

## DOUBLE STANDARDS OF SOCIETY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S SMALL REMEDIES

**Ashish M. Sahare**

*Research Scholar (Ph.D.)  
 R.T.M. Nagpur University Nagpur*

**Dr. Neehal Sheikh**

*Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor  
 Santaji Mahavidyalaya, Nagpur*

**Abstract:**

*Shashi Deshpande throws light on anguish, love, rage, and despair in her novel Small Remedies. It's a modern Indian society novel. Shashi Deshpande has boldly attempted to give voice to the frustrations of women in patriarchal society in this novel. The novelist attempts to shed light on society's double standards for women in a tradition-bound society. It's a novel that sparks your imagination and moves you slowly and calmly.*

**Keywords:** *Patriarchal, double standards, unconventional, stereotypes, contemporary.*

Madhu Saptarishi is the novel's central character. She is a Kannadiga-Maharashtrian Brahmin from a traditional Kannadiga-Maharashtrian family. She is a middle-aged, educated woman. She is now working on a biography of Savitribai Indorekar, a well-known Gwalior Gharana classical vocalist. Savitribai is a classical music vocalist who chooses to forego marriage and family in order to pursue her dreams. Madhu's life is turned upside down by a single event. She visits a painting show, which brings back all of her prior memories, particularly her sexual encounter with her father's friend. She believes Som is a considerate husband, so she tells him about the incident. But she was wrong; Som, like any other Indian spouse, thinks about chastity and virginity, and this bothers him, therefore he behaves erratically. Madhu remembers, "But it is the single act of sex that Som holds onto, it's the fact that he can't let go of, as if it's been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, an intact hymen-these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter" (262). Since that day, Madhu's perfect world has crumbled; Som is tormented by her history and has become even more sceptical and hostile toward her. As a result, Madhu and Som have a regular verbal spat. The emotional intimacy between them, as well as their shared faith, has vanished. He keeps returning to what she said. He asks Madhu, "tell me the truth, Som says over and over again. He dismisses the truth of our life together, of our love, our friendship, our life as parents of a

beloved son. What he wants is something separate and distinct from these things, something which really is, though he refuses to recognize this, a minute part of a whole. To him, that part is the whole" (235).

Madhu, who is unaware by male psychology, tells him a secret and pays for it. She was only fifteen at the time and lacked maturity. She wants her husband to be a friend who understands her and is willing to share this personal truth with her. Madhu, on the other hand, had no notion that discussing the act would lead to a mountain of issues in her life. Madhu's anguish is reflected in her writing: "When will this end, oh God, how will it end? I think of leaving him and going away, but where will I go? And there's Adit. Som and I locked in a silent, fearful struggle that exhausts us. We are like two travellers embarked on a terrible journey, rocketing at a dangerous speed, on the verge of going out of control, yet unable to stop, unable to help ourselves" (257-258). Between the two, communication gap develops. Madhu is unable to comprehend Som's behaviour because she is unfamiliar with conventional male mentality. In contemporary society, a woman is considered as a commodity to be exploited solely for the satisfaction of the owner, she becomes the husband's private property.

A woman should not indulge in such activities with others before or after marriage, and she must serve her spouse with unwavering dedication and loyalty. She should not challenge her spouse, even if he is harsh and crafty by nature. A sex-centred morality exists throughout society. As a result, we can observe that she was a victim twice. First, she is victimised by patriarchal society's double standards; second, she suffers because of her innocence. There would have been no complications in her wedded life if she hadn't exposed her premarital sex with Chandru. Som shows characteristics of masculine mentality in this matter. When he found out his wife's premarital sexual act, he was furious. The novelists focussing here society's double standards. Before marrying Madhu, Som had an intimate contact with a married woman. It's worth mentioning that

premarital romances can cause marital strife, and that these issues can sometimes lead to the breakup of a marriage. However, this rule exclusively applies to women. Men have complete freedom to do whatever they wish to. Som, Madhu hopes, would understand her. He, on the other hand, does not. Regular quarrels become normal for them. She is a good and honest woman who has been put to the test simply because she is a woman. Som pretends to be normal in his actions, but he ends his married relationship with her. Som names several persons in front of her and accused her of having an affair with them. This experience instils in her a dislike for male thinking. She doesn't respond; she's taken aback by his blame. But she feels that silence "Makes thing worse, it's a bigger barrier between us than my words had been" (256). Shashi Deshpande here, through the character of Madhu, seems to bring forth the significance adhered to female's virginity by men. For Som it is her female virginity, chastity, the pure sexual body of a woman that counts, and nothing else as far as man-woman relationship is concerned. Shashi Deshpande seems to criticize typical male attitude toward women as if women were the only custodians of social, moral, and sexual codes while they are free to do anything.

Savitribai has always been a self-reliant young lady. Her mother has a stronger influence on her than her father. She says, "It was my mother who showed me the beauty of music. She had a sweet voice. She sang the sort of songs women sang then, aarti songs, ritual songs, stotras. When she sang the Ramraksha, it became something quite different from what it was when the women just recited it; the music transformed it altogether. I loved listening to her when she sang it. I even picked up a few verses on my own" (27). On her insistence, Savitribai's mother would send her to learn music along with little girls from a few families living in the neighbourhood. When her father came to know about it, he was furious. He said: "Do you want your daughter to be one of those women? he asked his wife. That was the end of those music lessons" (62). She challenged the idea that the father is the head of the family and has the sole right to decide the life of the daughter. As a young woman, she married a Brahmin named Sadashivrao from Pune and gave birth to a beautiful daughter. Savitribai's love of music forces her to listen to music safely. Once her father-in-law observed her activities and he realized her true passion for music and encouraged her to learn music. Music lessons begin in a dark corner of the house. The women in the family

started chatting. She doesn't care about these things and builds a good relationship with Gulamsab- tabla player during her education and one day she ran away with him. Breaking all the barriers of castes, religion and marriage codes, she started to live with him. All this was difficult for her but her musical qualities and determination to pursue a career in it did not allow her to settle down. She was well aware that the male-dominated environment at home would never give her a chance to do so, so she decides to break all the norms and get out of the maze of old stereotypes.

She recognises one thing from the beginning of her childhood: women are viewed as second-class citizens in society. Women are subject to one set of regulations, while men are subject to a different set of rules. She recalls how men spend their life according to their desires. Women, on the other hand, must live within the four walls and adhere to the norms and restrictions. If they try to do something different than the behaviour expected of them, the family, the society criticizes, scolds and make their lives difficult to live. Madhu says, "In the conventional society of Neemgaon, where each family had its place marked out for it according to religion, caste, money, family background, etc. our families, Munni's and mine, were difficult to place, not confronting to the norms" (138). Madhu's father was isolated from society in his unconventional ways. He was a widower, bringing up a daughter on his own with a male servant at home. He was so untraditional that he would not observe any rituals or ceremonies and would openly indulge in a drink or two every evening. Madhu comes to know about her father's mistress through Munni. She remembers: "Do you know he goes to a woman at night? she asked me and then went on to spell out in graphic detail why he went to her and the things he did. I was horrified, I felt sick. It was not the fact of his having a mistress-which, at that age, did not mean anything to me. It was beyond my capacity to understand the implications of that. It was the way she put it, the context of absurd vulgarity into which she placed it, making my father both ridiculous and disgusting, that upset me. My father doing those disgusting things! And with a woman- a strange woman! The two of them and....." (139). However, all his unconventional behaviour did not invite any kind of censorship or rejection from the society because he was a man and was free to do whatever he wanted. On the other hand, as soon as it came to Savitribai, it was a different story. Her behaviour was disapproved and she lost

respectability in the society. Even Savitribai's father-in-law wasn't a believer in morality. He had an adulterous relationship with a woman as well. He was going about his business in his own way, and it seemed as if he was receiving some sort of recognition from society because he was respected. His mistress was a thumari singer. And he was always seeing her, and everyone in the neighbourhood was aware of it. It was a self-evident fact that women were debating among themselves. A man marries a woman from his own society while also keeping a mistress from another. Women, on the other hand, are exiled from society if they do so. Turning aside from the social norms lays her open to much disapproval and criticism.

**Conclusion:**

The above observations clearly show that Shashi Deshpande wants to draw the attention towards the double standards of society, mentality of men that create obstacles in individual freedom of women. Empowerment of women cannot come through

only education but we need to give them individual freedom.

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