**WOMEN AS A GENDER IN THE SOCIETY**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Gender, which is the social construct that divides male and female as oppositional categories with unequal social values, is something that hinders the life and living of every woman in the society. When Beauvoir claims that ‘Women’ is a historical idea and not a natural fact, she clearly underscores the distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity. But to be a ‘women is to have became women. Gender is thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. It is not necessarily indicative of the sexual differences between male and female but politically set rules with numerous mechanisms of expressions and impositions by one sex over the other. And in this game of power men controls women. He is 'self ' and she is 'other '. What Showalter says may not be missed:

……Gender is not a question of difference, but which assumes that the sexes are separate and equal; but of power since in looking at the history of gender relations we find gender asymmetry, inequality, and male dominance in every known society ………

Shashi Deshpande created female characters of flesh and blood but not harsh enough as compared to other female characters created by other writers on woman. Her women are characters with their own strength, challenging hostilities under the male-dominated culture and society. They have got strong personalities that cannot be crushed and destroyed by the authoritative patriarchy. Shashi Deshpande, in her novels gives a clear reflection about women’s struggle and achievement through her works. Her writings provide a clear vision to bring out the revolt of women for equality and liberation against the traditional voices and different assumptions about women. Her writings focus on the images of oppressed women as seen in the patriarchal Indian society and on the other hand the rise of the new women, liberated and conscious, who are capable of deciding their own destiny and of self-determination on the hand.

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1. Bhatnagar, K. Manmohan and Rajeshwar. *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers (P) Ltd. 2011. Print.
2. Dr Neeta Sharma**. “**Authentic Female Characters in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande”, *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature,* Volume 2, Issue 10, 2015, PP 13-15
3. *Clear Light of Day*. London. William Heinemann Ltd., 1980. Print.

Shashi Deshpande is concern with being women on the basis of their potentiality. Women, then have to struggle to deconstruct the socially imposed gender roles to bring forth their identity and importance in this masculine world. In interaction of women’s experiences, that is the state of their oppression, suppression and self-determination, with their spatial existence in the three novels written by Anita Desai, namely, Fire on the Mountain (1977), Clear Light of Day (1980) and Fasting, Feasting (1999). In many of her novels, Desai focuses on her women Characters‟ Experience in the patriarchal society. Her female protagonists are often placed in an antagonistic position in relation to traditional ideologies, which are strong upheld by men and some older generations of women, who see the subservience send passivity of women in Indian society as normative behavior.

*‘I asked you, Saru……give it up and do what?*

*‘I don’t know. Live like the others do, I suppose. Stay at home and look after children. Cook and Clean. What else? The Dark Holds No Terrors. p 80*

*‘Saru, do you know you look amazingly like your mother now?’ It neither annoyed her nor pleased her, that remark. Nor did she imagine that it was expression that so resembled the dead woman’s …….the eyes joyless and arid, the expression one of indifference. The Dark Holds No Terrors. p 164*

Sarita (Saru) is made conscious of her own gender even as a child. Saru is a typical middle class woman who is not comfortable with the false rhetoric of equality between man and woman. She wants to free from the clutches of tradition and practice her rights for the presentation of her personal capabilities and the consciousness of her feminine self through identity and self affirmation. Saru is anti patriarchal. Since her childhood she is deprived of parental care and affection and she lives a loveless life. Her mother loves her brother but hates her. When her brother is drowned, she is blamed for her death without any reason. In this way this is the plight of not only Saru but, several who are born girls. Their gender is a curse for them. Ultimately Saru against her parent’s wishes marries a boy, Manu who belongs to a lower caste. Here we find the sign of her refusal from the patriarchal ways. Her marriage with Manu is attaining of autonomy of the self and it is also assertion and affirmation of her feminine sensibility. Consequently Manu’s male ego is hurt by her superior position as a doctor. Saru is ‘a two in one’ a doctor during the day and a trapped animal at night. The novel, The Dark Holds No Terror; she explores the social taboo of women and their perception in the lower status and women’s economic independence with,

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1. *Fire on the Mountain.* New Delhi: Random House India Pvt. Ltd., 1977. Print.
2. The Dark Holds No Terrors New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990
3. *Fasting, Feasting*. London: Vintage, 1999. Print.
4. *Clear Light of Day*. London. William Heinemann Ltd., 1980. Print.

saru as the main protagonist breaking the patriarchal construct. The Dark Holds No Terror, she explores the social taboo of women and their perception in the lower status and women’s economic independence with Saru as the main protagonist breaking the patriarchal construct. Saru deconstruct the traditional way education and becomes a medical practitioner by going against the wishes of her traditional parents. She fights back the brother-fixation that has been haunting since childhood. She even promotes inter-caste marriage by marrying Manu (Manohar) of the lower class. Here again the novelist brings forth the problems faced by women when entered in the marital core that are under the strict patriarchal authority of the husband. Thus Saru (Sarita) who is a successful woman outside as a doctor but a victim at home at her husband’s hand. Hence the writer seeks to be recognized as a person rather than as a woman with an independent social image. Thus the novel perfectly breaks the social conventions and patriarchal ideology that subordinate women to men in familial religious political, economic, social, legal and artistic domains which hampers the socialization of women sections.Shashi Deshpande distinguished that, there is the reflection of the women’s condition in the domestic and married life. There is the presentation of the fractured marital relationships occurred where education, economic independence and motherhood disturb the existing equation. There is the picture of the traditional Hindu male who longs for a son; the sole heir of the family and property. Even the educated Dr. Kulkarni in the quest for a son silently torture the wife; without words, making his wife fully dependent on him. Admittedly, in Come Up and Be Dead the activities of women are exhibited with their problems and perils out of their presence in the society as a female sex. There is the exposure of violence against women where murder is employed by men as an instrument of oppressing women. Besides, the novelist gives the representation of females being suffered under the tradition–oriented parents. Thus: with Kshama.

*Women?, Why was I trying to fool myself, why was I trying to protect myself? I had to admit it- It had been I who laughed. “The weapons of weak and the, oppressed, Jaya.’ Dada had, with a grin, handed me the usual reassuring Freudian patter when I had consulted him about Rahul’s bed-wetting which had started soon after Rati’s birth. ‘Tears, Tantrums, bed-wetting, they are all part of some guerrilla warfare.’ That Long Silence p 168-169*

The novelist is protesting against the treatment of women in our culture through her protagonist ‘Jaya’.

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1. The Dark Holds No Terrors New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1990
2. That Long Silence. New Delhi: Disha Books, 1992.
3. John, M. "Gender and Development in India, 1970s-1990s", Economic and Political Weekly, November 23, 1996

She is a self-conscious, sensitive and creative. She is undergoing an introspective psychological journey towards self-actualization. But due to the devastating effects and long suppression of her personality makes her psychologically ill and, nervous and schizophrenic. It is thus a protest in the form of questions pertaining to gender issues and Indian women’s position. Besides it is the character’s attempt to give another version of history from the women’s point of view. The study of the women characters of Shashi Deshpande has repeatedly placed the question in front of the readers – is feminism in search of identity? In answer to this question it can be said that feminism is really trying to search its identity through the multiplicity of voices. But some may argue at the point of “feminism”. For them it can be said that the question of analyzing women’s voices through a feminist theoretical method is necessary as the society is not ready to give women their due respect. Equality of women is nothing but a myth and it is proved for many sources. Deshpande’s Novels are one of these sources. So everyone can look forward universalization of women. Deshpande further made it is remarkable that gender is only a concept of power. It is the social construct that divides man and woman into two sections with man as the superior and woman as the ‘other’ and man as the subject and woman as the object.

**2. FEMALE SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE: THE DILEMMA**

A common Indian proverb states, “Raising girls is like watering someone else’s  
lawn.” Marriage provides a woman with an acceptable social identity in the same way that initiation into the caste does so for a man. Marriage is a crucial need for the woman. The traditional responsibility of the woman for child care, looking after other members of the family and her less physical strength make her subordinate to her husband in most of the countries of the world. Family is treated as the institutional structure through which concepts of sex inequality are enforced. The woman's fate is considered to be tied to the family whose fate, in turn, is related to society. Women characters think of returning to their husbands. Although this is their silent submission to patriarchy but the novelist never ignores the value of marriage. Coming back to the husband does not mean defeat of a woman. In the novels of Shashi Deshpande we can locate extreme forms of love which ranges from sexual abuse and cruelty to the love that transcends sex. Sexism is often expressed through male domination – that is probably the root cause of the subjugation and oppression of women.

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1. Kishwar Madhu (2004), ‘*A Horror of ‘Isms’: Why I do not Csssall Myself a Feminist’ in Chardhuri Maitrayee* (ed.),Feminism in India: *Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism’* Delhi: Kali for Women
2. Septi Gumiandari and Ilman Nafi’a. Women in the identity of feminism: “A critical Analysis of gender movement based on Islamic psychological perspective”. *Journal of Gender Studies*.*Vol.03, No.01, (2019).*

Bell Hooks, in her essay Sisterhood makes it clear that it is not necessary for women “to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression” *(2000: 43)* nor do they require “anti male sentiments to bond them together” *(2000:67).*The best thing is to share their problems and experiences. A woman as life partner has a fourfold character: she is ardhangini, one half of the her husband, metaphorically speaking; sahadharmini, an associate in the fulfillment of human and divine goals; Sahakarmini, a part to all her husband’s action and sahayogini, a veritable co- operator in all his ventures. Husband and wife together are called dampati, joint owners of the household, sharing work in terms of their biological, psychological and individual dharma. However, in recent times the status of women has received considerable ' attention from the social scientists owing to modernization of the society and female economic participation. The employment of the wife in a professional occupation does empower her with resources and higher levels of prestige which, in turn, affect the structure of power in the family. Shashi Deshpande, A Matter of Time is a multi-generational story that explores the intricate relationships within an extended family. The story, set in present day Karnataka, is narrated in the individual voices of the characters. One day, Sumi’s husband Gopal walks out on her and their three daughters, without offering any kind of explanation. Surprisingly, the wife too doesn't even ask him for a reason and this unsettles the young girls. Sumi takes her daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema, to her ancestral house. Her parents, Kalyani and Shripati, live together but have not spoken to each other for more than three decades. Gradually, the mystery behind the strange and oppressive silence is unveiled. Kalyani finally starts to open up as her relationships with her daughter and granddaughters deepen. Meanwhile, eighteen-year-old Aru is convinced that she is the reason because her father deserted the family.

*Female Sexuality! We’re ashamed of owning it. We can’t speak of it, not even to ourselves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore were the men, unused to such women, Frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it- A Matter of time p-191.*

These lines tell the story of Sumi, the protagonist. One morning, without warning Gopal, a respected Professor,

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1. Dr Neeta Sharma**. “**Authentic Female Characters in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande”, *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature,* Volume 2, Issue 10, 2015, PP 13-15
2. Kakkar, Sudhir. *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian Sexuality*. New Delhi; Penguin Books, Ltd. 1989.
3. A *Matter of Time.* New Delhi: Penguin, 1996.

walks out on his family for reasons even he cannot articulate. Sumi is shocked that she laps into complete silence. Gopal’s abrupt desertion is a great cause of humiliation and mental trauma for her as it is not only a matter of great shame and disgrace but also a better realization of being unwanted. Sumi returns with her three daughters to the shelter of the Big House where her parents Kalyani and Sripati live in oppressive silence. They have not spoken to each other for thirty five years. Modern and liberal in outlook, Sumi defies the outdated social opinion and orthodox treatment of women subjected to desertion by her husband. Shashi Deshpande highlight the issues of rape, death and decay, Here three generations are put forward to express the bitter of marriage and married life as against the original sanctity and compatibility. Here Aru is the main protagonist who fights against certain differences that reside in the male-female relationships. With her Deshpande is reflecting the present stage which is the point of culmination between tradition and modernity. Aru herself is the bridge between the old and the new.

*I was not allowed the healing passion of a fit of crying that would have left me exhausted, sleep-washed and becalmed something slipped into my tear –hazed vision………. Cry The Peacock p 10.*

*I was alone. Yes, I whimpered, it is that I am alone, and then give myself up to a fit of furious pillow-beating, kicking, ever thing but crying. From childhood experience, I knew this to be sweetly exhausting. Cry The Peacock p 11.*

Maya who is trapped in a bad marriage to Gautama who is much older, almost the entire story is "remembrance of things past" by Maya herself. It is really her effort to tell the story to herself to understand and findmeaning in her life. Her husband, Gautama, is, a successful, middle aged lawyer. He does not understand the temperament partly spiritual of his young wife. The complexities of her inner life, is effectively brought out through the landscape as is her resentment against her husband for his inability to communicate with her. One day during a dust storm when both husband and wife go up to the roof of their house, she pushes him off from the parapet and he dies. A few days later she too commits suicide. The peacocks are said to fight before they mate, "living they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life." InMaya's mind reality and myth merge into a nightmarish outcome. Anita Desai speaks that the most important social and religious occasion in a person's life is his or her marriage. "Everything here seems to begin and end with marriage."

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1. Desai, Anita. Cry, the Peacock. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1980. Print.
2. Gopal, N. R. *A Critical Study of the Novels of Anita Desai*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1999, Print.
3. Dalmia, Yashodhara. “An Interview with Anita Desai.” *The Times of India*. 29 April 1979.

Even in a society where celibacy is a religious virtue, it is clear that to become a celibate ascetic without first having experienced marriage and parenthood is to act contrary to social and religious norms. In fact, marriage is so important among Indians that the decision to marry is rarely entrusted to the individuals involved. Marriage "arrangements" and "negotiations" are caste and clan concerns. "Love marriages," those, in which a man and woman decide to marry independently of family consultation, are regarded as anti-traditional and even dangerous. When a couple marries, their union is not one of individuals, but of lineages. Each marriage must be arranged in reference to rather strict rules of exogamy and endogamy, for each marriage is a public statement of a family's and a lineage's social and ritual status. In short, every marriage constitutes a public act whereby a family or lineage defines its formal relations with other lineages.

*‘It was an accident, a car knocked her down.’*

*‘This doctor has examined your daughter.’*

*‘She was raped,’ he says, still speaking in English.*

*‘Your daughter has been……….’Vanna hesitates, searching for the Marathi word, gives up. ‘Some one has wronged her.’……The Binding Vine. … p58*

*‘If a girl’s honour is lost, what’s left? The girl doesn’t have anything wrong, people will always finger at her. ‘She turns to him, ‘even if it is true, keep it to yourself, don’t let anyone know of it, I have another daughter, what will became of her ……….?’*

*‘Where is your husband? ............*

*‘He came yesterday after I sent word. He sat, he cried, and went away.’*

*‘Doesn’t he live with you?’*

*‘No, He has another wife. ….The Binding Vine p59*

The novel with Urmi an educated middle class wife grieving over her dead infant daughter, who finds it difficult to let go her memories, In such an aggrieved state she happens to meet Shakuntala in the hospital where her sister in law vanna works. Shakuntala thinks that her daughter has met with accident while Dr. Bhaskar reports that Kalpana has been brutally raped. Then there one can observe Shankuntala’s reaction as an oppressed Indian mother in the male dominated Indian society. Urmi escorts Shakuntala home and this starts their association. Urmi visits regularly to enquire about Kalpana, a carefree soul. On the other hand Urmi learns from her in law Mira’s diary how she was averse to physical intimacy and how her husband used to impose himself upon her.

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1. Deshpande Shashi. *The Binding Vine.* London, Virago Press, 1994.
2. Deshpande, Shashi. *The Binding Vine*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, (1993).
3. Mukherjee, Bharati. *Wife*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, (1975).

In an Indian marriage a woman has to reduce herself to a prostitute in order to satisfy her husbands’ carnal desires. In this way Mira’s diary is a glaring revelation of her intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion for the man she married. Thus this novel also gives us a graphic account female voice in the male dominated society.

*Sita noticed the haste with which they ran from her. They had all got together, she decided, her family, to fight her, to reject her, to run away and hide from her. Where Shall We Go This Summer p 141*

*Sita had escaped from duties and responsibilities, from order and routine, from life and the city, to the unlivable island. She had refused to give birth to a child in a world not fit to receive the child. She had the imagination to offer it an alternative--- a life unlived, a life bewitched. She had cried out her great ‘No.’ Where Shall We Go This Summer p143*

Sita is trapped in a joyless marriage to Raman. She goes to a forsaken place Manori, an island in Marve, to escape the mundande reality of her husband and her four children. She also wants to avoid giving birth to her fifth child. She feels it is inhuman to bring another life into this cruel world. The Island brings back her childhood memories of her time spent with her selfish father. She realizes that the island is no place for her problems. Peace eludes her there and she feels alienated. Finally, she concludes that it is better to get back to reality. So she returns to her family.

*Woman – She is the one who is torn between tradition and modernity, she is one who is in search of self identity, she is the one who tries to give shape and content to individual existence in a sexist society (“Conflict and Identity in Shashi Deshpande novels”, 12-19)*

Traditions, that teach women to behave like ideal mythical women like Sita, Sakuntala, and Savitri, tempt them to be called ideal, and prohibit them to come out of the traditional circle. Almost all novels of Deshpande narrate the story of Indian women who have been facing mental trauma and turmoil for ages. Now I choose four of her novels (as mentioned in the title) to find the conflicts of tradition and modernity in her protagonists. Shashi’s women at the beginning of the plot remain docile, obedient and complying with all the requests of their husbands. But gradually drift away from their spouses due to natural quarrels and conflicts.

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1. Desai, Anita *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1982. Print.
2. Joshua, p., & Rajamanickam, k. g. (2017). Self-constructive women–seeking identity in the select novels of Shashi Deshpande.
3. Deshpande Shashi “Conflict and identity”, An International Refereed Journal of English Language and Literature, 5.2: 12-19.

Deshpande seems to believe the sentiments of de Beauvoir who she admits has influenced her and according to whom it is women who have to define, measured and explore their special domain. As there are estrangements between wife and husband, Deshpande’s protagonists go out of their house for peace and freedom. But after careful observation and proper perception, they realize that their tyrannical husbands are better than the disgusting outside world. At the end, they understand the ways of the world, reconcile themselves to the harsh realities of life and return home with enlightenment, maturity and mellowness—the common theme in all the novels. Deshpande has a proper understanding of passionate women and the social realities. Deshpande fights for women’s independence from the stronghold of female domination; became economically independent and frees herself from the marriage institution; which itself is the way for women’s total submission to men.

*‘Those women were sitting on the bare ground, right in the dirt, mind you, not even a bit of a news paper or a mat under them. Just sitting there on the ground, like-like beggars. Imagine, Jaya, people like us in that situation!’ That Long Silence p 5*

Indian housewife, Jaya maintains silence throughout her life. The helpless and suppressed silence of the modern Indian housewife finds a voice in this novel as it depicts the inner-consciousness of Jaya and her guest for her own identity. Convent educated, English speaking woman with a literary taste, Jaya is torn in the conflict between her as a writer and a housewife. This novel is an autobiographical story of Jaya. Her husband has withdrawn with her protean roles-daughter, sister, wife, mother, daughter in law, friend, mistress and writer of genteel ‘feminine’ newspaper pieces, even in the company of Mohan and two children she feels lonely. Mohan is also not able to understand her feelings as a result of which she is torn within. Her married life is also not blissful as she describes it as ‘a pair of bulls yoked together’. Hence Jaya feels suffocated at the house of Mohan and she finds her female identity effaced. She also realizes that the writer in her cannot come to light because of her husband who is not happy with her writing. She is suppressed under patriarchal conventions. She is tortured by an abortion concealed from Mohan. When her young son runs away from home, she is crushed by a sense of inadequacy as a mother.

**4. CONCLUSION**

Women are suffering under the patriarchal construct. Women in India since ages are suffering in the male-dominated social structure of the society. They are suffering physically, emotionally, financially and privileges, but not able to get their rights as par men. Many hurdles and restrictions are coming up, refraining and socially in their diverse ways of life. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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2. Ghadially, Rehana, ed. *Women in Indian Society*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 2001.

But with the passage of time women started to achieve the light of education. They are now started struggling and fighting for their rights them in their cry and voices against the discriminatory social setup. Women has, examined a variety of common domestic crisis, which trigger off the search. Despande’s concern and sympathy are primarily for the women. While revealing the woman’s struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity for herself, the author subtly bares the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression experienced by women in our society. A new generation of women emerged, embracing the changed values according to which women have a voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. Shashi Deshpande reveals the fact that she upgrades the position of women. She strongly believes in the reciprocal relation between men and women. She feels that both men and women should live together to make their lives beautiful and also make the nation great.

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2. Anand, Sweta. (2018). “The Crisis of female Identity of Shashi Deshpande: A Comparatives study”. *International Journal on Multicultural Literature*, 8.1.