



Portrayal of relationships in selected short stories of Shashi Deshpande

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Shashi Deshpande is one of the Indian Writers who has created a niche for herself by virtue of her writings which make her stand out of crowd of Indian Writers in English. Starting her journey as a writer by writing Fiction for children, she delves deeper into the realms of writing about women. She has been continuously denying the label of being feminist yet she continues to write about phallogocentric perspective prevalent in the society in general and Indian society in particular. Very categorically, she asserts that the ideas of feminists like Kate Millet and Simone De Beauvoir can't be taken as the standard paradigms for the Indian writers as well as the Indian readers. Having authored around twelve short story collections, nine novels and many prose writings in the form of essays. She is recipient of great awards like Sahitya Academy Award and Padam Shree. Being the daughter of famous Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, she has art and literature in her blood which magnetized her to pursue career in journalism in spite of having degree in Economics.

In the present paper, I aim to present an analysis of female characters in respect of their relationships with their own self, fellow female characters and males in their lives. I would like to bring home the idea that Deshpande's protagonists are not the product of the moulds of western feminist female characters. Her heroines don't wish to break the chains of family ties or relationships rather they prefer to make their suppressed voices heard which had remained muffled since centuries. How cultural stereotypes affect women to follow the trodden path of unrealized identity. The present paper aims to the rare competence of Shashi Deshpande to unmute the muted voices of women in Indian Middleclass households in the context of selected short stories.

Mother-daughter relationship is very pivotal among all the relationships in the fictional world of Shashi Deshpande. Generally speaking, mother-daughter relationship is one of the most glorified relationship in Indo Anglican fiction but Shashi Deshpande has portrayed this relationship in the light of female patriarchy also. Many of her stories including a few discussed in the present paper show mother daughter estrangement that terminates in reconciliation. Initially daughters in her stories don't have intimacy with their mothers who are keen to bridge the gap between the two. According to Psychological studies, mother-daughter relationship aids in development of female personality. However, the relationship nose dives if mother daughter duo is not able to bridge the gap between them and fail to open

the channels of communication. Generally speaking, mother daughter relationship in her novels has been shown not to be cordial due to various reasons such as generation gap, illiterate or less educated mothers, death of husband or son or modern wayward nature of daughter and all these reasons result in cold or indifferent attitude of daughter towards her mother. This breach of cordiality between mother and daughter is healed when daughter herself passes through some life crisis or is exposed to some bitter reality of life. The gap ends when mother and daughter become aware of the marginalization of their individuality and they are reconciled to refuse the life of silent suffering. Her stories are the depictions of the inner worlds and dilemmas of women who undergo crisis and emerge as resilient 'New Women' out of that crisis in their lives.

"Why A Robin" is one such story in which mother feels intellectual and emotional gap with her daughter. Her daughter who feels emotionally and intellectually closer to the father comes and seeks the help of her mother in finishing her school assignment of writing about the bird, Robin, mother doesn't know about the bird except that it is a beautiful bird, she raises an intellectual question that why to study this less familiar bird Robin instead of more familiar bird like crow, she says:

"Why not a bird we know something about? A sparrow, or a...a...a...myna or even a peacock?"

Her question is allegorical as it also reminds her of her relationship with her husband who wanted to marry another girl who unfortunately died in an accident. Both of them were never consulted by their respective families regarding the decision of their marriage and could never become companion in real sense. She feels a desire for the company of her husband and daughter but they remain indifferent to her. Her daughter turns to her mother when she receives the shock of her first menstruation. Shashi Deshpande wants to highlight that only a woman can understand the problems and agonies of her other women. The story proves that she writes about ordinary women in urban setting proving her idea that women's lives are to greater extent governed by gender. Mother in the story has been conditioned to great extent by Myths of Puranas and folk stories which expect a woman to be happy only in the roles of being wife and mother. In her work 'Of Concerns, Of Anxieties', she says

"My writing comes out of a consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman". (of Concerns ,of Anxieties)

It is not that Shashi Deshpande writes about female relationships only but also about unknown and undefined relationships such as in the story 'The Legacy'. The doctor, throughout his youth, had no faith or belief in the family or patriarchal legacy but takes a complete U turn when on his deathbed he confides in one of his friends to hand over his financial assets to his so called 'biological son' whose face he has not seen till date. Without seeing or knowing that young son who has also pursued medical profession, he is so overwhelmed by his undefined relationship with him that he decides to give his assets to him. The story ends with the peripetian note that when mother reveals that the boy in whose name the protagonist leaves behind the legacy, is not the same child but her second child.

Relationship among women of three generations are depicted by Shashi Deshpande in her story 'My Charioteer' in which the narrator Ajji is the first-generation woman among the three. Ajji has estranged relationship with her daughter, Aarathi, who continues to dwell in past after the loss of two important figures in her life, her husband and her father (Ajji's husband). She doesn't bother for her own health and indulges into excessive smoking while confining herself to the room of her father. Aarathi is so pessimistic about life that she warns the small nine-year-old girl child to beware of being happy as according to her sorrows and tragedies come to humans in the garb of happiness. Ajji perceives it to be very harsh treatment to such a young child and she expresses her displeasure. When expresses the bitterness, Ajji tells her how badly her husband used to treat her very badly. He was not only rude to her but also suppressed her desires. In the meantime, photo of Ajjis's husband gets broken and Ajji prepares to throw the picture outside as she ruminates and opines that it is not advisable to live in the past as told by Lord Krishna in Geeta. After this mother daughter and granddaughter's conversation, Aarathi becomes aware of the past and believes that one should move on in life and she begins her journey on improving her life. To Ajji, Preethi is the charioteer who gives her motivation and insights to handle Aarathi, therefore, the small child is the real charioteer of Ajji like lord Krishna who escorted out Arjun in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. At the end of the story, all the three mother daughter and grand daughter are reconciled. Preethi is real the ray of hope in the life of Ajji who teaches her grandmother that she needs to forget the past sorrows and live peacefully in the present.

Shashi Deshpande does not confine herself to the relationship among mother daughter only rather relationship between husband and wife has been depicted by her in the light of financial dynamics also. In the story, 'A Liberated Woman', she presents a woman who earns more than her husband and she persistently cosseted with a dangerous thing called a man's ego, which is only by asserting the supremacy in bed. The wife wakes up each morning bruised all over and considers each passing night as a nightmare. In the story, the author tells that how job imparts financial independence to her but this liberty does not extend to social enfranchisement. Woman might earn more than her husband but that does not guarantee her an equal status in the family. Patriarchy is the place of genesis of fears in women about divorce as the patriarchy challenges financial autonomy as gateway to emancipation. The story is incisive commentary on marital equation between husband and wife.

Another story that mentions mother daughter relations is 'It Was Dark', published in 1986, the story explains the theme of child sexual abuse and the related fears of parents. Characters have not been named and include mother, father and their small daughter who has been abducted and supposedly raped. Parents are not sure about the situation of their daughter but they want their neighbours not to know the reason of illness of their daughter. They have the worst possible fears of parents that their pubertal daughter has been raped. Finally, when mother decides to open the window and let the ray of light in, her daughter who had fixed her gaze on ceiling now looks towards her mother and says that it was dark there. The mother realizes that whatever has happened in the life of their dear daughter but she can soothe her. Though the story ends on the note of uncertainty about exactly what happened to their daughter but the ray of light in the room symbolizes hope as she determines that she will leave

no stone unturned to revitalize her pubertal and heartbroken daughter. The story ends on an optimistic note. By opening the window, mother rejects the conventional tenets of morality. Shashi Deshpande does not depict the bright side of mother-daughter relationship only but she chooses to paint frustration and disappointment in the life of the relationship also. She feels lonely when her husband leaves her behind alone and she feels like a burden on her son. She pleads miserably her daughter Anju not to go abroad but the daughter goes away leaving behind her mother heart broken and shattered. She reminisces that how her daughter used to plead her mother not to leave her alone in the school. She realizes that now it is the turn of her daughter to leave her behind.

Father-daughter relationships are also common threads of interest in the stories of Shashi Deshpande. One such example is the story 'The Awakening'. Mother being an aggressive person forces her daughter Alka to give up college education and work as a typist to provide financial support to the family after the death of her father. Initially, she blames her father for leaving behind the family in the lurch as he left the unfulfilled responsibilities. Later she realizes her mistake when she lays her hand upon the letter written by her father. She comes to know about the real feeling of her father and she comes to the realization that she must fulfil the financial responsibilities of the family but at the same time decides not to give up her dream of pursuing higher education. Finally, she comes to terms with her mother.

To conclude we can say that Shashi Deshpande portrays a realistic and authentic picture of relationships in her stories. She depicts women as daughters, mothers, wives caught in the web of human relationships but majority of them deal with relationships among female characters. She depicts the conflict between past and present, between old and new generations which usually ends in reconciliation. Shashi Deshpande has been completely successful in portraying these relationships in the light of rapid changes in the Indian urban society.

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