



# A COMPARATIVE FEMINIST STUDY OF MAN–WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS IN SELECTED WORKS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AND KAMALA DAS

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**Abstract :** This study conducts a comparative feminist analysis of selected works by Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das, two notable authors in Indian English literature, emphasizing the portrayal of male-female relationships. Both authors depict women's experiences within patriarchal social structures, yet they employ distinct narrative techniques and feminist viewpoints. Deshpande primarily examines the psychological and emotional aspects of marriage, domesticity, and female silence, whereas Kamala Das emphasizes female sexuality, desire, emotional alienation, and resistance to conventional gender norms.

The research utilizes feminist literary criticism as its primary theoretical framework to examine the construction, contestation, and negotiation of gender roles, power dynamics, and female identity within the chosen texts. The study uses a qualitative and comparative approach, with in-depth textual analysis based on relevant feminist theories and critical points of view. The study illustrates the similarities and differences in the feminist perspectives of the two authors. It presents how women's voices and experiences are different in Indian culture..

The study situates the works of Deshpande and Das within the broader framework of Indian feminism, illustrating how literature can serve as a medium for societal critique and awareness-raising. The study contributes to feminist literary discourse by emphasizing the dynamics between men and women as a central theme. It also helps us understand how Indian English literature shows how men and women interact with each other.

**IndexTerms - Feminist Analysis, Conventional, Man-Woman Relationship, Patriarchal, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das**

## INTRODUCTION

Among all outstanding Indian novelists, Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das have made a substantial contribution to the growth and enrichment of the Indian novel in English. Their novels are especially concerned with gender discrimination and other problems related to women who are subjected to both physical and psychological abuse and ill treatment in the male-dominated Indian society. Both authors analyse the character of Indian women, their inner thoughts, and their relationships with men from the perspective of feminine sensibility and insight. These outstanding writers have portrayed how women struggled not only against aggressive male domination but also against the social, cultural, and religious oppression predominant in contemporary society. The principal themes found expression in their works are inner conflict, search for identity, and the concept of marriage and sex. They are greatly fascinated by the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman. They also deal with the inner workings of the female psyche and the psychological tension that a woman undergoes. They deal with women's aspirations, hopes, desires, anxieties, and emotional and social insecurities with keen understanding and observations of contemporary Indian society. They also portray how legends, myths, orthodox attitudes, and traditional beliefs strengthen the patriarchal mentality, which has created women as inferior creatures and mere objects of pleasure. They have tried to redefine women's roles in society, assert their independence, and express their identity through writing.

Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das, two prominent feminists in Indian English literature, depict the interaction between a man and a woman, providing an engaging yet complementary perspective on gender dynamics to examine this viewpoint. Their writings explore the social, psychological, and emotional dimensions of relationships, especially concerning intimacy and marriage.

Both Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das have gained recognition in Indian English literature for their vivid depictions of man-woman relationships in their literary works. They confront the deep and often painful realities of being a woman in a male-dominated society. Shashi Deshpande explores these themes through the novel, diving deep into the internal lives of her female protagonists. Kamala Das speaks through a confessional style of poetry that fearlessly exposes the physical as well as psychological realities of being a woman. According to their portrayal, man-woman relationships are not as romantic ideals but as battle fronts of control, silence, and self-erasure.

This comparative analysis scrutinizes Deshpande's novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence* alongside Kamala Das's poems *An Introduction*, *The Old Playhouse*, *The Looking Glass*, and *The Sunshine Cat*, highlighting their examination of feminism and gender dynamics.

## FEMINIST UNDERSTANDING OF MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Feminism is a women's movement that advocates for the social, political, and economic rights of women, aiming to achieve gender equality and equal opportunities and to improve the lives of women as a social group. The feminism of Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das is not radical but deeply rooted in personal experience. It emerges through self-examination, emotional turmoil, and a gradual, agonizing self-discovery rather than just rebellion.

Shashi Deshpande identifies herself with women, and therefore her protagonists are women. She examines her female character's childhood and shows how their early experiences greatly influence their adult life. She asserts that early life events have a lasting impact on the formation of a positive personality. However, having a "deprived childhood" gives a person the strength to persevere and survive until the end. This is the destiny of Deshpande's female protagonists. Deshpande's novel frequently revolves around women who seek self-realization and navigate the conflict between traditional expectations and personal desires. Women in her stories grapple with societal roles imposed upon them as daughters, wives, and mothers, and struggle to carve out a space for themselves as independent individuals.

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* from her childhood; she is discriminated against by her mother, who always values her son, Dhruva. Saru has been constantly reminded by her mother that she is a 'woman.' There was a significant impact of patriarchy on the mindset of Saru's mother; she always asked her to take care of her complexion so that she could be easily appreciated by the groom and her mother.

"Don't go in the sun; you will get much darker." (Sinha, p.03) These words made a deep impact on her mind. As a result, Saru proves herself to be a rebel and pursues her career as a medical student without her mother's consent. By pursuing a professional career to acquire the identity that she hopes would be "the key that would unlock the door out of this life." And that "I had to make myself secure so that no one could ever say to me again... why are you alive?" (Sambharwal, p.187) Again, she shows her resistance by marrying Manohar, a man of a lower caste in comparison to them; she gets married to Manu to secure the love that she could not get in her parental home. But unfortunately, Manu's male ego asserts itself through sexual assaults on Saru in the night, who bears these sufferings silently. Saru is grappled between her personal and professional life. Saru could not resist her husband's brutal torture even after becoming a doctor. She has proven to be marginalized in terms of resistance. It is our patriarchal society that has given men the discretionary power to use the body of a woman in any of the ways.

Jaya in *That Long Silence* is a creative writer; Mohan advises her to write "light humorous pieces about the travails of middle-class housewives," (148-149) but it is not satisfactory for Jaya; she decides to write something of her 'own,' so she writes the story about a man "who could not reach out to his wife except through her body," (144) but Mohan understands it to be the truth of their life, which creates tension between them. Jaya lives a contented life as a housewife with two children before her husband's arrest and suspension from his job due to dishonest practice. She is forced to live the drab and boring life of a woman, which causes her to lose faith in her husband. As a result, she endures a protracted period of silence. She says, "I have lived my life, the life of a woman. I have taken on all the burdens of womanhood. The silence, the compromise, the submission, the guilt, the living for others—I have done all that, and yet I have never truly lived." (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*).

This statement captures the integral conflict faced by the protagonist Jaya, who feels stifled by the expectations placed on her as a wife and mother. Her realization of having lived for others but not for herself is a key feminist moment.

Indu in *Roots and Shadows* experiences the submissiveness of being a woman because society has made her feel this way since childhood. The women in her life constantly remind her that, as a girl, she should not act like a boy, which imposes a certain restraint on her behaviour.

"As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked, "Because you are a female, you must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl," they had said. "It is the only way for a female to live and survive." (Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows* p.158)

Deshpande represents a society where women are not economically and ideologically independent. So, her female characters want to create a space of their own to serve as a living identity. Deshpande's works highlight silent forms of oppression that women experience within patriarchal structures. She often critiques how women are conditioned to accept their roles without questioning them. Her characters are acutely aware of the limitations imposed on them by society. Yet they often lack the power to break free from these constraints. This phenomenon shows the deeply ingrained societal belief that women must accept subjugation without protest, which Deshpande explores extensively in her work. Deshpande highlights how women are often defined by their

relationships with men, be it as daughter, wife, or mother; these roles often suppress the individuality and growth of their characters, and she critiques how this societal construct undermines women's autonomy.

Most of Deshpande's protagonists are on the journey of self-discovery, where they come to terms with rejecting the traditional roles that have assigned. Often, through confrontation with societal expectations, these women find empowerment not through rebellion but through introspection and self-assertion. When Jaya realises and speaks, "I have been taught that to be a woman is to live in relation to others, but I want to live for myself without needing anyone's approval." (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*) This statement captures a pivotal movement of self-realization where Jaya acknowledges her desire to break free from the societal expectations that have defined her entire life. Saru, when she walked out of her husband's house, had selected an option where she pursued her career. "My life is my own" (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, 1980, p. 201) becomes the motto of Saru's life from then onwards.

Deshpande's feminist perspective is subtle yet powerful. She does not offer simple solutions but instead presents her female characters' struggles in a complex, layered manner through introspection, female friendships, and a critique of societal norms. Deshpande's works invite readers to question and confront the gendered limitations imposed by patriarchal culture. Her feminist perspective is deeply human, emphasizing the need for women to reclaim their voices and their rights to define their own identities.

Like Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, through her poetry, expresses every woman's desire, but she is a rebellious writer. She revolts against the exploitation of women in a male-dominated world. Without hesitation, her poetry is a rebellion against the forbidden sexual openness. She reveals the hidden reality of society with a fearless attitude. Das is not concerned about society, friends, and critics. Das expresses her female experience with boldness and freedom. She feels language is a way of expressing thoughts.

Das portrays feminist ethos in her poetry with a confessional mood. The main purpose of her poetry is to focus on the equality of women, which appears to be associated with an analysis revealing the collective feminine psyche in its response to external realities in which it is fostered. She expresses a longing for an emotionally stable life in all her works, which only true love and understanding can achieve. Kamala Das is frequently considered a confessional writer since she writes on topics that are taboo for women and openly disregards all social restrictions. She writes about sexual desires, sexual behaviour, extramarital affairs, describing private body areas, and more. Additionally, she is confessional in that she helps her fellow women see their repressed sexual urges and their discontent with their sexual life, which they easily attempt to repress out of fear of social rejection.

Kamala Das has mentioned in her autobiography that "she grew up more or less as a neglected child because her parents were disappointed by her skin colour; she did not get love and affection in the way she wanted. Her father was not of an affectionate nature." So, she says that, "I wondered why I was born to Indian parents instead of a white couple, who may have been proud of my verses." (Das, *My Story*, p.9) She belonged to a typical Indian patriarchal family where she had to follow certain rules and regulations that were created specifically for women. As she mentions in her poem

An Introduction:

"Dress in sarees, be a girl.  
"Be a wife," they said. Be an embroiderer, be a cook.  
Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
"Belong," cried the categorizer. Don't sit.  
On walls or peep in through our lace-draped windows.  
Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better  
Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to choose a name, a role." (Das, *An Introduction*, 36-42)

Kamala Das did not experience love and compassion either as a child or as a married woman. Her early marriage, too, proved disastrous; her husband was mean and lustful like others. She called him "a merciless watcher"; without any attachment, he was interested only in satisfying his desires and actual desire. In such emotional sterility and a loveless atmosphere. She becomes, "She was a cold and half-dead woman, now of no use at all to the woman or the man." (Das, *The Sunshine Cat*, 20-21)

This is the life of a woman in a male-oriented society where her identity, individuality, and freedom are dreams for them. A woman is constantly denied love, passion, and satisfaction in her married life. Her life is filled with dissatisfaction and embarrassment. As a result, much of her work is autobiographical and confessional. While she sometimes makes the personal universal, Kamala Das is the first Hindu woman poet who speaks about her sexual experiences and physical desires. In the poem "An Introduction" by Kamala Das, the introductory line, "I don't know politics," illustrates the marginalized condition of women in society. It is evident that a woman is a victim, but she does not even realize her victimization. Kamala Das believes that a man has consistently exploited the woman, treating her like a slave. Her poem reflects the reality of male dominance. *The Old Playhouse*:

"Beneath your monstrous ego, I ate the magic loaf and  
Become a dwarf. I lost my will and reason to all your  
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies." (15-17)

Through her poems, she reveals a protest against all kinds of male supremacy in our civilization. She revolts against female subjugation and male dominance, but she shows her dissatisfaction with women's passive acceptance of oppression as the appointed lot. In *The Looking Glass*, Kamala Das makes an honest confession about her desire for sexual gratification. It powerfully evokes the image of a lustful relationship between two sexes. She presents the sterility and futility of sexual love. Das has the guts to oppose the establishment and show her feminine sensibilities. She expresses her understanding of the necessity of liberty, safety, and love. Her rights to psychological stability and even sexual fulfillment are recognized. Thus, Das opposes both the demands of a joint family and male dominance. She longs for respect, love, and understanding. She perceives life to be emotionally sterile and barren.

Her poetry preaches to women that they should openly speak and believe in themselves. Kamala Das believes that every woman should be treated as a person and individual, not a mere object to men. She advocates freedom and self-respect for women. She should be granted a respectable status in society. It is evident that Kamala Das voiced the feminist movement in India through her works.

## MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIPS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The patriarchal frameworks that frame the relationship between a man and a woman are analysed by both outstanding authors Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das, who emphasize the emotional alienation, power imbalance, and social expectations that often restrain women's individuality and independence. The main character in their stories is a middle-class Indian woman.

Deshpande's writing uses a reflective style to show how a woman in a traditional relationship has trouble with her sense of self and her identity. Kamala Das, on the other hand, has a strong confessional perspective that goes against what is normal in society by writing poems about love, desire, and sex. This comparative analysis also shows how different both writers are. They both make deep critiques of gender dynamics while also calling for equality, love, and respectful relationships between men and women. Both are showing how emotional involvement in traditional male-female relationships can go wrong, especially when it comes to love, equality, and respect.

## MARRIAGE: THE ILLUSION OF LOVE AND SECURITY

According to traditional patriarchal society, marriage is idealized as a base of love and stability, but both authors exposed it through their works as disillusionment, a domain of control, and emotional suppression. Kamala says, "Marriage means nothing more than a show of wealth to families like ours."

The mindset about marriage is that it provides a woman with a place to live and security, but there is no opportunity for self-expression and open involvement in the outer world. She only pretends to be content and satisfied. According to Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das, marriage is proven to be a cage where she is shifted from one cage to another.

Kamala Das pens down her life experiences in her poems, in which she expresses the idea that men and women are related to one another. She has dreamt of a loving husband who seems to give her the ecstasy of heaven, but on the contrary, she has been stripped of her autonomy within the confines of marriage. He never comprehends her feelings or emotions. She writes in *The Old Playhouse*: "You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her  
In the long summer of your love." (1-2)

She is portraying her husband's desire to domesticate her and drain her of her spontaneity. Married life begins as a promise of love, ends in entrapment. Her 'laughter' is dead; her 'freedom' is replaced by the duties of a wife. She regrets the loss of her identity and autonomy. Her whole world is reduced to a "playhouse" where she performs roles dictated by her husband. In her poem "An Introduction," she portrays the pitiable circumstances of a confounded woman who needs love, compassion, a valued life partner, warmth, and a home. Her husband's wild behaviour makes her feel awkward, which influences her peace of mind. Her married life is full of disillusionment; her husband is a complete failure to provide Das the love life that she has always desired. He is always busy with work, even in private.

She muses:  
When I asked for love, not knowing what else to ask  
For he drew a youth of sixteen into the  
Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me.  
But my sad woman-body felt so beaten. (Das, *An Introduction*, 30-34)

Therefore, she is very frustrated and disillusioned; she occupies herself with household chores in an attempt to fit in well with the role of a typical Indian wife; however, the attempt is a total failure. She longs to get away from the housekeeping duties. This disappointment leads her to commit suicide; she also goes through a phase of nervous breakdown because of the miserable attitude of her husband. But while undergoing treatment for her severe depression, she feels her husband's affection and care. This experience leads her to complete surrender, and she develops a spiritual attitude. As a result, she starts a search for love that is greater than the physical, like the love shared by Radha and Krishna. She develops intimate encounters with numerous guys during her search for love.

In her poem *The Sunshine Cat*, she presents the contrast between men's and women's thinking. Here, man only satisfies his sexual desires; on the other hand, woman yearns for emotional satisfaction. As her husband is only interested in sexual gratification, she frankly describes the man-woman relationship with a bold attitude. Despite living together for a long time, she and her husband have fallen out of love, leaving her heart empty. The concept of a man-woman relationship in the family is apparently based on gender patterns, i.e., male dominance. However, Kamala Das does not find favour with the existing state of affairs; she is stunned to witness the relationship between her mother and her father as an arid union.'

She muses:  
"Her father behaved like a monarch, and her mother was treated as a slave; she unhesitatingly called it a victim-victimizer relationship." (Jain, p.231)

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

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed man-woman relationships with different tints and shades in her works. Shashi Deshpande presents the gender of men in her works as a device in the hands of the patriarchal framework. It is the patriarchy that has instilled in their minds the belief that men are 'superior' and women are 'inferior' or the 'other' in society. In her work, men are depicted as both agents and victims; while they continue to be the primary social force exerting dominance over women, they also struggle to escape the constraints of a patriarchal definition of masculinity. However, women are obliged by birth and often fulfil them. Her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, is where the protagonist, Saru, against her parents' wishes, marries Manu, the man whom she loves. Saru has a dream of a blissful married life and expects the love and care that she did not get in her childhood, but her married life turns out to be a fiasco because she is a successful doctor and a self-reliant lady. Manu's feelings of inferiority and wounded male ego lead him to become a sadist. At night, Manu brutally abuses her body, and 'Dark' threatens Saru. Sarita reflects: “Why didn't I leave him then? Why did I stay on? Why didn't you walk out?” (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terror*)

This internal conflict of Saru mirrors the dilemma of many women who are trained to endure by birth rather than resist. They are taught that it is a wife's duty to adjust even at the cost of her selfhood. In *That Long Silence*, the heroine, Jaya, has cherished a dream of a blissful married home with her husband and children, but the cold behaviour of Mohan shows that he needs Jaya only for household responsibilities. He never understands her feelings and the writing talent she has. As a result, she loses her individuality, and there is unbreakable silence between them. Her marriage remains incompatible, unfulfilled, and a barrier to the realization of herself. She muses, “I am passive and unresponsive; I am still and dead.” (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, 1989, p. 192) In *Roots and Shadows*, the protagonist, Indu, gets married to Jayant, the man of her choice, against the wishes of Akka, but soon she gets disappointed and disillusioned with her marriage, and she says about it: “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*, p. 03)

Indu thinks that the relationship between a man and a woman is affected by socio-economic forces, and she fights to break free from the institution of marriage and its shackles of tradition. She is striving to discover her unique identity.

## RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY

The foundation of society has been the relationship between man and woman. In all her writings, Shashi Deshpande has found a fresh perspective on the connection between man and woman. She says that there are two types of relationships between men and women: marriage, which is a social institution, is the first well-known and accepted type of relationship; romantic love, extramarital affairs, and sex are examples of relationships that are not recognized. Shashi Deshpande has portrayed man-woman relationships with an undercurrent of discontented sex for various reasons, like an 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.

However, when we talk about the three prominent works and their 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” (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, p. 201) serves as their rallying cry for independence. After getting married of their own choosing, they initially search for a room of their own but quickly get disillusioned with their new homes. Indu, who loves her husband too passionately, liberates herself from the binding embrace of her husband; she feels no qualms about her sexual encounter with her cousin, Naren. She muses, “An ecstasy filled my body, and I could not be still anymore.” (Sambharwal, p.180)

Jaya weds Mohan, a man of her choice, but she feels uncomfortable about her relationship with him. “The man-woman relationship is nothing but a deep chasm between the two,” (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, p. 98) she says with dissatisfaction. When her husband was suspended from service due to his corrupt practices and left her alone, it shattered her faith in him. In this depressed state, she finds solace in the company of Kamat, her neighbour. Despite her passionate union with her husband, Mohan, she has an affair with Kamat, but is unable to pay homage to his death 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 Terrors*, p. 17). Indeed, after investing fifteen years of long married life, she is a successful doctor and a self-reliant lady. However, her married life ultimately proves to be a disastrous journey. Through these characters, Shashi Deshpande is showcasing the internal conflict and dichotomy they experience between natural desire and societal shame.

Kamala Das is frequently considered a confessional writer, as she writes on topics that are taboo for women and openly disregards any social constraints. She discusses extramarital affairs, sexual desires, sexual acts, describes private body parts, and more. Additionally, she is confessional in that she helps her fellow woman see their repressed sexual urges and their discontent with their sexual life, which they readily attempt to repress out of fear of social rejection. Kamala Das, in her autobiography, expresses her inner conflict and writes that due to the insensitive attitude of her husband, who is only interested in having sex without love, she finds it a dreary and boring affair. Therefore, she confesses that she could not develop intimate relations with him even in the initial days of her marriage, but surrendered herself to him completely. This disillusionment, due to an unhappy marriage, leads the woman to find 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." All her quests for true love end in disasters of sexual intercourse, which bring only sorrow and fatigue. (Karunakar, p.850)

In her quest for true love, Kamala Das only finds sexual fulfilment, which makes her need for true love even stronger. For a while, the "unending lust" binds the lovers together, but Das is dissatisfied when this bond is diminished to "just skin communicating things," failing to bring happiness. Das yearns to come out of the shackles of power-hungry males, and 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. She writes in her poem

An Introduction:

"I met a man and loved him. Call  
Not him by any name; he is every man.  
Who wants a woman just as I am every  
Woman who seeks love. In him... the hungry haste  
Of rivers, in me... the ocean's tireless  
Waiting..." (Das, An Introduction (46-51))

In her poem *The Looking Glass*, she speaks boldly about female sexual desire and advises women to break the taboos and to use their bodies to attract male interest.

She speaks:

"Gift him all,  
Gift him what makes you woman, the scent of  
Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts." (13-15)

These lines are not a celebration of sexuality but a bitter truth about how women are trained to show off their bodies to perform sensuality, not for mutual fulfillment but to sustain the man's ego. The poem "The Old Playhouse" explores a similar theme of slight deviation, as she muses:

"You dribbled spittle into my mouth, you poured,  
Yourself into every nook and cranny, you embalmed,  
My poor lust with your bittersweet juices." (10-12)

These lines explore the complex and often painful aspects of sexual relationships. She addresses her husband with these words, reflecting on how his overpowering love and control stifle her individuality and desires. The phrase "poor lust" indicates a sense of shame and vulnerability; "bittersweet juices" is a contradictory phrase that presents the intricate emotions of pain and pleasure, which are both intertwined. She is expressing her disillusionment with the sexual relationship with her husband, where she is expected to submit emotionally, sexually, and intellectually.

Das's poem *The Sunshine Cat* directly highlights the miseries of a forlorn woman. Every man treats her very badly—the man she loves does not understand her feelings or emotions, and he is basically 'selfish' and 'a coward.' The husband, who neither 'loved' her nor 'used' her but who is 'a ruthless watcher,' is also made of the same soil. The 'band of cynics' she ultimately turns to for her emotional gratification is all selfish and egoistic. These cynics with monkey-like hair on their chests subject her to all kinds of humiliation and torture, including physical and mental. Their smells are sickening, and they are mostly driven to her to quench their raging lusts. They all tell her to be kind to her, but they also say she isn't meant for love. The conclusion suggests that she is likely frigid, cold, and unsuitable for lovemaking. She is portraying her frustration and loneliness in this poem, saying that she has not received love from her licit or illicit orbits.

Both writers present how women's emotions and bodies are objectified. Das criticizes the expectations that women should be submissive in physical relationships. At the same time, Deshpande highlights the internal conflict that occurs when women attempt to balance their desires with social expectations or conventions. The woman is emotionally and physically alienated in the writings of both authors. Relationships that should foster a sense of belonging instead lead to fragmentation, and love turns into a source of suffering instead of healing.

## FROM SUPPRESSION TO SELF-ASSERTION

Deshpande's protagonists often undergo a long emotional journey from suppression to self-assertion. In the beginning, the woman is unconventional, but over time she discovers herself and finds solutions to her issues through self-introspection, strength, and adjustment to tradition. Like a specialist, Deshpande addresses the conflicting phases and fundamental issues faced by her characters and, to some extent, suggests a way out of these situations.

In *The Dark Hold No Terror*, Saru suggests that when her dream of married life is shattered, she decides to assert herself and leave the clinic and her suppressive relationship with her husband. She goes to her parental home, where she desires to "sleep the night peacefully through, to wake up without pain." (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, p. 27). Here, Saru undergoes a process of self-introspection and self-realization concerning her future and past experiences. After experiencing indecisiveness and inner conflict, she is now ready to transform her life with confidence, assert her rights, and face her husband with her identity. Now she does not have any doubts regarding her potential as a human being and as a professional doctor. She proclaims, "My life is my own." (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, p. 201)

In *That Long Silence*, the protagonist Jaya's dream of a peaceful home with a husband and children becomes a chimera, resulting in unbreakable silence due to a lack of communication, compassion, and understanding. This frustration leads her to failure in her writing talent. When her husband, Jayant, left her after being suspended from his job, she felt abandoned and alone. These days of loneliness compel her to reflect on her life, and she realizes that she has been leading a sheltered existence by not speaking up in her defence. She receives a telegram from her husband in which he defends her decision to return home. She determines after having realized. She realizes her mistake and decides to resolve the issues and “erase the silence” between herself and her husband. So, she decides to assert her individuality by breaking that long silence. She proclaims, “I’m not afraid anymore; the panic has gone.” (Deshpande, *That Long Silence*, p.191) This line shows that to bring a positive change in her life, she must assert herself; only then will the emergence of a new woman be possible.

Indu of *Roots and Shadows* gets married to a man of her choice against the wishes of Akka, but it proves to be a cold relationship with Jayant. Having realized her mistake, she comes back to her ancestral home, and Akka has been dead. Now she gets to know about the real truth of Akka, who was the strong pillar of the family and struggled a lot. Now she understands the words of Akka that “Rules add grace and dignity to one’s life.” This experience makes her realize she has to fulfill her responsibility and obligation to the family, as Akka expects. By the end of the novel, Indu inherits new wisdom and wealth from Akka, achieves freedom by rejecting all shadows, and finally proclaims, “That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing.” (Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*, p. 205) Now she asserts her identity and expresses her will, which includes her sexuality and career aspirations.

The transformations of all these protagonists, Saru, Jaya, and Indu, are difficult but necessary, and it is all through their own self-introspection and self-realization.

Das understands the realities that women face in society, the family, and the world. In her poetry, the conventional ideas of feminine conduct and socialization disappear, and she rejects the idea of a traditional submissive wife. Das is truthful about every facet of women, while still being extremely sympathetic. She discusses her personal shortcomings and unspoken desires while speaking candidly about women’s strengths and failings. The poem is presented as an illustration of feminine sensibility, including desperation, anxiety, desire, and hope. Unlike Shashi Deshpande, Kamla Das breaks the silence and suppression with her strong, unvarnished voice. She boldly asserts her individuality in *An Introduction* by saying, “I too call myself I.” (63)

This straightforward but impactful statement questions social conventions that aim to eradicate women’s uniqueness. Through her poetry, she gives a powerful voice to the emotions of every suppressed woman. Her inner urge is to have an equal space for them in the male-oriented world. In her poetry, she discards the societal and family pressures on her, and she rejects being categorized or confined by roles.

Instead, she decides to live her life according to her terms. She rejects the idea of being reduced to someone’s daughter, wife, or lover. She asserts her body, her language, and her choice as she muses:

Then... I wore a shirt and my  
Brother’s trousers, cut my hair short, and ignored  
My womanliness. (Das, *An Introduction*, 33-35)

But she is marginalized by society whenever she asks for freedom. Her poetry is confessional and a blend of her past and present incidents. The central emotions of her poetry are love and sex. Her disillusionment with marriage and sexual dissatisfaction is the most striking point in her poetry. Kamala Das universalizes women’s pain and their quest for identity, love, and freedom. Her poems become a statement on gender differences and a moment to break free from the limitations placed on women by pursuing personal autonomy, love that enables the body to accept its demands, and a self that is free to celebrate love’s true glory. She asserts that no poet has influenced her in this matter, and she rarely reads anyone’s poetry. She exemplifies how an Indian woman poet can carve out a unique niche for herself.

She has turned into the spokesperson for all women of that time. Her childhood innocence was destroyed by the frightening realities of adulthood; she demonstrates that the only thing that can satisfy a person’s emotional and spiritual needs is true love. She endures sexual assault and maltreatment at the hands of her husband and supposed lovers. Her poems primarily focus on the inner qualities of being a woman and seem to be connected to analysis that shows how the collective feminine psyche reacts to the outside world in which it is raised. According to Kamla Das, every woman is an individual. She should be treated as a person, not as a mere accessory to man. She demands equality for women. The poetry of Kamala Das is confessional, fiery, and more immediate.

Her assertion is raw:

I am a sinner; I am a saint.  
I am the beloved and the betrayed” (Das, *An Introduction* 60-61).

Her poetry doesn’t need neat solutions but presents emotional truth. She doesn’t ask her people to be understood but demands to be seen. This unapologetic self-exposure becomes her strength.

Das’s speakers scream, weep, and whisper in verses full of fire, while Deshpande’s women search for their voices through lengthy hallways of uncertainty and remorse. When taken as a whole, they provide an important, honest, and haunting examination of what it means to be a woman in love in a society that demands her to disappear. Both authors provide critique as well as catharsis in their works, which serve as a mirror for all devalued women and a way forward for them to regain their identity.

**CONCLUSION: TWO VOICES, ONE TRUTH**

Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Das write in such distinct genres and techniques; however, they both depict feminism and man-woman relationships in ways that are remarkably similar. The anguish of unrequited love, the emotional cost of silence, and the hollowness of traditional rules assigned to women are all prominent themes in both works. Das's fiery poetic voices and Deshpande's subdued reflective protagonists combine to form a chorus that calls for acceptance of the feminine experience in all its complexities. They both expose how patriarchy is deeply embedded in man-woman relationships and how women are taught to sacrifice their independence for safety and their identity for acceptance.

Both authors present a sustained presentation of failed marriages, questioning the functioning of marriage. The psychological oppression caused by male supremacist ideology becomes evident, as it ruins mutual love and concern, corrodes a woman's self-esteem, and destroys her sense of identity. Deshpande depicts marriage in her works as an institution where men dominate women. With a pragmatic and practical perspective, she deals with the everyday reality of women's repressed condition, while Kamala Das's compositions are endowed with an autobiographical note, and her style is bold and confessional. There is a note of failure and disappointment in love. Das talks about the injustice meted out to women.

The exploration of man-woman relationships in the works of Shashi Deshpande and Kamla Das, particularly regarding marriage and extramarital issues, leads to self-introspection and critical conclusions. In Deshpande's works, the novel starts with an unconventional marriage, which is an institutionalized way for men to dominate women. It then addresses the issues of the female protagonists' mental conflicts and adjustments, and finally, their attempts to conform to the roles that are expected of them. Her female characters initially appear to rebel, but ultimately, they conform to the patriarchal conventions of Indian society.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, and Indu in *Roots and Shadows* are examples of Deshpande's main characters who often go through a process of self-discovery that has been brought on by marital difficulties, including abandonment, infidelity, and a lack of emotional intimacy. Therefore, extramarital affairs arise amidst the complexity of morality and love, reflecting the protagonist's struggle 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. She doesn't say that these problems are solutions, but she does understand how emotionally damaging affairs can be and how they can't really make you happy. Deshpande and Das work together to show that romantic love is not a safe place for women. Instead, they show how love can turn into pain and silence when it is shaped by unfairness. They discuss how sexuality is monitored, how marriage can be a trap, and how women are often emotionally alone.

The main theme of Kamala Das's poems is the pursuit of love. Her poems show that she wants a relationship that is based on equality, freedom, and respect for each other. Both Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande criticize the relationship between men and women. They say that true freedom comes from questioning social norms that limit women's liberty, not from leaving a marriage. They also suggest that healthy relationships thrive when love, respect, equality, mutual understanding, and freedom are the cornerstones of a relationship. Maintaining emotional and physical equilibrium can create a beneficial relationship.

Both authors serve as a reminder that feminism encompasses more than just slogans and protest marches. Sometimes it's about reclaiming voices that have been stolen, recognizing the unsaid, and having the courage to feel completely. Both authors provide not only criticism but also catharsis through their writings. This process serves as a mirror for all women who have ever been devalued and a way forward for them to regain their identities.

The major purpose of both writers in delineating women's lives is to raise awareness about their predicaments so that they can better understand and adapt to their circumstances. Through self-examination and self-realization, they can shape their identities, free from social judgment and patriarchal structure, and they can embrace a relationship based on love, respect, and equality. So, it can be said that Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande are the forerunners of women's liberation and have written unceasingly to give voice to their women's standpoint so that they can celebrate their strength, resilience, and potential to transform societal and patriarchal culture.

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