

The Depiction of Man-woman Relationships in the Select works of Shashi Deshpande and Kamla Das: A Study

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das, prominent women writers, occupy a prestigious position in Indian English literature owing to their picturesque presentation of man-woman relationships in literary works. This study presents a nuanced portrayal of gender dynamics in their writings. Deshpande's works employ an introspective approach, illustrating women's struggles for identity and self-worth within the confines of traditional relationships. In contrast, Kamala Das offers a striking and confessional perspective, challenging societal norms through her poetic expressions of love, desire, and sexuality. Furthermore, the study also aims to highlight the distinctive approaches of both writers, who provide profound critiques of gender dynamics while advocating for equality, love, and respectful connections between men and women. By revealing the intricate dimensions of gender relationships in literary discourse, this research paper eventually seeks to illuminate the shortcomings of emotional engagement in conventional male-female relationships, particularly emphasizing the lack of emotional intimacy, love, equality, and respect.

KEY WORDS: Dynamics, Introspective, Relationships, Traditional

INTRODUCTION

According to India's ancient social history, men and women's relationships were regarded as a sacred, reliable, and loving one. Both of them received the same respect and standing in the community. Women had the freedom to pursue an education, engage in conversations and debates, and fight alongside males. In Indian society, women performed a variety of roles that were admired. When Muslim conquerors arrived in India throughout time, however, they took Indian women as a means of gratifying their sexual desires. In India, the institution of purdah was consequently established and became ingrained in daily life. They were restricted to the domestic sphere.

With the passage of time, there were lots of feminist movements for the emancipation of women from male-dominated social structures that are called 'patriarchy,' which is imbued into the minds of men so profoundly that still they can't acknowledge the equal status of a woman in society. Naturally, women are delicate and powerless physically as compared to men; that's moreover the reason for the reliance of women on men, but intellectually, they are not inferior to men. Mary Wollstonecraft comments in this respect:

"The minds of women are no different from the minds of men, but that only men and women differ in their bodies. Women have become silly creatures because the goal of their education is to lure a man. A system based on one's sex dependence is demanding to everyone."

It is the horrible fact of the society that actually, after playing every function completely to their levels, whether it a wife, a mother, an advisor, or a companion. They are not receiving the love, respect, and acknowledgment they are due. Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das, two well-known feminists in Indian English writing, illustrate the interaction between a man and a woman and offer an intriguing yet complementary viewpoint on gender dynamics in order to explore this point of view. Their works examine the social, psychological, and emotional facets of relationships, particularly as they relate to intimacy and marriage. The patriarchal frameworks that frame the relationship between a man and a woman are analysed by both great authors, who emphasize the emotional alienation, power imbalance, and social expectations that often restrain women's individuality and independence. Their stories revolve around the central character, who is an Indian middle-class woman.

Shashi Deshpande writes "The point is, I always begin with characters..... even the themes emerge from characters who belong to the Class I know best" (Deshpande, *A Women's World All the Way*, 1987, p.12)

DISCUSSION ON MAN -WOMAN RELATIONSHIP

Perception of Shashi Deshpande

When nature has created human beings, she has assigned multiple roles. The foundation of society has been the relationship between men and women. In all of her writings, Shashi Deshpande has found a fresh perspective on the connection between men and women. She asserts that there are two different types of relationships between men and women. The social institution known as marriage is the first well-known and accepted type of male-female interaction; romantic love, adulterous affairs, and sex are examples of unacknowledged forms of relationships.

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed men-women relationships with different tints and shades in her works. There is an undercurrent of discontented sex for various facts, like the uneven pitch of passion and physical relations as a dull habitual routine. She makes it obvious that while sex is an essential component of a man-woman relationship, emotional and psychological fulfilment are less significant.

Shashi Deshpande portrays the 'man' gender in her works as a device in the hands of a patriarchal framework. It is the patriarchy that imbued into their minds that they are 'superior' and women are 'inferior' or the 'other' in the society. Men are shown in her works as both agents and victims; at times, males continue to be the primary social agency of dominance over women, but they also fail to free themselves from the monopoly and authenticity of a patriarchal "man." However, women are obligated by birth and often fulfil them.

However, when we talk about the three prominent works and its protagonists—Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Indu of *Roots and Shadows*, and Jaya of *That Long Silence*—the phrase "My Life is My Own" serves as their rallying cry for independence. After being married of their own choosing, they initially search for a room of their own, but quickly get disillusioned with their new homes.

Regarding marriage, Indu considers, "Behind the façade of romanticism, sentiment, and tradition, what was marriage after all but two people brought together after a cold-blooded bargain to meet, mate, and reproduce?" (Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, 1983, P.03). Indu, who 'loves her husband too passionately' (Deshpande *Roots and Shadows*, 1983, P. 83). She liberates herself from the binding embrace of her husband; she feels no qualms about her sexual encounter with her cousin, Naren. "An ecstasy filled my body, and I could not be still anymore." (Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, 1983, 151-152).

Jaya weds Mohan, a man of her choice, but she feels uncomfortable about her relationship with him. "M-

an-women relationship as nothing but a deep chasm between the two.” (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, 1989, P. 98). Despite their passionate union, she has failed. To hell with "marriage," Jaya, who has an affair with Kamath, is unable to honour his passing because it would destroy her marriage.

Saru, against her parents' wishes, marries Manu but gets disappointed and indulges in an extramarital affair with Boozie, which is an expression of her freedom and autonomy. She gets threatened by the 'dark' at night since her husband assaults her body and tortures it horribly. She is caught in the grip of "familiar irritation, the familiar exasperation" (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, 1980, P. 17). Indeed, after investing fifteen years of long married life, she is a successful doctor and self-reliant lady. However, her married life turns out to be a fiasco, and Saru proclaims, "My life is my own" (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, 1980, p. 201).

In Deshpande's works, the protagonist is always a woman, involving the central space in the novel. In the beginning, the woman is unconventional one, but in the course of time she discovers herself and finds solutions to her issues through adjustment with the tradition. Like a specialist, Deshpande deals with the conflicting phases and fundamental reasons confronted by her characters and, to some extent, suggests a way out of it.

Perception of Kamala Das

The Works of Kamla Das depict her determined protest against patriarchy and persistently pen down her own life experiences; she mentions in her autobiography that:

“Poets, even the most insignificant of them, are different from other people. A poet's raw material is not stone or clay; it is his or her own personality. I could not escape from my predicament even for a moment; I was emotional and oversensitive.” (My Story 92)

Das writes poems that are both universal and personal. Her verse expresses the idea that men and women are related to one another. The patriarchy, which is the cause of women's exploitation and captivity, is protested against throughout her poems. The woman's quest for identity, mythological references, feminine sensibility, and the man-woman interaction are all highlighted by the theme of love. Both her husband and her lovers betray her in different ways. Her ideas and feelings are never understood by others. In her memoirs, she describes the arduous path of her life as being exhausted by the pursuit of attachment. She has always been irritated and troubled by the unequal rights and interactions between men and women. She makes this statement in 'My Story.'

“You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her in the long summer of your love so that she would forget not the raw seasons alone and the homes left behind, but also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless pathways of the sky.” (Kamala Das, My Story 192)”.

Her poems like “A Relationship,” “Summer in Calcutta,” “An Introduction,” and a few others are viewed as the declaration of the pitiable circumstances of a confounded woman who needs love, thought, compassion, and needs a valuing life partner, warmth, and home. Her husband's wild behaviour makes her feel awkward, which influenced her peace of mind: “Fond husband, ancient settler in the mind of an old fat spider, meandering webs of bewilderment” (my story 1977).

Therefore, due to an unhappy marriage, the woman finds herself unwittingly dragged into an illicit relationship in search of genuine and pure love. In her autobiography “My Story” (1977), Das says:

“In the orbit of illicit sex, there seemed to be only crudeness and violence.”

In the poem “Summer in Calcutta,” she presents a contrast between man and woman's thinking; here, man only satisfies his sexual desires; on the other hand, women yearn for emotional satisfaction. As her

husband, who is only interested in sexual gratification. She frankly describes the man-woman relationship with a bold attitude.

In her poem 'The Stone Age,' she regrets the loss of her identity through marriage. She says that although she and her husband have been living together for a long time, they have failed in love, and as a result, her heart has ended up in an empty place. She says:

"Who can help us who have lived long so and have failed in love? The heart, an empty listen, waiting through long hours, fills itself with willing snacks of silence."

Every interaction she writes about in her poetry conveys a sense of instability and loneliness rather than peace. She rebels as a result of this sense of betrayal and hopelessness, and in her poetry "The Invitation," she expresses her hate and disdain for all of her relationships.

"..... Marriage means nothing more than a show of wealth to families like ours." She has dreams of a loving husband who seems to give her the ecstasy of heaven. But the absence of love and affection has alienated her from her husband.

Kamala Das is an advocate of liberty and uniformity for women. She is magnanimous with the institution of marriage. The concept of a man-woman relationship in the family is apparently based on gender pattern, i.e., male dominance. However, Kamla Das does not find favour with the existing state of affairs. She is stunned to witness the relationship between her mother and father as "an arid union."

"Her father behaved like a monarch, and her mother was treated as a slave; she unhesitatingly called it a victim- victimiser relationship."

An intellectual disillusionment with the man-woman connection is sparked by this. Her autobiographical work "My Story" aims to illustrate the terrible experience of a married lady by parodying herself. For women, conventional morality means different things than it does for males. This dual norm of sexual virginity and ethical integrity is what she discards.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of men and women relationships in the works of Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das, particularly regarding marriage and extramarital issues, leads to self-introspection and critical conclusion. In Deshpande's works, the novel starts with an unconventional marriage as an institutionalized way for men to dominate women. It then addresses the issues of the female protagonists' mental conflicts and adjustments, and finally their attempt to conform to the roles that are expected of them. Her female characters initially appear to revolt, but at the end, she conforms to the patriarchal conventions of Indian society.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, and Indu in *Roots and Shadows* are examples of Deshpande's main characters. often go through a process of self-discovery that has been brought on by marital difficulties including abandonment, infidelity, or a lack of emotional intimacy. Therefore, in the midst of the complexity of morality and love, extramarital affairs do occur, expressing the protagonist's conflict between duty and desire.

Contemporary poet Kamala Das writes effortlessly about marriage, sex, and love—all topics that are within her consciousness and experience. Her poetry is therefore autobiographical, reflecting her own self-discovery. She articulates the various levels of hypocrisy. It's only normal for her to feel cold toward her husband because of the way she interacts with him. She has engaged in extramarital affairs as a kind of rebellion due to the lack of affection. The standards of a male-dominated culture have been challenged by her candid portrayal of sex and sexuality, which are regarded as social taboos. These matters aren't shown

as solutions, nevertheless. She acknowledges the emotional cost of extramarital affairs, knowing their limitations in offering genuine fulfilment.

The main theme of Kamla Das's poems is the pursuit of love. Her desire for partnerships founded on equality, freedom, and respect for one another is shown in her poems.

Both Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande criticizes the man-woman relationship and suggests that true liberation stems from questioning social norms that restrict women's autonomy rather than the act of stepping outside from marriage. They also suggest that healthy relationships thrive when love, respect, equality, mutual understanding, and freedom are the cornerstones of a relationship. A good relationship can be created by maintaining emotional and physical equilibrium.

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