

Female Characters in Shashi Deshpande: A Psycho Analysis

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God made each and every thing which we see and realize in our world, but the best creation is the women. Among Indians women English novelists Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent position. She has sensitively treated typical Indian themes and has portrayed contemporary middle class women with rare competence. They represent the overwhelming majority and struggle in the traditional world of the society. Her "every novel starts with people." characters occupy a pivotal position in her fiction. Her characters are not wooden ones. They are modern ones. They are written in a psycho analytical way. They have strength of their own and in spite of challenges and hostilities remain uncrushed. They are sensitive, self conscious, brilliant and creative. They revolt against the traditional parental family and run away from the suffocated atmosphere of the narrow minded society. In *The Dark Holds no Terror*, *That long silence* and *The Binding Vine*. Shashi Deshpande has tried to search for self realization and self affirmation through different female characters she gives the message that human nature itself is the "hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, to live with."

In Indian English fiction, Shashi Deshpande has a distinctive position as a writer of women centric novels, with a special drive to unveil the gender imbalance in society; she ventures to explore the life of Indian women with socio cultural and psycho ethical paradigms of human existence.

Shashi Deshpande is a highly talented woman who was born in Dharwad, in Karnataka, India. She is the daughter of the renowned kaumada writer and Sanskrit scholar Adya Rang char, better known as Sriranga, a cerebral man who wrote plays of ideas. She inherited literary accumen and was honored by Shaitya academy and other prestigious awards. She obtained degree in Economics, Law and English and a diploma in Journalism. She is widely read woman and was very much influenced with the novel of Somerset Maugham, Jane Austen, Dickens, Tolstoy and Bronte Sisters. She also has approached contemporary Indian women novelists with an open mind. But her angle of writing her characters is totally on the line of Indian thoughts. She does not put her vision with foreigner's eyes. Her novels present the synthesis of Victorian and modern views of her own country. The women are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationship within their given social world. In the extended families that Deshpande presents, two or three generations live together. The old tradition bound world coexists with the modern, creating unforeseen gaps and disruptions within the family fold; woman's understanding becomes questionable as the old patterns of behaviors no longer seem to be acceptable. These struggles become intense quests for self definition because it would not be possible to relate to others with any degree of conviction unless one is guided by clarity about one's own image and role.

She in her seven novels has chronicled and strengthened feminist movement by her deep analysis of man woman relationship. Her "every novel starts with people." Characters occupy a pivot position in her fiction. Her characters are written in psycho analytical way. In an interview with Vimal Rama Rao, she says, "My characters are all human being, one sees in the world around."

Shashi Deshpande is very much influenced with the psycho analytical characters of Virginia wolf. She reveals the subconscious and unconscious psyche of her characters. Her

female protagonists are sensitive, self conscious, brilliant and creative. They revolt against the traditional parental family and run away from the suffocated atmosphere of the narrow minded society. In *The Dark Hold no Terrors*, Saru is the heroine. The novel is the story of a marriage on the rocks, Sarita called Saru is a "two in one woman", who in the day time is a successful doctor and at night a terrified trapped animal in the hands of her husband, Manohar. He is a English teacher in a third rate college, is a jealous husband and is the victim of inferiority complex. Saru is not happy in his company and is unable to fear the sexual sadism of her and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over other. She defies traditional code at the slightest threat to her importance as that in what she missed and craved for in her mother's house. She is a broad minded woman and realizes that economic independence alone could be an insurance against subordination or suppression. Her husband is not an ordinary male chauvinist. He has absolutely no reservations about treating his wife as an equal and as a person. He is very much shocked when an interviewer asks him, "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter bus most of the bread as well?". It undermines his confidence totally. He lets his wounded male pride sexual sadism. Saru's brother Dhruva, unfortunately dies by drowning into the water and her mother makes her feel quality of his death. That fills revolt in her against her mother. She is a courageous woman and does not care for the harsh words of her mother.

Don't go out in the sun. You'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all you life?

Why not?

You can't.

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy.

She reacts against the traditional concept of society that single purpose of a woman is to please the elders and especially the male ones. Through her Character the novelist wants to project the post modern dilemma of a woman who strongly resents the onslaught on her individuality and identity. The antagonism is faced mainly from two person- Saru's mother and Manohar, saru's husband. Both of them represent the values and norm established by the patriarchal society. She wants to be a strong woman in all the three angels, biological, psychological and social in the end of the novel. She identifies herself with the roles fulfilled. She decides to cut off the traditional bonds of marriage and home and walks into the wide world. It is her comprehensive realization of "self" in which the consideration of family society and personal relationship assume a pigmy position. She declares:

My life is my own..... somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are just as a strutting grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving mother right (220).

It is her final withdraw not only from society or parents or Manohar but form a sense of nothingness with an exclusive feeling of negation towards life itself. She jails to make spaces for herself both as an individual and as sensitive woman.

In her novel *The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande tried to make balance of the two sexes. She wants to give women equality. She opposes the views of those people who consider woman as sex object. It is a novel that admits complex structure with multiple layers of suggestion focusing on the illusions of man woman relationship. It is basically concerned with the obsession of a young mother Urmi who is the chief narrator in the novel. She is professionally a lecturer in college and appears as an agonized mother, craving for the loss of her own daughter, Anu . The untimely death of Anu comes as a serious shock to the maternal sensibility of Urmi la. After Anu 's death, a sense of quilt grips her conscience and the idea of personal happiness without Anu becomes a "betrayal" for her. "When a child dies, there's so little left. After you've tied and put away the cloths and the toys, there is nothing only emptiness. Reflecting on her masochistic attitude, S. Indira commented.

Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds on to it as she believe that to let go that pain let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu , every small incident to food her with longing and a great sense of loss(S. Indira Bond or Burden:22)

Beneath the anguish of lost motherhood of Urmi , the writer reflects on the issue of undesirable and torturous sexual relationship, the horrors of rape, the apathy of society and the hollowness of the institution of marriage. Urmi is herself a victim of personal loss but she analyzes her loss in the background of the life condition of two women of her own family- Mira, her own mother in law and Kalpana , an unfortunate teenager who becomes the. Victim of rape. Present is represented by Urmi but the past echoes in the silence of Mira and future is focused in the suffering of Kalpana . The presence of Kalpana becomes a substitute of Anu in the life of Urmi . In this state of mental crisis, two events take place in the life of Urmi discovery of the poems of Mira, her dead mother in law and her encounter with Priti, a lawyer who makes arguments about the previsions of protections provided by law to women against the tortures done by men. The presumption that the fate of women can be improved by the process of law makes no impression on Urmi . Women's condition in male dominated society is that she can't think ever at the level of bodily ego. In the matter of sexual relationship. Women has to play the role of a passive partner. Priti argues, " This is a beginning once you know the law can help you. If one woman can win the right to her own body." But Urmi declares, "One Indira Gandhi in the charge of nation and country full of women not allowed to take charge of their own lives.... No, Priti, laws can't change people's lives(38), Urmi tried to discover in the life of Mira who lived and died in silence but making a desperate burial of her suppressed consciousness in her unexplored letters and diaries. She intends to establish a " woman's vision" but fear grips her consciousness because Mira was her own mother in law. She clarifies her vision," Do you have to get bogged down in the personal? Don't you understand? She's not just herself, she's a symbol. We need symbols to focus attention on the thing, the symbol stands for."(40)

Unconsciously Urmi identifies herself with life of Mira and with the realization of this common perception of life, she endeavors to establish a common aesthetics of female experiences. Mira had died in Kishore's birth and name 'Kishor' was given to him by Akka.

From the trunk of dead Mira's Urmi gets lot of papers and unpublished poems. Mira's diaries were written in English but poems were written in Kannada. In Mira's papers, the line is drawn with an absolute clarity- her thoughts as written in English, her creative writing are in Kannada. The personal diaries of Mira bears a mark "strictly private and confidential", and it was not an account of her daily routine of life but personal communion with herself." This confession obviously evinces that each woman possesses her own "private" world and seeks an outlet of it in the world that is adverse and hostile to her imagination. Urmi endeavors to recreate the world of Mira but in the meanwhile Vana appears in the corridor holding a girl in her arms. She informs Urmi that girl is a victim of head injuries and even of rape. The victim was Kalpana and her mother Shakuntala was lost in the persistent sobbing "my daughter, my Kalpana". At this juncture, the writer presents a viral and poignant account of the suffering of woman whose self respect is often ignored in the name of social ignominy Shakuntala is more conscious for social shame than the physical and mental anguish of her daughter Kalpana. She is not ready to accept that the charge of 'Rape' might be brought against Kalpana. She cries "It's not true, tell me, it's not true, what you- What his doctor says." (58) The anxiety, fear and insecurity of Shakuntala is a manifestation of the horrible reality that in male-dominated social structure, it is the woman who has to suffer the shame of social injustice. Kalpana was expected to bear the pain of physical torture and self humiliation in silence. Shakuntala asserts that the case must not be reported to the police." No, no, no tell him Tai, it's not true, don't tell anyone. I'll never be able to hold up my head again. Who'll marry the girl. We're decent people. Doctor don't tell the police." (58) Vanna as a doctor has three distinctive roles, concerning the expectation of different characters associated with this tragedy. First, of all as a medical practitioner, she is expected to provide immediate medical aid to Kalpana, the rape victim. Secondly as a woman, she has to identify herself with innermost of Kalpana. It is a tragedy involving serious emotional havoc beyond physical suffering. Thirdly, as human being Vanna has to deal with the entire situation with proper love and respect. Vanna leaves Urmi just to take care of Kalpana but Shakuntala asks so many personal questions related with it, when she is informed that Vanna had two daughters, she makes a desperate remark, "why does God give us daughters?" (60) The attitude and reactions of Shakuntala works only as a foil to the pain of Urmi. For Urmi, Anu's death comes as a loss because she identifies herself better with Anu than her son Kartik and on the other hand Shakuntala treats her daughter Kalpana as a curse of her life. For her the only anxiety is the hasty marriage of Kalpana. Urmi seeks the image of Anu in Kalpana and so she propagates the voice that has long been suppressed under the cover of feminine morality.

After Anu died..... Then I saw Kalpana, I met Shalutai, I read Mira's dear diary her poems and I've begun to think uses, I've managed but I've been lucky that's all these women..... you understand what I'm saying..... they never had a chance. It's not fair it's not fair at all. And we can't go on pushing it..... what happened to them_ under the carpet forever because we're afraid of disgraces. (174)

Her cry echoes the harsh reality existing behind the web of illusion:

How can I not worry? I have to live with people, I have to live among them, and I think I made a mistake. I should have kept quiet. I thought I was helping Kalpana. But sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana was now her death. You know each time I came here, I keep thinking may be this time, when I come into this ward, I'll see an empty bed or may there will be another patient in her bed and they "I'll tell me?" Your daughter is dead, she died last night." And for a moment sinner that I am, my heart feels light at the thought. Then it is as if someone has not been here and I think what kind of a woman. I too long for my daughter's death? I who gave birth.... I will never live like you." (178)

The mother and daughter relationship of Anu and Urmi seems to be hollow against the naked reality revealed by Shakuntala. Thus the traditional social order neglects both the individuality and femininity of women. The gender based social structure, sexual colonialism is doing a great harm for women than the social discrimination. The end of the novel is thought provoking where society leaves the question of women's respect and identity externally answered.

In the novel *That Long Silence*, the narrative is fabricated at two levels:- one represents the inner world of Jaya's consciousness reflecting her discontent of personal life and on the other, Shashi Deshpande reflects on the various dimensions of problems of women in the traditional society of India. Mohan, the husband of Jaya is an engineer by profession; Mohan's concern is basically with the externals such as money, status, material comforts. Jaya is a very bold lady. Her father taught her to have confidence in herself and has taught her lessons of morality. Jaya is not one merely a housewife but she is also a career woman. She is a successful columnist and an aspiring writer of fiction. She writes serious stories and sends them to magazines. But her husband is a materialist man and has no craze for her creative genius. Apparently Jaya adjusts with it but gradually it becomes a burden to her. She confesses:

A pair of bullocks yoked together..... a couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man and woman. (8)

There is no bridge of understanding between the wife and the husband. Though they were living together," but there had been only emptiness between them." This emptiness draws Jaya towards Kamat who is opposite in nature to her husband Mohan. Though Kamat is not a handsome young boy like Mohan but he is an intelligent man who understands the psychology of women. Jaya is happy in his company because she can exchange ideas with him. Being an intelligent middle aged man he always appreciated her creative power. Kamat treats her as an equal and therefore Jaya used to feel an ease in his company. She says, "I told him things I'd never been able to speak of not to Dad, not to Mohan." She talks to him about everything, including her parents and his "full blooded smile," encourages her to go on. He encouraged her to write on the issues related with the suffering of women in society. Jaya is conscious that in a gender based social system even basic human sensibility and emotions are classified on the basis of gender assigned roles. Kamat's suggestion to express female anger through her writings baffles Jaya and she ridicules the whole issue, "A woman can never be angry, she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There's no room for anger in my life, no room for despair either." (148) The anticipation of the reaction of Mohan, Rati and Rahul scared her writing and therefore instead of searching a space for herself in the outer world, she withdraws herself to her private world. In

order to expose the reality of society and the futility of personal relationship, she starts writing under the disguised name "Seeta" and after it, she becomes free to write without guilt and shame. It was a self chosen shield to avoid the blow of despair and conflict.

...and for me, she had been the means through which I had shut the door, firmly. On all those other women who had invaded my being, screaming for attention, women I had know I could not write about, because they might it was just possible- resemble Mohan 's mother, or aunt or my mother or aunt. Seeta was safer (149).

But when Kamat dies she feels heartbroken. Even her corrupt husband has lost his highly paid job and thus she has come to the end of the road. In the moment of crisis, her husband expects her to share his anxiety. He wishes to use his wife as buffer on opiate to soften the impact against himself. But Jaya reacts to the situation differently. She wants to burst out in anger, but she fails to break her silence. When repression of anger continues for a long time, ego, self crisis reaches its climatic point. Mohan becomes frustrated and leaves the house. Now Jaya was alone she bears him two children and third was aborted. She suffers from isolation. Her marriage is loveless which causes the wife and the husband to drift away from each other. She is ever hunted by the memories of the past, her earlier life and her marriage with Mohan . In the end of the novel she decides to put an end to her long silence . She recollects the triumph with the present with which her father had named her Jaya,'Jaya for victory.' She is renamed as Suhasini. Now she is soft, smiling, placid motherly woman. She tries to remove her long silence and struggle with the problems of self revolution and self estimation. She has decided to come out form her house to the open word and decides to show her talents. She reminds the words of Kamat which he said her long away that "pursuit of happiness is meaningless and loneliness is the essential condition of human existence. Everyone has to fight his own battle. The novel becomes a self critique of Jaya. She has fathomed the darkness of herself and learnt to articulate her predicament.

Thus in her novels she has given the outer and the inner self of her all male and female characters in a psychological way. She herself says to her interviewer M.D.Riti that," I am always concerned about people, their predicaments and moral values. It is a search in every human being something more than mere mundane life."

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