

Women of Shashi Deshpande: Dark sides and Disappointments

Dr.T.Kavitha

D.H.T.,M.A.,B.Ed.,Ph.D, Department of English(S&H), Assistant Professor, Kalaignarkaranidhi Institute of Technology, Coimbatore-641402

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is one writer who presents as a bridge between the past and the present of Indian Writing in English. This author conveys the deeper aspects of a woman's life. But every time she brings out a book, her mysterious side gets revealed. The author's sufferings and losses find an incomparable place in the narration. There could be different reasons for the writers projecting their darker sides and the purpose to share their regrets and sufferings play a prime role. The darker sides stand firmer than the joyous moments of the narrative. Shashi Deshpande is one whose novels have lots of similarities with one another. Moreover, very few Indian writers focus on the disappointments and the sufferings associated with them. Writers like Chetan Bhagat never spend their time on those darker sides of life.

Shashi Deshpande's novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *The Binding Vine* and *That Long Silence* have disappointment and deprivation in them, loneliness is predominant and omnipresent, and above all, there is a touch of dissatisfaction throughout these works. It is appealing to come across the frustration aspect as it enables the reader to understand how the characters bear the sorrow and the related sufferings. The emotional approach associated with death exposes the power of women, and Shashi Deshpande tries to present the suffering women as stoic personalities. More than this, only the characters suffer death-related deprivations while other characters that play lesser roles are left alone.

One factor that makes increases the dark sides of Shashi Deshpande's novels is that the language of silence is dominant despite the noise of the characters. Critics often write about the 'silence' that recurs in almost all her novels. Ironically, her first novel, titled *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), has this overbearing silence that makes the novel shady.

Silence has always been a powerful tool in various ways. For some, it is a symbol of power while for others it is a symbol of weakness. The present study feels that there is always a sense of frustration in the silence of Shashi Deshpande's novels. This frustration is powerful. Usually, the build-up or so-called former home for the protagonists has inimitable darkness in it.

The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence and Moving On. The Dark Holds No Terrors is a wonderful novel that assays to portray the journey of a woman who aspires to be happy through financial, emotional and social equations. It is a story that reflects the lifestyle of a woman who lived in the middle of twentieth century when women were not much free and in fact were under the yoke of masculine gender. Saru is the main protagonist of this work who returns to her parental home after a long time. Saru's return is significant as she had kept away even from her mother's funeral. Her relationship with her mother was a tough thing as the latter very much believed that she was responsible for her younger son's death. From then on, she was too harsh towards Saru and both of them disliked each other without any restriction. Her return to her parental house is not a happy one as her father Baba receives her with coldness and in an unemotional way. Surprisingly, another young boy Madhav whose father is a priest stays with her Baba and it was interesting for her to see Baba showing much affection on this boy who was doing his college. Though initially she dislikes him, she started enjoying his companionship in the course of time. Her prolonged stay was due to her troubled marital relationship with her husband Manohar alias Manu as he was shortly called by people. Manu was financially an unproductive guy who lived under the shadow of his wife. He tormented her sexually that forced her to hate him from the bottom of her heart that she as a girl sought affection from her mother but did

not get even an ounce of love. After marriage the same thing continued as there too she was left unloved and uncared except for money and sex.

So she leaves everything and takes refuge in her father's home. Hereto, she recalls her past memories and lives a life of comfort after which she returns to her home for the sake of her children. Thus this novel has all the potential to be a great work. The role of her mother and her brother play a vital role in the progress of the story. The death of Dhruva and the darkness associated with his memories are the things that would be discussed and analysed in this research work.

That Long Silence (1989) is the next novel that would be taken up for study. It is a work that fetched the famous Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 1990. Unlike the previous work where Saru alias Sarita is a professional, here the protagonist Jaya is a housewife. She is not an ordinary housewife as she exhibits her stoicism in multifarious ways. Jaya resembles the heroine of *The Duchess of Malfi* in her stoicism. She is the wife of Mohan to whom she got married at an early age. Their domicile keeps changing as they had to shift to different places due to her better half's working schedule. The couple is blessed with two children Rahul and Rati and their smooth life gets derailed as Mohan gets caught in some business malpractice. So he leaves to a distant place for a reasonable period of time to escape from probe. His absence allows Jaya to rethink her past life in a nostalgic manner. She was a journalist once and this enables her to jot down her life in order to put full stop to the "Long Silence." These writing abilities are with her even before her marriage. But her dreams about the married life get shattered as she marries Mohan. Their marriage was devoid of love and feelings. It was more of a mechanical attachment. He discourages her to write and her work was all about looking after the children like a typical Indian woman. She did not have any outside contact as she was confined to her familial life without interest. She felt the domination of her husband throughout the work and even in his absence. She always felt the power of his presence. She was unable to be free. Finally she decides to transform herself as women generally do regularly at different stages of their life.

Moving On is another work that deals with the journey of a woman. Manjari or Jiji Ahuja as she is called is the protagonist who is known for her complexity. She oscillates between the demands and reality of life. She

is more modern and bolder than other female characters of Shashi Deshpande as she breaks the rules of the past and moves forward with vigour. Throughout the novel, there are two constant voices of which one is Jiji's and the other belongs to her father Badri Narayan who is dead. But he still speaks through the diaries he had written. From her childhood she was brought up like a typical Shashi Deshpande's woman, who experiences a protective and submissive life. But Jiji becomes impatient at a particular stage of her life as she revolts against the norms which naturally cause problems with her parents. Her cousin Raja on the one hand is a clear minded guy who comes up drastically in her life. She is rather close to him and finds extreme peace and comfort in his presence.

Throughout the novel, she struggles to maintain her equanimity. She is frequently at crossroads unable to decide her future course of action. Her husband Shyam is almost a non-entity and it is his death that gets noticed by the readers. Her father was a doctor in layman's term and technically speaking he is an anatomist who introduced the importance and uses of the bones to his daughter. Jiji was very close with him and after his death she was left without company. There are other characters in the novel that are equally important like Gayathri, her aunt, her mother and her daughter Sachi. Her home is bequeathed to her daughter Sachi and it is in this place does she come across her father's diary that makes her relive her past. At a particular point, she decides to learn new things through Raja like driving a car and excelling. Thus Jiji's life is clearly portrayed by the author in her own way. It is not only these novels but a few other works of Deshpande need to be summarized to have a better understanding of the author and her state of mind. The work *Small Remedies* is a recent one in the chronology. It was written in the year 2000 and the protagonist Madhu narrates the whole story. She introduces a couple of women who had inspired and had a hold on her. Her relative Leela and her neighbour Savitribai are the ones who are mentioned by the narrator. As usual, this novel of Shashi Deshpande too moves between the past and the present and at times even to the future. The narrator feels the pulse of time and works on to solve the problems of life. She feels that there are many sweet and sour memories in her life of which she wanted to preserve some while she works to dump some unwanted ones.

The work is all about the narrator Madhu's life and her experiences though it begins by mentioning that it is "Son's Story." Madhu is married and begets a son by name Aditya. Then life goes quite smooth till they visit a painting exhibition when Aditya was around seventeen years old. At the exhibition, she is impressed by a painting and it really moves her and she even comes to know that the painter died recently. The excitement caused by the painting makes her confide about her personal affair. Actually, her father's friend had a sexual affair with her when she was young. Though the fault was fully his, she innocently tells about it to her husband Som who takes it in a negative way. Their smooth relationship cracks and he starts suspecting her.

Frequent quarrels erupt between the husband and wife which in a way affect their son Aditya. Aditya under the mental stress leaves the house never to return again. Soon they come to know that he has been killed in a bomb blast. In order to divert from her sorrow, she writes a biography of Savitribai and Leela who are women of extraordinary strength. They break the tradition to fulfill their desires. She diverts herself and enjoys happiness in small remedies like songs, books and etc. Thus the author has a whole lot of works and a detailed analysis of few selected ones could unfurl the hidden aspects of the author herself.

CONCLUSION

Though critics keep pondering about feminism and other feminine aspects of the author's works, there are certain inherent features that add the needed weight age to her works. As a person, an artist needs to be doubly sensitive and Shashi Deshpande is no way weak in her dimension. Her sensitivity is such that her personal experiences have settled quite strongly in her mind that she is unable to unseat the thoughts that stick strongly in her works. Every work of Shashi Deshpande has similar elements, though in different settings and the present research has tried to collect the fragments of Shashi Deshpande's novels which are omnipresent in her works. The present research is an attempt to understand the impact of death on the protagonists of the author's novels. Likewise, why there is a sad darkness pervading the parts and the whole of the novel and the isolation experienced by the characters even in the presence of a large number of people have also come under the discussion. The

purpose as already stated is not just to mention the presence of death, darkness and isolation but to probe the inter relation and the impact of the same on the storyline. Even if it is an inherent thing, it is an example of the author's dominance in the course of the story that does not allow a free flow for imagination. The study has made a concrete effort to analyse three major works of Shashi Deshpande which abound in the factors that are mentioned above. The selected works are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *The Binding Vine*, and *Moving On*. Though the works differ based on the year of publication in reality, there is an unseen connection between the three. Shashi Deshpande might have been impacted by her husband's profession and it would have made her deal with death in all her novels.

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