


Cultural Tapestry and Female Narratives: Unveiling Identity Crisis in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the intricate exploration of cultural tapestry and female narratives by analysing how identity crisis is portrayed in *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande and *Desirable Daughters* by Bharati Mukherjee. Both novels provide deep insights into the challenges faced by the characters as they negotiate their gender roles and cultural heritage in the face of opposing cultural backgrounds. Deshpande and Mukherjee give a comprehensive representation of the problems encountered by women in contemporary Indian culture as well as in foreign lands by deftly combining themes of tradition, modernism, and female autonomy. This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the changing dynamics of gender and cultural identity in modern literature by analysing these literary works in comparison.

Keywords: *Cultural Tapestry, Female Narratives, Identity Crisis, Alienation, Immigration, Tradition, Modernity, Gender Roles, Indian Society, Self-realization.*

Introduction

The concept of a cultural tapestry functions as a metaphorical lens that offers a unique perspective for identifying the intricate and interrelated elements of social identity. The very idea illustrates the complex network of literary references, social structures, historical events, and traditions that collectively shape human society. Each of these threads represents a distinct facet of the cultural landscape, enhancing the diversity and richness inherent in the collective identity. This concept promotes exploration and appreciation of the many hues, patterns, and textures that make up the cultural mosaic. This research looks at how women are portrayed in literature by authors from several cultural backgrounds. These authors' depictions of women are often influenced by societal norms and cultural expectations, which are often rooted in tradition. It does this by examining the critical part tradition plays in shaping female identity.

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Literature has played a vital role in telling the stories of women's revolutionary journeys throughout history. From Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Women authors have expressed their struggles, aspirations, and accomplishments through their work. Since women have been marginalised and silenced for many decades, literature has worked as a powerful tool for them to express their opinions and challenge cultural norms. Through both creative and explanatory writing, women have been able to overcome the constraints of their historically marginalised position. Poetry, fiction, essays, memoirs, and other works by women writers have addressed themes of gender inequality, discrimination, oppression, and the longing for freedom. We may also recognise the diversity, resilience, and tenacity of women's experiences through literature. Literature, whether through the representation of fictitious characters negotiating social expectations or the portrayal of real-life heroines who have questioned the status quo, provides a rich tapestry of storylines that reflect the intricacies of women's lives. The literary creations strike a chord of genuineness, promoting reform and female empowerment while shedding light on the intricacies of female role in different cultural backgrounds. Virginia Woolf, the great feminist critic, has expounded in her masterpiece work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) to advocate for women's emancipation: "All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point- a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." (7) Woolf makes the argument in this polemical essay that for a woman to develop her abilities in the field of literary discourse, she needs both financial independence and support from her family. Simone de Beauvoir examines women's submissive status as the "other" in the social, religious, and economic spheres of patriarchal adding, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (*The Second Sex*, 15) The legacy has been superbly taken forward by the contemporary Indian authors such as Kamla Das, Shashi Deshpande, Bharti Mukherjee, Nayanthara Seghal, Arundathi Roy, Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya have expressed the actual oppression and struggle of women to attain gender equality through their works in English.

The present paper, however, focuses particularly on the skillful depiction of the shifting roles and identities of women in conflicting cultural contexts in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Bharti Mukherjee. These novels *That Long Silence* and *Desirable Daughters* superbly address feminism, cultural identity, and the many difficulties that modern women face in their day-to-day lives. These works provide a variety of perspectives in their portrayals of female characters and highlight how things like race, class, and cultural background collectively contribute to

impact women's lives beyond just gender. Undoubtedly, women's stories from classical mythology to modern literature succeed in offering insights into gender roles, cultural conventions, and the development of feminine identity. Ancient myths and folktales, especially those portrayed in legendary epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as well as folklore from many regions, retain cultural values and societal expectations. It offers valuable acumens on societal norms, gender roles, and the dynamic development of female characters by assisting us in recognising archetypes and tropes that have historically influenced how women are depicted in cultural narratives, from ancient mythology to contemporary literature.

Cultural Context and Identity Crisis in *That Long Silence* and *Desirable Daughters*

Indian novelist, essayist, and short story writer Shashi Deshpande is well-known for her astute writing on women and their experiences in family in general and married lives in particular. The Sahitya Akademi Award and the Padma Shri, India's highest civilian distinction, are only two of the many accolades and honours she has received for her creative works. She has made a substantial contribution to Indian literature, particularly in English. Because of its empathetic portrayal of women's life and analysis of the intersection between Indian heritage, modernity, and human agency, her work continues to be appreciated by readers worldwide. Her novels and short tales represent and define women who struggle to obtain independence in the present Indian culture, focussing on middle-class women, usually married young girls, who can be seen contending with Indian patriarchy and, at times, with their life partners. What is noteworthy about her method is that she delves into her characters' psyches and shares them with her readers in a truly genuine manner. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* deftly weaves together the strands of the Indian middle-class milieu, drawing readers into an exhaustive investigation of the social complexities, family connections, and the multifaceted everyday lives of its characters. *That Long Silence* reveals the extended stories of sorrow that women have been keeping hidden for a very long time inside of their hearts. The metaphorical term "Silence" is used to represent the mute submission of women folk from distinct generations.

As she says about the novel:

And then I wrote *That Long Silence* almost entirely a woman's novel nevertheless, a book about the silencing of one-half of humanity. A lifetime of introspection went into this novel, the one closest to me personally; the thinking and ideas in this are closest to my own. (Sidhartha Sharma, Shashi Deshpande's *Novels: A Feminist Study*, 38)

In the framework of the Indian middle class, this literary mosaic explores the protagonist's inner conflicts and goals and depicts the outside world. As a kind of microcosm, the novel captures the broader social structure together with its unique expectations and conventions. Deshpande's perspective provides readers with a deep look into the lives of the people, illuminating the traditions, rites, and social mores that remarkably shape their lives. The novel is a gripping narrative that tells the story of Jaya, the heroine, as she grapples with the intricacies of her identity and existence in an Indian middle-class environment. To her, everything is an illusion that is typically beyond her comprehension:

Things can never be as they were. It's astonishing how we comment on the change as if the change is something remarkable. On the contrary, not changing is unnatural, against nature. Biology recognizes this fact; it is stasis that is an aberration. And here, even the façade of sameness crumbled at a touch (TLS 47).

It is a moving investigation of social expectations, gender roles, and the personal battles that women endure in traditional societies. Jaya, a middle-class mother of two, is left in emotional distress when her husband, Shripad, admits to having an extramarital affair. This discovery shatters the supposedly perfect veneer of their family life, forcing Jaya to face the traditional standards that govern women's duties in the family and society. Jaya is a gifted writer. However, this well-educated and refined woman knows that accomplishing her goal will not be easy and faces several obstacles along the way. She says:

To achieve anything, you've got to be hard and ruthless. Yes, even if you want to be a saint, if you want to love the whole world, you've got to stop loving individual human beings first. And if they love you, and they bleed when you show them you don't love them, not especially, well, so much the worse for them! There's just no other way of being a saint. Or a painter. A writer. (TLS 1)

The novel also illuminates the deeply ingrained gender norms in the strict patriarchal Indian environment. One needs their life partner's encouragement and support to attain the goals. However, in Jaya's situation, neither "the sheltering tree" nor the patriarchal surroundings provide her with a stable setting. Her efforts to grow and mature as a writer are fruitless. She seems to be a stranger even to herself, "But what bewildered me as I looked through the pages of the diaries was that I saw in them an utter stranger, a person so alien to me that even the faintest understanding of the motives for her actions seemed impossible." (TLS 69) Deshpande examines the expectations put on women in the context of nuptials, and how marriage, as a social institution, changes the lives of the characters. Particularly, the protagonist struggles with the complex dance of compliance and rebellion while navigating the middle-class environment, reflecting the demands to uphold traditional gender norms. As Jaya deals with

the fallout from her husband's revelation, she struggles with the expectations put on her as a wife, mother, and woman. The title, *That Long Silence*, captures the enormous effect of Jaya's emotional and social quiet. She bears the weight of cultural expectations for forgiveness, sacrifice, and the preservation of family unity. The narrative develops as Jaya goes on a voyage of self-discovery, challenging the roles given to her and seeking control over her life. Her psychological issues reflect the greater cultural demands placed on women, especially in terms of marriage and family life. The story explores Jaya's relationships with her husband, children, and extended family, depicting a complex structure of familial pressure. She used to believe that "the relation of man to woman is the most natural of one person to another" (TLS 132), but now she realises that this is true not just for her, but for all women. It is ubiquitous. According to her, "there's only treachery, only deceit, only betrayal" (TLS 158). Both Jaya and her husband feel like "a pair of bullocks yoked together" (TLS 7). In the composite title of her journals, which she labels "The Journals of a Sane Housewife," she writes that "the largest issue confronting every lady of these diaries had been: what will I prepare for breakfast/lunch/tea/dinner? That has been the recurring theme of my life" (TLS 70). Jaya's search for her identity is aided by her quest for knowledge. The novel emphasises the importance of education as a method of personal development and empowerment for women in the Indian middle class. Jaya's scholastic path becomes a transforming experience, enabling her to question cultural standards and express her own identity. Throughout the novel, Deshpande expertly weaves the cultural fabric of Indian middle-class life, integrating aspects of tradition, modernisation, and the changing roles of women. The conflict between tradition and modernity is obvious, lending complexity to the investigation of gender roles and social expectations. Deshpande skillfully conveys the weight of social expectations, including managing decisions about school, marriage, and jobs as well as adhering to gender stereotypes. Jaya, struggling with the intricacies of her identity, is pulled between several roles and personalities: "Physical touching is for me a momentous thing.....And I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well." (TLS 15) The use of the phrase "physical touching" as a "momentous thing" implies that Jaya feels great emotional and psychological effects from even basic acts of physical closeness, showing a deeper issue with intimacy and self-awareness. The protagonist's shattered sense of identity is highlighted by the mention of 'Jaya' and 'Suhasini'. Suhasini is her given name, indicating the character she has created for herself, but Jaya is most likely a name from her past, implying that she has lived multiple lives or taken different identities at various times. This duality exposes Jaya's internal turmoil and bewilderment as

she struggles with balancing multiple pieces of her identity. For her, changing one's name, title, or appearance proves as a burden that stifles originality and upholds gender discrimination. Jaya's struggles with social expectations and her sense of independence present economic concern as a key component of middle-class existence. She bursts out in dejection: "I'm cast out of happiness forever" (TLS 136).

Deshpande deftly incorporates the story's economic context, which mirrors the goals and constraints of the protagonists, her financial stability, and her longing for a better life. Certainly, *That Long Silence*, is a literary masterpiece that not only vividly depicts the Indian middle-class milieu but also deftly reveals the many facets of familial dynamics, educational goals, gender roles, and cultural norms. All of these elements come together to form a deep and well-rounded story that readers will find deeply relatable.

Similarly, Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* is a literary tessellation that expertly weaves together the threads of Indian middle-class life, the immigrant experience, and a deep feeling of cultural alienation. Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian-born American author, has emerged as a prominent literary figure in English literature. She has won critical accolades from all around the world in a very brief writing career excelling at depicting the cultural confrontation between East and West. Mukherjee has presented her female folk as beings and individuals dealing with the stress of being immigrants. According to Dr. N. D. R Chandra:

Like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya (Suraiya), Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Pravar Jhabwalla, and Githa Hariharan Mukherjee exposes many facets of feminism, encompassing agitation for equal opportunity, sexual autonomy, and right to self-determination. (Critical Perceptions, Ed. N.D.R Chandra. 267)

In her novels, Mukherjee depicts the difficulties that Indian and other Third-World immigrants have while attempting to adapt to North American culture. The cross-cultural dilemma is an important issue in modern literature, and it has grown in importance in today's globalised society. Mukherjee states in a *Massachusetts Review* interview: "The immigrants in my stories go through an extreme transformation in America and at the same time, they alter the country's appearance and psychological make-up." (654) Mukherjee's writing transports readers on a riveting trip through the complex landscapes of identity, tradition, and the difficulties of adjusting to a new environment. *Desirable Daughters* is the story of Taralata, an outstanding San Francisco lawyer, who journeys from Kolkata, India, to the United States. The narrative starts with Tara's recollection of her early days in Kolkata. Tara's life is upended when her sisters, Padma and Parvati, come from India for her fiftieth birthday. This reconnection evokes

recollections of their memories of childhood. Tara writes about her childhood in Calcutta: “Our bodies changed, but our behaviour never did. Rebellion sounded like a lot of fun...My life was one long childhood until I was thrown into marriage.” (DD 27-28)

The characters' lives are shaped by family structures, social expectations, and the interaction of tradition and modernity, which serve as a background for the investigation of relationships and the fabric of daily living. As the novel progresses, the emphasis switches to migration, reflecting the greater immigrant experience that resonates with individuals seeking fresh starts in faraway nations. Tara and her sisters go on a transforming trip from Kolkata to the United States. Mukherjee beautifully conveys the struggles, aspirations, and cultural dissonance: “The finding of a new identity.... the painful or exhilarating process of pulling yourself out of the culture that you were born into and then replanting yourself in another culture.” (Nayak, 123)

As Tara reconnects with her origins, Mukherjee brilliantly draws a realistic image of the Indian middle-class environment, examining family and social settings. *Desirable Daughters* explores the significant issue of cultural alienation as individuals negotiate their lives in the United States. The conflict between their rich Indian ancestry and the temptation of integration into American society becomes a recurring theme, depicting the characters' emotional conflicts. Tara, the protagonist, often thinks about her life, her choices, and the complicated patriarchal environment that limits women's independence, even for the most significant occasions like marriage, which subjugates her identity. At the age of nineteen, Tara was married to Bish Chatterjee and migrated to America with him. Her father chooses him because,

"He had that eagerness and a confident smile that promised substantial earnings. It lured my father into marriage negotiations, and it earned my not unenthusiastic acceptance of him as husband. A very predictable, very successful marriage negotiation." (DD 7)

She sees herself as having several identities and perceives her identity through the constantly changing prism of awareness and society, including her sexuality and ethnicity. She travels to America with her husband just after marriage, intending to support and raise their children while fitting the stereotype of the conventional Indian woman. However, her succumbed desires reject the conventional role because "the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled," she makes the decision of 'divorce' that is regarded as the most harsh in Indian culture. (DD 82).

Mukherjee makes identity crisis and cultural alienation prominent topics while investigating Tara and her sisters' problems, hopes, and cultural dissonance in their chosen country. The

conflict between their Indian roots and the appeal of integration into American society adds layers of complexity to their journey. Mukherjee brilliantly captures discord masterfully conveying the dissonance between their origins and changing identities in their new nation, particularly Tara, who is torn between her history in India and her present in America. The effort to integrate cultural subtleties, social standards, and personal goals generates a compelling story arc, representative of the whole immigrant experience. As Tara struggles with the conflict between her origins and her emerging identity in America, the story delves deeply into issues of cultural alienation. Tara's effort to combine cultural subtleties, social standards, and personal goals becomes an emotional examination of identity, echoing the immigrant experience as a whole. Mukherjee presents the fundamental assimilation dilemma by contrasting the tales of Tara and Padma. By rejecting everything American and adhering to Indian culture, Padma has rebuilt India in America. Whereas Tara goes on to embrace American culture, she interacts with individuals who are exclusively of Indian descent, works for an Indian television network, and lives in a South Asian community. She's prepared to take on the obstacles of integration and reinvent herself. As Tara states, she sees her Didi's efforts to preserve Indian culture as a sign of her incapacity to handle the difficulties of integration:

Her clinging to a version of India and to Indian ways and to Indian friends, Indian clothes and food and a 'charming' accent seemed to me a cowardly way of coping with a new country. Change is corruption; she seemed to be saying. Take what America can give, but don't let it tarnish you in any way. (DD134)

Throughout the work, Mukherjee successfully depicts Tara's character development, demonstrating her tenacity and flexibility in the face of shifting situations. Tara's voyage exemplifies the flexible nature of cultural identity, defying the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. The story finishes with a feeling of transition, emphasising cultural fusion and the fluidity of identity. However, Mukherjee goes beyond describing cultural alienation to demonstrate the possibility of cultural synthesis and development. The characters transform, adjusting to their new circumstances but keeping aspects of their cultural background. The novel raises questions on the changing nature of femininity under the influence of tradition and modernity. Tara embodies the fortitude of a woman who adapts to the shifting demands of time and place, a reflection of the challenging immigrant experience when identity formation is a societal as well as personal endeavour. Undoubtedly, *Desirable Daughters* stands as a testament to the intricacies and elasticity of cultural identity, inspiring readers to contemplate the intricate relationship between ancestry and the dynamic environments of their adopted country.

A Comparative Analysis of Cultural Alienation in *That Long Silence* and *Desirable Daughters*

Literature has always been exploring the themes of cultural alienation which capture the conflict that individuals experience when they feel desolated from their cultural roots or find it difficult to adapt to an unfamiliar environment. Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee explore the complexities of identity formation, gender interactions, and societal norms through the lens of cultural alienation. The intriguing plots of *Desirable Daughters* and *That Long Silence* emphasise the struggles and triumphs of the female protagonists in the face of tradition and modernity. Numerous creative works have explored the topic of cultural alienation in literature, particularly in postcolonial and diasporic narratives. Deshpande and Mukherjee's works have drawn a lot of critical attention due to their nuanced portrayals of female experiences in the setting of cultural alienation. In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande's protagonist Jaya battles the constraints of patriarchal and cultural norms in urban India. Jaya's discontent with traditional female roles and her yearning for independence are the root causes of her sense of cultural alienation. Deshpande skillfully navigates the complexities of parent-child relationships, shedding light on how personal choices are influenced by cultural conventions and how love, duty, and sacrifice interact in the context of family life. *That Long Silence* serves as a potent reminder of the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society in addition to being an individual narrative. Jaya's story demonstrates how women may navigate the intricate web of societal norms and expectations while overcoming obstacles and demonstrating perseverance. The novel's ability to enthrall readers everywhere and provoke reflection on the societal institutions that shape our lives is what gives its narrative depth. The pursuit of education and social mobility are seen as essential components of middle-class existence. Deshpande presents the quest for knowledge as a method of achieving both social mobility and personal improvement. Jaya mirrors the prevalent thinking of the middle-class ethos by skillfully balancing academic accomplishment with social expectations:

To achieve anything, to become anything, you've got to be hard and ruthless. Yes, even if you want to be a saint, if you want to love the whole world, you've got to stop loving individual human beings first. And if they love you, and they bleed when you show them you don't love them, not especially, well, so much the worse for them! There's just no other way of being a saint. Or a painter. A writer (TLS 1)

Deshpande deftly combines themes of domesticity, motherhood, and selfhood, demonstrating how Jaya's cultural identity fragments as she faces the reality of her marriage and family life. Similarly, in *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee delves into the experiences of Tara, an Indian-American woman who returns to Kolkata and faces the challenges of her dual identity. Tara's

feelings of cultural alienation are exacerbated by her isolation from both her American upbringing and her Indian origin. Mukherjee effectively contrasts Kolkata's liveliness with Tara's isolation as she navigates its social systems and family expectations. Through Tara's quest of self-discovery, Mukherjee draws attention to the contradictions between tradition and modernity as well as the flexibility of cultural identity in the diaspora. The moving accounts of cultural alienation in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* show the complexity of the female experience in the face of social conventions and cultural expectations. As remarked by Homi Bhabha in the Location of Culture:

The creation of a Third Space disrupts the logic of synchronicity and evolution which traditionally authorize the subject of cultural knowledge. It makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process and destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated open, expanding code. (125)

As the narrative develops, readers are made to consider the interconnections of culture, gender, and identity, as well as empathise with the problems of people navigating the conflicts between tradition and modernity. Finally, Deshpande and Mukherjee's works are compelling testaments to the universality of human experience, as well as the ongoing need for belonging and selfhood in the face of cultural estrangement. Mukherjee captures themes of individuality, tradition against modernity, self-discovery, and empowerment by using the Sanskrit verse modified by Octavio Paz and translated by Eliot Weinberger as the epigraph of the novel.

No one behind, no one ahead.
The path the ancients cleared has closed.
And the other path, everyone's path, Easy and wide, goes nowhere.
I am alone and find my way (DD Epigraph)

The comprehensive analysis of these lines gives an insight into the great message conceptualised in it. It encompasses a feeling of solitude or distinctiveness, bearing the sense of isolation signifying a journey destined to be undertaken alone. It also symbolises a departure from longstanding norms, encapsulating the feeling of alienation from traditional fetters with a desire to establish a new path away from old expectations. However, this indicates the culminating feeling of empowerment and agency in choosing one's path, especially in the face of hardship at the end.

Generational Conflicts and Traditions

A comparative study of *That Long Silence* and *Desirable Daughters* reveals the intricate dynamics of intergenerational relationships as well as the evolving nature of traditions in

contemporary contexts, demonstrating how the characters maintain their identities in the face of conflicting cultural and societal forces. By analysing characters, settings, and narrative techniques, the story offers realistic depictions of families navigating generational conflicts and the shifting terrain of tradition, illuminating the difficulties of navigating intergenerational relationships and negotiating cultural identity. We see Mohan's mother, who has devoted all her life to surrendering the male sovereign, making fun of patriarchy in her circumstances: “Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, you are safe. This poor idiotic woman Suhasini believed in this. I know better now. I know that safety is always unattainable. You’re never safe.” (TLS 17) Waiting irritates Jaya, she says: “I must do something. This waiting is getting me down.” (TLS 30) To her waiting is universal for women. “But for women, the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws’ home. Wait until you have kids.” (TLS 30) Jaya tries to balance the boundaries between tradition and modernization within her family. Jaya's struggle to show her uniqueness is exacerbated by the expectations put on her by her parent's generation, who strictly adhere to traditional values and patriarchal conventions. As Sara Grimke remarks: “Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means of selfish gratification, to minister to his sexual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill.” (Grimke 10) Through Jaya's tale, Deshpande illustrates the generational split and the obstacles experienced by those seeking to break away from the restrictions of family customs while honoring their cultural background.

Correspondingly, in *Desirable Daughters* Mukherjee delves into the experiences of Tara, an Indian-American woman dealing with the complications of ethnic identity and family duties. Even though Padma, Tara’s sister lives in America, she adheres to Indian customs, friends, attire, and food. She remarks:

American meaning self engrossed. She reminds Tara to follow the models of Sita and Savitri, things are never perfecting marriage; a woman must be prepared to accept less than perfection in this lifetime-and to model herself on Sita, Savitri and Behula, the virtuous wives of Hindu myths. (DD 134)

As a symbol of her ethnic heritage, Padma takes pride in her life. She is attached to her interpretation of Indianness. Tara says: “...I always knew that something marked Didi as different and at the same time I would have, of course, denied the possibility.” (DD 31) Mukherjee skillfully depicts the clash of generations and the changing character of traditions in the diaspora, highlighting the difficulties between assimilation and cultural preservation.

Assessing these stories encourages readers to contemplate the complexities of intergenerational relationships, as well as the ongoing relevance of tradition in shaping individual identities and familial connections.

Women's Agency and Autonomy

The portrayals of women's agency and autonomy in *That Long Silence* and *Desirable Daughters* provide a complex picture of female characters negotiating social norms, family expectations, and personal goals. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya struggles with conventional Indian society's suffocating expectations of marriage and motherhood. Jaya's path to agency is distinguished by her progressive recognition of the restrictions imposed by patriarchal conventions, as well as her subsequent efforts to express female freedom. As she asserts: "Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces." (TLS 1) Despite the restraints, Jaya attempts to recover her liberty and establish a path toward self-fulfillment via her reflection and rebellion. Rashmi Gaur in her article "That Long Silence: Journey Towards self-Actualisation in Women in the Novels of Sashi Deshpande" remarks: "The haunting riddle of the ultimate purpose of a woman's life within the family can be solved when she learns to assess her worth as an individual and shuns to be guided by pre-fixed norms about it" (DD 179).

Similarly, Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* delves into the experiences of Tara, an Indian-American woman dealing with the ambiguities of ethnic identity and personal agency. Mukherjee ironically seems to generalise the dismal fate of women saying: "A Bengali Girl's happiest night is about to become her lifetime imprisonment. It seems all the sorrows of history, all that is unjust in society and cruel in religion has settled on her." (DD 4) However, Tara's rejection of family expectations and her search for self-discovery in the face of cultural assimilation and diasporic dislocation identifies her strong femininity. Tara asserts her autonomy and navigates the complications of her dual identity with tenacity and conviction, eventually regaining control of her own life and choices. *That Long Silence* and *Desirable Daughters* are strong stories of women's agency and autonomy, exposing the intricacies of female experience in the face of social restraints and cultural standards. Both Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee magnanimously emphasise women's resilience and persistence in

expressing individuality and pursuing empowerment in the face of adverse life conditions reflecting on the subtleties of women's lives and the ongoing struggle for agency and autonomy in a challenging and complex environment.

Conclusion

Finally, this research allows us to envisage the many forms of femininity that gracefully hold the complexities of their identities and experiences through exploring Jaya and Tara's journeys. Through astute and pragmatic handling of life's challenges, Jaya and Tara emerge triumphant, skillfully navigating societal expectations, cultural norms, and personal goals. In the depiction of Jaya's internal conflicts, the author succeeds in portraying the competing emotions and aspirations that form her evolving life path. Jaya exemplifies a multifaceted femininity that combines tenacity, sensitivity, and strength while challenging gender norms and asserting her independence in the face of societal constraints. Whereas, a symbolic image of womanhood has been created through Tara in *Desirable Daughters*. The virtues of perseverance, flexibility, and resistance are well-defined in her damaging blend of modernity and traditionalism. Through her journey, Tara reveals different sheds of her identity as a family woman committed to handling chores and strongly holding her individuality. She represents a charismatic blend of feminine serenity that defies general categorisations, embracing her culture along with her enterprising self simultaneously. Furthermore, these narratives highlight gender inequity, which endures as a result of deeply established cultural attitudes and structures that favour men's superiority while recognising women's biological and intellectual equality. Shashi Deshpande's investigation into Jaya's inner conflict and Bharti Mukherjee's portrayal of Tara's path to self-realization serve as powerful mirrors, highlighting the complicated link between cultural heritage and personal identity, as well as the complexities of femininity. Certainly, these women prove to be the true representatives of today's women and both the authors through their outstanding narratives have made these literary works a timeless creation brimming with great treasure of women's remarkable tales of strength, resilience, and self-discovery.

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