

# **PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AND KHALED HOSSEINI**

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## **Abstract**

The intended research analyzed and compared the works of Khaled Hosseini, the Afghan- American best-seller writer with the works of Shashi Deshpande, the Indian female writer. The research focused on how the issues of women in two cultures have been tackled and treated with and how the two writers have succeeded in increasing women's self-awareness with respect to their rights and identities. The study examined the works of these writers from both male and female viewpoints and from a feministic perspective as well. The rationale behind this study lies in the significance of the issue. Women have been marginalized and oppressed in male-dominating societies now and then and writers advocating the rights of women have constantly portrayed these issues in their novels and literary works. Among these writers, Khaled Hosseini and Shashi Deshpande from opposite sex have vastly dealt and reflected on the issues of women as marginalized part of society, domestic violence, arranged and forced marriages, patriarchy and male dominance which have deprived women from their basic rights. Khaled Hosseini reveals the bitter truth behind the walls of Afghanistan about women. Women have been suffering deprived of their basic rights let alone other human rights. The issues have been reflected in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and in *And the Mountains Echoed* and his other works too. On the other hand, Shashi Deshpande mirrors the life of particularly middle class Indian women in the patriarchal society of India. She writes of the hot topics that unfortunately entangle Indian women. This research paper discussed the subject in an analytical and comparative method. It applies qualitative and textual analysis.

**Key words:** Women, Domestic Violence, Self-awareness, Shashi Deshpande, Khaled Hosseini.

## **Introduction**

"Woman" as man's partner has had major problems in the course of history. Throughout most of Western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere while public life was reserved for men. In the old traditions „man“ has always dominated and societies of the past have considered man as a „superior“ type and woman as the „inferior“ or the „first class“ and the

„Second class“. This social mindset of the man has been reflected in different texts, be it, religious, historical, literary, fiction or non-fiction. This dilemma continued in English mainstream literature until the rise of the so-called „Feminist Movement“. Feminism as comprehensively defined in Wikipedia is „a range of political movements, ideologies, and the social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes.

The problems of the women and the challenges they have faced in patriarchal societies have been widely reflected in many English writers' works irrespective of being male or female. The struggle for women's rights can be seen in "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf of England in 1929 to the American writer and poet, Sylvia Plath, the French writer Simone de Beauvoir, the great late Indian writers Kamala Das and Bharati Mukherjee, and the contemporary Indian writers Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee and Shashi Deshpande.

The issues of women have not only been reflected in the works of female writers, but it has also been widely mirrored in the works of famous male writers representatively in the American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlett Letter" and the British playwright George Bernard

Shaw's "Saint Joan" to the contemporary Afghan-American novelist, Khaled Hosseini's "A Thousand Splendid Suns" and "And the Mountains Echoed".

Women's issues have been the central themes of Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Mountains Echoed*, & Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, *The Dark Holds No Terror* and *The Binding Vine*.

Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* depicts the dilemma of women behind the walls of Afghanistan during several invasions in the country. The issue of feminism and gender equity has been raised through the character of Mariam and Laila. The novel focuses over the rights women were not given along with the limitations to education, choices and liberation that restrict their great potentials in the male dominated world. Male dominance over the women in Afghanistan is a major concern that relates this novel to feminist aspect. Forceful marriages, lack of freedom, lack of identity, limited space in terms of mental, social, cultural and psychological level and torture that was perpetrated towards the Afghan

women are the main issues in reflected in the Hosseini's novels *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and in *And the Mountains Echoed*.

On the other hand, Shashi Deshpande has also reflected the plights of women in the patriarchal society of India. Her novels voice Indian woman struggling for identity. The chief protagonists in her novels are female characters who are in constant search for meaning and value of life. *The Dark Holds No Terror* projects the postmodern impasse of a woman who intensely hates the attack on her identity and individuality. Saru, the protagonist in the novel, is symbol of a progressive woman who tries to exercise her influence over whatever she does, wherever she goes she always prefers to take the road less travelled. In her third novel, *That Long Silence* Deshpande depicts the life of the protagonist, Jaya's passage through a maze of doubts and fears towards her affirmation. In her *The Binding Vine* depicts the agony of a wife who is the victim of arranged marriage and marital rape, and then there is Kalpana the survivor of a brutal rape and a young woman who has been silenced.

Both writers, though from different cultures, deal with the same issues entrapping women as arranged and forced marriages, male dominance, and domestic violence in their novels.

### **Literature Review**

Many writers have discussed the themes of women's oppression, arranged and forceful marriage, violence against women, patriarchal dominance, women's awareness and women's search for identities. Through a thorough reading of existing literature for the topic, I have read the novels, articles and interviews regarding the different topics as feminism, women of Afghanistan, women of India now and then, historical and political backgrounds of Afghanistan and about the writers' life and viewpoints.

In her book, *Reading Khaled Hosseini*, Rebecca Stuhr says, Hosseini explores issues of gender equality, gender stereotypes, and domestic abuse. Both novels illustrate to some extent the excesses and abuses of governments and the novels include references to capital punishment, political and economic injustice, religious freedom, linguistic diversity, literacy and enfranchisement, and familial relationships (65).

Namita Singh, in "Feminism v/s Gender Equity" (2013), discusses gender equality and feminism in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and concludes that Afghan women are deprived of their human and civil rights both professional as well as personal.

Basharat Shameem, in his review article "Living on the Edge" (2014), also talks about feminism and how women are portrayed in the novel. In this novel women are reflected as the miserable creatures living in Afghanistan who do not deserve any human rights neither basic nor equal to men. The author quite artistically pictures the bad condition of Afghan women.

Similarly Dr. Indra S Patil in her article "Feminist Prospectives in Shashi Deshpande's Novels" (2018) talks about women's dilemmas in Shashi Deshpande's novels, and states that "Her novels are women oriented like Jane Austen and deals with women's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and most of all as human being".

Dr. Shamenaz Bano, in her article "Gender Discrimination in the Indian Society as Depicted in Shashi Deshpande's Novels" points that the agony of women in a patriarchal society is not only the case of an Indian society but mostly all around the world. She further adds that Deshpande is a writer who addresses the realities of the lives of women stressing the importance of their own agency in their progress.

Although many writers have analyzed the works of each writer individually, the present research tries to do a comparative study of both writers' viewpoints regarding the issues of women in two cultures from the perspectives of male and female. Thus, the study will review and make use of all these views of these critics and apply the views to the analysis of the topic.

### **Discussion**

The lives of women in Afghanistan is much difficult, as it has deemed according to the writings of Hosseini in his novels. In Hosseini's works, the female characters' life is not an easy mission to be accomplished. You ought to endure a lot in order to survive in Afghan community as a woman, mother, wife and a daughter. However, if you are willing to work for education and women rights then you will pay a double price sacrifice in Afghanistan.

The works of Hosseini are good examples of women portrayal unequal treatment of women in Afghanistan during the age of Mujahideen, Taliban Rule and post-Taliban era. The situation of women and their treatment in the post-Taliban era in all over the country has not significantly changed except the typical apparent changes in the life of women in the urban areas. The novels have represented both personal and public levels of the protagonists and the violence and discrimination they suffered in their communities. Hosseini pieces of fiction focused on the themes of lost, family violence, patriarchy, cultural sensitivity based on gender, discrimination against women, oppression and survival. Women are represented as powerless, voiceless and passive victims of war, patriarchy, male-domination, domestic violence and political repressions. Ultimately, women were degraded for their gender and stereotypical understanding of female character in Afghan society.

Shashi Deshpande has well known for her dedication to feminine sensibility in Indian English Literature. Her art was centring female psyche to dig the mind of the characters and explore their inner world. The novels of Shashi Deshpande

have mainly been focusing on the women's psyche to understand their urges and despairs and explore their inner world in a more sophisticated way. Her protagonists were the mere agents for advocating such as for 'A Room of One's Own and proclaim their rights on their bodies. Through her main characters, she dealt with the social conditions that confront their aspirations, needs, urges and hopes. They displayed their attitude and temperaments through various ways self-exploration. The protagonists of Deshpande novels have practiced potential dynamism and desirable development from personality to social conditions that shaped their attitude and view of life. As stated earlier, Deshpande's novels portrayed women inner world hence responded against the oppression and injustice inherent in our social, political and economic system where incompatible marriage, child marriage, divorce, rapes are common and still require fundamental solutions. In conclusion, both writers from two different cultural, religious, geographical and social background have portrayed women as powerless, victim of domestic violence and social cultural beliefs. Women in both context shared violence, patriarchy and male domination but the degree differs in each context. Both writers have focused on despair and sufferings of women in one or other way. Finally yet importantly, the women portrayed as mere objects for the uncontrollable future and life with little or zero hope and the life turned to hell. Eventually, the despair and infinite domestic violence cover the various walks of women in both Indian continent and Afghanistan through the writings of Dashpandi and Hosseini but in the works of Dashpande there is a hope for development of women in social, political and economic spheres. Thereof, in both contexts, women undergo certain traditional and cultural boundaries that increased their vulnerability and women were not allowed to express anything about their naïve feelings and emotions.

### **Conclusion**

However, both writers have different cultural, geographical and social context but they have relatively focused on common themes of women position and status in the Indian and Afghan communities. They revealed that in both communities, women are merely the object of male domination and they have always subjugated (subjected) to various stereotypical violence of Indian and Afghan Society. Thus, the two writers have common approach to address violence against women and young girls. The thematic analysis of the novels of the two writers found the fact that women are just the cheap object to the very lust and material expectations of the men. Women have been experienced various forms of exploitation and abuse such as violence, betrayal, sexual abuse, psychological torture, family violence and sexual colonialism in various roles a women play in the course of their life as a wife, a mother, a sister, a female employee (particularly in Afghan context), a daughter, a daughter-in-law and so on. Into more extent, the women world has depicted realistically in the conventional society of Afghanistan and modern India in the works of Deshpande and Hosseini. Finally and most importantly, the works of both writers have focused on women struggles and concerns, social, cultural and economic status and how not only these circumstances led to the negation of women rights and emancipation but the fact that it is their women folk caused their polarization of freedom.

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