

SEARCH FOR SELF IDENTITY IN SHASHI DESPANDE'S NOVELS

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Abstract

Literature is a river which flows on unbroken from one age to another. Writers who belong to one age continue to write far into the following age. Literary trends and movements overflow from one literary epoch into another, there is much overlapping and there are no water shutters to control it. Literature to be appreciated and enjoyed must be viewed as a whole. It is not the result of calculating the profit or loss involved in resisting the tastes of the multitude; it is the exposition of the artist and impact it is the real experience the artist. It takes up themes from everyday life and treats them in such a way that we get glimpses of a better life. All great literature is the bond that connects man with man; it renders man-made boundaries devoid of meaning, and another object of literature is to inspire and elevate man and alter the set up of his mind. Indian literature is very older than that of the Himalayas. Ancient India was highly advanced in literature, philosophy, religion, science, music and the performing arts.

Key words: Identity, Social, Literary, Sensibility and World

I. Analysis

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indian social workers have sought the liberation of woman by advocating a curtain on certain social customs such as polygamy, child marriage, Sati and Purdah, and by demanding educational and legal rights for her. They have been working even for the eradication of social evils such as dowry-deaths, female foeticide and infanticide, rape, etc. while also fighting for education, equal wages and economic independence for the women. The issues may have altered but the nature of the battle against her oppression remains the same.

Since time immemorial, woman has felt that she wants a better deal at the hands of man. Women who are conscious of their emotional needs are striving for self-fulfilment, rejecting the existing traditions and social set-up and longing for a more liberal and avoids the old traditional way of life. This sensibility for women's

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liberation finds a place even in literature. Literature is being written with a woman-centred attitude, challenging patriarchy, which is the most spread ideology of power all over the world. The development of the woman's mind asserting equality has been described by Elaine Showalter.

Showalter states that there are three phases in women's fictional writing. The first phase of male superiority was when everything revolved round men. Women too subscribed to this view taking on male pseudonyms. They "imitated the dominant male models and internalized their aesthetic and social values" (The Coming Age, 99).

In this phase many female writers wrote about woman but they wrote from a traditional point of view popular in patriarchy, not from an angle which demands equal rights and status for women as men. They imitated male authors who had cornered the woman either on this side as a mother, goddess or on the other side as seductress, temptress, etc. Women were presented in these stereotypes and not regarded as human beings or autonomous individuals.

The second phase or the phase of protest (the feminist phase) sought to look at life from the woman's point of view. The third phase (also called the displacement phase) shows the search for core identity; the quest for freedom is turned inward and aimed at the goal of self-discovery. The transition in the woman's consciousness has continued. The Indian woman is well on her way to move from the feminine or feminist phase to the phase of displacement and self-discovery.

Self-assertion seems to have become the keynote of the expressions of the evolving woman. The image of a sheltered, cribbed and confined woman has been portrayed through the works of many Indian novelists like R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and others. One such prominent writer is Shashi Deshpande. These are some of the names who have created impact in the society of male domination by taking women as women seriously in their writings. These women novelists writing in English attempt to project woman as the central figure and seem to succeed in presenting the predicament of women most effectively. Their instinctive perception of and insight into women's reactions and responses, problems and perplexities, the complex working of their inner selves, their emotional involvements and disturbances help them in portraying a life-size picture of the contemporary woman with all her longings and aspirations, hopes and frustrations. Women, responding quiveringly to the sensitive, surrounded by violent and vicious circumstances, reacting neurotically to the overpoweringly enveloping existentialist problems, begin to appear in the fictional world of these women writers. They come to a conclusion that man and woman may be different biologically but not traditionally, mentally, intellectually and wisely, and hence women also ought to be given a chance to think over themselves.

Shashi Deshpande portrays the state of women in a traditional society during the different phases of their lives : childhood, adolescence and married life. There is a struggle within her protagonists to seek their 'self' by redefining their roles and identity. They adopt a simultaneous approach of looking inward at their individual self and outward at the evolution and growth of the society and its changing trends.

Despite the educational opportunities and economic independence, women are surrounded by domestic inequality, crimes against women and the crude customs of our society. They work outside as well as inside the home. The writers of the contemporary world came out rapidly from historical romance and mythical stories and

presented the realities of the lives of women. As the image of woman, family and society kept on developing all through the years. Besides, the writer's views also were all changing, resulting in a variety of realistic images. Deshpande's contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle-class woman and she mirrors the society as she looks through it. ShashiDeshpande believes that a writer gives to society a mirror image of itself, and so has she tried to do so in her creative writing. In India, woman has been the victim of various forms of discrimination and exploitation at each and every stage of her life. She is socialised, discriminated and sidelined, so as to be inferior to a man in patriarchy. Women are caught in the spider-web grip of tradition, religion and materialistic greed and trapped in its inescapable entrails—extinctions in the womb, rejection at birth, death in infancy in childhood, discrimination in the sphere of material and psychological necessities, hard working toil in the home or the field, deprivation of childhood and education, even subjugation to traffic in the flesh—trade for money.

Deshpande's novels are primarily concerned with the plight of the modern Indian woman who is seeking to understand herself. She may have escaped from the difficulties of the traditional family and sometimes has made a love marriage, but the roles into which she tries to fit are stereotypical, none of them quite right. The setting of Deshpande's work is the middle-class India of an educated woman. Her characters attempt to make sense of their lives, to find a pattern in the past and direction for the future. Responsibility is a particularly charged issue in the world of Deshpande's passive narrators. It is possible to explain their mixed response towards responsibility in terms applicable to women everywhere. Deshpande's female characters have both a tendency to find faults with. Sometimes they feel sorry for their actions which are beyond their control. They often worry about matters of moral responsibility for someone's life or death. Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, can never escape a sense that as a child she was to blame for her younger brother's death.

The protagonists see their marriages as largely a kind of business, in which it is the woman's job to support the man in his dealings with submissively in this world. This is true of Jaya in *That Long Silence*. She feels she should keep some of the duties of Mohan's shady business practices, since she shared in his desire for greater wealth.

The desire for loneliness is a particularly charged theme in Deshpande's writing. In a society in which there are so many defined, culturalized agreements among the members of the family, Deshpande's narrators react by taking a cold rational view of families. It is not that ShashiDeshpande has voluntarily made women the focus in all her novels. She, in fact wanted to project the whole society in her writings but somehow, as the characters took shape, the women characters brought out to be the protagonists. Deshpande never writes with the purpose of propaganda. Her main concern is human psyche. The main themes found in ShashiDeshpande's novels are : inner conflict and search for identity, parent-child relationship and concept of marriage and sex. Above all, the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman holds a great fascination for ShashiDeshpande. She deals with the inner working of the female psyche.

The novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence* are very close and similar to one another at the thematic level. The basic theme around which the plots revolve is a middle-class graduate woman caught between the modern, trendy things and traditional ones. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* examines the complex relationship between a successful, frustrated and irritated husband, just because the wife has got a better job than that of him. It is obvious that the tension between them leads to their separation. In *That Long Silence* Jaya, the protagonist is so much

disturbed about the whole set up and the happenings around that she finds no other way but silence as her means of communication.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu, a young ambitious girl, working for a women's magazine, is confused about her concept of love, marriage, career and her own life. She marries for love but is herself not sure whether it is real love or just an attempt to show the elder people how correct she was in taking a decision for herself.

ShashiDeshpande, through her creative skills, has served as a committee for women, by encouraging honest self expression unrestricted by pre-existing standards unknown to female culture. She has provided in her female protagonists the role models and has induced a positive sense of feminine identity by showing them moving towards self-explanation and self-realization. The present study on the personal view of ShashiDeshpande's protagonists and their quest for self shows a similar pattern of journey to their self-realization.

The Dark Holds No Terrors traces the heroine Sarita's growth to womanhood through a bitter, claustrophobic girlhood, followed by an industrious studentship, country type romance, and finally, a terrible wifehood. The protagonist Saru, grows to womanhood, and, in the process, discovers herself, that is, her identity, by understanding what it means to be a woman. After being a failure all long, she finally emerges victorious with the discovery of her identity. When the realization that she is her own refuge dawns on her, she experiences a "dreamlike" sensation, "a feeling of weightlessness", and, consequently, "her fears fade into insubstantial ghosts" (219). She discovers her true self, her real identity, and feels so quite and composed that she admits to her being "the guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife" (220), and accepts all "these selves to become whole again" (220). The lesson that she draws from her self-discovery is, "My life is my own" (220), and she is relieved to find "the connecting link" (220) in this hard learned lesson. She is now convinced that Indian women, especially career women, have to learn to reconcile in their womanhood, the various damaged and conflictual roles that they are called upon to play in their day-to-day life. But to arrive at such an understanding, Saru had to undergo a lot of struggles.

The question arises out of her story is, why did she not step out of the story when her romance had become rape, the rescuer had become the Villain? Why did she not speak the word that would dispel the illusion of normality and let the loveness, williancy husband meet his known or unknown twin, the rapist? The moment of such utterance often surfaced, but always Saru let the opportunity pass her by. Why did not she take an initiative earlier, to redraw the boundaries of their mutual fiction? The simple answer is that she lacked the courage to be the lone voice revealing the masks and myths of convention and mistaken convenience. The dark holds no terrors is what she liked to have told to her frightened little brother, Dhruva, who had habitually sought refuge in her bed at night. But he had gone alone into his darkness when he drowned, while she could not face the gloom cast by his death and the accusation assigned to her for it, nor the darkness of the recurrent rapes she endured. Denied public utterance, the guilt retreated into the nightmare, and eventually achieved complete repression only to surprise her at the most unexpected times.

But in reality enlightenment dawns upon her at the end of the novel. She emerges as a self confident individual who is no more afraid to live like a woman in the Indian male dominated society, characterized by over riding patriarchy. As educated, well-read, well-informed and professionally competent, she has come to understand these new avenues and has become aware of the plight of women in the male-dominated Indian society. At the same time she has grown a new

woman in herself. She is able to discern aggressive feminism, and is doomed to fail. She is in fact against generalizing women's problems and seeking their solutions through defiant feminist means. Such generalizations are found to obliterate women's right to individuality, she concludes.

The story of Saru is thus an evolution of a middle class Brahmin girl into a successful career woman in whom the female roles of the daughter, the mother, the wife, and the doctor metamorphose into a strong woman, who though not a self-declared feminist, finds that women are not inferior to men. The refugee fleeing from mysterious struggles of life, has, in the end, to turn inwards for refuge. As a fully evolved woman, Saru becomes conscious of the fact that "[a female] can be dominated, she can submit, and yet hold something of herself in reserve" (85) that prevents "erosion and self-destruction" (85). In other words, she discovers and decides to act upon what being a woman is. She realizes, "I have been my own enemy" (221), and learns from her own experiential reality the philosophical truth: "If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk" (220). Therefore, she decides to accompany her husband to Bombay.

The Penguin Books, India quoted when publishing *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in the year 2003;

The Dark Holds No Terrors by ShashiDeshpande is a tremendously powerful portrayal of one woman's fight to survive in a world that offers no easy outs. The story line is mainly on the waking up to the releasing knowledge that there is more to life than dependency on husband or parents and social acceptance. The woman is self-sufficient in all aspects and in this story the protagonist is on the process of searching that.

Her self-discovery thus frees her from her fear of the horrors of the dark.

One of the most impressive narratives of ShashiDeshpande is the story of Jaya as a writer in *That Long Silence*. Her disguise as Mohan's wife amounted to erasing her real self and its inventions from her writing, because of their evident differences with the public image she was required to sustain. Jaya had systematically insulted and alienated herself from everything and everybody that posed the deep threat to the peace of her home. Her absorption into the family-fold is so total that from a fiercely independent girl, she gradually deteriorates into the "stereotype of a woman: nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support" (76).

In the one published instance when she stepped out of line, Mohan was rebuking because he read her story as self-revelatory and therefore a breaking in their marriage. For him she had no autonomous self in excess of her identity as wife and mother and her writing was to confirm to that. Thus the linguistic rights inscribed in her marriage to Mohan were clearly to be employed at his disposal.

Hence Jaya writes within her boundaries by which she can cater to the society's expected image of a woman without disturbing intensity and nakedness of emotions that the society feels haunted by. Such an act of intellectual dishonesty to her true self propels the novel to become something of a long, lyrical, fractured interior monologue on Jaya's part, on the meanings of womanhood in the given social and cultural context. Her compliant writing is announced in her assumption, under her husband's encouragement, Seeta, doing a writers role, who writes humorous pieces for a popular daily.

Thus, in this novel, ShashiDeshpande throws light on the gender conflict which is not waged on the issue of whether women may write, but on what they will write. ShashiDeshpande places the problem of gender inequality, not on role-playing in itself, but on the equality of speaking or expressing rights attached to these

roles. Another most structured pattern of Indian society is the role assigned to man and to woman. Woman is the servant, man the master. Woman is the sufferer, man the authorizer. Woman is of the home, man of the world. Jaya wonders at the belief that wifehood is "holy" and widowhood is "unholy", the belief that women's main functions in life are those that originate and emerge from the womb. These equations are found commonly in all sections of Indian society.

We come to understand from such instances that the novelist knows her ground thoroughly – the middle classes, housewives and their despairs, the fear of closest fight, showy marriage, the underestimate of woman's talent, not brought about by any overt malice but merely through a dead weight of Indian tradition and the sheer bitchiness of Indian milieu. Deshpande in this novel, *That Long Silence*, on one level presents the condition of the woman in Indian society – her role model and how the different types of women act out their roles with their silence. The title emphasizes the silence that the protagonist Jaya wishes to break and to search her own self, her wife – role and her real individual self.

At another level, she examines the role of Sita and Gandhari and Maitreyee, at still another level, it is the modern convent – educated English speaking woman into the darkness of life – the dissatisfaction with her role model in marriage and her agony over her own acceptance, though unconsciously of two standards for man and woman in society. What happens in Deshpande's fiction is the woman's western education awakens in her a desire for freedom and individuality which is resisted in a traditional society, and this makes her alienated and dissatisfied. The marital relationship too, has its share of overt and covert manifestations of repressions. Both men and women are socialized into accepting the male's superiority. The day-to-day struggle on the domestic front is the most intangible part of the Indian woman's existence and contributes in good measure to her suffering.

This novel written in the first person narrative enables the reader go on a roller coaster ride in the guise of narrator's stream of consciousness. Individual tragedies are woven into the pictorial design of the novel. It talks of locked doors and fears that turn into walls in a woman's world. There are no easy solutions, with validation of the struggle at the end of the tunnel – Just a thorough introspection into the female condition. Deshpande spent out everything into measure – not a word, not an incident that could be considered out of place.

The woman as silent sufferer, forever waiting for creative and emotional release in the opening out of the womb in the case of the ordinary, or the flowering of artistic expression in the case of the different woman, seems to be a role that designs in the fiction of Indian women writers. In Shashi Deshpande's novels the agony of waiting offers the tension and the complication, while the suffering offers the fictional material. The resolution always comes forth at the end with the protagonist emerging as a new woman with fresh perspectives aided by self-realization which help her to face the society boldly. Looking to the past she prepares herself for the future to erase that long silence and make life possible.

Through her portrayal of the Indian middle – class woman's existence in India, Deshpande not only presents an insight into patriarchal values, but also prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. By tradition she means those values of security and harmony that symbolize the Indian way of life, while modernity basically refers to the assertion of the independent, individual self. Her protagonists, at the start of their quest for self, find that they have passively accepted their

socially accepted roles. Deshpande advocates that to realize herself, the woman must be true to her own self. The woman needs to venture out of the familial framework, to discover her potential as an individual and give outlet to her pent up feelings and self. At the same time, she need not deny her marriage or family.

Dearth of emotions and spiritual oneness between husband and wife is highlighted in these novels. Marriage cannot bring happiness to both the spouses unless they withdraw their ego and merge into each other. But here we find that neither of the women protagonists is emotionally united with her husband and there is a difference in attitude towards life. In a moving analysis of women in juxtaposition of the traditions and cultures of the past and the modern-day situations where old values are constantly being changed and questioned, Deshpande concludes that they are limited by fear. It is their cowardice and the suppression of anger that causes marital tensions. It is not the husband, but marriage itself which makes them considerate. Given the widespread cultural degradation of women, Deshpande still seems to think that any marriage is better than none. So, Rajaram the violent husband of Tara is worth saving from death, because he stands between her general commodification. The girl whom Jaya sees in the churchgate bus station, reduced in public to a puppet of two men in return for a puff of cigarette, symbolizes the cultural construction of women. They are blank pages, which men may own and on which they may write on their choice.

At such cross-roads, the choice that both women make is the conventional one. They resolve the conflict by bringing about a unification of their fragmented psyches. Their desire is to continue in their married state, with the hope that their husbands too would change. These novels end with an optimistic note with the hope of some positive action in the future. For example, Saru is ready to talk to her husband and start their life anew, and Jaya interprets Mohan's letter in positive terms and hopes for the better. Though in the beginning, they question the social customs, due to their sensual urge towards the traditions, they finally try their best to conform to their roles, but of course with a new awareness and approach.

Jaya moves towards an acceptance of mutual responsibility in marriage. Realizing how her behaviour as her role as a middle-class wife has helped trap them both, Jaya changes her idea of family roles. She understands that she considered her husband a "sheltering tree" from whom she will get protection. His attitude reduced her awareness of her own responsibility. Finally, however, she rejects the bullock images as a way of finds falls with them to continue their same mistakes, to don their same roles. Instead she hopes to be herself, not "Mohan's wife", to be able "to erase the silence" between them. In order to have a well balanced conjugal life, it is imperative that husband and wife be at par with each other. They should complement and contribute each other. Further, they should know each other well. It is this harsh reality that ShashiDeshpande tries to project through the female protagonists who, at the end, choose to break their long silence of the past.

Here we understand that Deshpande's feminism is not rebellious or anti-male domination. She is firm in her conviction that in India, particularly, feminism cannot be 'anti-male' since both man and woman have to communicate and work towards "a better, more meaningful, compassionate relationship" (*No Woman*, 12). For Deshpande, feminism means an improved relationship between man and woman, an erasure of gender discrimination and all oppressive practices against a woman from "female foeticide and unequal pay to dowry and rape" (12). She finds freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. The

predicament of Deshpande's heroines, is one of identifying their potential as opposed to the imposed social roles and of integrating this speak feature within the norms, so as to be whole persons.

Shashi Deshpande makes a note of realism and optimism in her portrayal of the Indian middle class educated women. Her gift to now a day's women has been to write novels which show women engaged in the complex and difficult social and psychological problem of defining the authorized self. But unlike the women protagonists of Anita Desai's novels who in their quest for self lose their ability to live in the community and maintain human relationships, limiting themselves to loose their individual freedom which they loose their identity. Deshpande's women characters seek their self within the ambit of family and relationships. The women in her novels are neither demi-goddesses nor strong-minded super-heroines. They are normal educated middle-class women who are independent to some extent but vulnerable at the same time because of an inalienable bond of tradition.

Her protagonists are not very courageous heroes or heroines but women struggling to raise their own voice. Jaya in *That Long Silence* and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* continually search to define themselves and ask themselves if there is any 'self' to be found. Jaya sees herself in two pictures: Jaya, who is searching for an individual although she does not know what she really wants; and Suhasini, who is a soft, smiling, calm mother. Both Jaya and Saru do not claim for themselves a privileged place and neither do they want to be the focus of the happenings. Deshpande is deeply concerned about the marginal status of women, and her novels explore the patriarchal social set up of India and her protagonists located within the social boundary, reach out to define the 'self' in an attempt to free themselves. In their quest for 'self', each protagonist breaks free from certain religious and moral codes that determine and undermine a woman's spirit and deny her an identity of her own.

Though Deshpande's novels are about women, project their problems, let the world know the problems that women of today are facing, yet cannot be categorized among feminist writings. Hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the reason for all problems. Rather her writing deals with the inner mind of the women. Shashi Deshpande has projected this aspect of Indian women with more sensitivity and instinctive understanding. The projection of the women world in her novels is more reliable, authentic and realistic. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is certainly a protest novel especially in the Indian context in the sense that it reacts against the traditional concept that everything in a girl's life [is] shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male" (148). The protagonist has more reason to protest as her husband basks in her glory by day and takes vengeance on her at night. There are references to the women's liberation ideologue Betty Freidan and Virginia Woolf's idea of a woman's right to "a room of her own". Whether it is gratuitously referred to or introduced with a purpose, the strength of Deshpande's novel is that she has not let it get trapped in the framework of clichés borrowed from the women's liberation movement in the west.

In their formal characteristics, both *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* bear many similarities to recent definitions of what constitutes "Writing as a woman". Both *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (Deshpande's first novel published in 1980) and *That Long Silence* (Deshpande's fifth novel published in 1988) locate their protagonists at a critical juncture when the fictions and roles by which they have lived, no longer reduces. Saru's ostensible success as a doctor, her middle-class life, material acquisitions and an outwardly stable marriage cover the sordid and degrading actuality of recurrent rape by her husband. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya the narrator, finds that she has to re-evaluate her comfortable person as wife and mother of a middle-class family when these are threatened as a

result of her husband's involvement in fraudulent activities. In both novels, the change of the physical locale is an augury of more fundamental changes. The protagonist symbolically returns to the past by visiting her family during which time she is separated from her husband. In her psychological journey the protagonist recognises her relationships with her family, reexamined herself by sifting her virtues from her flaws and finally makes peace with the family. On achieving the self-hood, the protagonist returns to her profession with greater dedication, using it as a means to reach out to other, not very fortunate women. This is not a negative, but a positive end to the novels. When the protagonist returns, it is with the determination to be an individual and not a mere role. Saru's return to her father's home and her consequent self-revelation and Jaya's return to the Dadar flat where her familial ghosts existed, are evident of this.

Saru and Jaya are confronted with an unexamined guilt over a past incident, a vague feeling of having disturbed another being. This guilt is brought to the surface. There is, however, no simple resolution, no answer to the question; life must continue, in spite of conflicts and uncertainty. Both Saru and Jaya seek an inner peace and a more mature relationship with others. They both are, however, in many ways dependent upon the opinions of their friends and relatives. Men, however, are usually respected. There is often a male figure, differing greatly from the husband, through whom the character imaginatively lives out her fantasies of a different life, as he seems to her, less controlled by convention. Jaya's father's proclamation of her being a triumphant one; Kamat's moral support and his understanding of her; Saru's father's permission to her doing medicine and his advice to her that she must face the problems in her marriage and not run away as she did in the past – all are candid examples which shape the protagonists' minds in some way.

While both Saru and Jaya initially have schoolgirl romantic ideas of love, they quickly change their attitude towards their husbands. They think marriage is a kind of business, in which it is the duty of women to support the man in his endeavors with a hostile world. This is very evident in Jaya's character, who feels she should bear some of the responsibility for Mohan's shady business practices, since she shared in his desire for greater wealth. Besides, it also applies to Saru, who earns most of the money in her household, but who feels guilty because her position and income degrade his self-confidence. Deshpande's works are particularly effective in her analysis of the different types of misunderstandings, emotions, rationalizations and that make the relationship between a married couple.

Both these novels come as witness to the fact that woman suffers as wife owing to her emotional home-loving heart, soft nature. She may try to rebel as an individual but it gives her immense pain to be away from home as wife and mother. She wants to stay at home and accept the sufferings, whatever it may be. She is able to face problems at her home silently. It is difficult for an Indian woman to rebel against her husband, because the code of submission, sacrifice and chastity is dinned into her ears and imprinted on her mind from childhood. That is why we find both Jaya and Saru kept confrontation with their husbands at sea. her aloneness.

The narrative in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* fluctuates between 'She' and 'I' which are the two facets of the same self. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, has more than one name, confusing her search for a stable identity; her memories, dreams, possible delusions work against the creation of a linear story. The narrator's visit to their parental home triggers off memories, so that often there is a constant oscillation of their human mind. Their narrative is what the psychoanalysts call "a talking cure". Memories flood in often linked by the vaguest association of ideas and each incident, a little story in itself, gives a new perspective and recreates the speaker. The past is a story of mundane matters that make up the total involvement in the life of a woman, the relationships which define her role, the

expectations and hopes that are relevant in the context, the frustrations and disappointments of unfulfilled selfhood – all these make up the rich texture of the stories. It is by a process of going over and interpreting these memories that the protagonists create a world of understanding, truer relationship and a complete self. The past they revive and relive modifies earlier perspectives and necessitates a new way of looking at things. Deshpande has woven in the narrator's recapitulation of her life and experiences, sights and sounds, fables, sayings, internalized codes about the place of women, recollections and parallelisms with varied myth.

It is the protagonist whose voice is traditionally muted, who tells her own story. She speaks of the world as she sees and experiences. Her world where relationships and incidents, norms and values are interpreted in terms of how she understands them and is affected by them. Thus her understanding and experience are the determining reality. The unpredictable outline gains enough form in the telling to become the wholly believable story of any of our friends to whom we would recommend a good psychiatrist. Sheer technique makes for a lot of interest though it includes a lot of flashbacks and flash-forwards, of which dreams, delusions and fears form the major part. The reader's interest in filling in the jigsaw-puzzle is vastly increased by seeing how well, in fact, it all fits together, in spite of very few associations. The ease in reading is also helped by the author's no-nonsense sense everyday Indian English, neither bookish on the one hand nor ungrammatical on the other.

It is perhaps not coincidental that almost all of these fully-rounded private lives that are foregrounded as the principal motifs in Deshpande's novels belong to women, who are well-educated, sometimes professionally well-established, often torn between the visible and invisible networks of tradition that center on the overarching family – structures these women are part of on one hand, and a liberal bourgeois modernity on the other, neither of which is spared a persistent critique. The most crucial site of this dilemma is the web of patriarchy, both obviously constructed and delicately spun, that these female protagonists and the host of other women characters variously battle, aid, rebel against or are complicit with, with an endless range of responses – anger, despair, resentment, resignation, reflection, acceptance, even perpetuation. The lives of the protagonists often move back and forth between the turmoil-ridden spaces of home and family networks on onehand and large public or professional spheres on the other. Deshpande shows the various stages of a painful adjustment in the protagonists' lives. We see them through a complete range of emotions, from shock, numbness, a shattered consciousness to grief, pain, a muted and humbled acceptance of a loss set against the impersonal, uncaring, business – as – usual life surrounding them. What is remarkable is the way Deshpande makes us question our everyday existence and helps us see, through the evolution of well-etched characters, the frailties and possibilities of human life. Deshpande has addressed various social problems of modern India and gender issues invariably find a prominence in her writing.

Deshpande is known to have the veracity of a social historian, but also has the skill to use the same to subvert stereotypes and to uncover the personhood of women. So unerring is Deshpande's grip on social reality that whatever comes through as 'gendered', does so as natural, almost undistorted record of reality. She tells it like it is, without lapsing into sectarian shrillness.

Although the characters with whom she is concerned are women, and although she is aware of the particularities of women's experiences, her work is not limited to themes of the relationship between the sexes. As she herself says:

"I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men"
(*Literature*, 8-14).

Deshpande's novels are about women making, taking or losing spaces says Jasbir Jain, the famous critic. Given the tangled terrain of a gendered reality, there are territories to be fought for, territories to be won and territories to be guarded as their turf, if the women have to preserve their self. He further feels that in this embattled field, women have to struggle with not just men but with women as well, for some women are pitted against women. The woman with a strong sense of the self, will still find herself up against the granite wall of a community that forces her to first qualify as someone 'useful'. To carve a space for herself that goes beyond this domestic utility, a woman has to be brave enough to give up what does not matter any more. She needs to cross over hurdles that belittle her worth and maim her potential in the name of social "responsibility" (*Gendered Realities*, 318).

Thus, perhaps the writer has tried to convey to the society that the need of the time, in this transitional phase, is not a total revolt but a gradual change in the society for which everyone has to put some effort to bridge the gap between the old and the new generation. Really, the need of the hour is to identify the nature of women within a masculine ideology, to give place to the liberal views of equality and the leveling of differences between the sexes. Men will no longer be wolves, should the woman decide not to play the lamb anymore: both belong to the same species: both have to play the ball to keep the tournament of life running. The woman of today is determined not to let others script her story; she is in the process of being reborn.

The difference in philosophical stance between the two novels may be attributed to the very different initiatives required by **the woman as text**, who is written and directed by others and **the woman as writer**, who is capable of creating her own destiny. The idea that woman's only career should be her family is now rejected by the up-coming girls who are very much influenced by factors such as education, the spread of scientific ideas, the growing impact of other cultures on the individuals, and the availability of a vast body of literature.

Though most of the educated working women still give preference to marriage and their family life, which according to ShashiDeshpande should not be neglected, the wish to be economically independent, to have an individual identity in the society is more prominent among the majority of women than was found earlier.

II. Conclusion

Deshpande's books are not merely for women readers – though that is a large section of the population – but for all married people, and those interested in human psychology. Her works are very relevant, meaningful and extremely thought provoking. She is in the midst of formulating a philosophy of coming to terms with life, religion and tradition in the twentieth century context. It is the particular strength of the realistic novel to evoke through its picture of a few individual lives, a sense of a whole milieu, its ethos and ambience, its physical and social environment. The honesty and compassion of her vision lifts her book above the common place. It is in this respect that she progresses from the particular to the universal. The protagonist's recall of traditional precepts from *The Mahabharata* and *The Bhagwad Gita*, emphasizing larger essential questions is of a piece with this. The intrinsic aloneness of human beings (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*), the recognition of responsibility in choice (*That Long Silence*) and the meaning of Dharma in one's life (*The Binding Vine*) are

serious metaphysical issues that subtly envelop ShashiDeshpande's works and take them beyond feminist concerns. Deshpande's human-centredness makes her more than just a significant woman writer of our times.

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