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### Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study with Humanistic Perspectives

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#### Abstract

The crux of novels of Shashi Deshpande lies in the fact that, it's not easy to sustain and survive as a woman with dignity in the patriarchal and tradition bound society. The venture may land them into tremendously disastrous situation. At the same time, the message communicated by Deshpande is loud and clear that they will not lie low suffering the pangs of their situation meekly. The protagonists would wage a war against the hostile human condition in which they are found trapped as if it were a cage. In this respect her writings are akin to the vision of Anita Desai unlike that of Arundhati Roy, Shobha De and Manju Kanpur. Deshpande and Anita Desai evolve a balance between traditional demands and circumstantial compulsions and renegotiate their will to transcend the facticity they are plagued with.

**Keywords-** Patriarchal, Identity, Human-Condition, Predicament, Autonomous, Polarities

This socio-economic emancipation of women in India has brought in trail changes in their status and outlook. The widely affected area of this change has been the vital relationship between man and women. The concepts of love, marriage and sex have undergone a lot of change. Woman, who was dissatisfied with the inhibiting cultural and sexual roles assigned to her from the pristine dawn of the patriarchal India is now gaining strength to rebel against the socio-culture oppressions. But at the same time she fowls to reject totally her traditional social and cultural backgrounds. She stands, therefore, at cross roads, caught between tradition and modernity.

It is remarkable to note that, in the last phase of her fictional works, Shashi Deshpande explores the inner self, of her protagonists, as a ultimate source of energy and

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power to face and settle all the worldly affairs, in the whole sphere of life only self is the symbol of completeness and without its realization and utilization one cannot find completeness in the life. In the beginning of her works Deshpande mostly deals with physical material, sensual and sexual aspects of women life and in the end of her fictional works she invokes the mental moral and spiritual aspects of women's life and between the two ends she teaches them the lesson of co-operation on the basis of mutual understanding. It is the novel *Small Remedies*. Madhu seeks the power of writing, as recovery of the past in the writing is a supplement, a retrieval of forgetting. Hence writing is one of the *Small Remedies*. It is both a condition and the consequence of recovery. The writer writes to communicate that seems difficult for the world to understand. Madhu's writing of Savitribai's biography makes her realize that true self of her life does not lie in indulging only the false-self as that brings nothing but hopelessness to mar the essence of life. Savitribai finds herself unable to speak the truth but in her biography Madhu presents Savitribai's life with a stamp of truth.

In the novel *Moving On*, Manjari, the protagonist, derives power from the written texts by her parents: whole narrative of the novel contains six reading of Baba's Diary alternately after two or three chapters. Manjari also discovers that her mother was a writer as she says that her mother was a writer, but for years she scarcely knew: "Mai was the Centre of our Universe she was the sun around whom the three of us, Baba, Malu and I revolved" (Deshpande, 342). Thus we see that 'Self' finds clear-cut reflection in the process of writing. Speaking about the value of writing and writer's role Deshpande says:

When we talk of the writer's role, we have necessarily to bring in the intent, because you can't have a role unless there is intent to play the role. Therefore the question becomes 'Why do you write?' a question often addressed to writers, but rarely to other professionals. This is a question almost impossible to answer as well, not because there are no answers, not because there are too many. To look for one answer among the multitude is like trying to locate identify one particular star in the sky. (*The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, 32)

In this way Madhu and Manjari both go on thinking positively against all the problems arising before them and, as last, settle their relations as best as could be. Madhu accept the power of sweet relation and says, "And I, sore with the pain of my father's death, with the disruption of my entire life, had felt a kind of healing in the words" (*Small Remedies* 324). Similarly Manjari acknowledges the value of faith and says, "Faith, The adhesive Baba called it that holds things together" (*Moving On*, 342).

Hence, we observed that in her process of writing Deshpande covers the whole range of life i.e. from body to soul. As it is well known fact that soul is symbol of purity and faith, free from anger, worry, jealousy and greed that cause many troubles in the life. Thus she teaches her protagonists her appreciation for contemporary human values. She, realistically depicts

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the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for the self or identity. About that long silence, she says,

And then I wrote 'That Long Silence' almost entirely a women's novel nevertheless, a book about the silencing of one-half of humanity. A lifetime of introspection went into this novel, the one closest to me personally; the thinking and ideas in this are closest to my own. (*Creative Theory: Writers on International*, 210)

Jaya is a convent-educated girl with a sense of unique and extra ordinary. In her childhood she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility. When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises to be always good to Mohan, her husband. Vanita Mami counsels her 'Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. She further says, "If your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it. Take up a hobby instead, cats, may be or your sister's children" (*That Long Silence*, 22) her upbringing demands suppressions of the self so the marriage can survive. Unable to free herself from the traditional code of conduct, her inner voice remains inarticulate through and through, even in her writings and her paint up feelings make her neurotic. Still she longs to be called an ideal wife and caring mother. She revolts in silence. Adele King opines, "Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really" (*Effective Portrait*, 22).

Thus, we observe that Deshpande in her earlier novels has dealt with the theme of silence, surrender and compromise. Her women protagonist come to the point of compromise avoids all open fights. They practice non-violence and advocate the people should learn to negotiate disagreement and problems without fighting. This is seen in the earlier novels of Deshpande when Saru, The protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya, The protagonist of *That Long Silence* and Indu, The protagonist of *Roots and Shadows* come back to their home to resolve the issues with her husband's.

In the latter phase of her writings Shashi Deshpande in her novels *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Small Remedies* (2000) tries to project her protagonists towards acceptance and reconciliation. However, She underscores the fact that there are no easy solutions to their existential predicaments. It's not easy to sustain and survive as a woman with dignity in the patriarchal and tradition bound society. The venture may land them into tremendously disastrous situation. At the same time, the message communicated by Deshpande is loud and clear that they will not lie low suffering the pangs of their situation meekly. The protagonists would wage a war against the hostile human condition in which they are found trapped as if it were a cage. In this respect her writings are akin to the vision of Anita Desai unlike that of Arundhati Roy, Shobha De and Manju Kanpur. Deshpande and Anita Desai evolve a balance between traditional demands and circumstantial compulsions and renegotiate their will to transcend the facticity, they are plagued with.

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Shashi Deshpande has shown her beacon light to overcome the women's predicament in the re-incarnation of a 'New Women' as delineated on the pages of her last novel of my study *Moving On*. She has ignited a lamp-post of relational autonomy, being situated in family and bound by relationship yet not subservient to it. They would master it while grappling with it. Manjari is an affectionate daughter, a loving sister, a caring mother and a good friend, yet she is neither imposing nor demanding and, of course, not dependent either. She is neither over protective nor allows her children to have their own spaces too. Actually, Manjari wants to tread on middle path-be yourself and allow others to be, live on your terms and let others on their own.

The long and short of the crux lies in the fact that she has intertwined two streams of her themes in one. The first one being silence, surrender and compromise whereas the second one is Rebellion reconciliation and autonomy. Life for a woman has to be lived and bewitched just like a floating lotus on the stream. Life which belongs to a given condition, yet retains its glory and splendors by being autonomous and exercising the free volition in a given situation. It is a life based on the golden mean of avoiding the polarities by retaining one's self hood. This is the New Woman she wants to reincarnate as adumbrated through her last novel *Moving On*.

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