



Study of Social and Emotional Issues of Women in Shashi Deshpande's Novels

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Abstract : women and their problems have a central place in Shashi Deshpande's novels. And so women characters, their interaction with men and other women, their attitudes and values are more important in the over all design of the novels than the plot.

In short, her earlier novels are what may be called 'the novels of self realization' and so the area of action is the mind and not the

material world. After their moment of crisis, the protagonists isolate themselves and go into temporary exile. This is because they need to take a quiet and objective survey of themselves and their relationship with others. This is not possible in day-to-day life, that gives us neither the time nor the space required for such self-realization. Besides, they must also go away from those persons about whom they have to think.

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Shashi Deshpande says,

People/characters first come to me. They develop in my mind. In that sense, I know the person I am going to write about. The plot then develops. The plot actually works out through the development of the person, his/her reaction to other people in the society. Other than that when I start writing I do not have a ready plot. In fact, the end is a surprise to me also, many times. This also explains as to why in all the novels the plot is quite thin and can be summarized in just a few lines. No sub plot is to be found, although the same person may move about in two different worlds.

If all her novels are taken together, we find that Shashi Deshpande is obviously concerned with feminist issues. Not only are all her protagonists women but also the story is narrated from their point of view.



A Matter of Time, that she has shifted to the omniscient narration, but there too it is the women's point of view that prevails. Indu (*Roots and Shadows*) is a journalist, Jaya (*That Long Silence*) a housewife and a creative writer, Saru (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*) a doctor, Urmi (*The Binding Vine*) a college teacher, Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) though educated, takes up a job only later, while Savitribai and Leela (*Small Remedies*) are a singer and a social worker respectively. Madhu, the narrator (*Small Remedies*), is also a journalist and a writer. Deshpande thus 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 behaviour. While the lower class-working woman is handicapped for want of education and economic opportunities, the upper-class woman is a slave to material comforts for which she makes compromises. Besides, Deshpande's stress is on creativity rather than on any thing else.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu undergoes great mental trauma in her childhood and in marriage due to her husband Jayant's double standards. Ostensibly educated and liberal, he is intolerant about any deviation on her part from the traditional role of a wife. He is no different from the other less educated and conservative Indian men when it comes to playing the role of a husband. The miserable plight of Indu's Kakies and atyas is revealed through Indu's eyes.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya's troubles in marriage stem from her husband's tolerance towards any deviation from her role of a subservient wife. When threatened with charges of corruption, he expects her to go into hiding with him; when she refuses to comply, he is greatly enraged and walks out of the house. Jaya is miserable as she followed her Vanitamami's advice that a husband is like a 'sheltering tree', which must be kept alive at any cost, for without it the family becomes unsheltered and vulnerable. She does so but finds herself and the children the more unsheltered and insecure.

In *The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande raises the issue of marital rape. Women like Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law, have to bear the nightly sexual assault by their husband silently. Other women like Shakutai, her sister Sule, Kalpana and her sister have their own sorry tales. Shakutai's husband is a drunkard and a good-for-nothing fellow, who leaves his wife and



children for another woman. Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, Sulu's husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana's behalf and the culprit is caught. Urmi's husband is in navy and during his long absence she craves for some physical gratification. Her friendship with Dr. Bhaskar provides her ample opportunity, but she never oversteps the boundaries chalked out in marriage. This virtue of hers remains unacknowledged by her husband.

A *Matter of Time* is yet another novel wherein the husband walks out on his family comprising the wife and three daughters. Sumi, is so shocked that she lapses into complete silence but, apparently tries hard to keep things normal for her daughters. Her desertion is a cause for great humiliation and mental trauma for her as it's not only a matter of great shame and disgrace but a bitter realization of being unwanted. Words of sympathy from relations fail to console her. She is self-respecting and takes up a job for herself and her daughters. Though, Gopal, her husband, returns but she is a new Sumi now. She has coped with the tragedy with remarkable stoicism.

In *Small Remedies*, is narrated the tragic tale of Savitribai Indoreker, doyenne of the Gwalior Gharana. She leads the most unconventional of lives, but undergoes great mental trauma because of the double standards practiced in society. Right from her childhood she had sensed the gross gender discrimination in the society that had one set of laws for men and another for women. Madhu, too, is a victim of double standards of society. She gets totally estranged by her husband, Son after she naively discloses to him about her single act of physical intercourse before marriage, though Som has himself had a full-fledged physical relation with another married woman before marriage.

If I Die Today contains elements of detective fiction. The narrator, a young college lecturer, is married to a doctor, and they live on the Campus of a big medical college and hospital. The arrival of Guru, a terminal cancer patient disturbs the lives of the doctors and their families old secrets are revealed, two people murdered, but the tensions in the family resolved after the culprit is unmasked. One of memorable character is Mriga, a 14 year old girl.

Come Up and Be Dead is a psychological thriller. In this novel Deshpande demonstrates the versatility of her award winning literary skills. The suicide of a school girl is an exclusive school



is something, even the efficient Head Mistress cannot deal with specially when it is followed by rumours pointing at her brother. Two more deaths follow, making the school a hotbed of fear and suspicion.

Moving On is a story that begins, conventionally enough, with a woman's discovery of her father's diary. As Manjiri, Unlocks the past through its pages rescuing old memories and recasting events and responses, the present makes its own demands : a rebellious daughter, devious property sharks and a lover who threatens to throw her life out of fear again. The ensuing struggle to reconcile nostalgia with reality and the fire of the body with the desire for companionship races to an unexpected resolution, twisting and turning through complex emotional landscapes with her uncanny insight into the nature of human relationship and an equally unerring eye for detail.

Conclusion :

Here we can conclude that to the older generation of men, love means lust. To the women, however, Sex is tortuous. In Jaya's case, there is no cruelty but there is nothing except physicality that connects her to Mohan. Jaya's is a representative case of an average Indian housewife. Love between Sumi-Gopal, Leela-Joe, Savitribai- Ghulam Saab transcends the body and its limitations too. This love creates the small good moments of life which are the small remedies of which Shashi Deshpande speaks in the interview. She states that she does not "believe in a simple opposition of bad bad man and good good women. I don't believe the world is like that at all."7 Thus, she has constructed motifs of patriarchy and oppression by employing the method of negation and affirmation. Her protagonists are victims of the Indian patriarchy and after initial submission resist the oppressive situation, thereby reflecting the author's view that a woman must assert herself within marriage to preserve her individuality.

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