THEMATICAL STUDY IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Among the recent women novelists, Shashi Deshpande’s credentials are most impeccable. She is the mistress of the well-rounded novels rooted in middle-class minutiae. With Deshpande, we know what we are getting—believable situations, fully-fleshed characters we care for, lives ordinary but very real a story well-told and silence as a means of communication. Shashi Deshpande has produced nine novels uptil now. She has been a winner of prestigious Sahitya Academy Award (1990) for her That Long Silence (1989). “With That Long Silence, Shashi Deshpande tells to The Hindu, “I came to the end of a phase. The Binding Vine and A Matter of Time were explorations of a new path. Both Small Remedies and Moving On are, I think more mellow and more concerned with the human condition though that concern continues”.

For a good thematic study of her work, let us try to understand the word ‘theme’. The term ‘theme’ is an idea which is the subject of a talk or piece of writing (An English Reader’s Dictionary), while patterns are different arrangements of model, design or form. The present work is an attempt to study delineation of the themes in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Her popular themes include themes of endorsement of patriarchal structures, domination of male over female, kiberation of females, subalterneity, theme of alienation, determinism, self-belief, self-discovery and theme of revolt. Her famous novels include The Dark Holds No Terrors (translated also into German and Russian) That Long Silence, Small Remedies, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Roots and Shadows and recently released Moving On.
Beginning with the death of seven years old brother, Dhruva, which follows his elder sister Saru for a lifetime in Shashi Deshpande’s first novel in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Death and bereavement have always been the liet-motif in other novels too. Apart from this theme, the novel explores the myth of man’s unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of varieties. It projects the theme of predicament of career woman—a new phenomena in Indian English fiction. Saru, the protagonist in the novel, neither surrenders to, nor escapes from problems but accepts the challenges with great strength and vigour. She is her own refuge; she says, “If we can’t believe in ourselves, we are sunk”. The protagonists of Deshpande seek their own salvation. Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* fights to bring the husband wife relationship on an equal footing where there are no “hierarchised oppositions” like superior/inferior, high/low, and man/woman.

Without waving a feminist flag, she feels strongly about the woman’s situation. Shashi Deshpande is one of the best writers of feminism in India because she is free from any unjustified stance. She is neither supportive of the male point of view nor she is with the feminist libbers who what to throw everything to the wind. She “analyses the image of woman more interestingly because it portrayed by woman.”

*Roots And Shadows* (The best Indian Novel of 1982-83) deals with the endorsement of patriarchal structure. Indu, the protagonist who is an educated young woman brushes aside all the age-old beliefs and superstition. Shashi Deshpande observes : ‘Indu’s acceptance of western values and her search for liberty with a precondition of unfettered growth and maturity of personality, despite the insidious conflict between tradition and modernity, ultimately result in her emergence as a human being evolving basically as a woman of determination not yielding to dictates of the patriarchal society.’

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande brought forth the theme of alienation and isolation and the theme of revolt to break up that long silence. Jaya, the heroine recalls her married life with nostalgia. In the end,
she gives us the new image of the Indian woman who tries to assert her individuality and seeks to break the age-old silence by refusing to dance to the tune of her husband. In this simple story, there lies the grand swell of frustration; a loveless married life is compared with the help of a beautiful image as Jaya says:

“A pair of bullocks yoked together—but the reality was only this. We were only two persons. A man. A woman.”

We can also derive the theme of existentialism in That Long Silence when Jaya concludes,

“Nothing, Nothing between us...nothing between me and Mohan either. We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us.”

Her novels also show the theme of existentialism, sufferance of human mind, grappling with the experience of the lonely anguished and rootless man. He is cast into a meaningless, amorphous world, to find himself to identify, to define himself and prove that he is the maker of his own destiny. The Existent, Madhu, in Small Remedies sustains herself by writing the biography of Savitri Bai. She devotes herself to the art of writing only after the death of her son, Aditya, in riots, hence defining herself, and identifying herself.

In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Small Remedies, That Long Silence, women protagonists exhibit another approach of postmodernism to some extent. Postmodernism is marked with the ‘amnesia of past’ and ‘trivality’. Shashi Deshpande reveals the dynamics under lying surface Saru, Madhu, Urmi are impressed by high society, wavering their faith in middle class morality, but in the heart of their hearts, they repent for their decision and return to the fold of middle-class. Shashi Deshpande delves into deep of contemporary society and offers an authentic conflict between tradition and postmodernity. Besides, a crowd of minor themes also peep out of her novels. In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Saru shows a juxtaposition of postcolonial arguments wherein she posses ‘white soft and ‘clean’ hands in the beginning but ‘roughened palms’ towards its conclusion.
In the end I would like to mention one other thing that works in her favour, “Deshpande often speaks of English being an “Indian language”’. By writing books that have a more direct bearing on our lives than her famous contemporaries, she actually makes this true. “Definitely in That Long Silence and Moving On Deshpande is more interested in getting to know the male characters more. Shashi Deshpande told to June Gaur, “...that we can not isolate the female experience. What men are and why they are the way they are, is part of it.” She holds her position right in the centre.

Thus, my study will focus on the themes in the nine popular novels of Shashi Deshpande. It would be my endeavour to unfold an almost unexplored area of thematic patterns in her works. For this purpose, I divide my thesis in nine chapters including introduction and summing up. I hope it would be a positive contribution in field of research and exploration.
THE TENTATIVE PLAN OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

INTRODUCTION
(i) Short Biographical Sketch of Shashi Deshpande.
(ii) A mistress of Human-Bondage depiction.

CHAPTER-I
Theme of Endorsement of Patriarchal Structures: Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is haunted by the parents dominance throughout life, Indu of *Roots And Shadows* determines not to yield to patriarchal society.

CHAPTER-II
Theme of Marriage, Sex And Extra-marital Relation: Jaya of *The Long Silence*, Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, show dissatisfaction in *Married life & Sex*. Indu of *Roots And Shadows* shows inclination towards *Extra-marital relation*.

CHAPTER-III
Theme of Violence and Death: In *The Binding Vine*, Urmi, herself discovers that her long-dead mother-in-law has also been a victim of rape in her marriage *Come Up and Be Dead, the psychological thriller*, furnish the same theme.

CHAPTER-IV
Theme of Feminine Assertions:
(i) **Theme of Career Woman's Predicament**: Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Madhu in *Small Remedies* i.e. women from different walks stand against male superiority and suppression.
(ii) **Rage of Impotence**: In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru, becomes the object of Manohar’s wrath an outburst of his frustration in physical life.
(iii) **Male-Female, Female-Female Exploitation**: Saru of *A Matter of Time* struggles to understand her father’s desertion and her mother’s indifference.
CHAPTER-V
Theme of Subalterneity
(i) Who is a subaltern? Subaltern consciousness.
(ii) Woman as ‘gendered subaltern’.
   Jaya (That Long Silence)
   Saru (The Dark Holds No Terrors)
   Indu (Roots and Shadows)
   Madhu (Small Remedies)
(iii) Other Subalterns in terms of caste and status as Janaki Bai etc.
     in The Dark Holds No Terrors.

CHAPTER-VI
Theme of Existentialism:
(i) Meaning of Existentialism and The Existent.
(ii) Determinism comes to surface: Tryst with Destiny Struggle of
     Woman protagonists.
(iii) Jaya (That Long Silence), Madhu (Small Remedies), Saru (The
     Dark Holds No Terrors) held as Existents.

CHAPTER-VII
Minor Themes:
(i) Theme of Fragmentation and Reconciliation: Jaya in
    That Long Silence, Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors.
(ii) Theme of Revolt: (The Dark Holds No Terrors), Jaya (That
    Long Silence), Indu (Roots and Shadows) etc. revolt against the
    tyranny of their relations.
(iii) Theme of Self-belief and Self-Confidence: Jaya (That
    Long Silence), Saru (The Dark Holds No Terrors), emerge out
    successful characters due to their qualities of mind and heart.
(iv) Theme of Shame and Guilt: Madhu in Small Remedies. Indu
    in Roots and Shadows sometimes feel the pangs of guilt in the
    inner recesses.
(v) Post-modern and Post-colonial Arguments: Saru shows a
    few Post-modernist approach. Indu of Roots and Shadows in her
    friendship with Naren but returns to her fold of middle class
    society.

SUMMING UP:
(i) A versatile novelist.
(ii) A keen observer of human life and affairs.
REFERENCES


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SECONDARY SOURCES


**Articles**


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OF
SHASHI DESHPANDE

(A Selective Study)

The purpose and scheme of study submitted
to the C. C. S. University, Meerut
for enrolment to the
Ph.D. Degree
in
English

2004

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