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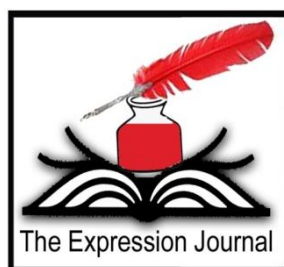


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## **DESPONDENCY OF WOMEN PORTRAYED IN THE WRITINGS OF ANITA NAIR AND SHASHI DESHPANDE**

**DR. SANTOSH**

**Assistant Professor, Department of English**

**Govt. College, Jind, Haryana, India**

**Email: santoshsainiphd@gmail.com**

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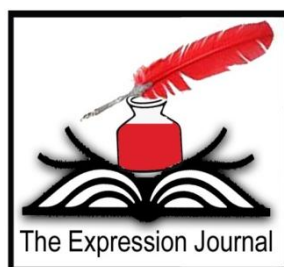
### **Abstract**

It is true that women have been quite concealed and exploited. Even though educated, a large section of Indian women is suffering today also. An attempt is made to compare the feminism present in the works of Anita Nair and Shashi Deshpande by protagonist Anjana from *The Better Man* and Jaya from *That Long Silence*. Both the novelists have presented the troubles of Indian middle-class women who face inconsistency of tradition and modernity. They express how women are exploited within the marital frame. This paper is centered on the examination of sensibility and psychology of female protagonist of Anita Nair and Shashi Deshpande's work. This examines the particular conditions of Indian women characterized with self-realization in their different appearances. Through the character of Anjana we come to know that women are not the puppets in the hands of men but she has her own will to make her existence and from Jaya we come to know that women used to suffer for the sake of children and so called married life. They suffer from mental trauma because of frustration, hopes and disappointments. They feel trapped between her own aspirations and forces of patriarchy which confine them. This study explains that feminism fights against male prejudice and demands equal rights and treatment of women as human being. Further, it explores the comparative analysis between two protagonists of both feminist writers.

### **Keywords**

Married Life, Sufferings, Existence, Alienation, Exploitation, Identity-crisis and Self-discovery.

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**DR. SANTOSH**

Assistant Professor, Department of English

Govt. College, Jind, Haryana, India

Email: [santoshsainiphd@gmail.com](mailto:santoshsainiphd@gmail.com)

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### Introduction

Both writers have expressed the concern with which the women are conditioned right from the beginning of their birth. They are told that the ultimate aim of their life is to find a suitable match and get married. They are made to feel that their attributes are obedience, humbleness and servility. Thus, they are forced to assimilate their inferior roles gradually. Novels by both writers are a study of husband-wife relationship.

The condition of women from lower class, as presented by Deshpande, is really pitiable. Their sufferings start much before their marriage. They continue working and earning all their life. They are married off at the age considered suitable by their parents, to any boy who has one head, two eyes, two ears, two hands and two legs like any man. Marriage does not bring any positive change in their lives, but it brings with it endless pain, suffering and burden. Anita Nair is a genuine Indian Fiction writer concerned with the predicaments of women in Indian scenario. Her women characters come out with full strength and vitality to encounter the oppressive environment. She envisions a beautiful future of women by her optimistic attitude and by bestowing her female characters with undoubting courage. Anita Nair's women are so courageous, so bold, so daring that they, in order to free themselves from the male domination, can go to any extent. Overturning the gender roles is not impossible in Anita Nair.

### Objectives

- To reveal the sacrifices of women for the sake of married life through Jaya, the protagonist of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*.
- To explore the sufferings and then decision making of women through Anjana, the protagonist of Anita Nair's *The Better Man*.

### Character of Jaya

*That Long Silence* is a study in Jaya's Character and the fortitude she displays. Despite the fact that she is humiliated and her individuality is hindered at a number of places, she is able to come out as a winner in the end of the novel by mustering up courage. The process of success and self recognition is not that easy as she has to undergo much mental trauma. But

she emerges as a powerful individual in the end as she is possessed with better understanding of human relations and her own role as a daughter, sister, wife, mother and a woman. She is able to break that long held silence. Jaya, in the beginning, is a stereotyped, educated, middle-class woman, whose aim is to suppress her own wishes and to act according to her husband. She dares not protest against his wishes: "I had learnt it at last—no questions, no retorts, only silence" (143).

Jaya was very close to her father. Her father always encouraged her. He named her Jaya which stands for victory and always made her aware that she was not just any person. She was different from others. He would dream that Jaya either bags an international award or goes to Oxford. However, his early death shatters her dreams and makes her strong to confront the reality of life. Her early training at home has made her obedient and submissive towards her husband. As she was taught that a husband is everything for her, and it is impossible to survive in this male-dominated world. She must have a male support, especially her husband's if she wants a happy marital life. Her husband is one of the traditional Indian husbands who believes that woman's strength is sitting in front of the fire but to Jaya, it is a despair. Jaya is a woman who accepts things silently, suppressing her own desire. In our traditional scenario, a woman's identity is never her own. It gets changed with the passage of time and her relationships with others, as a daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. As her father named her 'Jaya' which means victory, but her husband named her 'Suhasini', stands for soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. She wants to retain her own old name and to some extent she succeeds in but over all gets fail. Moving on to the physical relationship between husband and wife, it is again the case of a dominating husband and a suppressed wife. The same thing is in her relationship. Mohan hurts her but she remains silent;

'Did I hurt you?' and my answer, 'No'. Each time, after it was over, the same question; and my reply too, invariably the same—'No'. It was Mohan who encouraged her but when her story was awarded, he got furious because it was the revelation of their own life. This story wounded him, 'How can you reveal us, how can you reveal our lives to the world in this way?' (144)

And Jaya knows that it has nothing to do with Mohan that it is a good story after all. It is not the revelation of their life that disturbs him but her success and fame which this story brought to her. Social consistency has always been more mandatory for a woman than a man. A woman, generally, does not speak bitter to her husband but her husband speaks. Mohan has crushed both the woman and the writer in Jaya because it seems, he neither loves nor encourages her. Jaya has every reason to be bitter with him, for he has been responsible for her misery. Jaya recalls their relationship as wife and husband. There was no feeling of love. Both of them were bearing the burden of this husband-wife relationship.

### **Character of Anjana**

Anjana, in the novel *The Better Man* was brought up in a liberal atmosphere by her parents. She is happy in her world of independence which gives her a profound sense of self fulfilment. When her age turned twenty seven her independence is lost in the name of marriage. In her married life, she endures several injustices perpetrated by her husband. In the days of her earlier married days she tries a lot to impress her husband, Ravindran but she couldn't. She wants to give the best to him but he was not interested in her. Anjana consciously or unintentionally imitates the perfect woman because of her conventional upbringing. From her early childhood, girls are trained to stay pleased in their married lives under any circumstances, and thus fit in these ethics in her psyche. Whenever Anjana is ready for a casual

conversation Ravindran feels irritated and leaves the place at once. In spite of his actions, she is ready to perform her duty and all that she wants to know about the likes and dislikes of her husband. Her husband's home signifies a place of meaninglessness where she feels a stranger in the bed beside her. She is eager to lead a healthy life with him but it is mere a dream for her to achieve. She longs for freedom and love in marriage, but it breeds pain, misery and fury. She develops hatred to all the things around her, even to herself. She feels that she has been victimized in the name of customs and practices. In the world of Anjana, marriage is used traditionally.

Apparently, communication in the Indian society marriage brings together man and woman under one roof, but she skins over the sexual relationship. She conveniently gives up the fact that every relationship, of course, sexual relationship also incomplete without the involvement of emotional relationship. There was no fine exchange between them. Her marital relation with her husband is marked by loneliness and improper communication. Anjana moved to her parents' home in order to look after her mother. Her entrance to her mother's house is kind of escape from her loveless marital life. For the first time after four months her husband spoke an extended discussion about his plans to give up the house and start a new factory on his own. In course of her married life only on that night she feels really happy and she flavours the conjugal bond with him. Anjana tries to understand him because all her thoughts stand for the Indian wife who is compelled to carry her tradition and culture. Ravindran's business failed and decided to start a new one. He being a selfish man wants to achieve his goals and ambitions in life. He becomes self-obsessed man. He concerns about himself and rarely he thinks about her. His frequent visits were reduced.

The novel also cross-examines the environment of the relationship between Anjana and her husband and the nature of their married life. Their relationship is affected adversely by their incapability to understand each other. Due to lack of communication the growing 'silence' between them, their marital life grows unsteady and dismal. For his lack of confidence, he violently attacked Anjana. On watching the terrifying behaviour, her father raised a voice against him:

"When I gave you my daughter's hand in marriage, it was with the hope that you would love her. Cherish and protect her for the rest of her life. If all you intend to do is hurt her, and made her unhappy, then there is no need for such a relationship. My daughter can manage very well without a husband like you. If you ever hurt my daughter again, I'll throw you out of this house. Do you understand?", her father told Ravindran. (Nair *TBM*: 232)

Again the worries begin to start in the life of her parents. Ravindran began to assault her in another way. In order to save their daughter from the cruelty of her husband, her father finds a suitable teacher job. She enjoyed her job and made many friends. She prefers to read magazines, books and carried the transistor radio along with her like a baby.

She tries to come out from the married life which she considers it as a disaster. Having realized her position, Anjana would not accept the earlier image of a pair of bullocks yoked together, signalling a loveless couple. She comes to realize that life can always be made possible. The earlier impulsive Anjana becomes a mature woman, and with her realization, shadow that befalls between wife and husband tends to disappear. Anjana like all women is a victim and conquered woman but not a passive silent sufferer all restricted women. Yet she does not question the man; her oppressor because she is more concerned in getting on her life and in finding her meaningful existence. She was not unaware about the thoughts of her



husband. The novelist tries to establish that it is not only the patriarchal set up which is responsible for the women's condition in the Indian society. The responsibility also lies within the victim to refuse, to raise a voice and to achieve the goal.

Finally, Anjana's positive attitude towards life, work, financial independence, and self-identity helps her to go ahead in her life with hope and optimism and she proves that women can achieve autonomy. Anjana finds her voice and establish her identity. She has also created her gender identity and found a significant way of life with Mukundan. It shows that the novel does not end in depression but ends on a note of hope. Thus, Anita Nair in her novels has given the external and the internal identity of her all female characters in a psychological way. In fact, her fictional speciality occurs to be the exploration of the psyche of her women characters of all age groups. Towards the end of the novel, Mukundan visits Anjana to plead with her to forgive his trespasses and accept him again. Anjana warns him of the consequences:

"The Villagers won't approve of it Or me. You will be kicked out of the committee. They will ostracize you. You won't be invited to anyone's wedding or housewarming or be included in any of the village's activities." (TBM 355)

For Anjana, Mukundan's well-being was her primary concern. She represents the traditional Sita's image, an object of pity and compassion.

Due to higher education, women start questioning and are able to prove themselves. A woman in the contemporary era has developed the urge to create an environment for the full expression for her emotional and moral self and what is important to her is that the craving to be accepted as an individual, a person in her own right and enjoying the same status as man has always enjoyed. So, she indulges in search of self or real image. Today, the woman plays diverse roles both indoors and outdoors. She participates in all the hitherto male-dominated spheres. But a conflict persists in her mind and makes her restless. Family, marriage and social norms bind her completely. In the name of tradition and conventional beliefs, Indian women are subjected to a lot of tortures. We can see this in the both novels, how do the protagonists suffer on the name of marriage. At last, they both decided to understand their own existence and make decision without any confusion.

Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair depict the misery of Indian girl-child who suffers from gender discrimination and feels herself inferior. They express how women are exploited within the marital frame. I have tried to focus on the exploration of sensibility and psychology of female protagonist of the Anita Nair and Shashi Deshpande's work. The theme of marriage in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is depicted. Marriage is an institution which is meant to provide security, love and emotional harmony to both male and female. But the institution of marriage has failed dramatically in its aim. Instead of providing love, it has only resulted in sex and lust without even an iota of love and emotional understanding. The novel by Deshpande *That Long Silence* clearly brings forth the various ways by which Jaya's life has been subjugated, making her only an object rather a lifeless object. Marriage plays its disastrous role and Jaya is left aghast. She has to mould herself after marriage according to her husband's likes and dislikes. Her creative urge remains pent up as her husband is not at all happy with whatever she writes, thus ultimately she has to shun writing. Not only Jaya but other women including Nayana and Jeeja are also victims in marriage.

The mind or the deepest thought of Indian woman is generally influenced by violent powers that control unfairly her acceptance and admittance of defeat which results in varieties of reactions and includes protest, revenge and violence. Here is made an effort to explore the issues like rape in marriage in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. She depicts that rape, in

marriage life, is used as tool by husband to dominate women; the strength and weakness of Indian women through the woman protagonist of her novels. She explores the psyche of educated middle class Indian women who find themselves smothered and fettered in patriarchal society. They suffer from mental trauma because of frustration, hopes and disappointments. This paper explores the study of feminism and its various definitions. It explains that feminism fights against male chauvinism and demands equal rights and treatment of women as human being. It demands emotional and psychological adjustment respecting each other. Feminism is not insult of partner but is a movement of social reconstruction. It is not anti-man but it challenges to patriarchal thoughts.

Shashi Deshpande portrays the image of modern women who face void and feel vacuum in their life and tells about the patriarchal set up, where man is given complete freedom and futility of life which compels the women characters for self introspection and to find out their own identity in the society. It elaborates how the protagonist Jaya suffers due to lack of communication with her husband. It explores how her mother, her brothers, her husband, her children disappoint her. This makes her to revolt and need for the identity and in the end her quest reaches to compromise. She through her male characters, presents Indian masculinities. She does not dehumanize the male characters and depicts that plight of Indian middle class woman like Jaya is the result of her own making. The greed for materialistic life is the main reason of the suffering of male as well as women in the society.

Lastly, we come to know that how silence is used as a weapon against their male counterpart to inflict punishment. Shashi Deshpande through her women characters insists to bring about the change in the norms and values for women and give equal space for women in society and also expresses co-existence and co-operation which make the marital life successful. Man's success or failure is closely linked with degeneration and regeneration. The women characters in the three of Shashi Deshpande's novels namely *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* are discussed here. Deshpande's novels reflect the problem and the concern of the middle class Indian women and the root of her feminism is in the sufferings of Indian women which are caused due to the conflict between tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature.

## Conclusion

The present paper discusses how self-discovery awakens the spiritual intelligence in the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's novels and proves that women in her novels not only stop with identity-crisis and self-discovery but also analyze their sufferings, concerns, and problems, understand the culture and make positive decisions through introspection. Her heroines suffer from alienation and identity-crisis and they feel the need of complete freedom to their own life. But in the end, showing maturity, they find happiness in peaceful co-existence, understanding and acceptance and expect the same from male community. Through Jaya, Shashi Deshpande depicts the inhuman behaviour and treatment of man-made society towards women whereas both are the two sides of same coin so can't be separated and through Anjana, Anita Nair tells that Anjana is the new woman who can be self-sacrificing, but who can also fight for her independence and make her own decisions. I probe into the root causes of plight of Indian women through this paper and explore that illiteracy among the women, their weak and submissive natures are responsible for their sufferings. Although Indian women are aware about the rights, status and identity, yet they lack the will and courage to fight against the exploitative forces.

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