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The Female Emotional Realism in the Female Characters: A Comparative Study of Selected Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De

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Abstract

This paper investigates the intricacies of female emotional realism as portrayed in selected novels by Indian English authors Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De. Female emotional realism refers to the authentic and nuanced depiction of women's psychological and emotional landscapes. Through a comparative literary study of Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, and De's *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights*, this research explores how these authors depict emotional truths through female perspectives. While Deshpande focuses on internalized emotions within traditional and middle-class Indian settings, De-emphasizes external expressions of emotion in cosmopolitan contexts. The paper examines thematic concerns, narrative strategies, character development, and socio-cultural dimensions, aiming to reveal how both writers contribute to feminist discourse in Indian English fiction.

Keywords: Emotional realism, Indian women writers, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, female identity, comparative literature.

Introduction

Emotional realism in literature captures the authentic emotional experiences of characters, particularly as they relate to the social and psychological conditions that shape human life. In the context of Indian English literature, the representation of women's emotional lives has become a critical area of scholarly interest. Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De are two prominent voices who offer distinctive portrayals of female emotional realism. While Deshpande delves into the psyche of women entrenched in patriarchal domestic spheres, De portrays women navigating the liberating yet challenging urban environments of post-liberalized India. Their works serve as cultural texts through which we can examine the evolving emotional dimensions of Indian womanhood.

The objective of this paper is to analyze how emotional realism manifests in the selected works of these authors. The analysis will focus on the interplay between personal identity, cultural expectations, and emotional expression. It seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these authors construct their female characters not only as fictional figures but as emotionally real women with inner conflicts, desires, and resilience.

Literature Review

Shashi Deshpande has been celebrated for her subtle,

introspective narratives that reveal the emotional depth of women grappling with familial and societal expectations. Critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee and Usha Bande note how her characters undergo a journey from silence to self-expression, making her novels seminal in feminist literary studies. In *That Long Silence*, the protagonist Jaya represents the voice of countless Indian women who endure emotional suppression in patriarchal households. Deshpande's *The Dark Holds No Terrors* explores similar themes, depicting Sarita's struggle between professional identity and domestic confinement.

In contrast, Shobha De's novels have been both celebrated and critiqued for their candid and provocative portrayals of women. Scholars such as Sunita Reddy and Jasbir Jain argue that De's characters, often seen as controversial, reflect a new genre of emotional realism—one shaped by the complexities of modern urban life. Her protagonists confront issues such as sexual autonomy, ambition, betrayal, and loneliness. Despite the glamour and scandal associated with her narratives, De's works resonate deeply with emotional authenticity and female introspection.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a feminist critical perspective, drawing from psychoanalytic and postcolonial feminist theories. The psychoanalytic approach facilitates an understanding of

characters' internal emotional states, while postcolonial feminist theory offers a lens through which to view the socio-cultural constraints and liberties of Indian women. The concept of emotional realism is understood as the faithful representation of psychological experiences, inner turmoil, and affective responses to external circumstances. These theoretical tools allow for a deeper examination of how Deshpande and De render emotionally authentic female experiences within their respective narrative worlds.

Emotional Realism in Shashi Deshpande's Novels

Shashi Deshpande's narratives are steeped in psychological realism. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya's internal monologue is replete with emotional conflicts stemming from her marriage to Mohan. Her silence is not mere passivity; it becomes a powerful commentary on the emotional burdens carried by women in conventional Indian households. The domestic space is both a physical and emotional prison. Jaya's emotional realism is articulated through fragmented thoughts, memories, and moments of quiet rebellion. Deshpande's mastery lies in conveying the deep emotional undercurrents of her protagonist without overt dramatization.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita's trauma is both physical and emotional. Her successful professional life contrasts with the abuse she faces in her marriage. Deshpande illustrates the dissonance between societal expectations and personal happiness. Sarita's journey is marked by introspection, emotional paralysis, and eventual confrontation. Her retreat to her parental home symbolizes a return to emotional origins and the beginning of self-discovery. The emotional realism in this novel stems from Deshpande's skillful portrayal of guilt, fear, and the longing for emancipation.

Emotional Realism in Shobha De's Novels

Shobha De's *Socialite Evenings* presents Karuna, a woman caught between societal expectations and her desire for autonomy. The emotional realism here is outward and performative. Karuna's emotional journey unfolds in a world of media, fame, and superficial relationships. Yet beneath the glossy surface lies a woman searching for authentic emotional connections. Her candid reflections, sarcasm, and vulnerability add layers of realism to her character. De uses Karuna's voice to critique the emotional emptiness of elite urban life while revealing her internal struggles.

In *Starry Nights*, Aasha Rani's story is one of ambition, exploitation, and heartbreak. Her rise and fall in the film industry are marked by emotionally charged episodes of betrayal, longing, and self-realization. De does not shy away from depicting the raw emotional experiences of her characters. Aasha's pain, desire for love, and ultimate resilience showcase an emotional depth that defies the stereotype of the glamorous heroine. The emotional realism in De's work lies in the contradictions—strength amidst vulnerability, ambition coexisting with emotional dependency.

Comparative Analysis

Deshpande and De differ markedly in style and thematic concerns, yet both succeed in crafting emotionally resonant female characters. Deshpande's women are introspective, their emotions subdued yet potent. Her narratives are grounded in everyday realities—family, marriage, and societal expectations. Her characters evolve through self-reflection and emotional endurance. In contrast, De's

protagonists inhabit a flamboyant, fast-paced world. They express emotions loudly and openly, often through defiance and confrontation.

Despite their differences, both authors portray emotional realism with remarkable authenticity. Deshpande's subtle narrative techniques—symbolism, stream-of-consciousness, and psychological depth—create emotionally complex characters who mirror the silent struggles of many Indian women. De's bold narrative voice, urban settings, and use of dialogues emphasize the expressive aspect of emotional realism. Her characters, though sometimes exaggerated, reflect genuine emotional dilemmas faced by women in modern Indian society.

The divergence also reflects the authors' socio-cultural milieus. Deshpande's middle-class Brahmin background informs her understanding of conservative domestic settings, while De's modeling and media background influences her depiction of cosmopolitan life. This diversity enriches Indian English literature, offering varied representations of female emotional landscapes.

Conclusion

The exploration of female emotional realism in the works of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De highlights the multiplicity of women's emotional experiences in Indian literature. Both authors contribute significantly to the portrayal of authentic female subjectivity. While Deshpande offers quiet, introspective journeys toward self-awareness, De presents bold, expressive narratives of emotional struggle and resilience. Their works underline the emotional truths of Indian women across different socio-cultural contexts.

In capturing the nuances of female emotion, both authors transcend mere storytelling to provide psychological and cultural insights into the lives of women. Emotional realism, as depicted in their novels, becomes a powerful tool for feminist critique and literary expression. It validates women's emotional labor, internal dilemmas, and journeys toward selfhood. Thus, the comparative study of Deshpande and De not only enhances our understanding of female emotional realism but also affirms its central place in the evolution of Indian English fiction.

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