



Transformative Roles of Fathers and Friends in Shashi Deshpande's Novels

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

In Shashi Deshpande's novels, the transformative journeys of women protagonists are significantly influenced by the support of fathers and trustworthy friends. Fathers emerge as pivotal figures in fostering self-esteem, a quality often diminished by patriarchal norms and societal expectations after marriage. Similarly, the steadfast encouragement of friends helps these women navigate their struggles, reclaim their identity, and rediscover their self-worth. The present research paper examines the catalyst effect of these relationships, bringing forth how they empower the protagonists to confront their challenges, regain their autonomy, and cope with their predicaments. Furthermore, it highlights the broader social implications of such supportive dynamics, emphasizing the crucial role of positive familial and social bonds in mitigating the effects of patriarchal oppression. By analyzing these transformations, the paper attempts to underscore the importance of fostering relationships that enable women to rebuild their confidence and lead self-empowered lives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

When viewed through the lens of Indian social parameters, the parenting of girls is often marked by patriarchal dominance and gender discrimination. Either parents, or either one of them, may treat the girl child as secondary, giving preferential treatment to sons. A father's relationship with his daughter significantly influences her well-being, both as an individual and within the broader societal context. True women empowerment begins within the family. In addition to the father, good friends can also provide vital support during periods of hardship and emotional distress. A trustworthy relationship fosters coordination and contributes to an individual's overall well-being. These supportive relationships act as catalysts, triggering or accelerating meaningful change and transformation in women's lives. The term "catalyst effect" refers to the process through which an event, person, or situation initiates or expedites substantial change. Supportive fathers and good friends play a crucial role in helping individuals, particularly women, regain their identity and self-worth. Many protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's novels exemplify this, as they are often shown to have benefited from such supportive relationships.

2. FRAMEWORK

The framework of the paper involves tracing the journey of the protagonists from meek victims of a patriarchal society to strong individuals—a transformation influenced by their fathers and friends. The study will also explore the secondary treatment given by mothers and the self-worth instilled by their fathers. By sharing their predicaments with their fathers and friends, the protagonists are able to rediscover and re-establish their sense of self. The paper will analyze the pre-marital and post-marital situations of the protagonists, focusing on the pivotal role played by fathers and friends and examining its social implications.

3. DISCUSSION

The "catalyst effect" refers to how a person, event, or situation acts as a catalyst in someone's life, meaning they cause or accelerate significant change or transformation. Just like a chemical catalyst speeds up a

reaction without being consumed, a person with this effect prompts important developments or shifts in someone's life, often leading to personal growth, change in direction, or new opportunities. In literature, such a character might provoke key decisions or shifts in the protagonist's life, significantly impacting their journey and development. The novels of Shashi Deshpande reflect this catalyst effect of friends and fathers as agents of growth and propel the protagonists to shift from stagnation to aspire and coordinate with their predicaments. Deshpande's father had a great influence on her; "her father was a man of learning who composed plays of ideas and young Deshpande must have surely been influenced by the profound thoughts of her famous father" [1].

Saru's father in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* empowers her by supporting her medical education, despite opposition from Saru's mother, who emphasizes the double financial burden of Saru's dowry and education. With her father's encouragement, Saru becomes a successful doctor. However, her marriage turns into a competition rather than a companionship, leaving her a submissive victim of her sadistic husband, Manu.

Boozie, a doctor by profession, supports Saru in climbing the ladder of success. Impressed by his knowledge and confidence, Saru decides to model herself after Boozie, learning from him to become a skilled doctor. He even lends her money to build a hospital. However, as the novel unfolds, it becomes evident that Saru has been burdened by the trauma of her mother's false accusation of killing her brother.

To escape Manu's sadism, Saru returns to her father's home. There, she and her father have an open conversation, which helps to alleviate her tension. Jasbir Jain highlights this pivotal moment, describing it as significant: "This confrontation, this bringing into the open of past fears, hatreds, and prejudices, of accusation and defense, is also a cathartic moment for Saru" [2]. Saru shares details about her husband's sadistic behavior, and her father advises her to confront the situation directly:

"Give him a chance, Saru. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what's

wrong. Tell him all that you told me. Don't turn your back on things again. Turn around and look at them. Meet him" [3].

Gathering her courage, Saru decides to return to Manu and her family, ready to face the challenges ahead.

In the novel *Roots and Shadows*, Indu's father sends her to a convent school despite opposition from the narrow-minded society and rigid family rules. Her higher education fosters awareness and helps her develop a sense of identity. However, her husband, Jayant, imposes his will on her, discouraging her from pursuing creative writing and insisting she write for magazines because it generates income.

Staying at her father's home gives Indu an opportunity to reflect on her inner conflicts and recognize her self-worth. She confides in the Old Uncle that she fears failing to meet expectations in relationships. Marriage, she admits, has made her weak and dependent on Jayant. Indu expresses that love and attachment often feel like punishments, and she is even afraid to have children. In response, the Old Uncle explains that family provides an anchor and a sense of background, giving life meaning through interdependence.

He advises Indu not to escape from attachment, as it is a natural part of life. While acknowledging that relationships bring limitations and restrictions, he encourages her to view her marital life positively, emphasizing that freedom can always be found within boundaries. This conversation leads Indu to a deeper understanding of herself and her own need for Jayant.

Another influential relationship in Indu's life is with Naren, her cousin and childhood friend. Both are sensitive artists—Indu as a writer and Naren as a singer. Naren has always taken an interest in Indu's writing and admires one of her short stories. Unlike Jayant, who never appreciated her writing and instead imposed limitations on the kind of writing she could pursue, Naren offers constructive criticism.

Naren perceives the artificiality in Indu's writing, noting that it lacks authenticity and depth. He encourages her to write her own "stuff" [4], urging her to express her true voice. By articulating her experiences and emotions in an artistic manner, Naren suggests that Indu can channel her repressed feelings and make her

writing an extension of her true self. This encouragement eventually gives Indu the courage to resign from her job of writing for magazines, freeing her to pursue her genuine creative aspirations. Finding a good listener in Naren, Indu shares about her loneliness and sexual suppression to him. The long suppressions suddenly come out with an emotional outburst.

I pummeled him on the chest with my fist and for the second time that night burst into a storm of weeping.

But that too passed away. And I felt calmer, quieter, and clearer. As if I had passed through the agony of suffering, of apprehending death and now found the peace of it (RS 154).

The cleansing of emotions brought clarity to Indu's mind. Her relationship with Naren eventually extends into a physical affair. For a time, she is confused, uncertain whether it is Naren or Jayant with whom she truly wants to be. With Jayant, she struggles to achieve equal participation in their relationship. However, with Naren, Indu experiences sexual intimacy that is deeply fulfilling and infused with love. She reflects on this experience, saying:

"There was a joyous sense of release, of passion I could experience and show and participate in. I clung to him, convulsing, marveling that I didn't have to hold myself back" (RS 152).

Naren also helps Indu understand her need for Jayant's love. Despite being an extramarital affair, the relationship with Naren does not disrupt her marriage; instead, it helps her gain a deeper understanding of herself and ultimately brings her closer to Jayant. Tragically, Naren later dies by drowning in a swimming pool.

Bhatnagar describes this situation-

It was Naren who made her realise that she did not want, as she had believed earlier, detachment and noninvolvement. Naren's detachment made it possible for him to remain unaffected by anything. He could never be anybody's husband or beloved. Her rejection of him had left him completely untouched, whereas, she knew she could shatter Jayant completely with her rejection which made Jayant so precious to her. Know, she did not want detachment and

noninvolvement which are meant for the dead not for the living [5].

Indu informs Jayant of her decision to resign from her job and pursue creative writing. She now views her marriage with renewed hope, as she has learned to seek freedom and space for herself within the bounds of familial responsibilities. S. P. Swain aptly summarizes Indu's growth.

The meek and docile humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus define male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman's masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self-struggle for harmony and sanity...She is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer [6].

Jaya (That Long Silence) is raised in a middle-class family where girls are expected to remain submissive. Like Saru's mother, Jaya's mother also showers more love and care on her son, Deelip, than on Jaya. However, it is Jaya's father (Appa) who supports and motivates her. He is pleased to have a daughter and sends her to a convent school. From a young age, Appa helps Jaya realize that she is unique. He instills confidence in her by promising to send her to Oxford University for further studies. He names her "Jaya," meaning victorious, and would often make a "V" with his fingers, telling her that "V" stands for victory.

But after Appa's sudden death when Jaya is only fifteen, she is left alone without emotional support. In the early years of her marriage, Jaya is on her way to becoming a successful creative writer. She wins first prize for a story published in a magazine. However, her husband, Mohan, feels that people will perceive him as the kind of husband depicted in her writing. Concerned about how others will view him, he tells Jaya to stop writing creatively and instead focus on contributing to the column "Seeta." She writes under a pseudonym.

As her writing is now controlled by Mohan's impositions, Suman Ahuja aptly describes her situation:

"Jaya, caught in an emotional eddy, endeavors to come to terms with her protean roles, while

trying, albeit in vain, to rediscover her true self, which is but an ephemera—an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother, and a failed writer." [2]. Kamat, a widower, is Jaya's neighbor. She finds him free from the constraints of patriarchy. An advertiser by profession, he is well-read and possesses the sensitivity of a writer. Finding equal companionship in Kamat, Jaya confides her suppressed feelings and anger in him. He advises Jaya to improve her writing. Jaya shares her frustration that publishers categorize writing by women separately, considering it suitable only for women's magazines. Kamat analyzes her writing objectively and encourages her to express her experiences as a woman in society, advising that this will make her work "more forceful and heated." [7]. Kamat helps Jaya realize that she lacks originality in her writing. Instead of writing to please her husband and publishers, she must express herself genuinely. He encourages her to channel her anger into her writing. Kamat also helps Jaya acknowledge her fear of failure as a writer. She comes to accept that it is not only Mohan's imposition to make her write for Seeta, but she is also responsible for her own writing. Her father struggled with creative writing, and she too carries the same fear and doubt.

Kamat does not indulge in self-pity but urges Jaya to confront the reality of her situation. He tells her that the household chores and Mohan's impositions are merely excuses. The truth is that she lacks the courage to write boldly and express what she truly wants. He reminds her that the power to break her silence lies within her, not outside.

Jaya continues writing but keeps it hidden from Mohan. Kamat offers to receive her mail at his address, as she knows it is impossible for the practical and unemotional Mohan to understand her sensitivity. But with Kamat she feels comfortable. She describes her relationship with Kamat as – "With this man (Kamat) I had not been a woman. I had been just myself - Jaya. There had been an ease in our relationship I had never known" [7]. She also describes Kamat the day when Appa died. This is the most tragic event in her life. Jaya, even today is not able to overcome the trauma of the said day. While remembering the memory of her father, she suddenly bursts into tears. After sometime, she realizes that she was crying and Kamat was holding her. She soon takes herself back. She describes these feelings - "It had been warm and comforting, like wearing Appa's coat on a chilly

night, like sitting before him on his bike" [7]. She finds sexual relationship accompanied with love and care. Mittapalli describes Jaya's relationship with Kamat – "She (Jaya) derives from Kamat the best of her father's concern for –assurance and comfort –and the best of attention that she would like to have from Mohan" (68-69). She recalls the words read from Appa's diary – "Yethecchasi that kuru" meaning 'Do as you desire' [7]. At the end of the novel, Jaya writes a novel which is but her own story.

In another novel, *Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande presents Mira as highly educated and intellectual. Mira's father, despite coming from a middle-class, traditional family, protects her self-worth. He educates her in spite of social opposition and has always gifted her literary books on her birthdays, shaping her literary mind. However, her possessive and patriarchal husband suppresses the creative writer within her. It is only after her death during childbirth that her daughter-in-law, Urmi, discovers her diaries in a trunk.

Urmi, a professor of English pursuing a Ph.D., is able to recognize Mira's latent talent as a writer after reading her diaries. The scribbling of poems and passages reveal that the submissive Mira had been marginalized as an artist. Without the support of her father or any friends, Mira never fully claimed her potential or identity. It is Urmi who, posthumously, publishes Mira's poems. The novel highlights the absence of a catalyst effect in Mira's life.

The singer-artist in *Small Remedies*, Bai, is propelled to take bold action and elope with her Muslim home tutor, Ghulam Saahab, to create her own space for singing. The two live together without marriage and have a daughter. Bai's act is an open challenge to the Hindu patriarchal society, where a Brahmin wife and daughter-in-law elopes with a Muslim man and lives with him without marriage. While it is clear that patriarchal norms prevent Bai from developing her art, it is also evident that Ghulam Saahab supports her in fulfilling her artistic potential, despite the social restrictions on women. Through Ghulam Saahab, Shashi Deshpande presents an example of how mutual understanding and freedom can foster both individual development and a healthy relationship. Ghulam Saab gives mutual support to Bai to progress in the art of singing. He arranges shows for Bai. He also gives tuitions in music in order to give financial support while Bai couldn't earn from art. He proves worthy to the

He proves worthy of the trust Bai places in her tabla player lover to support and motivate her in her music career. The man-woman relationship, as presented and reflected by the novelist, is described as a "companionable relationship between men and women" rather than an "uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed" [8]. The harmony in the relationship between Bai and Ghulam Saahab can be described in the words of the novelist: "...this kind of thing too often not to know that their (Bai and Ghulam Saahab's) smiles are not shared feelings of lovers, but a moment of support between singer and accompanist, the ecstasy almost that they attain when they reach their destination, the moment of 'Sam' together" [9-14]. This description does not give the impression of a union between two lovers but rather a symphony between artists. To describe the catalyzing effect of fathers and friends in the words of Thapan, these women draw strength from "deep reservoirs of self-reliance" (105) and resist the "imposed controls and seek to establish their own norms" (142).

4. FINDINGS

The discussion shows that friends and fathers play pivotal roles in changing narratives, plots, and bringing dynamic changes in character development. They are crucial in developing their daughters' self-worth, encouraging them to achieve career goals, and face the challenges of patriarchy. They reveal the emotional and psychological turbulence of characters who grapple with personal desires and societal norms. Guided by their fathers and friends, these women walk new paths and find their vision in life. Achieving autonomy, they are also able to coordinate with their surrounding relationships. Like catalysts, these fathers and friends remain unaffected. The role of friends highlights the limitations of marriage as an institution to support women, while friends offer equal treatment. These friends set the protagonists on a self-quest and trigger their careers and potentials. Like catalysts, they never interfere in the marital life but support better coordination.

5. CONCLUSION

In India, where the social and emotional marginalization of women begins in childhood, it is crucial to have the support of inspiring figures such as a father, brother, or friend who promote gender equity within family structures. A positive father-daughter relationship enhances self-

esteem, academic achievement, supports social mobility, and helps women navigate their marital situations as well. To conclude, supporting father-daughter relationships can serve the foundation to break patriarchal social norms and establish gender equality.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models, etc. have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts. This explanation will include the name, version, model, and source of the generative AI technology and as well as all input prompts provided to the generative AI technology:

- A little help has been sought using Chat GPT Version 2 (v2). But the argument is original. Actually The First Author Dr. Yogini Rajput has done her Ph. D. on the novels of Shashi Deshpande, that is why please rest assured about the authenticity of the research.

Details of the AI usage are given below:

1. Chat GPT Version 2 (v2).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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