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## Beyond Feminism: Post-Feminist Perspectives in Shashi Deshpande's *Literary Landscape*

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### ABSTRACT

This abstract explores the literary oeuvre of Shashi Deshpande, an acclaimed Indian author, to explore the presence of post-feminist perspectives within her works. Shashi Deshpande, a stalwart in contemporary Indian literature, has garnered acclaim for her insightful exploration of women's lives in a rapidly changing social and cultural milieu. While feminist literature traditionally focused on exposing and challenging patriarchal norms, Deshpande's writings signal a shift towards post-feminist sensibilities. As a prominent figure in contemporary Indian literature, Deshpande's novels explore the subtle complexities of women's lives, relationships, and social expectations. This analysis examines how Deshpande's writings transcend traditional feminist discourse, embracing a post-feminist lens that critically engages with the evolving roles and identities of women in a temperamental socio-cultural landscape. Through an in-depth exploration of key themes, characters, and narrative techniques employed by Deshpande, this abstract seeks to illuminate the unique ways in which post-feminism is manifested in her body of work, shedding light on the author's contributions to the broader discussion on gender and empowerment. This paper aims to unravel the distinctive characteristics of post-feminism in Deshpande's literary landscape, examining how her narratives navigate the complexities of modern womanhood.

**Keywords:** Shashi Deshpande, post-feminism, literature, gender dynamics, woman empowerment, modern womanhood.

### INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande arises as a noteworthy voice that surpasses the traditional confines of feminist analysis in the diverse structure of contemporary literature. Deshpande's literary world delves further than the

boundaries of traditional feminism, offering readers an in-depth analysis of post-feminist ideas and a chance to explore the complexity of the intersection of gender and societal standards. Through her narratives, Deshpande discusses the changing dynamics of agency, identity, and empowerment

in a society that is changing constantly. She also questions the stereotypes associated with feminism. The study of post-feminist themes in Deshpande's writings provides readers with an intriguing and provocative viewpoint on the ongoing discussion about gender equality and women's roles in contemporary literature. It also serves as a compelling lens through which one can understand the complex interactions between gender, selfhood, and societal norms.

### **Feminism vs Post-Feminism**

Within the larger discourse of gender equality, feminism and post-feminism reflect two different schools of thought. The goals of traditional feminism, which gained traction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were to combat structural gender inequality, support women's suffrage, and deal with concerns like reproductive rights and workplace discrimination. Later on, post-feminism surfaced as a reaction against several perceived shortcomings of classical feminism. The contention made by post-feminists is that women no longer feel restricted by conventional gender norms, and that the objectives of equality have essentially been met. While post-feminism is sometimes criticized for possibly down playing persistent gender inequities and structural difficulties, feminism aims to destroy patriarchal structures. The discussion between these two points of view demonstrates how the feminist movement is still developing and how difficult it is to achieve absolute gender equality.

### **Shashi Deshpande: The Trailblazer**

Shashi Deshpande is commonly considered as a post-feminist novelist who has explored the intricacies of women's life in a changing social milieu, leading to notable literary achievements. In works like *"The Dark Holds No Terrors"* and *"That Long Silence,"* she explores the complex ways in which women negotiate the boundaries between tradition and modernity. Deshpande's stories tend to emphasize the agency and autonomy of her female characters, presenting them as

unique people with their own goals, aspirations, and challenges. Deshpande's post-feminist approach is distinguished by an emphasis on the complexities of individual choice and the negotiation of identity in the modern world, even as it acknowledges the accomplishments of classical feminism.

### **Post-feminist Perspectives in Shashi Deshpande's Works**

Deshpande's works for literature explore the complexities of women's life and societal expectations, providing as an inspiration for female study. Her works challenge preconceived notions about femininity, portraying characters who navigate their own paths.

In the seminal work *"The Dark Holds No Terrors"*, Deshpande skillfully challenges the typical portrayal of women, breaking free from stereotypes that often confine female characters to predefined roles. The protagonist, Sarita, defies the Stereotype of the submissive wife and challenges societal norms by seeking independence and autonomy. Saru depicts the middle-class working woman in contemporary India. Although she initially protests against the established norms and ideals, she ultimately strives to find acceptance for the status quo. Saru is disobedient because she has experienced numerous trying circumstances that have affected her mental health. Saru and her brother Dhruva received distinct treatment from her mother. She starts to hate her mother and, to a certain extent, all of the traditional practices as a result of this discrimination. Childhood has a significant impact on a person's value system formation and character development. Conventional patriarchal structures often neglect and marginalize the girl child. Against the wishes of her family, she marries Manohar. She is rebelling against her family and customs with this. As a doctor, she is successful. After her job interferes with her marriage, she leaves her abusive husband and goes back to live with her father. There's an opportunity for her to turn back time and see the footsteps she left behind. By thinking

things out, she finds the answers to the issues in her life. In the end, she comes to the realization that, from a modern standpoint, she will never be able to achieve in her future if she completely rejects her history and family.

Through minute characterizations and intricate narratives, Deshpande underscores the multifaceted nature of women's lives, subverting stereotypes to portray them as individuals with agency and complexity. Deshpande's novels stand as powerful examples of literature that goes beyond traditional gender norms, contributing to a broader conversation on the subversion of stereotypes and the empowerment of women in literature.

Deshpande's character often exhibit a strong sense of agency, challenging conventional gender roles. The author intricately weaves narratives that explore women's personal growth, empowerment and the pursuit of individual identity. In the novel *"That Long Silence"*, The protagonist Jaya's husband Mohan disliked her interest in Paulskar and Faiyaz Khan, the classical singers. Mohan said, **"What a poor taste you have, Jaya?" (3)**. Subash Chandra in *"Silent No More: A study of That Long Silence"* avows that, **"As a child, Jaya, the narrator, nurtured shame because she could not, in spite of her father's exhortations and admonitions, respond to and admire the classical music" (148)**. Jaya's grandma, Ajji, has continually chastised her for her inquisitive nature and warned her that, **"I feel sorry for your husband, Jaya, whoever he is, 'Look at you - for everything question for every a retort what husband can be comfortable with that?" (27)**. Woman seems to be forced to conform to the tastes of both her husband and father. Though her husband Mohan chastises Jaya for having such taste, she did enjoy the musicians as her father had encouraged. It is forbidden for the woman to have her own opinions and take decisions independently. Jaya even stopped writing because Mohan didn't like the stories she wrote, which involved a relationship in which the husband could only communicate with his wife through her body. Even though she had written a short story that won first prize and was

published in a magazine during her early married years, her husband Mohan would only express his disapproval for the story that made her well-known in the community. As Jaya celebrated receiving first place for her story, **"Oh God, Mohan, I've won a prize, it's the story I sent for the contest, it's got a prize..." (143)**. Rather than expressing gratitude, Mohan becomes unhappy and says,

**'Jaya' he had said dully, 'how could you how could you have done it? How could I have done what? 'They will know now, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us, they will think I am this kind of man, they will think I am this man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write things, how will you face people after this? (144)**

Jaya changes her perspective from being a normal meek Indian middle-class housewife to writing humorous articles for a magazine called "Seeta". She receives a lot of positive feedback for these essays from readers as well as a small sign of approval from Mohan.

She remembers learning Sanskrit with indignation since women characters were required to speak Prakrit and were not permitted to speak Sanskrit due to cultural constraints. In contrast to Sanskrit's literary and religious standards, Prakrit is described as an original, natural, artless, normal, and ordinary vernacular language. Because Prakrit was an easier language to learn, women were forced to study it instead of Sanskrit dramas due to strict rules in the past. She now understands that she has been speaking Prakrit the entire time. She decides to listen and speak Sanskrit and resolves to **"plug that hole in the heart," (192)** in order to erase the silence. She recollects **"- a language that had sounded to my ears like a baby's lisp" (192)**. Jaya is empowered by her intellectual competence. She decides herself that, **"I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us" (192)**.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the complex realm of post-feminist perspectives within Shashi Deshpande's literary landscape with the goal of enhancing one's understanding of gender dynamics in contemporary literature. After a thorough analysis of Deshpande's major works, we have pinpointed subtle changes from post-feminist sensibility to standard feminist paradigms. Deshpande intentionally eschewed binary oppositions and oversimplified categorizations in favour of a more inclusive and realistic representation of women's experiences in her storytelling. Deshpande challenges readers to interact with the complex web of interpersonal relationships, cultural norms, and personal agency by going beyond the confines of a purely feminist lens. This forces us to face the dynamic nature of gender roles and identities. The present research stresses how crucial it is to acknowledge how feminist discourse is changing and how important post-feminist viewpoints are in modern literature. Deshpande's body of work reminds us that the feminist discourse is dynamic and ever-evolving, ever shifting to fit the shifting social

landscape. Through navigating the post-feminist landscape in Deshpande's writings, gender studies become more inclusive and intersectional. By doing this, we serve the legacy of feminist philosophy while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a more thorough comprehension of the complexity present in people's everyday experiences in our dynamic global society.

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