



## HUMAN BONDAGE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S A MATTER OF TIME

Mangayarkkarasi K.S\*      Dr. Shobha Ramaswamy\*

\*Assistant Professors of English, Kongunadu Arts Science College, Coimbatore.

The contribution of women writers to the validity and variety of the Indian novel is considerable. Fiction by women writers provides penetrating insights and a great deal of human understanding. Indian women were covered with thick layers of traditions, convention, ignorance and silence in literature as well as in life. But they emerged as new-being with the western education and culture. Curiosity and anxieties of women's life give scope for new feminine literary tradition.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in English. Deshpande begins her writing with short stories which later developed into writing novels. She has written nine novels, some of them are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *If I Die Today*, *Come Up and Be Dead*, *Roots and Shadows*, *That Long Silence*, *The Binding Vine*, *A Matter of Time*. Deshpande expresses the position of woman in a patriarchal society. The confrontation with the truth of self is a painful process, involving a prolonged phase to intense introspection. It is clear that the emphasis is not on the development of the relationship but on the forces which work together to make the relationship an effectual exhibition of togetherness.

Her feminism is peculiar in the sense it is born out of the dilemma of Indian women placed between two controversies, tradition and modernity. Woman has been a silent sufferer as she has to play different roles like daughter, mother, sister, wife and she has never been able to claim her individuality. In her works, she concentrates on the place of women in society, their wavering thoughts due to the conflict between tradition and modernity. The themes of the novel, *A Matter of Time* are silence, gender differences, passive suffering and familial relationships. Generally in all her works, she explores women's psyche. The present novel deals with human bonds and bondages. The outstanding theme of this novel is human-relationship through which the author explores the inner life of the protagonist Sumi and her emotional isolation from her family is also echoed.

The story revolves around the absence of the principal character Gopal. Gopal, the respectable professor, devoted husband, caring father walks out on his wife and three daughters. Gopal's words reveal his detachment towards life, "I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on" (41). Gopal's absence in the family creates an inimitable tension in the family. This story is set against the backdrop of the sad tale of Kalyani and Shripati in the 'Big House'. It is the house where Sumi returns with Aru, Charu and Seema when Gopal leaves them.

Shripati suspects Kalyani of purposely losing the mentally retarded child whom she found difficult to manage. Kalyani and her daughters did not see Shripati for nearly two months as he went on searching around the city like a madman for his lost son. Even though he was distraught and frantic for his son, it was an act of public desertion as he left Kalyani and her daughters on the platform, surrounded by curious strangers. The lack of communication in the marital relationship between Kalyani and Shripati is result of his punishment and it end up in 'Kalyani - silent sufferer.' The punishment of being a psychic wounded person is due to lose of her son, a male heir, so she abandoned her motherhood as well as her right as a wife. Kalyani's sufferings are not numbered, even difficult to understand the reason,

They know nothing of the reason for the marriage, of Sripathi's reluctance, of Manorama's appeal to Sripathi's sense of gratitude, of the cruelty that made Kalyani accept a feared uncle as a husband. They have no idea of the hopelessness that lay within the relationship that doomed it from the start. (143)

For nearly thirty-five years she remains passive silent sufferer. The oppression of the patriarchy sentence women to the margin of silence dreads Kalyani. This spark light of patriarchy influenced the successive generations. Sumi like her mother is a silent sufferer, but she has not questioned her oppressor, Gopal. Kalyani never wants her daughter to experience the similar fate. So, she approaches Gopal and tries to convince him as he is a generous man and she thought her humble pleading will not hurt him, she says:

I know she was careless, I know she didn't bother too much about her home, But, Gopala how could she have known what being a good wife means when she never saw her mother being one? I thought her nothing, it's all my fault, Gopala, forgive me and don't punish her for it. (47)

Deshpande's fiction is an example of the ways in which a girl child's particular position, social reality and identity and psychological growth determine her personality. Deshpande's daughters are more attached to their mothers, Sumi's eldest daughter in particular, seeking to protect her mother from the consequences of her father's desertion. Aru does not want her mother to suffer alone, so she decided to consult a lawyer about her father's actions and is advised that there is little the law



can do for her. She visits her father and argues, ‘Why did you marry? Why did you have children?’ (65). It is ironical that both Shripati and Gopal have taken sanyas, both of them have detached from house-hold responsibilities before they have fulfilled their duties. In doing so, they have left the house-hold duties to the women. Sumi tried to rescue herself by indulging in gardening, learning the scooter, becoming economically independent and by writing plays.

At the end of the novel, Sumi and her father, Shripati, are killed in an accident, when Kalyani acquire knowledge about Sumi’s death and she cries out “I lost my child Goda” (244). Aru has taken her promise of being Kalyani’s daughter, her son seriously. She has taken upon the responsibilities of the house, doing all the things that have to be done. She considers herself as a rope-walker, holding the weight of her grief in her two hands, not as a burden, but to balance herself. Aru had rushed to Kalyani and kneeling by her huddled body says, “Amma, I’m here, I’m your daughter, Amma, I’m your son, I’m here with you...” (233)

After the death of Sumi when Gopal tries to console Aru, she tells Gopal, “Yes, Papa, you go. We’ll be alright, we’ll be quite alright, don’t worry about us” (246). Gopal realises that he has no a place in his family as his daughters have shaped new lives, Aru, the eldest looking after her widowed grandmother, Charu, the second pursuing her medical career and Seema, the youngest self-centred.

But Shashi Deshpande ends the novel on a tragic note. The reunion of Gopal and Sumi is an unusual one. When he returns she neither cries to him nor abuses him or does she ask him for any explanations, for her experiences and predicaments have taught her that ‘happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain’. The death of Sumi and her father Shripathi in a road accident, gives philosophical dimension to the novel.

Sumi, a deserted wife is fearless in her hard times evolves herself from bitterness linked up with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. Sumi’s self-confidence makes her conscious of female sexuality, when she is given to understand that neither the stronger, nor the fairer sex needs a total elimination from the succinct of a healthy domesticity or social existentialism; Robin Morgan points out the solution of problems is to be achieved through mutual and reciprocal discussion.

The woman has over the centuries developed an ethic that is appropriate to the world view that is emerging out of the new physics: they see in terms of relationship and in terms of environmental of human values for centuries. Their primary value is a reverence for life. This ethnic must become the governing world ethic (282-84)

Woman characters challenge society’s traditionally defined role of wife and promise the traditionally defined role of mother. It records with courage, dignity, responsibility and independent spirit, even after desertion, she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. Subhash tries to convey through: “Idea of three women from three generation from the same family and how they respond to the tragedy that suddenly overpowers their lives.” (54-55).

The story covers a broader time span than Deshpande had ever attempted. This novel also contains a daughter who feels guilty in her relationship with her mother, yet another new development in Deshpande’s creations. Innumerable mother-daughter relationships are portrayed in this novel especially of Sumi and her three daughters, Sumi and Kalyani, Kalyani and her mother, Manorama.

Deshpande places the failed marriage of Sumi and Gopal firmly at the centre of the novel and it is compared with other marriage, Kalyani and Shripati. Focusing on the marital relations, the author seeks to expose the tradition by which woman has to train themselves to play submissive role in the family. Men do not play active role in the story but they are the root cause of all the suffering, Gopal and Shripati. This novel reveals the man-made patriarchal traditions and agitation of modern Indian woman as a part of them.

The novelist presented in her novel the modern Indian woman’s suffering to find her identity in the society. In her works, she highlights social norms which act as a root cause for their torn feelings between demands of tradition in one hand and freedom and equality of modern world on the other. She uses this point of view of present social reality as it is experienced by women. To present the world of mothers, daughters and wives is also to present indirectly the fathers, sons and husbands the relation between men and woman, and between women themselves.

Her heroines especially Sumi and Aru, rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal values. The words associate with concept of an ideal woman are, self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. In this novel Deshpande illuminates hope of happiness,



If we are to construct a world why not shape one with the hopelessness left out, why not end with the hope of happiness, the promise of realization ... better to leave things alone, end with the word 'Shubham'. (158)

In *A Matter of Time*, Shashi Deshpande emphasis the everlasting theme of human bondage through which she explores the inner self of woman characters, especially Kalyani, Sumi and Aru and shows the spot light on mother-daughter relationship. The author brings light to the crucial elements like the role of early life experiences, the role of education, closeness to parents, sibling relationships which create a woman's personality. Through the character Kalyani and Sumi, Deshpande presents the fact that breaking off the bonds of family would result in loneliness and disintegration of the larger social set up, as they look for happiness and fulfilment within the family.

#### Works cited

1. Deshpande, Shashi. *A Matter of Time*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1996.
2. Deshpande, Shashi. "You Cannot Dismiss My Writing." 1 Sep. 2000. Rediff. Online. 1 Sep. 2000. Deshpande, Shashi. *A Matter of Time*. Penguin India: New Delhi, 1996.  
Dharkar, Rani. "Girl-wife-mother: The Marginalized in the Texts of Shashi Deshpande and Bharati.
3. Mukherjee" in *Indian-English Fiction 1980-90: An Assessment*, edited by Nilufer E Bharucha and Vilas Sarang; New World Literature Series, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1994
4. Robin Morgan, *the Anatomy of Freedom: Feminism, Physics and Global Politics*, New York: Doubleday, 1982.
5. Subhash K. Jha. Knotty Problems, *The Sunday*, 22-28 Dec. 1996.