
THE DEPICTION OF THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY, MALE PASSIVENESS AND LACK OF RECIPROCITY

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Abstract

The present study undertakes a comprehensive exploration of gendered experience in literature through an interconnected analysis of women's suppression, the conceptual framework of patriarchy, the operation of repressive forces, and the often-overlooked phenomenon of male passivity. Situated within the broader domain of feminist and cultural literary studies, this inquiry seeks to examine how power is constructed, internalized, and represented across diverse narrative forms, while also attending to the subtle and complex ways in which individuals negotiate, resist, or reproduce these structures.

Keywords - English literature, patriarchy, male passivity, feminism, literary studies, society, norm.

INTRODUCTION

literature is not merely a passive reflection of social realities but an active site of ideological formation and contestation. The representation of women's suppression across literary traditions reveals a multiplicity of constraints—social, economic, psychological, and linguistic—that shape female subjectivity. These constraints are neither uniform nor static; rather, they evolve across historical and cultural contexts, intersecting with other axes of identity such as class, race, and colonial experience. The theoretical contributions of thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak provide a critical foundation for understanding how gender is constructed within systems of power and how women's voices are often marginalized or mediated within dominant discourses. The concept of patriarchy serves as a central analytical framework in this study, enabling a deeper examination of the structural and ideological mechanisms that sustain gender inequality. Rather than viewing patriarchy as a monolithic or universally consistent system, this study approaches it as a dynamic and context-specific formation that permeates institutions, cultural narratives, and everyday practices. Complementing this perspective is the analysis of repressive forces, drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, which highlights how power operates not only through overt domination but also through subtle processes of normalization, surveillance, and consent. These frameworks collectively underscore the ways in which individuals become both subjects and agents of power, often participating in their own regulation.

In extending the discussion beyond women's experiences, this study also engages with the concept of male passivity as a critical counterpoint to dominant models of masculinity. By examining literary representations of male characters who exhibit indecision, alienation, or emotional restraint, the study challenges the binary opposition between active masculinity and passive femininity. Drawing on theoretical insights from R.W. Connell and existentialist thought, it explores how changing social conditions and internal conflicts contribute to a crisis of masculine identity, thereby revealing the instability of gender norms themselves. The theoretical concerns of this study are further grounded through close engagement with the short fiction of Shashi Deshpande and Anjana Appachana. Their narratives, rooted in Indian and diasporic contexts, provide rich textual spaces for examining the lived realities of gendered experience. Through their focus on domestic life, interpersonal relationships, and psychological interiority, these writers illuminate how broader structures of patriarchy and repression are enacted within everyday situations. At the same time, their works reveal the nuanced forms of resistance that emerge through introspection, silence, and the gradual assertion of selfhood.

Different Forms of Women's Suppression, their Response and Its Portrayal in Literature

The representation of women's suppression and their varied responses to it has remained a central concern of literary studies, not merely as a thematic preoccupation but as a critical lens through which broader structures of power, ideology, and identity can be examined. Across historical periods and literary traditions, the suppression of women has manifested in multiple, intersecting forms—legal, economic, social, linguistic, and psychological—each of which has been theorized and interrogated within feminist and interdisciplinary frameworks. Literature, in turn, has served both as a site of reproduction of these suppressions and as a space for their critique, subversion, and reimagining. One of the most foundational forms of women's suppression is patriarchal control over the female body and agency, which has been extensively theorized by scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" foregrounds the constructed nature of gender and the ways in which societal norms confine women to immanence, denying them transcendence and subjectivity. Literary texts across centuries reflect this condition, often depicting women as objects of exchange, desire, or moral symbolism rather than autonomous agents. In works such as *Pride and*

Prejudice, marriage functions as both an economic necessity and a mechanism of social control, subtly exposing the limited avenues available to women within a rigid class and gender hierarchy. Similarly, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the protagonist's tragic fate underscores the moral double standards imposed upon women, where sexual victimization is recast as moral failure.

Beyond physical and social constraints, linguistic and symbolic suppression has been a significant focus of feminist literary theory. Hélène Cixous, in her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," introduces the concept of *écriture féminine*, advocating for a form of writing that resists phallogentric language structures. Cixous argues that patriarchal discourse inherently marginalizes female expression, rendering women either silent or misrepresented. This idea resonates with the work of Julia Kristeva, whose distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic highlights the tension between structured language and pre-linguistic drives, often associated with the maternal and the feminine. Literary portrayals of women's silence or fragmented speech—such as in *The Yellow Wallpaper*—can thus be read as both symptoms of and resistance to linguistic suppression, where the protagonist's descent into madness becomes a radical, albeit tragic, form of self-expression. The economic dimension of women's suppression has been critically examined through Marxist and materialist feminist frameworks, particularly in the works of Friedrich Engels and later theorists. Engels' analysis in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* links the subjugation of women to the rise of private property and the patriarchal family structure, situating gender inequality within broader systems of class exploitation. This perspective is vividly dramatized in literature such as *A Doll's House*, where Nora's realization of her economic and legal dependence culminates in her decision to leave her family—a moment that has been widely interpreted as an assertion of individual autonomy against systemic oppression. Nora's departure, however, is not merely a personal act of rebellion but a critique of the socio-economic structures that render women infantilized and economically invisible.

In postcolonial and intersectional contexts, the suppression of women acquires additional layers of complexity, as gender intersects with race, class, and colonial histories. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" interrogates the epistemic violence that renders marginalized women doubly silenced—both by colonial discourse and indigenous patriarchy. Literary works such as *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplify this condition, reimagining the silenced figure of Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* as Antoinette Cosway, whose fragmented identity reflects the entanglement of colonial and gendered oppression. Similarly, in South Asian literature, writers often depict women navigating oppressive structures that are both culturally specific and globally resonant, revealing the inadequacy of universalizing feminist narratives. Women's responses to suppression in literature are as varied as the forms of oppression themselves, ranging from silent endurance and internalized oppression to overt rebellion and transformative agency. The concept of the "madwoman," explored by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, reinterprets female madness not as pathology but as a symbolic protest against patriarchal constraints. This reinterpretation allows for a more nuanced reading of characters who have traditionally been dismissed as irrational or deviant, positioning their "madness" as a form of resistance that exposes the limitations of rational, male-dominated discourse. Moreover, contemporary feminist and queer theories have expanded the understanding of resistance by challenging binary notions of gender and identity. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity posits that gender is not a stable identity but a repeated performance shaped by social norms. This insight has profound implications for literary representation, as it opens up possibilities for subversive performances that destabilize traditional gender roles. Characters who defy normative expectations—whether through cross-dressing, narrative voice, or non-linear identities—embody forms of resistance that are subtle yet transformative.

Concept of Patriarchy

The concept of patriarchy, as a foundational structure within feminist literary and social theory, extends far beyond the simplistic notion of male dominance; it denotes a historically entrenched system of power that organizes social relations, cultural production, and epistemological frameworks in ways that privilege masculinity while subordinating femininity. The term itself, derived from the Greek *patriarkhēs* (rule of the father), has evolved in critical discourse to signify a complex network of institutional, ideological, and symbolic mechanisms that regulate gender roles and sustain hierarchical authority. Early theoretical articulations of patriarchy can be traced to Friedrich Engels, whose materialist analysis in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* situates the emergence of patriarchal authority within the transition to private property and class society. Engels argues that the monogamous family functions as a microcosm of capitalist relations, where women's labor and reproductive capacities are appropriated and controlled. This economic determinism, while influential, has been further nuanced by later feminist theorists who emphasize the cultural and ideological dimensions of patriarchy. Sylvia Walby expands the concept by defining patriarchy as a system composed of six interrelated structures: the household, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. Walby's framework is particularly useful for literary studies, as it allows for the analysis of how texts reflect and reproduce patriarchal norms across multiple domains. For instance, canonical literature often encodes patriarchal assumptions within narrative structures, character development, and symbolic representations. In *Jane Eyre*, the titular character's struggle for autonomy is continually mediated by male authority figures, from Mr. Brocklehurst to Rochester, illustrating the pervasive reach of patriarchal control even within ostensibly romantic narratives.

The ideological dimension of patriarchy is further illuminated by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*, where she conceptualizes patriarchy as a political institution that naturalizes male dominance through cultural narratives, including literature. Millett's analysis reveals how literary texts often function as vehicles for the internalization of gender hierarchies, presenting them as inevitable or desirable. This insight aligns with Louis Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses, which posits that institutions such as education, religion, and media disseminate dominant ideologies in subtle and pervasive ways. Literature, within this framework, becomes a powerful apparatus that shapes subjectivity and reinforces patriarchal norms. Jacques Lacan's notion of the symbolic order underscores the role of language and law in sustaining patriarchal authority. The "Name-of-the-Father" functions as a central organizing principle within the symbolic, regulating desire and identity through linguistic structures that privilege masculinity. Feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray challenge this phallogocentric model, arguing that it marginalizes feminine subjectivity and reduces women to objects within male-defined systems of meaning. Literary texts that foreground female consciousness or disrupt linear, rational narratives can thus be read as attempts to resist and reconfigure the symbolic order. In postcolonial contexts, the concept of patriarchy becomes further complicated by its entanglement with colonial power structures. Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques the homogenization of "Third World women" in Western feminist discourse, emphasizing the need to account for cultural specificity and historical context. Patriarchy, in such frameworks, is not a monolithic system but a variable and adaptive structure that intersects with race, class, and colonial histories. Literary works emerging from postcolonial societies often depict hybrid forms of patriarchy, where indigenous traditions and colonial legacies converge to shape women's experiences. Thus, patriarchy in literary studies is best understood not as a static or uniform system but as a dynamic and multifaceted structure that permeates both the material and symbolic dimensions of life. Its representation in literature reveals not only the mechanisms of women's subordination but also the subtle ways in which power is negotiated, resisted, and reimaged. By engaging with these representations, literary criticism uncovers the deep-seated assumptions that underlie cultural production and opens up possibilities for more equitable and inclusive modes of expression.

Repressive Forces

The notion of repressive forces within literary and cultural theory encompasses a broad spectrum of mechanisms—both overt and covert—that regulate, discipline, and constrain individual and collective subjectivities. These forces operate through institutional authority, ideological conditioning, and internalized norms, shaping not only external behavior but also the very contours of thought, desire, and identity. In the context of women's suppression, repressive forces are particularly significant, as they reveal the intricate interplay between power and resistance that defines gendered experience. A crucial theoretical framework for understanding repression is provided by Michel Foucault, whose analysis of power departs from traditional notions of top-down authority. In works such as *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault conceptualizes power as diffuse and productive, operating through networks of surveillance, normalization, and discipline. The metaphor of the panopticon illustrates how individuals internalize the gaze of authority, effectively becoming agents of their own repression. In literary texts, this dynamic is often represented through characters who police their own behavior in accordance with societal expectations, revealing the subtle and pervasive nature of repressive forces.

Complementing Foucault's perspective, Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony emphasizes the role of consent in the maintenance of power. According to Gramsci, dominant groups sustain their authority not merely through coercion but by securing the active participation of subordinate groups in their own subjugation. This insight is particularly relevant to literary representations of women, where characters often internalize patriarchal values and reproduce them within domestic and social spheres. Such portrayals underscore the complexity of repression, which cannot be reduced to external domination alone. The psychoanalytic dimension of repression, as articulated by Sigmund Freud, further enriches this analysis. Freud's theory of repression involves the exclusion of unacceptable desires and memories from conscious awareness, a process that is both necessary for social functioning and potentially pathological. Feminist reinterpretations of Freud, however, highlight the gendered implications of this process, arguing that women's desires are more likely to be suppressed or pathologized within patriarchal cultures. Literary narratives that explore themes of hysteria, neurosis, or fragmented identity—such as those found in modernist and postmodernist texts—often reflect these psychological dimensions of repression. Repressive forces also manifest through legal and institutional structures that regulate women's rights and freedoms. Laws governing marriage, property, and sexuality have historically functioned as instruments of control, limiting women's autonomy and reinforcing patriarchal norms. In literature, these constraints are frequently dramatized through plots that revolve around confinement, whether literal or metaphorical. The domestic space, often idealized as a site of comfort and stability, can thus become a locus of repression, where women's roles are narrowly defined and strictly enforced.

At the level of language and representation, repressive forces operate by circumscribing what can be said, thought, or imagined. Roland Barthes's notion of mythologies reveals how cultural narratives naturalize specific meanings, rendering them invisible as constructs. Feminist critics have extended this analysis to show how language itself can function as a repressive force, encoding gender biases and limiting the possibilities for alternative expressions of identity. Literary texts that experiment with form, voice, or genre can thus be seen as attempts to disrupt these

constraints and create new spaces for articulation. In retrospect, repressive forces in literary studies are not merely external constraints imposed upon passive subjects; they are dynamic and multifaceted processes that shape and are shaped by human agency. Their portrayal in literature provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of control that operate within society, as well as the potential for resistance and transformation. By examining these forces through diverse theoretical lenses, literary criticism can illuminate the complex and often contradictory ways in which power is exercised and contested, revealing the enduring tension between domination and freedom that lies at the heart of human experience.

Factors Leading to Male Passivity and Its Portrayal in Literature

The notion of male passivity in literature complicates the traditional association of masculinity with agency, authority, and decisiveness. Rather than functioning merely as an inversion of gender norms, male passivity emerges as a historically and culturally contingent condition shaped by psychological, socio-economic, and ideological forces. Literary representations of passive male figures often reveal crises within dominant constructions of masculinity, exposing the fragility of patriarchal ideals and the tensions inherent in maintaining them. Far from being marginal, such portrayals occupy a critical space in literary studies, offering insights into the destabilization of gender roles and the evolving dynamics of power. One of the most enduring factors contributing to male passivity is psychological conflict, particularly the paralysis that arises from excessive self-consciousness and moral ambiguity. This condition is classically exemplified in Hamlet, where the protagonist's intellectual depth and ethical hesitation render him incapable of decisive action. Hamlet's famous indecision has been interpreted through multiple theoretical lenses, including psychoanalysis and existential philosophy. Sigmund Freud famously reads Hamlet's delay as rooted in unconscious desires and the Oedipus complex, suggesting that internal psychic conflict inhibits outward action. Later, existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre view such paralysis as a manifestation of existential freedom, where the burden of choice becomes overwhelming. In literary terms, Hamlet inaugurates a tradition of introspective male protagonists whose passivity stems not from weakness but from an acute awareness of moral and existential dilemmas.

Closely related to psychological conflict is the condition of modern alienation, a central theme in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. The rise of industrial capitalism and bureaucratic modernity, as analyzed by Karl Marx and Max Weber, produces individuals who feel estranged from their labor, society, and even themselves. This alienation often manifests as passivity, as characters withdraw from active engagement with the world. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect literalizes his social and psychological marginalization. His inability to assert agency within his family and workplace reflects the dehumanizing effects of modern systems, where the individual is rendered powerless. Kafka's work thus reconfigures passivity as a symptom of systemic oppression rather than personal failure. Another significant factor is the crisis of masculinity precipitated by shifting gender roles and the destabilization of patriarchal authority. As feminist movements challenge traditional hierarchies, male characters in literature often experience a loss of identity and purpose. R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is particularly useful here, as it defines dominant masculinity as an ideal that is both normative and unattainable. When men fail to embody this ideal, they may experience marginalization or self-doubt, leading to passive behavior. In *The Remains of the Day*, Stevens the butler exemplifies this condition: his rigid adherence to professional duty masks an inability to confront his emotions or assert personal desires. His passivity is not imposed externally but internalized as a form of discipline, reflecting the subtle mechanisms through which social norms regulate behavior.

Socio-political repression also plays a crucial role in shaping male passivity, particularly in contexts where authoritarian regimes or rigid class structures limit individual freedom. Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power elucidates how institutions produce compliant subjects through surveillance and normalization. In such environments, passivity becomes a survival strategy rather than a moral failing. Literary works set in totalitarian or highly stratified societies often depict male protagonists who are unable—or unwilling—to resist oppressive systems, highlighting the pervasive reach of power. This form of passivity underscores the extent to which agency is contingent upon socio-political conditions. At the level of narrative form, male passivity is frequently portrayed through techniques that emphasize interiority, fragmentation, and temporal disjunction. Stream-of-consciousness narration, unreliable perspectives, and non-linear plots all serve to foreground the inner lives of characters while simultaneously illustrating their inability to act decisively. Modernist and postmodernist texts, in particular, challenge the notion of the heroic, action-oriented male protagonist, replacing him with figures who are contemplative, uncertain, and often immobilized. This shift reflects broader epistemological changes, as literature moves away from certainties toward ambiguity and multiplicity. Importantly, male passivity in literature is not always portrayed negatively; it can also function as a critique of dominant paradigms of masculinity that valorize aggression, control, and emotional repression. Passive male characters may embody alternative modes of being that resist these norms, suggesting the possibility of more reflective and ethically attuned forms of masculinity. In this sense, passivity can be reinterpreted as a form of resistance, a refusal to participate in systems of violence or domination.

Short Stories by Shashi Deshpande

The short stories of Shashi Deshpande occupy a significant position within Indian English literature, particularly for their nuanced exploration of women's interior lives, domestic spaces, and the subtle operations of patriarchy within middle-class contexts. While Deshpande is widely recognized for her novels, her short fiction constitutes

an equally powerful body of work that distills complex emotional and social realities into concentrated narrative forms. Her stories are marked by psychological realism, restrained prose, and a deep engagement with the lived experiences of women negotiating identity, silence, and resistance. Deshpande's short stories are often anthologized in collections such as *The Intrusion and Other Stories*, *It Was the Nightingale*, and *The Legacy*. These collections foreground recurring thematic concerns, particularly the tension between individual desire and social expectation. In the titular story of *The Intrusion and Other Stories*, the experience of a newly married woman is depicted with unsettling intimacy, as the narrative exposes the emotional and physical alienation embedded within the institution of marriage. The "intrusion" of the husband into the wife's personal space becomes emblematic of a broader patriarchal entitlement, where consent is assumed rather than negotiated. The story's power lies in its understated tone, which renders the protagonist's discomfort all the more palpable.

Similarly, the stories in *It Was the Nightingale* explore the complexities of communication and miscommunication within intimate relationships. The title itself, echoing *Romeo and Juliet*, invokes the tension between romantic idealism and lived reality. Deshpande often juxtaposes literary or cultural ideals of love with the mundane, and sometimes oppressive, realities faced by her characters. This intertextual strategy not only enriches the narrative but also critiques the cultural scripts that shape women's expectations and experiences. A defining feature of Deshpande's short fiction is her focus on silence—not merely as absence of speech but as a complex mode of expression shaped by social conditioning. Her female protagonists often inhabit spaces where direct articulation is constrained, leading to forms of internalized repression. Yet, this silence is not always passive; it can also function as a site of resistance or self-preservation. The narrative voice, frequently introspective and first-person, allows readers access to the inner conflicts of these characters, revealing the disjunction between outward conformity and inner dissent.

The domestic sphere, a central setting in many of her stories, is portrayed with ambivalence. Rather than presenting it as either wholly oppressive or wholly nurturing, Deshpande reveals its layered nature, where care and constraint coexist. This approach aligns with feminist literary concerns that seek to complicate simplistic binaries and attend to the everyday realities of women's lives. Stories such as "The Legacy" examine intergenerational relationships, particularly between mothers and daughters, highlighting how patriarchal values are transmitted, resisted, and reinterpreted across time. Deshpande's work also engages with questions of identity and selfhood, particularly in relation to language and narrative. Her characters often grapple with the difficulty of articulating their experiences within existing discursive frameworks, echoing broader feminist concerns about representation. The act of storytelling itself becomes a means of reclaiming voice and agency, even when such acts are tentative or incomplete. In literary terms, Deshpande's short stories are notable for their economy and precision. She avoids overt dramatization, instead relying on subtle shifts in tone, gesture, and perspective to convey emotional depth. This stylistic restraint enhances the thematic focus on interiority, making her stories particularly effective in capturing moments of realization, disillusionment, or quiet defiance.

Short Stories by Anjana Appachana

The short stories of Anjana Appachana constitute a vital contribution to contemporary Indian English and diasporic literature, particularly in their sensitive and layered exploration of women's inner lives, cultural dislocation, and the subtle operations of patriarchy across both Indian and transnational contexts. Appachana's fiction is distinguished by its psychological acuity, quiet irony, and the delicate rendering of emotional tensions that arise within familial and social structures. Her work, while often understated in tone, engages deeply with questions of identity, belonging, and the negotiation of selfhood in environments marked by cultural expectations and constraints. Her most celebrated collection, *Incantations and Other Stories*, offers a rich tapestry of narratives that foreground the experiences of women situated at the intersection of tradition and modernity. The stories frequently center on middle-class Indian families, both in India and abroad, where the pressures of conformity, respectability, and gender roles shape the contours of everyday life. Appachana's protagonists are often young women or girls whose perspectives reveal the gradual internalization of social norms, as well as the subtle moments of questioning and resistance that disrupt them.

One of the most discussed stories, "Sharmaji," presents the world through the eyes of a young girl who observes the adults around her with a mixture of curiosity and unease. The character of Sharmaji, a seemingly respectable man, gradually becomes a figure of discomfort, suggesting the presence of inappropriate behavior that the child cannot fully comprehend but instinctively senses. The story exemplifies Appachana's ability to depict the vulnerability of girlhood and the early, often confusing encounters with patriarchal authority. The narrative does not rely on explicit exposition; instead, it uses suggestion and perspective to highlight how social realities are internalized even before they are understood. In "Incantations," the title story of the collection, Appachana explores the emotional landscape of a young girl dealing with familial instability and her mother's distress. The protagonist resorts to magical thinking—reciting "incantations"—as a way to cope with anxiety and uncertainty. This blending of imagination and reality underscores the psychological strategies employed by children to navigate environments they cannot control. At the same time, the story reflects the limitations placed on women, as the mother's struggles remain largely unarticulated, filtered through the child's partial understanding. Another significant story, "Her Mother," examines the complex and often ambivalent relationship between a mother and daughter. The narrative delves into generational tensions, particularly the ways in which patriarchal values are

transmitted within the family. The mother, shaped by her own experiences of constraint, inadvertently perpetuates similar restrictions upon her daughter.

Appachana avoids simplistic moral judgments, instead presenting both characters as products of their social conditioning. The story thus reveals how oppression can be reproduced even within intimate and emotionally charged relationships. In “Bahu,” Appachana turns her attention to the figure of the daughter-in-law within the traditional Indian household. The story portrays the expectations placed upon a newly married woman, including obedience, adaptability, and emotional restraint. Through subtle narrative cues, the text exposes the imbalance of power within the domestic sphere, where the bahu is required to negotiate her identity within a rigid familial hierarchy. The protagonist’s internal reflections highlight the tension between conformity and selfhood, a recurring theme in Appachana’s work. The diasporic dimension of her writing is particularly evident in stories such as “The Prophecy.” Here, Appachana explores the experience of displacement and the anxiety of navigating unfamiliar cultural landscapes. The characters grapple with questions of belonging and identity, often caught between inherited traditions and new social realities. This duality intensifies the sense of isolation, especially for women, whose roles are already circumscribed by gender expectations. The story illustrates how diaspora does not necessarily liberate individuals from patriarchal norms; rather, it can reproduce and even intensify them in new contexts.

A defining feature of Appachana’s short fiction is her focus on the formative experiences of girlhood and adolescence. Many of her stories are narrated from the perspective of young protagonists who are acutely aware of the contradictions within the adult world, even if they lack the language to fully articulate them. This narrative strategy allows Appachana to explore the early stages of gender socialization, where expectations regarding behavior, sexuality, and propriety are subtly imposed. The resulting tension between innocence and awareness creates a powerful emotional undercurrent, as characters begin to perceive the limitations placed upon them. The theme of silence, much like in the works of other feminist writers, plays a crucial role in Appachana’s stories. However, her treatment of silence is often inflected by cultural and diasporic contexts, where communication is further complicated by displacement and linguistic hybridity. Characters frequently find themselves unable to express their desires or frustrations openly, leading to a form of emotional repression that is both individual and structural. Yet, within this silence, there are moments of quiet observation and internal critique, suggesting that awareness itself can be a form of resistance. Appachana’s engagement with the diasporic experience adds another layer of complexity to her work. In stories set outside India, the sense of cultural dislocation intensifies the characters’ struggles with identity. The familiar structures of family and community are both preserved and transformed in these new settings, creating spaces where traditional norms are simultaneously reinforced and questioned. This duality is particularly evident in the interactions between generations, where older characters often cling to established values while younger ones navigate the ambiguities of hybrid identities.

CONCLUSION

The study of women’s suppression, patriarchy, repressive forces, and male passivity—alongside their literary representations in the works of writers such as Shashi Deshpande and Anjana Appachana—reveals the intricate and deeply embedded structures that govern human relationships, identities, and modes of expression. What emerges across these interconnected themes is not a static or monolithic understanding of power, but a dynamic and evolving network of forces that operate simultaneously at material, ideological, psychological, and linguistic levels. The analysis of women’s suppression demonstrates that it is neither singular nor uniform; rather, it manifests through overlapping domains—domestic confinement, economic dependency, sexual control, and symbolic marginalization. Literary texts become crucial sites where these forms are not only depicted but also interrogated. Through the insights of theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Judith Butler, it becomes evident that gender itself is constructed within power-laden discourses, and literature plays a vital role in both sustaining and challenging these constructions.

The concept of patriarchy, as explored in this study, emerges as a foundational organizing principle that permeates social institutions and cultural narratives. Yet, it is not an immutable system; its operations vary across historical and cultural contexts, intersecting with class, race, and colonial histories. Similarly, repressive forces—whether articulated through Michel Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power or Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony—highlight the subtle and often internalized nature of control. These frameworks collectively underscore that power is most effective not when it is overtly coercive, but when it is normalized and internalized, shaping subjectivity itself. Within this broader structure, the exploration of male passivity complicates traditional binaries of dominance and subordination. Literary portrayals of passive male figures reveal the instability of hegemonic masculinity and the psychological, social, and existential pressures that underlie it. Rather than positioning men solely as agents of power, such representations expose their entanglement within the same systems that privilege them, thereby opening up a more nuanced understanding of gender as relational and mutually constitutive. The inclusion of short fiction by Shashi Deshpande and Anjana Appachana grounds these theoretical concerns within specific literary practices. Their narratives, marked by psychological depth and attention to everyday life, illuminate how large-scale structures of patriarchy and repression are experienced at the level of individual

consciousness. Through themes of silence, identity, domesticity, and cultural displacement, these writers demonstrate that resistance does not always take the form of overt rebellion; it can also emerge through introspection, subtle defiance, and the articulation of previously suppressed voices. Ultimately, this study affirms that literature is not merely a reflection of social realities but an active participant in their construction and transformation.

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