The Female Body as a Site of Revenge: Understanding the Predicament of Deshpande's "A Liberated Woman" at the Intersection of Class and Gender

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Abstract

Throughout the years, Shashi Deshpande has emphasised the struggles of middle-class Indian women at the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy. Deshpande's "A Liberated Woman" establishes an innate relationship between an educated middle-class working woman's inner life and social praxis. The text explores the protagonist's struggle to gain autonomy within the institution of marriage and motherhood and further attempts to analyse how the so-called *transgression* of middle-class women into the public space disturbs the harmony of family life and supposed marital bliss. Even after being subject to sadism, Deshpande's woman refuses to acknowledge the gravity and intricacies of the sexual assault as she tries to mystify the concrete bruises visible on her body. The present paper attempts to understand Deshpande's unnamed protagonist's predicament at the intersection of class and gender by drawing insights from the discourse concerning capitalist patriarchy and the idea of intersectionality. It highlights how the plight of Deshpande's woman can only be understood when analysed through an intersectional lens that considers her position vis-à-vis the economic, sociocultural, legal, and political domains in India. It further endeavors to disentangle how the female body of the unnamed protagonist of Deshpande's story acts as a 'site' of control and domination, by undertaking a close textual analysis of the text.

Keywords: Gender, Body, Capitalist patriarchy, Intersectionality, Sexual violence

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande, an acclaimed Indian writer, is famous for tapping into the vocabularies and perceptions made available by the growth of the middle-class in India. A gradual modernisation process and the changing economic conditions in the late twentieth century not only transformed the cartography of Indian society but also changed its gender sensibilities. Deshpande's writings, situated at a time of economic and cultural transition, raise gender-

related issues relevant to the discourse concerning the dynamics and complexities of feminist concerns in India (Jain 2003; Sandhu 1991). Although she has resisted being labelled a feminist, her women protagonists embody a "quest for fulfillment," which is "thwarted at every stage" by apparatuses that effectuate the subordination of women, establishing her as a creative writer whose works encompass the issues of sexuality, body politics and sexual violence, among other "subversive" and "feminist" concerns (Naik 211). Moreover, Deshpande's works represent the everyday women of middle-class families in India struggling to break away from traditions and patriarchal role expectations (Sandhu 1991). "To represent the life and experience of middle-class families, particularly those of the women who live within and are confined by the expectations of their families" is a recurrent theme in Deshpande's writings (Deshpande, "Of Concerns" 107). In other words, her novels and short stories "portray the dilemma of the educated middle-class Indian woman trapped between her own aspirations as an individual and the force of patriarchy which confine her" (Khan, para. 1). Through her fiction, Deshpande explores the feminine sensibilities of Indian middle-class women, their suffering, their emotional dependence on the structure of the family, their dilemma of breaking or embracing the shackles, and most importantly, their desire to still be "good" wives, daughters and mothers.

Through her socio-realistic representation of women, Deshpande criticises the traditional ideals of womanhood that have been quintessential in suppressing women. However, what distinguishes Deshpande's women from those of her contemporaries is a sense of acceptance of their suffering to the extent that sometimes, they even fall into the trap of morally judging themselves as mothers and wives. This suggests that even though the "New Indian Woman," represented in Deshpande's novels and short stories is granted autonomy, she is limited in her traditional role within the domestic framework (Rajan 1993). Similarly, Deshpande's protagonist in "A Liberated Woman" embodies a meek acceptance of life,

suggesting a passivity that spells suffering, frustration, and the fracturing of her individuality. Despite being a financially independent woman, she feels entrapped and seeks fulfillment only within the boundaries of family and tradition. In this way, it can be maintained that despite "carving a niche out for herself within the fabric of contemporary urban India," the new middle-class woman continues to negotiate, compromise, and struggle for "a larger degree of individuality" (Lau 160).

Deshpande's "A Liberated Woman" deals with the predicament of a middle-class woman suffering at the interstices of "intersecting systems of oppression" (Subheesh and Kadakkadan 732). The unnamed protagonist of the short story is an educated middle-class Hindu woman who has run away from her parental house to enter a romantic inter-caste marriage with her lover. The story is narrated by an unnamed narrator who has been a mutual friend of the couple ever since they decided to "take the plunge" (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 36). In this light, the text explores the protagonist's struggle to gain autonomy within the institution of marriage and motherhood and further attempts to analyse how the so-called *transgression* of middle-class women into the public space disturbs the harmony of family life and supposed marital bliss. It further takes into account the way the unnamed woman's body is used as a tool to maintain the hierarchical structures of power in society. Furthermore, the physical violence, in the form of sadism, committed against the unnamed woman in the text depicts the trauma of "married women whose bodies are violated by their husbands but who would neither protest nor dare reveal this to anyone for the sake of social and moral security" (Khan, para. 5). While elaborating on the use of violence as a tool to discipline or punish women, Cliff Cheng states that in context to traditional Indian men, the ability to commit violence and control the female body is considered the most determining way of establishing a man's masculinity (Cheng 298). Cheng's statement reiterates the larger idea that women's bodies not only act as the "locus for the construction of femininity" but also as a site that serves

as a medium and channel through which men assert their masculinity (Deveaux 227). In this way, Deshpande's text emphasises the "victimisation and silencing" of Indian middle-class women at the crossroads of class, gender, and violence (Bhatt 13). The current study interweaves Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality with the notion of capitalist patriarchy to develop an inclusive and holistic approach to explore the way "in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" in order to maintain the power relation dynamics prevalent in society (Columbia Law School 2017).

Ever since its development in the 1990s, the idea of intersectionality has established itself as a major development in the corpus of feminist theory as it provides "inclusive ways to illuminate the multiple facets of gender understanding" (Subheesh and Kadakkadan 731). Intersectionality "describes the interaction between systems of oppression," be it race, gender, class, sexuality or nationality (Weldon 193). It enables us to reflect on gender "not through one lens but through a multiplicity of lenses that form a prism" for analysing the interdependence of gender and other social relations of power in society (Chow xix). Even though the concept of intersectionality is primarily rooted in Black feminism, it has the potential to enrich women's oppression across nationalities and races. Theorists like Kimberlé Crenshaw, S. Laurel Weldon, and Patricia Hill Collins have suggested that understanding women's oppression by focusing separately on race, class, and gender is inadequate and incomplete as it "obscures the experience of women at the interstices" of these intersectional identities (Weldon 197). In Kimberlé Crenshaw's view, the framework of intersectionality as an approach suggests a "methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies" to see gender, race, class, and sexuality as exclusive or separable entities (Crenshaw 1245). She further adds that "while the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, color, age," among others (1245). In this context, the present paper attempts to position the predicament of middle-

class Indian women's oppression at the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy. The framework of capitalist patriarchy employed throughout the paper helps unravel how the oppression of women results from the power that is derived from the bond that unites capitalism and patriarchy.

Capitalist patriarchy represents "the dialectical relation between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structure" and can be considered the real cause of women's oppression in contemporary times. (Eisenstein, *Capitalist Patriarchy* 5). Zillah Eisenstein maintains that the idea of capitalist patriarchy incorporates the "problem of woman as both mother and worker, reproducer and producer" (1). As a theory, it constitutes the coming together of capitalist structures of production and the sexual hierarchical relations of society to maintain women's subordination. The interdependence of these two oppressive structures of society is what makes them relevant to the Indian context, where women have been struggling to balance their roles as "wives" and "mothers," on the one hand, and their position under patriarchal capitalism on the other. In this context, the experiences of middle-class women in terms of 'oppression' and 'exploitation' under capitalism can be used as a premise to analyse Shashi Deshpande's literary piece (rooted in the Indian context) by using the various tenets of capitalist patriarchy and intersectionality.

This article locates the suffering of Deshpande's unnamed protagonist by using an intersectional approach that incorporates her position at the intersection of class and gender. This article will further disentangle how Deshpande's unnamed protagonist hesitates to assert her individuality and autonomy despite being aware of her position as an "object" in the dichotomy of women as "objects-who-defend-themselves" and men as "subjects-who-perpetrate-violence" (Mohanty 339). The first section of the article commences by providing a detailed explanation of the concept of capitalist patriarchy and further contextualises the dilemma of a working wife or a (co)provider in middle-class families. It further highlights how

Deshpande's unnamed female protagonist devalues herself and her personal integrity to keep her marriage intact (Lau 163). The second section examines the way Deshpande's unnamed woman's body is used as a site of revenge by her husband. It also addresses the larger discourse concerning the intersection of gender, violence and body in the context of the Indian legal and social system. This study, therefore, aims to unravel the predicament of a middle-class woman and the repercussions she faces once she enters the workforce in a capitalistic society by drawing insights from the notions of capitalist patriarchy and intersectionality.

Contextualising Capitalist Patriarchy: Deshpande's (Un)Liberated Woman

The idea of intersectionality "moves beyond dual system" theory, which considers patriarchy and capitalism as separate and distinct systems that coexist (Weldon 196). It further engenders the critique of the existing approaches that have tried to locate the root cause of women's oppression in one structure of society or another. In this light, it can be maintained that the intersectional approach facilitates the analysis of class and gender as mutually intersecting systems of oppression and not as autonomous structures responsible for women's oppression. Zillah Eisenstein, in her book *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism,* emphasises the interdependence of regressive structures of class and gender in maintaining the subordination of women both in the home and workplace. She writes:

> Patriarchy (as male supremacy) provides the sexual hierarchical ordering of society for political control and as a political system cannot be reduced to its economic structure; while capitalism as an economic class system driven by the pursuit of profit feeds off the patriarchal ordering. Together they form the political economy of the society, not merely one or another, but a particular blend of the two. (Eisenstein, *Capitalist Patriarchy* 28).

This quotation demonstrates the way capitalist patriarchy breaks through the binaries of private and public spheres, domestic and wage labour, family and economy, and most importantly, personal and political. In other words, it embodies the oppression of middle-class Indian women lying at the intersection of class, gender, caste, sexuality, and nationality.

Through the notion of capitalist patriarchy, Socialist feminists propose a development of theory and practice that synthesises the best insights of radical feminism and Marxist feminism. They outline a pattern of women's subordination that is rooted in the symbiotic interaction between Radical Feminism (which locates the root cause of women's oppression in their sex) and Marxist Feminism (which locates the root cause of women's oppression in their economic position). In other words, the ideologues of Socialist Feminism believed in an "interactive-system explanation of women's oppression," determined not only by "structures of production but also by the structures of reproduction and sexuality" (Tong 5, 111). In this way, it can be suggested that capitalist patriarchy takes into account the struggles of "women working outside the home, both professional and unprofessional, who bear the pressures and anxieties about being competent mothers, and caretakers of the home, [and] are becoming conscious of their 'double day' of work" (Eisenstein, "Constructing" 214).

The notion of "double day" or "second shift" takes into account the unpaid labour performed by working women in the domestic sphere, which includes "helping a child read, cooking dinner in good spirit, remembering the grocery list," shopping, doing laundry, cleaning, taking care of the children and husband, among others (Hochschild 282). In the words of Carla Brailey, "Working women perform a first shift in the paid labor force and a second shift of unpaid labor in their households" (Brailey 29). The burden of the second shift at home forces these working women to follow rigorous daily routines, which adds unbearable stress and tension to their new lives. Moreover, this unequal division of labour at home makes it difficult for them to create a balance between their home and workspace. While a husband ends

his first shift and returns home to rejuvenate himself for the next working day, the wife is expected to not only contribute to overall household income as a dual earner of the home but also take care of the "menial" daily household chores and their children's needs. Interestingly, these daily household chores at home often remain unnoticed and invisible as long as the women do not demand "equality in the second shift" (42).

Deshpande's protagonist is situated at a similar junction in the short story, as her oppression does not reside in either patriarchy or capitalism but at the interstices of capitalism and patriarchy. Under capitalist patriarchy, the "abuse of power" is often "veneered behind ideologies such as maternal altruism that invite women to be concerned about and to serve the family before self" (Kadyan and Unnithan 6). Working women often find themselves burdened with domestic labour and familial responsibilities as good wives, daughters, and mothers, ensuring their desires, ambitions, and success seem secondary to them. In addition, their "work in the domestic space is not seen as 'real' employment that needs to be recognized as such within the family" but a labour of love and duty (4). It signifies that just because women enter the workspace to work side by side with men does not necessarily indicate that they will return home in the evening "arm in arm" with men. Similarly, the unnamed woman in the short story goes to work as a successful doctor but comes back home as a wife and mother. The continuous disruption in her identity as a successful doctor and a woman who desires to embody "the myth of idealized womanhood" compels her to negotiate between her conflicted identity as a gendered and classed subject (Gunaseelan 93). The unnamed woman in the text says, "Have you noticed that wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? I think that's symbolic, you know. The Ideal Hindu wife always walks a few steps behind her husband. If he earns 500, she earns 400. If he earns 1000, she earns 999–or less," suggesting how a man uses his socioeconomic status as a breadwinner to negotiate power in the household (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 40). It further foregrounds the idea that a woman's freedom, financial

autonomy, and ambitions are deemed hindrances in achieving bliss in the marital relationship and the family's welfare.

Moving forward, the unnamed protagonist says, "It was all right for some time. Until our second kid was born" (39). It demonstrates that the dynamics of the husband and wife have not been like this from the beginning; rather, their marriage has deteriorated over the last few years, ever since the wife's rise in the workspace. While referring to those initial years of her marriage, she further proclaims, "We had no home, scarcely any money— you know what his lecturer's salary was— and a year of my college. God, it was terrible. But still, it was heaven. I was so fulfilled in every way" (39). It depicts how, till that time, the unnamed woman was fulfilling her role of being a "good" wife by self-denying her existence, by being the caretaker of the house, by allowing her body to be used as a reproductive being, by finding fulfillment in scarcity, there was bliss in the matrimonial relationship between the two. But ever since she "built a very good practice" and started to earn a "good sum" [more than her husband] and a "good reputation" as a doctor, the plagues of dysfunctionality have descended on her marital life (39).

In most Indian middle-class families, as in the world of Deshpande's "A Liberated Woman," conflict arises when the financial independence of the unnamed woman stands in conflict with the patriarchal ideology rooted in the institution of family. While the woman in the story has successfully built a reputable career, her husband still teaches "in that second-rate college. Earning not much more than what he did" when he started his career (40). The fact that he has failed to raise himself above the position of a college lecturer, whereas his wife has successfully climbed the ladder of success, makes him skeptical about his position as a "man" in the *home* and the *world*. There ensues a crisis in his masculine identity, for he has to constantly negotiate his position as the provider of the family. Deshpande's story brings to the surface the insecurities of a man as a husband and a coworker under capitalism. In a crucial

scene in the text, when the interviewer addresses him [husband] with the question "How does it feel when your wife provides not only the butter but most of the bread as well," the husband's hegemony within the family's premises and the nonfamilial space outside the private sphere is threatened (41). Traditionally, the role of the provider in middle-class families has been associated with men, but when women start sharing the role of provider or breadwinner, it is seen as a threat to the man of the house as his masculinity is primarily rooted in economic supremacy. In this way, Deshpande's protagonist challenges the "breadwinner model" rooted in a gendered division of labour where men are considered breadwinners or providers of the family and women are considered homemakers (Sanisbury 101). Moreover, in the case of middle-class households where both husband and wife earn salaries, wives are considered "supplemental earners rather than co-providers in their own and others' eyes" (Jackson 89). The statement implies that women are expected to function as a secondary labour force, not just in the workspace but within the private boundaries of the home as well. However, when a woman becomes a primary workforce material in the workspace and substitutes her husband as the house's breadwinner, the husband's position stands challenged and questioned. Similarly, Deshpande's female protagonist's financial superiority ends up disrupting and dismantling her husband's position as the *provider* of the family. This subversion makes him insecure to the extent that he seeks revenge on his wife by assaulting her during sexual intercourse.

Deshpande's unnamed woman might embody the characteristics of a new Indian woman, but she lacks the authority and courage to resist her husband's sexual aggression as a mode of revenge. She is caught in the conflict arising from the inability to choose between her liberation and societal expectations. Arnab Chakladar suggests that a middle-class Indian woman is often "caught between the demands of tradition and modernity" (Chakladar 84). While discussing this dilemma, Yasmin Hussain postulates that in the case of a "South Asian

woman, the individualism and independence so valued in the West appears selfish and irresponsible" (Hussain 22). The burden of the ideal woman prompts Deshpande's protagonist to endure the "exercise in sadism" that ultimately shatters her coherent psychological and social identity (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 39). The idea of capitalist patriarchy, thereby, allows us to locate the powerlessness of Deshpande's woman situated at the interstices of capitalism and patriarchy in four basic structures of production, reproduction, sexuality and socialisation of children, which are intertwined so inextricably that they do not let her disentangle her shackles. This suggests that women stabilise the structures of capitalist patriarchy by doing the double day work, reproducing new workers, providing care to the prospective paid and unpaid labourers, acting as consumers, and, most importantly, by letting their bodies be exploited to fulfill their roles as a wife and mothers.

The Female Body: A Site of Revenge?

The sexuality of women and their bodies has been a recurrent concern for feminists across borders. Be it the practice of "chastity belts in Europe to purdah in India," the beneficiaries of the division of power based on gender have always tried to control women's bodies, desires and sexuality (Jackson 52). Even though Western feminists have tried to treat the institution of marriage and sexuality separately "because of the ubiquity – and greater social acceptability – of *non*-marital sexual relationships in the West since the 1960s," Indian feminists have always tried to understand the two as closely intertwined institutions (52). Amidst the interdependence of controlled sexuality (in marriage) and the hegemony of men in society, the most gruesome is the use of violence, in the sexual, physical and psychological sense, to impose a sense of social control over women to keep them in their subordinate place (Brownmiller 1976). Patricia Hill Collins argues that violence "may serve as the conceptual glue that binds" the dominant systems of oppression together (Collins 919). The power of using violence as a tool

of domination lies in "both its ubiquity as a tool of domination and the ease with which it is rendered invisible" (Armstrong et al. 115). The legal, cultural, social, racial, national, economic and patriarchal axes of oppression intersect and interlock to maintain power inequalities to the extent that it normalises the use of gendered violence in marital relationships. In this light, it becomes crucial to investigate the intersectional experience of sexual violence, which is often used as a medium to maintain the matrix of domination prevalent in society.

Deshpande's unnamed woman had eloped from her house years ago to live with the man she loved, but what eventuates in her marriage has been nothing less than a nightmare. The deterioration of her marriage from being the epitome of bliss to an embodiment of brutality raises the larger issues of sexual violence and body politics in the Indian context. In the text, she explains her marriage as a relationship where "love-making has become an exercise in sadism" (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 39). It emphasises that in dysfunctional marital relationships, the female body is often subject to acts of violence and revenge, the fear of which often restricts women from attaining freedom or asserting their bodily autonomy. In other words, men's control over the female body symbolises a process that emerges as a "powerful means of social control" (DeMello 11). It further delineates how the body is used as a medium for social inscriptions as the (re)production of the means of production and reproduction are rooted in the exploitation of the female body. This highlights how, under capitalist patriarchy, women exist at the crossroads of the modes of production and reproduction, and the exploitation of their bodies in both the workspace and home further recreates the "structural inequalities of class and gender" that result in women's subordination (Jackson and Jackie 20).

Moreover, Deshpande's short story intertwines the larger questions regarding the issues of marital rape and sexual violence in India. India is one of the few nations that continues to "exempt husbands from being charged" with marital rape. (Mandal 251) The current law regarding marital rape is subject to "minimal regulation" by the Indian Penal Code, which still

labels sexual violation of a wife as an act of "cruelty," domestic violence, and "matrimonial fault" (259). It highlights how the vulnerability of Deshpande's unnamed woman as a victim of marital rape can be understood in terms of various factors like lack of legal measures for prosecuting the perpetrator, the inadequacy of religious and secular matrimonial laws in providing justice, the burden of social responsibilities as a mother and wife, and most importantly the desire to fulfill moral expectations. All these things cumulatively deprive married women of legal justice and even violate their "right of bodily autonomy" (Daya 98). It further suggests how women's bodies "can be suddenly appropriated from them through acts ranging from the 'male gaze' to sexual harassment to rape" (Tong 113). Based on this, it can be argued that the husband's act of "exercising his conjugal rights" by violating his wife's body leaves serious traumatic effects on the psyche of the victim (5).

The exploitation of women's bodies is fundamental to male dominance (MacKinnon 515). In other words, the woman's body acts as a political field "inscribed and constituted by power relations" (Deveaux 224). The body of Deshpande's protagonist is subject to her husband's love, lust, gaze, frustration, revenge, and violence. Interestingly, the unnamed woman experiences the ordeals of violence for the first time on the day she gives the interview titled "A Liberated Woman" within the premises of her home, where she is expected to be a subservient wife and mother and not a successful doctor. It is ironic that the day the world understands her as a "liberated" woman through the magazine, her husband (un)liberates her by inflicting violence on her body. The unnamed protagonist's body acts as a canvas, which the husband paints during the acts of sexual aggression. While describing the reason that might have provoked her husband to violate her sexually, she writes, "It was the day that girl came to interview me…then she had asked him…how does it feel when your wife provides not only the butter but most of the bread as well. That night it happened" (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 41). It enumerates that the moment she challenges her husband's position as a

'provider' of the family, he resorts to a new mode of control, i.e., sadism. It reminds us of Foucault's notion that bodies are sometimes 'disciplined' through various mechanisms, in a way, representing the male superior's ways of penalising women who defy men (Foucault 1980). In other words, the systematic and political use of violence within the institution of marriage as a form of punishment is nothing but an affirmation of the gendered power relationship that exists between a man and a woman. The batterer, in such cases, tries to humiliate the woman and make her feel guilty for not maintaining the family peace. In Deshpande's story, the disciplinary measures (in the form of sadism) inflicted on the unnamed woman's body can be understood as a method of containment and control that will eventually restrict her from questioning or challenging her husband's absolute power. Andrea C. Westlund unmasks the intention behind the use of violence as a mode of discipline within the domain of home by suggesting that "men who batter do so not because they are stressed but because they want to assert and maintain absolute power over their partners" (Westlund 1047).

Moreover, Deshpande's woman dissociates from the reality of her marriage in order to develop a defense mechanism that will allow her to survive the ordeal. To enumerate further, her response to her husband's sexual aggression oscillates between dream and reality. In the story, she says, "The next morning when I woke up, all bruised and sour and aching, my thought was that it was a nightmare I'd dreamt too vividly" (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 41). It suggests how, even after being subjected to sadism, she refuses to understand the gravity and intricacies of the sexual assault as she tries to mystify the concrete bruises visible on her body. She even tries to dilute her husband's acts of brutality by saying, "It's his way, the only way, perhaps, of taking revenge on me for what I've done to him. To his ego" (42). In her perspective, the self-abnegation that she fails to achieve is the cause of her husband's act of taking revenge on her. Deshpande's unnamed protagonist, therefore, epitomizes the plight of every educated middle-class Indian woman who blames herself and her inability to adhere to

the traditional ideals of Hindu womanhood for the marital crisis that haunts her. Even when her friend, towards the end of the story, confronts her with the question, "Why do you stand it,' her response, "I deserve it, don't I," denotes the helplessness of a sexually violated Indian middle-class woman (41). The statement represents the intractable dilemma of every educated middle-class woman who is critically aware of her exploitation, but this critical awareness fails to empower her enough to be able to break away from the Indian values of femininity, encapsulated in the normative ideals of self-abnegation, passive acceptance, and silent suffering (Daya 98). Deshpande's unnamed protagonist further elucidates her position during the night as a terrified animal "who cannot scream because the kids in the next room may hear" (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 42). This exhibits how she chooses to retreat into silence even in those horrendous moments of pain and humiliation due to her desire to maintain her position as a "good" mother. Moreover, she cannot "confide her problem to anyone, being inhibited by both ancient taboos (which prevent women from speaking frankly about sex) and modern taboos (which assume that a respected doctor like her would never be victimized in this way)" (Jackson 78-79). It suggests that a woman's silent suffering could result from the lack of a suitable cultural environment that allows women to talk about their bodies, sexuality, and body politics.

Therefore, the present study analyses how the oppression of Deshpande's protagonist is rooted in the interstices of marriage, motherhood, sexuality, law, patriarchy, capitalism, and nationality. The unnamed woman in the story feels confined and entrapped as she has neither "legal recourse nor means of escape" (Zibrak 752). Even though she realises that her marriage is nearing an end, this aspect is never developed within the boundaries of the short story. When the narrator presents her with the option of divorce, she determinedly negates it, citing that she cannot let the children be aware of what's wrong. Strangely, divorce is never a permanent solution for Deshpande's protagonists despite their education and financial independence. It

suggests how these women have fallen prey to the patriarchal assumptions according to which "husbandlessness in any form, is perceived as personal failure – failure to attract a husband [if a woman is single], or keep him [if separated], or failure to look after him [if widowed]" (Jain 84). In this way, it can be illustrated that marriage, in the Indian context, is often promoted as a necessary institution no matter how much suffering it inflicts on the woman. Therefore, the plight of Deshpande's woman in the short story can only be understood holistically when analysed through an intersectional lens that considers her position vis-à-vis the economic, sociocultural, legal, and political spheres in India (Armstrong et al. 2018).

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's "A Liberated Woman" points to the socio-cultural and historical realities of middle-class women's positions under capitalist patriarchy. The idea of capitalist patriarchy helps us explain women's exploitation at the intersection of class, gender, and sexuality. The most predominant mark of capitalist patriarchy is its view that autonomous structures of gender and class all participate in constructing inequality and exploitation, similar to how these structures inflict injustice on Deshpande's (un)liberated woman. Through the short story, Deshpande suggests the cause of the fragmented self of the unnamed protagonist lies in the shaken male ego of her husband that arises due to her position as a financially secure woman, which has disrupted the husband's position as a *man* in the family and the world outside. The animalesque acts of brutality committed against the woman and her incessant efforts to curtain them further encapsulate the wife's quiet acceptance of suffering. She retreats into the zone of mystifications and befuddlements instead of confronting the "forces which attempt to repress" her existence as an individual (Roy 111). The protagonist's feebleness, despairing indifference, and feat of plugging away all her routes are problematised in this article, for she is "an educated, earning, and competent woman" (Deshpande, "A Liberated Woman" 44). This article,

therefore, emphasises the need for disrupting the power that derives from capitalist patriarchy and its multiple interlocking structures that have been quintessential in oppressing middle-class Indian women.

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