

Unveiling Patriarchal Authority in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time and Roots and Shadows*

Mrs. M. Priscilla
PhD., Scholar in English
Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College (Autonomous)
Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University
Madurai.

Dr. V. P. Rathi
Assistant Professor of English
Mannar Thirumalai Naicker College (Autonomous)
Pasumalai, Madurai

Shashi Deshpande, a renowned Indian feminist author examines the intricacies of gender dynamics, identity and social expectations with patriarchal dominance as a major theme in her novels *A Matter of Time* and *Roots and Shadows*. Deshpande deftly explores the ways in which patriarchal systems impact women's lives limit their autonomy and affect their relationships and sense of self. Both the novels examine the widespread effects of patriarchy but they also emphasize how irrepressible women are and how they subtly challenge these repressive systems. This paper examines the theme of patriarchal dominance in both the novels emphasizing how it appears in marriage, family relationships and societal expectations as well as how the protagonists deal with these systems.

Key Terms: Patriarchal, domination, gender, dynamics, solidarity, intergenerational, perspectives, Indian, and society

Introduction

In the dynamics of families, patriarchal dominance exists. In both the books of Shashi Deshpande, *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Roots and Shadows* (1983), the family is a microcosm of a patriarchal culture with firmly established power structures. After her great-uncle passes away, Indu the main character in *Roots and Shadows* returns to her ancestral home and faces a traditional and male-dominated family structure. "I had been brought up to believe that the family was all, that nothing could be more important than the family, its honour, its name, its pride" (Deshpande 34). This authorizes the familial expectations. Rigid norms that emphasize male ancestry and decision-making control the family. The matriarch Akka for example upholds traditional gender roles rather than questioning them by exercising power only within the parameters established by patriarchal norms. The collective identity of the family which positions women's desires beneath

the upholding of male dominance and familial honor shapes Indu's struggle to assert her individuality.

The expectations placed on Indu to fulfill the roles of wife and daughter-in-law despite her desire to pursue a career in writing is one example of how family customs reinforce women's subordination which is critiqued in the book. Similar to this the family serves as a site of patriarchal control in *A Matter of Time* although Deshpande turns her attention to intergenerational dynamics. In the novel, Sumi is the main character who must deal with her three daughters after her husband Gopal deserts her. The historical account of Sumi's mother Manorama demonstrates the patriarchal family structure as she adopts and upholds patriarchal ideals in order to maintain her place in a home where men predominate. Manorama's manipulation of family ties such as her daughters marriage illustrates how patriarchal societies frequently cause women to cooperate in upholding oppressive standards in order to obtain a small amount of power. "Manorama had lived her life within the rules, believing they gave her power, not seeing they were chains" (Deshpande 89). Kalyan, Sumi's father likewise exhibits patriarchal authority by upholding traditional roles leaving Sumi to deal with the fallout from his and Gopal's choices. It is appropriate to quote, when Gopal abandoned Sumi, "He had gone, leaving her behind, as if she were a piece of furniture, something he no longer needed" (Deshpande 12). Deshpande provides examples of how patriarchal dominance shapes personal identities and familial ties across generations.

In both novels Deshpande analyzes patriarchal dominance through the critical lens of marriage. Indu's marriage to Jayant is portrayed in *Roots and Shadows* as a place of tension between her need for independence and the expectations of society regarding subservience as a wife. The gendered power disparity present in conventional marriages is reflected in Jayant's subtly dominant behaviour which demands that Indu put his needs ahead of her professional and personal goals. The interplay between Indu's need for self-expression and her love for Jayant highlights the conflict between individual autonomy and patriarchal norms. To maintain peace in the family, Indu remarks: "With Jayant, I had to be careful, always careful, not to hurt his male ego. I had to curb my tongue, my thoughts, my very self" (Deshpande 78). Her choice to quit journalism in order to conform to Jayant's expectations demonstrates how marriage frequently requires women to submit to their husbands thereby stifling their individuality. This theme is further explored through Sumi and Gopal's marriage in *A Matter of Time*.

Male privilege in marriage is exemplified by Gopal's impetuous decision to leave Sumi and their daughters without warning allowing men to act independently without taking responsibility. Sumi's early apathy toward Gopal's departure is a reflection of how she has internalized patriarchal standards that place a premium on male authority. These conventions are challenged though as she rebuilds her life and moves toward independence. Deshpande highlights a generational shift in the way that people challenge male dominance by contrasting Sumi's experience with that of her daughter Aru who challenges patriarchal structures more overtly. In both books marriage is portrayed as an institution that frequently upholds women's subordination rather than as a partnership despite the protagonists varied degrees of resistance. It is apt to quote, "This edited collection includes essays on Deshpande's early works, including *Roots and Shadows*. It explores how her narratives challenge patriarchal domination through the lens of family and marriage, offering insights into Indu's resistance to societal expectations" (Dhawan 124).

Both the novels are critical of the larger social structure that maintains patriarchal dominance through inflexible gender norms and expectations. The widespread impact of patriarchy is reflected in *Roots and Shadows* through Indu's struggle to balance her role as an educated modern woman with the traditional expectations of her family and society. She is taking a cautious step toward regaining agency with her decision to go back to her ancestral home and face these expectations. But her emotional attachments to her husband and family temper her resistance highlighting the intricate relationship between defiance and conformity. "This book provides a comprehensive feminist analysis of Deshpande's novels, focusing on how her works critique patriarchal structures in Indian society. It discusses the portrayal of women's struggles for identity and agency in *Roots and Shadows*, emphasizing Indu's conflict with traditional gender roles" (Atrey 135). Indu's eventual declaration of her identity as a writer suggests that patriarchal constraints may be overcome despite Deshpande's portrayal of society as a force that restricts women's choices. Indu against her patriarchal norms pronounces, "I wanted to be free, to be myself, to live my life as I wanted, not as others wanted me to" (Deshpande 142).

Social norms are demonstrated in *A Matter of Time* through the stigma that Sumi experiences as an abandoned wife underscoring the way that marital status is used to evaluate women. The novel examines the pressures placed on women by society to preserve family honor as demonstrated by Manorama's adherence to customs and Sumi's initial hesitation to question

Gopal's choice. Nonetheless the idea that women's identities are linked to men is called into question by Sumi's progressive empowerment which she achieved through emotional fortitude and financial independence. Since Sumi finds strength in her daughters and other women Deshpande highlights the importance of feminine solidarity and community implying that resistance to patriarchy can arise by group support. According to Nityananda, "This study examines Deshpande's feminist themes, particularly in *A Matter of Time*, analyzing how Sumi's journey reflects resistance to patriarchal oppression. It highlights the intergenerational dynamics and the role of female solidarity in challenging male dominance" (Nityananda 65).

The way the two novels handle different generation's perspectives on patriarchal dominance is one of their main differences. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu is a symbol of a younger generation that is starting to challenge patriarchal conventions but her opposition is tempered by her emotional ties and individualistic. Akka's representation of the elder generation demonstrates how women internalize and maintain oppressive systems by supporting patriarchy. *A Matter of Time* on the other hand provides a more sophisticated examination of generational transition. A slow shift toward opposing male dominance is demonstrated by Manorama's strict adherence to patriarchal ideals in contrast to Sumi's silent fortitude and Aru's vocal defiance. Deshpande contends that although patriarchy is still firmly in place women can challenge it in various ways throughout their generations. When Sumi challenges her patriarchal norms, "I will not be a victim. I will live, I will make my life, for myself and my daughters" (Deshpande 180).

Deshpande's critique of patriarchal dominance is strengthened by her narrative style. Her use of introspective stream-of-consciousness techniques in both novels highlights the psychological effects of patriarchal oppression by delving into the inner conflicts of the protagonists. In order to demonstrate how patriarchal values are upheld across generations, *A Matter of Time* employs memory and flashbacks to bridge the past and present. The ancestral home in *Roots and Shadows* is a symbolic location where the past and present converge making Indu face the burden of tradition. Without resorting to didacticism, Deshpande's feminist viewpoint is nuanced yet sharp highlighting the pernicious effects of patriarchy through real-world examples. "It offers a detailed critique of Deshpande's portrayal of patriarchal domination, focusing on family dynamics and marriage in *A Matter of Time* and *Roots and Shadows*. It examines how

Deshpande uses introspective narratives to highlight women's psychological struggles" (Sharma 135).

In *A Matter of Time* and *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande offers a sophisticated analysis of patriarchal dominance examining its effects on marriage, family and culture. Both books show women overcoming oppressive systems, Indu and Sumi represent distinct aspects of resistance, Sumi through her path toward independence and Indu through her search for self-expression. *A Matter of Time* highlights intergenerational change and group support whereas *Roots and Shadows* concentrate on individual rebellion within a traditional family. "This article explores how Deshpande's protagonists negotiate patriarchal constraints, with specific references to *Roots and Shadows* and *A Matter of Time*. It discusses the subtle rebellion of Indu and Sumi against gendered norms" (Pandey 146). In addition to celebrating women's strength and autonomy, Deshpande's work highlights the widespread impact of patriarchy and provides a potent commentary on the intricate relationships between genders in Indian society. Readers are prompted to consider alternatives to patriarchal norms by Deshpande's poignant depiction of women's struggles and victories.

This critical study looks at how patriarchal dominance manifests in marriage family dynamics and social expectations in Shashi Deshpande's books *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Roots and Shadows* (1983). Through the main characters Indu and Sumi, Deshpande highlights the subtly defiant actions of women while examining how patriarchal structures limit their agency identities and relationships. Indu's fight for self-expression in a traditional marriage and family in *Roots and Shadows* illustrates the conflict between gendered norms and personal goals. The progression of patriarchal oppression is highlighted in *A Matter of Time* by contrasting intergenerational viewpoints with Sumi's path toward independence following her husband's desertion. Deshpande's feminist perspective and introspective storytelling style highlight female solidarity and resilience as avenues for agency while exposing the psychological and social costs of patriarchy. The study emphasizes how both the novels challenge patriarchal dominance while speculating about potential reforms for Indian society.

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