

Sensitivity Women in Sashi Deshpande's Novels

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Abstract: *Shashi Deshpande's seven novels are apparently alarmed with feminist issues. She depicts contemporary, educated and career-oriented married woman, who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. All her protagonists' women, narrate the story from their point of view. Deshpande's protagonists are stronger than Anita Desai's women, for they attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. Revealing a remarkable insight into the nature of a women's mind, she depicts women in myriad roles—wife, mother, daughter, and above all an individual in her own right. She is concerned always with a woman's search for her identity. She endeavors to establish woman as an individual, who break loose from the traditional constraints and refines her identity in tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times.*

Key words: *feminism, family, identity, psyche, suffering*

I. Introduction

She depicts contemporary, educated and career-oriented married woman, who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. All her protagonists' women, narrate the story from their point of view. Deshpande's protagonists are stronger than Anita Desai's women, for they attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. In "**Roots and shadows**", Indu, in her quest to be independent and complete, realizes that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. Indu, is a journalist, and a writer, the novelist, seems to believe that, it is the educated and the creative woman, who will liberate herself first and contribute to women's liberation, both, actively as well as through her exemplary behavior. Indus's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in general in contemporary Indian society, passing through a transition from the old cultural modes to the new socio-economic forces impinging effectively on the patterns of human lives. Indu is presented as a woman torn between age-old traditions and individual views. Her awareness of the sanctity of the familial bonds, she restrains herself from the precipitous action of feeling from the domestic scene. Though these bonds appears to be unreasonable in the beginning, gradually she learns to be bound by them as a typical traditional Indian Women, she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. Indu is able to free herself from the shadows that bind her to the past, only after Akka's death. Forced by Akka's will to do the mantle of the family matriarch, she displays maturity and strength in executing her duties. She realizes that Jayant, her husband, need not determine or limit her sphere of activity, Indus's decision not to submit herself to anyone's dictates, not to get influenced by her husband in career matters shows that she is making independent decisions, and matures into an individual who chooses to live life in accordance with her own wishes, in a bold and challenging woman of determination. She negates all feminine limitations and also acquires the power to change others.

In the novel "**The Dark Holds No Terror**", Saru, the representative of middle class workingwomen in modern India, rebels against traditions, but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. When Saru, the doctor, takes great interest in her profession, in her patients. And her professional success casts a dark, negative shadow on her married life; she undergoes a trauma, but very bravely stands up to the situation. After a long painful experience, she realizes, that escapism is never a solution and that she is her own refuge. Through Saru, Deshpande endeavors to establish woman as an individual, who breaks loose from the traditional constraints and refines one's identity in tune with the changed social ambience of the modern times. And at the same time, she can have some significant control over their relationships and professions. Coming back to their natal home, though provides nothing like a womb-like security, yet helps them to raise questions, which they had never dared to ask themselves. Sarita a medical doctor, married a low-cued Manohar, against her parent's wishes, had walked out on her parents. But, now, using her mother's death as excuse, she goes back to her father's home, hoping to find solace away from her husband's frightening and inexplicable sadism. Unable to adjust to the social demands, Saru withdraws within, to probe into her inner psyche and attempts to understand her hidden strength and potentials, in a way, she rediscovers her personality and digs up her hidden skills and learns not to suppress her talents.

She very well understands her inner strength to overcome the hurdles of her life. She is anxious, eager, ambitions...Confused, hopeless, dull, and almost thoughtless and a recluse run-away. Sarita needs this temporary withdrawal to resolve her doubts about her life and relationships. She attains her inner strength and tells her father, to request Manohar to wait. Her withdrawal is not an escapist but a withdrawal, which is essential for her re-integration into society. She is able to break the illusions that she had created and face's life courageously.

Jaya, in "**That Long Silence**", though a modern women, is rooted in tradition, experiences an impulsive urge to be empowered, and at the same time with an instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. Jaya, apart from being a housewife, she is a creative writer too. At the beginning of the novel, Deshpande's protagonists always have a certain shock; here, Jaya's husband is accused of corruption and is forced to remain in hiding for a few days. Jayanand Mohan shift temporarily to their Dadar flat.

Jaya, through the patchwork of her life written, realizes that she alone is responsible for both her achievements and failures. Jaya is in a state of turmoil, when Mohan walks out of their Dadar flat. She is alone at home with her neighbour Mukta and Nanda who her nurse her back to normalcy out of her delirium and fever. Jaya is physically alienated from her family-temporarily. The next two days, Jaya writes continuously, pouring out all that she had attempted to suppress all these years together.

In this novel, Deshpande presents the problems, that women writers have to face. Jaya attempts to break not only her own silence but also that of women, especially women writers, down the ages. Jaya's imaginative writing is not appreciated and her desire for identity and self-expression, a natural gift for a creative writers, gets smothered by her husband Mohan who asks, "How could you, how could you have done it...? How can you reveal us, how can you reveal our lives to the world in this way?" (P22) . Hence, in order to fit herself into the role of a perfect good wife, she sacrifices her creative writing skill and finds herself content with writing the innocuous middle under the pen name Seetha. She begins to write what people wants to read and not what she wants to write. It is here, exactly that the writer brings out the constraints under which a woman writer tries to express themselves. Her acceptance of her pen name 'Seetha' indicates her desire for conformity the traditional Indian woman who treads the expected path of a dutiful wife. She gets smothered under the weight of her own silence and curbing her creative genius. It is only at the end, she slowly begins to realize that her very compromise shatters her individuality, and have allowed to be victimized. She decides that she will live without sacrificing her identity or individuality, she makes some adjustment of her own volition, taking care to see that she does not lapse into servility. Her decision to have her own way gives a new confidence to her and this confidence makes Jaya face the realities of life and decides to break her silences by speaking out.

Urmila in the novel "**The Binding Vine**" not only fights her own battle, but also endeavors to help other women, the poor and the downtrodden. She not only believes strongly that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society, but fight for their rights. She is very much upset and troubled about those families, whose uncomplaining attitude of the victims in the name of family honour, Urmila is an independent undivided from the beginning with and identity of her own. She draws the attention of the society to the inequality of sexes and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. In spite of all this, she does not rebel against the established system, for she believes that the things are improving gradually but at a slow pace. But any way the system was improving. The novel is a work that should be read as a projection of ideas as women's solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in male dominated culture. From The feminist perspective finds literature as a subtle device to weaken women. The novel is a sane post-mortem of several tragedies in the life of different women. It furnisher and mirrors authentic female experience, and the lives of women driven to the point of hysteria, escapist, sacrificial goats, and discusses the compulsions which compel them to silence, suicide or death while delivering a child. Most of the time women are misunderstood and marginalized because of the power amassed by men, and they become instrumental in forcing women to silence. Women became the cause of subjugation and suffering. The novel studies the multiple misunderstandings among the women characters, especially between mothers and daughters, causing misery and unhappiness to several intimately related women in their families though the misunderstandings are cleared late, they eventually try to establish a kind of solidarity among themselves. **Binding Vine** is a special novel for it presents predominantly the woman's world; the presence of men is felt merely by the power they exercise over the women by wives and daughters. It is the women's world where they outshine men in terms of their clear perception of things around them, their course to cope with their surroundings and to face their looses, their ability to forge an alliance among themselves and learn to live. Actually, they are unique individuals in their respective domains, may be a well to do family or a broken family front, voicing their displeasure and airing their views, so fighting against injustices inflicted, upon them by and oppressive patriarchal system.

' **The Binding Vine**' diversifies from the self-realization theme to widen the scope and includes the community of women with a common heritage of oppression and a whole host of complex issues. For the first time, there is an attempt to understand the male psychology and Gopal who deserts his wife and children, is not condemned without hearing. Sumi reasons out that the metaphysical question of the ultimate truth of human life and the persistent human search for meaning in existence is Gopal's reasons. The novel weaves an intricate pattern of relationships within an extended family spanning across generations. Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru belong to four generations of the same family, each representing a specific mode of experience Manorama is a typical product of patriarchal value system, for she resented the birth of Kalyani, her daughter, as she wanted a son. She forces a marriage between two unwilling partners, her daughter Kalyani and her younger brother Shripati and she even holds Kalyani responsible for all her sorrows and calls her an enemy. But it is Kalyani who represents the survival power, of women, which tides her across her mother's ill treatment and her husband rejection. The novelist observes

"... The real miracle is Kalyani herself, who has survived intact, in spite of what Shripati did to her. Kalyani who has survived Manorama's myriad acts of cruelty" (151) There is clear change from Manorama to Kalyani, and she says to Aru

"My mother did not care for my children either. Daughters again, she said.... I am luckier than my mother. She is the one unlucky who didn't know how to enjoy her children and grand children" (226)

when Gopal walks out on Sumi, it appears to Kalyani like a reenactment of her own life, but unlike her mother, she gives emotional support to her daughter. But it is in Sumi, the struggle to learn to live alone and assert oneself against the tide of tragedy, Sumi is trying to work out a strategy to withstand the shock and the emptiness left behind by Gopal, and create a life for herself and her daughters, Aru is full of the sense of injustice and protest against her father, If Sumi is trying to retain self-identity, Aru fights for the rights of women. There is a metaphysical question of the meaning of life runs as an undercurrent in the narrative. It is the emptiness of life that induces Gopal to leave his family. The narrator philosophizes that there is a great deal to be said for a belief in many lives. To think that we have only one life given to us, to know that this is all there is, and to understand the implications of this, is to be stricken by paralysis. The narrator reminds us the truth of Krishna's message to Arjun that 'we are mere instruments'. Death is seen as the final reality and the death of Sumi and Shripati endorse the belief. The novelist sums up," If it is indeed true that we are bound to our destinies, that there is no point struggling against them, even this remains-that we do not submit passively or cravenly, but with dignity and strength"(246). The words have definitely a specific significance in the context of the feminine discourse, which the novelist tries to place in the wider context. Her project is to reinstate women's experience to its proper place in history. She projects and focuses on the strategies of readjustments her female protagonists undertake in order to forge an identity of their own. They struggle to learn to become, "ones own refuge" and value the fellowship of other women. She recreates very sensitively the female world and through modes of women's experience, she gives and places it in the mainstream position. She refuses to isolate women's experience even as her fiction consciously creates feminine sensibility and specificity and is at times, even successful in creating a language of her own. The novel **A Matter of Time** extends the limits of the novel form to foreground aspects of women's experiences in the Indian context hitherto unexplored and creates values and power that demand recognition.

Shashi Deshpande's "**Small Remedies**", brings out the novelists professional endeavors, articulated woman's aspirations, and her relationship with her husband, and the changed expectations of motherhood. Deshpande evolves a balance between traditional demands and modern compulsions and renegotiate the power relations in an attempt to resolve the crisis. Both the novels" **A Matter of Time** (1996) and **Small Remedies** (2000) transcend the mundane and ultimately reconcile with the ultimate reality. The novelist poses a problem, question it, fights it and then works towards acceptance and reconciliation. She says that there is no easy answer to life's existential problem and the choice before us is limited. Both the novels **A Matter of Time** and **Small Remedies**, have the historical and cultural ethos of Maharashtra and Karnataka, in the novel **A Matter of Time**, the rhetoric builds around the history of a family that settles in Karnataka with Peshwa Madhavrao's entourage. In **Small Remedies**, the cultural ethos is of the orthodox Brahmin Community, Pune, in the late nineteenth and during the early twentieth Century. There is convincing intermingling of the past with the present, which paves an important point to question the revived hegemonic structure.

Savitri Bai Indorekar's bold and rebellious act to run away from her family, her love for music is not an isolated, whimsical and individual decision. "The love for music transcends personal borders and becomes a part of the key social and political agendas undertaken by the late nineteenth century women such as Pandit Ramabai, Anandi Bai Joshi, Kashi Bai Kanitkar, Tara Bai Sinde, to name a few, who had the courage to stand up against the oppressive social regime."

Madhu, the protagonist—biographer is a very strong character, exercises her choices, rejects her husband's ideology of essentialist approach and rebuilds her emotional, creative, imaginative and realistic 'self'. By writing the biography of Savitri Bai Indorekar's as a challenge, she exerts her artistic and intellectual capacities. Writing itself is an act of empowerment. She knows that, where there is power there is resistance. The female characters in the novel try to live life on their own terms, resisting its vagaries with stony silences, balanced self-assertion and deep involvement in their arts-for Savitri Bai, it is music and for Madhu it is writing. Music is at the core of the story and so is creative writing. Bai forgets herself in her world of music, while Madhu drowns in her writing.

Art is beyond caste, class or religion; Bai comes from an orthodox Brahmin family; Gulam Saab and Hasina are Muslims, Hasina sings Akka Mahadevi's vachana's at the musical concerts. Hence, at the altar of music they have but one faith-music. Politics creates problems, not art. Shashi Deshpande does not resist women dreaming, but she certainly resists the structure that does not allow them to dream. Her woman protagonist, though not brave, are definitely strong women struggling to find their own way and their own voice.

II. Conclusion

A family is an institution in itself—everything begins and every thing that happens outside the family mirrors in the family. The domestic atmosphere quite harmonious and sanctified by the standard norms of the society is often seen with dissention, domination and violation. The complex nature of human relationships is analyzed, whether it is within a family or in the broader of social space. The novelist knits her narration around multiple acts of transgression bringing into the conflict of selves, other man, other women, physical, emotional, sexual, ethical, individual and social binaries. Hence, the self-reflexivity, as she locates the self in the labyrinth of her lived experience, the experiential becomes the touchstone in narration. Thus a process of rebuilding and demolishing continues in the novel in a narrative flow.

Reference

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