

## Depiction of Indian Beliefs, Myths and Superstitions in Shashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows

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### Abstract

Indian beliefs, stories, myths, epics, cinema, fairy tales, culture, and philosophy all have a significant good and bad effect on Indian culture and philosophy. In her works, Deshpande explores the effects of these factors on the life of an Indian middle-class lady. Deshpande is not an outspoken revolutionary feminist who believes that males are solely to blame for women's woes, sufferings, and misfortunes. She acknowledges that a woman's life and destiny are shaped to a considerable measure by her male counterpart's convenience. Her destiny is defined by her character. Furthermore, Indian beliefs and superstitions, as well as orthodox practises, norms, and traditions, impede her progress toward independence and modernization. Some Indian women take their meals from their husbands' dirty plates. Most Indians believe that uttering the name of 'Rama,' the fabled monarch of Ayodhya, causes the immortal souls of the dead to ascend to paradise. A tulsi puja is held in high regard by an Indian woman. A tulsi puja performed by a married woman is said to help her life as a Suhasini and an unmarried girl find a suitable husband. Observing fasts, performing pujas, applying haldi and kumkum as a symbol of wifehood, celebrating hartalika, mangala gouri, Bhau-bij, Raksha bandhan, Diwali festival, Ganpati festival, birth and death anniversaries of the ancestors of the near and dear ones are a few of the inseparable parts of Indian conventions and traditions.

**Key Words:** Festivals, Indian customs and culture, beliefs, superstitions, and myths

### Introduction

Deshpande is indeed interested in Indian realities, particularly the lives of Indian women stuck between tradition and modernization. She is not an outspoken and revolutionary feminist who believes that males are solely to blame for women's woes and sufferings, as well as their problems and position. She confesses that, to a considerable measure, a woman's life and destiny are shaped to fit the convenience of her male counterparts. Her fate is determined by her character. She is torn between her wishes and ambitions on the one hand, and the constraints imposed by traditional customs and traditions on the other. The norms and restrictions of Indian society are impeding her progress toward liberty and modernization. She wants to be free of the constraints of centuries-old customs and traditions. Deshpande demonstrates how ancient Indian beliefs, superstitions, practises, and traditions have been skewed against women; yet, she also recognises that it is frequently the woman who oppresses women. She emphasises the myths

and superstitions held by India's older population. Some Indian women eat their meals on the dirty dishes of their husbands. Most Indians believe that saying the name of Rama, the fabled monarch of Ayodhya, causes the immortal souls of the dead to ascend to paradise. Beliefs and superstitions have influenced and influenced the Indian way of life. It is also believed that a married woman's tulsi puja transforms her into a Suhasini and assists an unmarried girl in finding a suitable spouse. Her life takes on a traditional structure as a result of these beliefs and superstitions, as well as many more.

Siddhartha Sharma asserts:

*But caught in the matrix of age-old customs or tradition, like the other Deshpande's women characters, she can not break herself free from the clutches of tradition. She painfully realizes that despite her education and exposure, she was no different from the women that circumambulated the tulsi plant to increase their husband's life span. Even her husband, who is educated and apparently a modern man, is only a typical Indian husband for whom she has to remain passive and submissive.*

Most Indian women go to temples, churches, and other religious locations on a daily basis to pray and worship God, hoping and believing that God will assist them meet their worldly demands. It is thought that if an unmarried female worships and prays to the tulsi, she will be blessed with a nice husband, and that if a married woman does so, the tulsi will protect her husband. When Indu was told that calling her husband by his first name not only showed disrespect, but also shortened his life, she became upset.

The women circumambulating the tulsi, devoutly standing in front of it with folded hands and closed eyes, astounded her. In the novel, Atya and Indu had a chat that reveals a lot about Indian women's beliefs and superstitions:

*What's it for?*

*You'll understand when you get married,*

*What'll happen then?*

*You'll have a husband. And Tulsi... if you pray to her... she'll keep him safe.*

*Didn't you pray, Atya?*

*I did, child. But it was not written on my forehead that I should be so fortunate.*

*What's written on mine, Atya?*

*Lots of good fortune, my darling. Indu did not fail to understand what Atya meant by good fortune. (Deshpande 32).*

The woman's fortune is said to be decided by the tulsi and her prayer to it. Kumkum, green bangles, and black beads are emblems of wifhood in Indian culture; wifhood is regarded as auspicious, but widowhood is regarded as unfavorable. Mini, a bride, is overjoyed with the prospect of marrying. Mini's mother has accomplished a wonderful feat in getting her daughter married. When Kaki removes the saris out of the trunk, Indu is taken aback by the transformation

in the Mini. The house is packed with guests. Indu is perplexed by the family's cheerful feeling of involvement, which has been free of previous animosities, concerns, and confrontations. The aromas of flowers, food, and incense sticks fill the house. Kaka has been relishing his position as a gracious hostess, while the women have been hard at work in the kitchen. There are waves of excitement with an undertone of stress as ritual after ritual is performed.

Shashi Deshpande depicts the pitiful and critical situations of girls in traditional Indian Hindu society in her work *Roots and Shadows*. In such a culture, a girl has neither the right nor the demand to make her own decisions or to do what she enjoys. She is unable to free herself from the shackles that bind her. She is unable to change her name, which has been given to her by either her family or her spouse. It is a society in which a woman who is unable to conceive or suffers a miscarriage is forced to live in hell. A girl is not allowed to speak to other guys in this situation. While telling Indu not to speak to other males, even at college or the library, Akka says:

*That is enough of such talk. And even if you did nothing, it's bad enough being talked about. No girl in our family has ever been talked about. You have to promise such a thing won't happen again. (132)*

When Shashi Deshpande makes these points, we are finally able to show the truth: the female way of life in India is just the opposite of what they are supposed to be. She has to live under strict control, constant instructions and hard restrictions. She must not have a will. If she has any, it must be suppressed in the name of false prestige of the family. Shashi Deshpande emphasises the difficulty that middle-class families have in finding acceptable spouses for their daughters. Padmini's parents marry her out of desperation. Padmini's acceptance of the groom's "heavy, coarse features and crude mannerism" illustrates the harsh reality that a woman has no option but to accept and submit wholeheartedly.

In Indian Hindu society, a girl's marriage is still a punishing burden for the family. It is the bride who is important, not the groom. Parents get frightened and frantic as they hunt for a husband, especially if they come from a poor household. The issue they face is how to end the marriage. In such a negotiating environment, the husband's power over his wife and the wife's obedience to the husband are inherently bound. They understand that marriage is a challenging endeavour in and of itself. It's nearly hard for two people to blend into one identity. The bride's parents believe that their burden has been lifted after their daughter's marriage, but the groom's parents believe that by accepting the bride, they have offered great charity to the bride's parents. In such circumstances, the bride is obligated to serve her husband and his family at all times. Furthermore, she is taught that the spouse, whether nice or bad, deaf or dumb, poor or characterless, is no less than a God. A nice wife is one who goes out of her way to satisfy her husband, regardless of his flaws or flaws, even his clandestine relationships with other women. As a result, both the bride and her parents are obligated to support the groom's party and suffer any mischief, ensuring that the relationship survives resentment. For Indian spouses, this is a huge irony.

Indu despises the romantic notion of a bride daydreaming about and anticipating her wedding day. She feels that the image of Mini, as well as other Indian brides, has always been misleading. She appears to be dissatisfied with marriage, a watershed moment in a girl's life.

Indu recalls a small present given to her during her wedding by her Kaka and Kaki. She remembers:

*But he had said nothing about that. On that day, however, he had awkwardly pushed a small packet into my hands... I opened it and found a piece of green silk, green bangles, packets of haldi and kumkum, all the symbols of a happy wifehood. I was incredibly touched. (Deshpande 40).*

Indu was shaken with laughter when learning Kaka's list of his would-be son-in-law's virtues. According to the horoscopes, it was a perfect couple. Madhav-kaka had a different opinion. He said:

*Not perfect... But what couple could be perfectly matched? Tell me, Indu... you chose your own husband. Are you a made-for-each-other couple? ... Marriage itself is a difficult enough business. For two people to merge into one identity, it's... almost impossibility. But given certain things in common, languages, customs, rituals, backgrounds... all this makes it easier. (Deshpande 98).*

He was implying that sharing a shared language, customs, traditions, and heritage resulted in a happy marriage. Indu retorted angrily, claiming that human emotions were more important than everything else. Sharing each other's emotions and feelings is the foundation of a good marriage. It was absurd to consider everything, including families, backgrounds, castes, communities, customs, stars, gotras, and horoscopes, virtually everything. People's unusual, unreasonable and illogical behaviour results in huge losses in terms of money, health, and peace of mind, since superstitions prevent them from thinking properly and sensibly. The caste system, Indu believed, was another societal evil in India, similar to superstitions.

For ten years, Indu was separated from her parents. She was well aware that it would be difficult for her to forget the rhythm of her life before her marriage. Before drinking a cup of tea, she was taught to clean her teeth and wash her face. She proceeded to the water tap in the garden, which was next to the elevated washing stone. It was more appealing to her than the bathroom, which had a filthy stone floor and massive copper containers that were rarely cleaned. She pondered: *When had they last been cleaned? There had to be an eclipse or a Diwali for the bathroom vessels to get cleaned. (Deshpande 34).* This has been the practice followed in Indian families. She remembered her friend who was back from abroad telling her: *You know, Indu, even there, I used to remove my stockings and shoes and wash my feet in the bath tub before going to bed. (Deshpande 34).* This, according to Indu, has been an Indian way of life. It is difficult for Indians to escape the compulsions of the past that shapes and modifies the present. They are complementary to each other. However, there can not be a watertight compartment between the two. After Akka's death, as her body had been taken away for her funeral rites, Indu remembered:

*Outside, I could hear the shuffling sounds of bare feet on the floor. They were leaving. Someone began to moan as a hoarse voice called out the name by which Akka would be whisked away to heaven. Ram, Ram, Shri Ram. Atya clung to me*

*conclusively... And then they receded... the footsteps, the murmurs, and the smell. We were left in silence. (Deshpande 21-22).*

Narmada Atya only told Indu about Akka's life after she died. When Akka married, she was twelve years old, and her husband was well into his forties, tall, powerful, and with harsh features. Akka was almost elfin, with a light skin as pale as alabaster, straight nose, wavy hair, and a tempting curl at the end. She finally returned to her husband's residence after six months of being apart. Before she was eighteen, she had been divorced twice from her spouse; she had fled away from his house twice with her mother-in-law locked her in a room and denied her food for three days, eventually causing her to become very weak and malnourished. Barely five minutes later, she was in the husband's room. A lady who dies before her husband is thought to be lucky. If a widow does not shave her head after her husband dies, she is considered a second-class citizen. When Indu saw Kaku's head uncovered, she was taken aback. Kaku, a widow, was happy to have two good, holy, and sacred names: Ganga, given to her by her grandmother, and Kaveri, given to her by her mother-in-law. She exclaimed with pride:

*Ganga... That was my name in my father's house. Actually, it was my grandmother who chose it. She had just returned from Kashi. What a welcome they gave her! ... Going to Kashi was a real pilgrimage in those days. Now, you just sit on a train and reach Kashi. What merit is there in such a pilgrimage? ... The Kaveri, another holy river named after my mother-in-law, has both good and holy names. (Deshpande 118).*

During her periods, the woman was kept out of the puja room on purpose. Indu's ancestral house has a traditional puja area as well. The norm that forbade the dirty lady from entering the puja room upset her. She was furious at the regulations that made her an outcast three days out of the month. She had once declared angrily that she would not be a female at that time. But she knew she couldn't help but breach the rules, and there was nothing she could do about it. Kaku had made a complaint, she remembered.: *It's so difficult to know these days... Nobody observes the rules any more. Even Sumitra... whenever she comes here, she always says, 'I just finished'. You can fool people, but you can't fool the family gods. (Deshpande 119).*

It was through Old Uncle, a typical old Indian, that she learned that we need rules in order to have direction and discipline in our lives, as well as grace and dignity, and that we can always find freedom within these norms. Old Uncle taught Indu the values of Indianness and the Indian way of life. The older generation may have a lot to teach the younger generation. The fundamental contrast between the young and the aged was underscored by Anant-kaka. This is really an Indian way of life, but Anant-kaka regretted that the younger generation represented by Sharad and others was deviating from it. The old dreamt of the past whereas the modern and young of the future. Old Uncle said the same thing to Indu in different words. He said: Affection in a family . . . it should be a living presence. (Deshpande 46).

Affection is really important in human life. It pulls people together, and it ties them. Old Uncle's passion for and confidence in the Gods and great Indian heroes like Swami Vivekananda impacted Indu enormously. She spotted Old Uncle moving around with the neurotic fussiness of the old and glancing at a huge image of Swami Vivekananda's calm, tranquil, serene, and confident countenance on her approach to his silent chamber. Swami's

photograph, with Swami in his normal heroic attitude, served as a backdrop for Old Uncle's collection of gods who had a significant impact on the lives of Indians from the previous generation. Perhaps it was in honour of his hero, Swami Vivekananda, that he selected the name 'Naren' for his grandson. Heroes from Indian mythology and statesmen such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and others guide Indians.

## Conclusion

With beliefs like these, it's difficult for women to see something for what it is. Formerly, women were unable to receive an adequate education, causing them to believe that it to find themselves predisposed to mediocrity, frivolous, and lazy, which led to the present condition in which she suffers. Experiences and ideals affect social norms just as much as the other ways in which ideas and concepts are influenced. The concept of 'ideal' appears to play a significant role in each given social setting, which encompasses circumscribing, that is, making up, and also being the central to that period and location.

Deshpande's best writing techniques include the usage of unconscious symbolism, Greek and Scandinavian mythology, and folkloric themes. When all is said and done, these terms will likely become well-known ones in literary analysis. Myths, legends and folklore are deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche-especially those, which are found in the epics and the Puranas. They are so much a part of our psyche make up that it is in terms of these myths and legends that we try to order our inner world and cognize our experiences.

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