

Presentation of Women in the Select Indian Women Novelists' Novels

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Abstract

Indian novelists of the second and third generations who write in English have concentrated on women's emancipation and identity exploration. Their novels now have more relevant and practical themes. They emphasise how crucial women's equality with men is to the wellbeing of both the family and society. It is imperative that we all think about defending women's rights and refraining from discriminating against them in any sphere of human life, including politics, business, finance, family, and commerce. The second and third generations of Indian women novelists who write in English include Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, and Anita Nair. They take women's issues seriously. This paper focuses on how traditional conflicts and the element of patriarchy subjugate women to second-class citizen status, resulting in an identity crisis for women. The paper also studies women's search for identity and struggle for emancipation.

Keywords: Conflicts, Tradition, Modernity, Identity, Patriarchy, Emancipation.

Indian women's English-language novels have achieved prestigious places in both domestic and foreign English-language literature. Studying the evolution of Indian women's fiction in English would be intriguing. Indian women have written English-language novels for three generations. The themes of first-generation novels often reflect the mistreatment of women in Indian society. The female characters in the second generation of women's English-language novels directly address their problems and obstacles. They have a very good grasp of their circumstances and are very good at communicating their inner selves.

The third-generation novelists not only depict the female protagonists' inner selves but also depict them as rebelling against traditional families and a male-dominated society to find their "selves," find self-identity, and gain freedom from a male-dominated society. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, and Anita Nair's *Mistress*: have been taken for the study.

Traditional conflict, aspects of patriarchy, identity crisis, identity quest, and women's emancipation are among the study's themes. The five themes can be found not only as significant subjects but also frequently in the works of certain Indian women novelists who write in English, especially those who were born and currently reside in India. Through these five subjects, the study attempts to simulate women's suffering within their families and their fight for liberation

from the repressive hold of traditional, patriarchal families and society. Additionally, it focuses on women's quest for emancipation and identity.

These five novelists' works all prominently show the interaction between tradition and modernity. Traditional families frequently have disagreement between mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law, and in-law's family. The younger ladies adhere to contemporary lifestyles, whereas the older women embody tradition and its conventions.

In these novels, the old women are almost traditional and the young women never seem to care for observing the customs, and traditions of Indian society. Though they are born and brought up in a traditional family where one is taught social rules, customs, traditions, and culture, modern women never tend to pay attention to social customs. "... the modern woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her. The new woman dares to pronounce her volitions and convictions" (Singh 12). People with strong traditional beliefs are frequently perplexed by the daring actions of the contemporary lady. Every action conducted in a modern manner is viewed by them as a breach of tradition. The three novelists examine the challenges and issues faced by contemporary women in their works, revealing the inner lives of their heroines and the stress, loneliness, consciousness of otherness, sense of identity loss, and mental health they experienced.

It is evident that women have been denied both the right to exist as whole human beings with the same physical and mental capacities as males, as well as the chance to express their emotions, worries, and discomfort. Traditional and cultural traditions, particularly in the home, which are upheld by social and political structures and reinforced by prevalent ideas, limit and regulate women's human rights. The conflict between tradition and modernity is the subject of *The Day in Shadow*. India's male-dominated society treats Simrit cruelly and unfairly. The book's main protagonists, Som, Raj, Simrit, Sumer Singh, Brij, and Ram Krishna, behave like contemporary individuals yet find it difficult to completely break away from their own country's long-standing traditions.

Because of cultural traditions, Som was under pressure to believe that women must submit to men's will. He believes that men should rule in a way that gives women little opportunity to express themselves, he hates the individuality and independence of women, and he sees the imbalance in the partnership as the inevitable outcome. Regarding the husband, Simrit seeks for divorce from Som because she feels stuck in the husband-centered society and wants freedom and independence. She rebels against the traditional security of marriage because she wants to talk freely with her husband about things other than gender related glandular sensations. She was a modern-day lady who was awakened in this regard; nonetheless, the tradition in her made her feel as though by getting a divorce she had offended something ancient and decreed. "A part of her would always be married to Som" (DS 220). wife relationship, for instance, he was entirely traditional despite being modern in other ways. Simrit has no voice in his decisions, not even in routine ones.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most successful modern Indian woman writers in English. In her works, she employs the post-modern technique to dismantle patriarchal culture and practices and demonstrate their artificiality. The weave and weft of Shashi Deshpande's works are human connections; her brilliance is revealed in the way she treats human relationships in order to delve deeper into the human heart. About her, P. D. Nimsarkar writes, "Deshpande is concerned with people, the women, and their relationship with others, like husbands, parents, children, and sons and daughters. She has faithfully tried to construct womanhood in the contemporary context, society, and the world" (Nimsarkar 114).

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, deals with the subject of gender distinction, the dominance of masculine categories, as well as the silence and submission that women experience in our culture. It presents an unusual picture of Jaya, a housewife from the middle class with a

college degree, who is frequently seen as being in quest of her own identity. Because she feels constrained and stuck in the stereotypical Sita position, she is unwilling to give up her name, either Jaya or Suhasini. She willingly accepts her new role as Suhasini, Mohan's wife, after realising that she cannot keep insisting. To be the best wife and mother she can be, she disregards her own emotional needs. She owes it to society and herself to be happy and to love her husband. It is the outcome of her grandmother's ongoing instruction to her father on how to be a modest and obedient wife. "a husband is like a sheltering tree" (TLS 137), and "the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (TLS 138) are pieces of advice by her grandmother. "When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she tries her best to follow his advice meticulously" (Kumar 215).

After becoming a wife and mother and assuming the stereotypical role of a woman, Jaya has buried her own existential self. She is dissatisfied with the monotony and predetermined structure of her life, even though she has a nice house with her husband, two kids, and financial comforts, Rahul and Rati. "I had to admit the truth to myself that I had often found family life unendurable," she says of her current circumstances. The monotony and unchanging pattern had been more boring than anything else (TLS 4). Because her husband was unable to understand her feelings, she was internally tormented. She is unhappy with her marriage and feels alienated from it.

One of the most well-known and imaginative novelists in modern Indian English literature is Manju Kapur. She is passionate about highlighting the challenging conditions faced by educated women in contemporary Indian society. She draws attention to the conflict that educated middle-class women have with their traditional mothers and mothers-in-law as one of their issues. In a traditional family, conflict between mother and daughter is a common occurrence. As time goes on and the daughter becomes more mature about tradition and its values, the conflict eventually fades. Generation after generation, the conflict between mother and daughter persists. Elsaritilda, puts it, "Manju Kapur is one of the leading figures of contemporary Indian English fiction writer, who has dedicated all her works which is related and discussed the women's suffering and struggling in their personal and social identity" (Elsaritilda 63).

Virmati, the protagonist in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) (DD), is a difficult daughter to her mother Kasturi and Ida is the difficult daughter to Virmati as they disobey traditional customs of their family as well as society. It is a common practice in every family. Manju Kapur admits, "Conflict between daughter and mother is inevitable and I suppose I was a difficult daughter" (DD 107). The conflict between mother and daughter, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, etc.

It is significant to notice that Kasturi is the result of her traditional bred self which is unable to accept the new order of things brought by her daughter Virmati. Rao states, "The authoritarian character of the traditional joint family entails decision-making powers concentrated, in the position of the eldest male members." (Rao 162). In certain households, this authoritative figure may be a woman. In Virmati's instance, her mother Kasturi is the one who makes all of the significant decisions in her life and is accountable for Virmati's decision to rebel against her family's customs and traditions. Since Virmati was a little child, Kasturi has neglected and disregarded her mental needs. As a result, she has never experienced the affection and tenderness of her parents, particularly her mother. According to Milhoutra, "Kasturi's relationship with Virmati prevents her from realising her daughter's need for a distinct identity, an independent existence." So Virmati has to rebel. She rejects the world of domesticity,

Anita Nair examines every nuance of the challenges and dilemmas faced by educated middle-class Indian women in her novels. Nair's literary universe is dominated by female characters who are motivated by modern concepts, financial independence, and professional opportunities. They are bold, self-assured, and practical enough to think independently and handle even weighty topics

like sex, marriage, love, and family with a great deal of casualness. In addition to the opposing effect of conservatism, Anita Nair's female characters deal with the many opposing forces that affect every woman's actions and decision to choose between a conventional and modern outlook on life. Anita Nair authentically portrays both traditional and modern women in all of her books.

She addresses Radha's struggle as the female heroine in her book *Mistress* (2005) (MS). Their marriage is not without its challenges as the stereotypically masculine Shyam tries to subjugate and control Radha by telling her how to act in accordance with his desires and dreams. According to certain portrayals, Radha is a bright lady who questions social mores, especially the unequal roles of husband and wife. Radha even becomes pregnant with Chris Stewart while attempting to break free from the responsibilities of being a responsible wife.

Women's issues are highlighted by many Indian women writers. They create a range of characters based on real individuals, incorporating their feelings, identity crises, mood swings, torments, and other psychological and emotional diseases. The traditional portrayals of enduring, sacrificial women in favour of female characters involved in conflicts and searching for their own identities have been abandoned by the current generation of Indian women novelists. Their victim status is no longer the only way to define and characterise them. One recent development in Indian fiction is the growth of a feminist or women-centered viewpoint. In order to create identities, a number of Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity.

Simrit is a skilled freelance journalist in Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow*, whereas Som is a businessman. Overall, their styles of thinking are very different. Som always has total control over Simrit, and he doesn't care how his well-educated wife feels. Simrit endures mental anguish for a very long time, but she starts to question her husband's power when she eventually realises that enough is enough and that the water has reached her head. She ultimately makes the courageous choice to divorce Som in order to get freedom and live a happy, independent, and dignified life after realising that his behaviour hasn't improved and that things are getting worse. M Banu Krishna, G Jegatheswari opine, "It was Simrit's longing for freedom and individuality that urges her to take divorce from her husband. Simrit does not want to be known as her husband's wife but as herself" (Krishna and Jegatheswari 42).

That *Long Silence*, the title of the book, refers to the inability to communicate and express oneself. The protagonist, Jaya, is a stay-at-home mum and a failed writer. During her time alone, the protagonist sets out on an introspective journey. She tries to rediscover her identity, which she believes she has lost during the course of her seventeen-year marriage. She is never certain about her identity. She struggles with choosing between becoming Suhasini, the ideal wife, and Jaya. She struggles with juggling her identity as a writer with her identity as a wife and mother. She expresses her alienation in the following way, "I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well – the Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft, smiling, placid motherly woman. A woman who coped" (TLS 16).

Jaya plays the traditional Indian wife who has become disconnected from herself. Mohan thinks her strength comes from her mother's silence. However, Jaya interprets the silence as a sign of despair. The perceptions of Mohan and Jaya are entirely different. There is an increasing silence between the husband and wife. It creates a chasm between them. She decides to remain with the family, but her circumstances have altered. She has left the confusing roles that were imposed on her by the patriarchal culture. "Shashi Deshpande occupies a coveted place in the annals of contemporary women novelists, who concern themselves with the problems of women and their quest for identity," remarks Dr. Arabati Pradeep Kumar. Most of her women characters can transcend their identity crisis by analyzing their childhood and the process of upbringing. She explores the conflict between tradition and modernity concerning women in the middle-class society" (Kumar 214).

Things become difficult as the daughters begin to dream, reflect on their identities, and express their uniqueness. *Virmati* is the new woman's emblem. She must accompany the men without exception. She refuses to be treated like clay by others. She stresses the importance of women's education and freedom. In an attempt to broaden her horizons, *Virmati* went to Lahore, but instead she got involved in a dubious marriage, an unmarried pregnancy, and becoming a second wife. She lost her identity as a result of all of this. She lived at the mercy of her husband, his mother, and his first wife after marrying a professor who was previously married. "She is the central character of the novel, rebels against tradition and is driven by the inner need to feel loved as an individual rather than as a responsible daughter ... who tries to search her identity," notes *Yashika Chandan* (*Chandan* 85).

Unlike many other regular Indian women, *Janu* is not the kind to merely submit to the customs and social order that are favoured by men. She fights the existing traditions on the one hand. She, on the other hand, challenges her husband in court. At last, *Janu's* husband allows her to file for divorce and take her kid with her. In *Anita Nair's* *Mistress*, *Radha's* constant arguments with *Shyam* and the pain of not being able to exercise her freedom make her long for *Chris's* intimate company. Her affair with *Chris* is an example of her attempt to genuinely commit to a relationship with a man who respects her needs and provides her space. In a relationship where she would be able to realise herself, like the women she reads about or sees on TV, this is a second major violation of the rules that are supposed to help her do so. The violation, however, does not work as intended since she is unable to find the space for self-realization that she desires. But by emphasising who she is and, more crucially, what she is not looking for in life, it helps her redefine her self-image.

Radha's main motivation for disobeying the regulations that restrict her life is her need to be free to live her life as she sees fit. On the other hand, most personal violations are fruitless attempts to achieve this goal. After never been able to truly find her place in society, she is making an effort to rediscover who she really is. Before becoming a wife to a spouse she did not love, she was a lover of a man who did not fully value her. Only after issues and arguments with her marriage and a relationship with a complete stranger does she eventually come to a decision about her fate and muster the will to make it a reality. *Radha* ultimately musters the courage to stage the biggest rebellion of her life, deserting her husband to pursue her own self-realization. When she eventually conceives a kid, she is regarded by tradition as an undercoated woman. She tells herself, "It is fear that makes me seek him, no regard for him. I cannot continue to play wife merely because it frees me of worries (*MS* 426).

Indian women authors have established robust traditions in Indian English-language writing. They have created a distinctive method for analysing the problem that women encounter. The novel became a medium for self-realization, societal reform, and rebirth with the emergence of female English writers during this period. Through the novels written by women authors, we learn about women who are both traditional in their lifestyle and modern in their outlook, and who manage to preserve their uniqueness. In an attempt to create an identity separate from patriarchal culture, Indian female novelists have written extensively about female subjectivity.

Although the legislation had changed, people's sentiments had not, and the terms of divorce settlement were harsh and involved a hefty tax burden on the *Simrit*. *Simrit* feels uprooted and abandoned in the male-dominated workplace and finds that no one attempts to analyse divorce from her perspective as a person seeking fulfilment and independence. *Moolchand* and *Shah* didn't see anything wrong with the divorce settlement, despite *Simrit* being totally harmed. As a result, women are not treated properly by the law in our culture. Since men made up the bulk of the population, all laws were made by men for men. Unquestionably, modern man had changed significantly, but he

had not yet given up the antiquated old mindset that viewed women as possessions. Following the divorce of Som and Simrit, Ram Krishnan remarks:

The Hindu woman traditionally has no rights apart from what her father or her husband chooses to bestow on her. The law has changed some of that, but attitudes haven't changed much, which is clear from the husband's attitude in this case and the court's acceptance of such a document. A woman can apparently still be used as a convenience for tax purpose by her husband even after he has divorced her. (DS 168)

Jaya, played by Shashi Deshpande, accepts her new role as Mohan's wife Suhasini rather willingly. To be the best wife and mother she can be, she disregards her own emotional needs. She owes it to society and herself to be happy and to love her husband. Jaya obediently follows Mohan's instructions as he gives them. Because she has found herself in the stereotypical role of a woman as a wife and mother, Jaya has buried her own existential self throughout the years. She describes her current situation as "Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern and unending monotony" (TLS 4). Unfortunately, her husband was unable to comprehend her emotions, which caused her torment. She feels estranged in her marriage and is not content with it. She now viewed their union as "a pair of bullocks yoked together ... A man and woman married for seventeen years (TLS 18).

When Jaya finds out that she shouldn't confront her husband even if he is at fault, she becomes extremely furious. Since she is asked to follow in her mother's husband's footsteps, Jaya feels as though she does not have the freedom to express herself at home. She reassesses her marriage and finds that she isn't genuinely content there. All of their marital bliss is a dream. In reality, she doesn't appreciate her individuality. There is an increasing silence between the husband and wife. It creates a chasm between them. She decides to break her seventeen-year silence and cease being Mohan's silent, submissive friend. She also makes the decision to stand up for herself. She chooses to stay with the family, but things have changed for her. She has exited the perplexing roles that the patriarchal culture had assigned to her.

Jaya, the book's female lead, yearns for self, identity, and independence despite her silence and lack of communication with her spouse. The feminine search for identity is perfectly embodied in this work. In order to respect her feelings and urges, Jaya strives for personal emancipation. By remaining mute and compliant, she is able to evaluate her life's expectations and recognises the emotional strain and pain she has experienced over the years. She gains so much power and confidence that she becomes a unique woman.

The impact and pressure of patriarchy are an unavoidable part of Virmati's life in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. It started at her parents' house, where she was coerced into marrying the irrigation engineer against her will. "It seemed to Virmati that her family could talk of nothing else but her wedding. Every word they said had so little relation to her inner life that she felt fraudulent even listening to them, passively, immorally silent" (DD 70).

Virmati was able to experience the freedom and independence of living on her own as a college student because to the aspirational seeds that were planted in her. However, she begins to date a married professor that she meets. When she finds out about the professor's intimate relationship with his first wife, she makes the decision to avoid him forever. She makes an effort to stand out from the crowd and pursues education as a means of gaining independence. But because of the professor's unavoidable visits, she gets pregnant and is forced to wed him. At his home, she is mistreated and kept out of everything. As a result, she dares to cross one patriarchal boundary while crossing another. "Virmati's self-expression and identity have been entangled with family relationships" (Sakthivel 674).

Virmati continuously battles against patriarchal influences and conventional ideas, but she still falls victim to the negative aspects of the male-dominated society. She has always struggled with her family's traditional values, although she has always had both successes and setbacks. The right person to cite here is Vandita Mishra, who succinctly recounts the poignant story of Virmati in *The Pioneer*:

Kapur never permits Virmati any assertion of power or freedom. Because even as she breaks, free from old prisons, she is locked into newer ones. Her relationship with the Professor, for instance. While it does provide an escape from a loveless arranged marriage, it is itself furtive and claustrophobic, offering only a stolen togetherness behind curtained windows.

(Mishra 187)

Virmati undergoes a steady transformation from a condition of innocence and victimization to one of self-actualization and empowerment. S. Sakthivel concludes, "Many generations of women is depicted in the novel. Virmati as a woman, who breaks many social norms to gain her selfhood. In all her novels traditions, transition and modernity are the stages through which the women are passing" (Sakthivel 677). "I'm getting married in two weeks' time. To a businessman who lives in Kerala. I've met him once; he seems pleasant enough. I don't suppose you want to know much more about him, and there's little more I can add to that description anyway" (AP 63).

There are two things that strain a lot on the young mind of Janu after she gets married to Suresh. Janu is unhappy at the beginning of her married life because of the ambiguous nature of Suresh. She doesn't begin her journey toward self-actualization until she recognises that she is losing herself. Janu finds her "self" and recognises her inner strength. People are motivated to strive for self-esteem when they realise who they are. Janu experiences this when she witnesses her spouse and other family members neglecting her daughter. She is aware that their mindset is more traditional than patriarchal. It is possible to understand her husband's disregard for his wife and daughter as a component of patriarchy. A feeling of estrangement and betrayal permeate Janu's thoughts.

Anita Nair accurately portrays both traditional and contemporary women in her books, emphasising all the subtleties of their hardships as educated, middle-class Indian women. The representation of a new, strong, contemporary woman by Anita Nair is consistently and deliberately at odds with patriarchal ideals and power structures. The novelist shows that this clash is painful but inevitable because nothing significant in a woman's life happens without a struggle against patriarchy and biases.

Following their marriage, Shyam progressively assumed control of Radha. He came out of the action a strong, dominant force, and Radha became a detached spectator. She is imprisoned in the marriage's imprisonment. She likens herself to a butterfly that has been photographed and nailed to a frame while she is with Shyam. In Radha's own words,

... I think that for Shyam, I am a possession. A much-cherished possession. That is my role in his life. He doesn't want an equal; what he wants is a mistress. Someone to indulge and someone to indulge him with feminine wiles. I think of the butterfly I caught and pinned to a board when it was still alive, its wings spread so as to display the markings, obvious that somewhere within, a little heartbeat, yearning to fly. (MS 53)

Shyam's behaviour changed after being married, which may be interpreted as patriarchal. It is expected of Radha to fulfil every duty associated with being a housewife. She is not allowed to teach or run a play-home school. She is not allowed to give him business advice. Even for small things, she should seek him for help or financial support.

Chris abandoned her after she became pregnant with him, but Shyam intervened to save her by promising to adopt her as his wife and to be the child's father. However, Radha held a different view, saying, "I have fumbled around all my life, convincing myself that this is the way things

should be. I have never acted as though I were an independent thinker. I've never decided anything. I have allowed myself to get carried along. Isn't it about that I took some charge of my life? (MS 401-402).

Radha eventually divorced her husband and moved out on her own. She decided to raise her urban child alone after cutting her relationship with both of the men in her life. In current day and age, Radha is referred to as "a new Indian woman."

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