu started writing in English under the spirit of freedom fighting against British rules and love for nation. They show interest in national issues as the influence of Ghandhiji's movements for free India was in vogue. At the same time the enlightened thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayanand Saraswati's had initiated social reforms to abolish the practice of Sati, the custom of child marriage, custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows and many other evil practices prevalent in the society. This gave impetus to the women writers who also harnessed their pen for the cause of welfare of this vulnerable section of the society. They gave vent to the women's suffering. These effects were depicted by Indian women writers' modern generation after the independence by using the foreign medium, English as well as regional languages.

The women writers of post-independence burst out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They got recognition for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of sensitizing the local gender issues through their literary work. It seems that the voice of new Indian women writers through their writings has ushered in a literary renaissance. The well-known women Indian English writers of post-modern generation are Nayantara Sehgal, Anitha Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Gita Mehta, Bharathi Mukherjee, Jhumpha Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Arundhati to mention a few only have created their own distinct identity as a novelist and raised the Indian novel to the world level recognition.

The characters they portray show very often as being torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Problem of marital adjustment and the quest for an assertion of identity make the predicament of working woman still worse. In the Indian context, the emancipation of woman has certainly brought woman far along the road of self-expression. But it has not gone to the extreme as in the case of the women's Liberation Movement in the West. There is no militant feminism in India. In India there is a genuine, sacred feeling for the family.

Among the this line of luminaries of writing of and about the lives of women, the most successful of the Indian women writers is Shashi Deshpande who created the difference among all the women writers. She is a dazzling storyteller with a distinctive voice. She has achieved international applause for her writing which mainly like non-resident Indian characters who dealt with, refugee issues and problems of people in overseas lands.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande have portrayed the evolution of this new Indian woman, especially during the last decades of twentieth century. The weight of the long silence imposed on women folk has, it would see, made the learned heroines of Deshpande's novels uneasy, and they try to cast off the shackles of restrictions habitually clamped on woman. The educated earning wife, and her adjustment, and sometimes

maladjustment within the family has been a recent phenomenon in India. In the context of contemporary Indian society Deshpande has her own independent views on woman, her position, predicament, her trials and tribulations. Her major concern has been woman's struggle to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and most important of all, as human being.

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938, in a small town of Dharwad, Shashi Deshpande the daughter of the famous Kannada playwright was educated in Bombay and Bangalore, and acquired an M.A in English from the Mysore University. She has written several novels and short stories. Despite having only five important novels to her credit, Deshpande has emerged as one of the mainstream women writers in India today.

Shashi Deshpande is a new name on the scene of Indian English writing. However, despite the smaller volume of her writing, her work has drawn critical attention because of her detailed, sensitive and realistic representations of the Indian middle class women in the domestic sphere. Her concern for women and their oppression is reflected strongly in all her writing. Her novels and short stories depict the anguish and conflict of the modern educated Indian woman caught between patriarchy and tradition on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality and independence for the woman on the other.

Shashi Deshpande is known for creating women characters that are contemporary. Deshpande's women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination, first as daughters and later as wives. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them, and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that limit their capability and existence as a wife. Fettered to their roles in the family, they question the subordinate status ordained to them by society. Her works have drawn great critical attention and acclaim for her sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle-class women. Her sincere concern for women and their oppressive lot is reflected strongly in all her novels and stories.

Shashi Deshpande has been successful in creating strong protagonist who refuses to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies and face life with courage and strength. Comparatively, they appear to more lifelike and more akin to the educated, middle class, urban Indian women today. In the novels *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, the major concern is to depict the anguish and conflict between patriarchy and tradition of the one hand, and self-expression Individuality and Independence for the women on the other. Its representation of a women's struggle in a society is marked by male ideology and of her situation as a women writer in patriarchal literary tradition.

Shashi Deshpande believes that women have a great strength. All humans do. Actually women have reserves we are often unaware of. But for the woman the situation is made more complex by the fact that they have been told they are weak, they are made to believe in their weakness. And often they learn to hide their own strength, because a woman's strength seems to weaken a man. She says that women are the main support of the family, though the male is the titular head. Women are better at dealing with emotional traumas. This is because women, unlike men, have never had to suppress their emotional selves, they are more open about these problems - both in articulating them and understanding them.

#### **Deshpande's Protagonist in search of their Identity:**

Shashi Deshpande, being one, voices the problems, which trap the middle class educated Indian women. The themes of marital incompatibility, identity crisis, imbalanced family relationships and the patriarchal gaze would be explored by taking into consideration Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*. The novels highlight the struggle of the conscience of shackled Indian Women characters, their journey from darkness to light presenting the problems that majority of women are still faced with both at the domestic and social levels. Women are not only viewed as a social category but a culturally conditioned and constructed category as well. It has been quite a 'great tradition' for women to follow the set norms of 'pavitrata' and surrender to the dictates of patriarchy. Women continue to suffer even in the Post Modern era whether at the hand of their own conditioned psyche or the society that they belong to. Indian feminism, therefore, exists as a clear response to the issues specifically confronting many Indian women.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* gains authenticity from the fact that Jaya, the heroine, is a well read woman, blessed with literary sensibility though nurtured in silence which corresponds with her emotional role. Jaya is a modern, convent educated, fluent English speaking woman and a creative writer who symbolizes the emerging new woman conscious of her status in the society. After seventeen years of troubled life in silence, Jaya pens her story revealing her feelings, incidents of ups and downs that caused her despair and disappointment, and endangered her life.

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* is very much similar to her earlier novels, as it sketches her middle-class female protagonist predicament in a male-dominated world, where she has very little scope to give voice to her concerns. Although the story in this particular novel at the superficial level appears to be very identical to her other novels, if one explores it deeply in all other novels, the protagonist is of paramount importance and all the other characters are used to feature her concerns and feelings. But in this novel, the minor characters play a very significant role; the protagonist Urmi plays the role of anchor, it is she who is used by the novelist very cleverly to expose the sufferings of women from different sections of our society. Shashi

Deshpande portrays the new Indian woman and her dilemma. She concerns herself with the plight of the modern Indian woman trying to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being. Deshpande unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation at work in the family and in the male oriented society. One of the features of their upbringing is their inculcation as girls into the socially dened roles as daughter, wife and mother.

**Conclusion:**

Shashi Deshpande believes that a writer gives to society a mirror image of itself, so has she tried to do in her creative writing. The study tries to understand and perceive the real dilemma of middle-class educated women in her novels. Deshpande has not tried to make her women characters stronger than they are in real life. Shashi Deshpande's not being outright feminist; highlights developed quite revolutionary ideas about the representation of female voice and quest for their identity. She also wisely stresses the dire need for becoming constructive and to move a step ahead in order to gain individuality and better existence in this contemporary world.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the greatest woman novelists who gave vent to the smothering emotions of women. Her women characters seems submissive to the subjugation of social orthodoxy. Like other women novelist, she does not hold decisive protest in action. Her suggestive approach indicates is the specimen instance of her craftsmanship as a novelist of progressive zeal who fights sans violence or vehement attack on the society. In her writing about the lives of women, she became the most successful of the Indian women writers. Shashi Deshpande has created the difference among all the women writers. She is a dazzling storyteller with a distinctive voice. She has achieved international applause for her writing which mainly like non-resident Indian characters who dealt with, refugee issues and problems of people in overseas lands.

Deshpande avoids the simple technique of straight forward narration and employs the ashback method instead, to draw her readers' attention. The narrative technique has earned criticism from some critics who feel that this leads to confusion in the mind of readers. In novels where the writer is to present a gallery of characters along with their relationships and interactions, it becomes necessary for him to present things in their chronological order and not indulge in too much experimentation. At times it is confusing. Hence a chronological clarity is important. Her heroines are educated young women with liberated and progressive ideas; therefore even ordinary incidents acquire a new meaning.

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