

**“RESONATING VOICES: FEMALE SOLIDARITY AND AGENCY IN SHASHI
DESHPANDE'S *A SMALL REMEDIES***

Dr. J. Paul Jayakar

Research Scholar, Department of English, The American College, Madurai, Tamilnadu, India

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ABSTRACT

*Shashi Deshpande's novel *A Small Remedies* is a painful examination of women's life inside a patriarchal system, making it an engaging topic for feminist critique. This article analyzes the complex representation of female unity and empowerment in the novel, utilizing significant feminist literary theories. The narrative centers around Madhuri, the protagonist, as she confronts societal expectations and strives to establish a career in singing. This emphasis on her struggle underscores the themes of resistance and self-actualization. The assistance and guidance Madhuri receives from other women highlight the need of female solidarity, a concept emphasized by bell hooks as essential for combating patriarchal tyranny. In addition, the novel explores the concept of intersectionality, examining how social class and caste overlap with gender to intensify the oppression experienced by women. Examining the theme of voice and suppression, as interpreted by Hélène Cixous, highlights the wider pursuit of individual expression and independence. Deshpande skillfully combines these themes to provide a subtle analysis of cultural conventions while also highlighting the strength and empowerment of women. This research highlights the novel's significance in feminist literature and its connection to the ongoing discussion on gender equality and identity.*

KEYWORDS: *Feminist Literary Theory, Female Solidarity, Women's Agency, Patriarchal Society, Intersectionality, Voice and Silencing, Gender Roles, Resistance*

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande's *A Small Remedies* offers a deep examination of the lives and challenges faced by women in a society dominated by men. Deshpande explores the intricate and sometimes contradictory realities that women face in their quest for self-identity and independence through her female characters' experiences. Deshpande's narrative is around the criticism of patriarchal limitations that influence the experiences of her female characters. The main character, Madhuri, represents the challenge of achieving one's full potential in a culture that enforces limiting gender expectations. Madhuri encounters societal condemnation and familial pressure, which mirrors the wider cultural expectation for women to adhere to conventional roles, despite her talent and ambition as a singer (Deshpande, 2000). The conflict between individual aspirations and cultural norms underscores the constrained options that women face, a frequent motif in feminist literature.

An important element of the work is Deshpande's depiction of women exerting their autonomy despite being constrained by oppressive systems. Madhuri's decisions, however accompanied by significant consequences,

demonstrate her determination to establish a domain for her personal ambitions and wishes. The novel avoids idealizing her challenges and instead offers an accurate portrayal of the sacrifices and determination that women need to demonstrate in order to establish their independence (Deshpande, 2000). The emphasis on women's ability to act and make choices, especially in difficult situations, highlights the intricate nature of their opposition to patriarchal standards. The intergenerational relationships depicted in *A Small Remedies* showcase many reactions to patriarchal subjugation. Madhuri's engagements with elder women in her life, such as her mother and mentors, demonstrate a range of approaches to dealing with and opposing cultural norms. The intergenerational dynamics discussed here emphasize the transfer of resilience and the changing nature of women's challenges over different generations (Deshpande, 2000). Furthermore, the novel highlights the significance of female solidarity, demonstrating how supportive connections among women may act as a reservoir of resilience and empowerment.

An overarching motif in the work revolves around the idea of vocal expression and absence of sound. Madhuri's trajectory as a vocalist epitomizes the wider pursuit of self-expression in a society that frequently suppresses women. According to Deshpande (2000), her music serves as a potent means of resistance, enabling her to express her identity and personal encounters. In contrast, the story also delves into the widespread suppression of women, seen not only through explicit cultural conventions but also through the internalized expectations they have adopted. This dualism encapsulates the inner contradictions and external influences that women encounter in their endeavor to assert themselves. Deshpande's story does not separate gender from other aspects of identity, but instead intertwines concerns of social class and caste, offering a more inclusive comprehension of the oppression faced by women. The characters' experiences are influenced not just by their gender but also by their socio-economic and caste statuses, which make their struggles for independence more complex (Deshpande, 2000). The utilization of an intersectional method enhances the feminist examination of the work, recognizing the intricate and diverse aspects of identity and oppression.

Deshpande depicts intergenerational ties as a crucial aspect of female solidarity. The relationships between Madhuri and the elder women in her life, including her mother and mentors, exemplify the transfer of fortitude and sagacity from one generation to another. These interactions are defined by a combination of kind assistance and occasionally constructive advice, illustrating the various ways in which older women impact the younger generation. The concept of intergenerational dynamics highlights the notion that every generation of women adds to the overall power and ability to recover of the gender as a whole (Deshpande, 2000). Mentorship plays a prominent role in Deshpande's examination of female relationships. Leela, Madhuri's tutor, plays a crucial part in her life, offering not just musical instruction but also emotional and ethical guidance. Madhuri benefits from Leela's mentoring, which assists her in dealing with personal and professional issues. This underscores the significance of mentorship in encouraging women to transcend societal barriers (Deshpande, 2000). This illustration demonstrates the potency of mentorship as a means of fostering unity, allowing women to bolster one another's development and ambitions.

The novel not only celebrates female solidarity, but also portrays the intricate and conflicting nature of these connections. Deshpande recognizes that the interactions among women can be filled with complexities and misinterpretations, which are shaped by individual characteristics and external influences. Nevertheless, these conflicts do not weaken the overarching theme of solidarity; instead, they enhance it by depicting the genuine obstacles women encounter in their contacts with one another (Deshpande, 2000). This complex portrayal

emphasizes the concept that solidarity is not uniform but has multiple aspects and is constantly changing.

Deshpande offers an authentic and nuanced depiction of the life of women, capturing the intricate challenges and limitations they encounter. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'the Other' posits that women in patriarchal countries are delineated in relation to men and frequently constrained to constrictive societal positions (Beauvoir, 1949). The protagonist of Deshpande's story, Madhuri, faces challenges as she strives to establish herself in the male-dominated industry of music. Madhuri encounters public condemnation and familial pressure to adhere to conventional gender roles, despite her exceptional abilities (Deshpande, 2000). This clash emphasizes the restricted options that women have and emphasizes the necessity for a feminist analysis of societal standards.

Judith Butler, a feminist theorist, contends that gender is performative, indicating that it is shaped by repetitive behaviors within a system of regulations (Butler, 1990). The acts of the characters in Deshpande's novel exhibit both adherence to and defiance of these frameworks. Madhuri's endeavor to establish a singing profession, in spite of societal limitations, demonstrates an act of defiance and a declaration of her autonomy. The resistance is clearly apparent in her refusal to conform to conventional gender roles and her unwavering resolve to establish her own unique identity (Deshpande, 2000). Deshpande's depiction is in accordance with Butler's concept of performativity, as it demonstrates how women can challenge and undermine societal expectations around gender by their behavior.

Deshpande examines the concept of female solidarity, a key aspect of feminist thought. Bell Hooks argues that the establishment of solidarity among women is crucial in order to confront and triumph against patriarchal oppression (Hooks, 1984). The novel portrays the solidarity among women through many connections, including the mentorship between Madhuri and Leela. Madhuri benefits from Leela's assistance and advice in dealing with her personal and professional difficulties, which emphasizes the empowering capacity of female connections (Deshpande, 2000). This solidarity serves as a means of opposition, empowering women to collectively confront societal standards.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality highlights the interrelatedness of social classifications like race, class, and gender, resulting in overlapping structures of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Deshpande's story demonstrates this intricacy by exploring the intersection of class and caste with gender, which profoundly influences the characters' experiences. The depiction of women from various socio-economic backgrounds and castes highlights the complex and interconnected nature of their oppression (Deshpande, 2000). This intersectional approach enhances the feminist interpretation of the text by recognizing the varied and complex experiences of women.

The subject of voice and silence has a crucial role in feminist literature. In her article "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous underscores the significance of women discovering and articulating their own voices as a means to confront the suppression imposed by patriarchal forces (Cixous, 1976). The novel portrays Madhuri's pursuit of self-expression and autonomy via her path as a singer. According to Deshpande (2000), her music serves as a method of affirming her personal identity and opposing the suppression imposed by society. This theme aligns with Cixous's plea for women to assert their existence through writing, liberating themselves from the silence enforced by patriarchal systems.

Shashi Deshpande skillfully creates a complex and detailed depiction of female unity and connections in her novel *A Small Remedies*. Deshpande explores how women in a patriarchal society empower and support one another through intergenerational relationships, mentorship, emotional support, and collective resistance. The novel's examination of the intricacies and contradictions within these connections enhances the complexity of its feminist discussion, demonstrating that female unity is a potent, although subtle influence. Deshpande's research makes a substantial contribution to our comprehension of how women effectively negotiate and defy societal limitations by forming strong connections with one another. Shashi Deshpande's novel *A Small Remedies* can be interpreted via a feminist lens, since it offers a critical perspective on patriarchal society while also highlighting the strength and empowerment of women. This critique utilizes feminist literary ideas from Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Hélène Cixous to emphasize the novel's examination of gender roles, agency, solidarity, intersectionality, and voice. Deshpande's intricate depiction of women's experiences and challenges provides a deep analysis of the continuous pursuit for gender parity and self-governance.

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