

SHASHI DESHPANDE: HER ART OF CHARACTER- PORTRAYAL

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Abstract:

Shashi Deshpande is the first novelist in the history of Indian English literature to have heard the restive sound simmering beneath the age-long silence written large upon the face of women against cruelty and injustice meted out to them by man in the name of gender. Also, she has given the educated Indian women tongue to express their lacerated heart and body freely, frankly without any fear when they struggled to realize their dreams and aspirations in the male-dominated society of ours. For the first time we see an original vision, hear an original voice and feel the touch of a great artist in everything she says and writes about educated women in her novels. Her novel shows how they feel torn from within when they find a conflict between their emotional self and intellectual self, a conflict between their familial obligations and professional obligations, a conflict between their personal aspirations and traditional roles, they are expected to play in the family. With the help of her original voice and vision she has carved a niche for herself as a novelist in the history of English literature. But attention has been focused here on the art of her character-portrayal which forms the centre and core of her novels

Keywords: Age-long silence, Simmering discontent, Niche, Original vision, Lacerated heart and body, Original Voice.

Apart from reflecting the colour of the texture of life, when a novel is written, it also reflects its author's vision of life. The discrepancy between what life is and how it is lived and what the author feels and thinks about it, forms the centre and core of all great novels.

Shashi Deshpande says, "Literature, especially the novel, is a writer's response to society. Ideas are worked out through people and their lives. And these lives are lived in a particular region which has a social, political and cultural context- all of which is intrinsic to a novel" *17

Like all great novelists Shashi Deshpande holds her own vision of life and truth related to it which she intends to communicate through her novels. But she doesnot write a novel to prove a theory or teach a lesson. Besides, it is also true that she is dissatisfied with the world she lives in. She says,

"My writing does come out of dissatisfaction with the world. But I know, and I think most writers do, that no writing can change the world. At the most I can raise questions and doubts about things. I can communicate certain ideas to the world about the world". *104

But she doesnot give an answer to the questions she raises in the novel. She knows that any attempt to give answers to the questions would turn her into a committed artist. Commitment to an ideology on the part of an author diminishes the artistic quality of a creative work she says,

"Read my novel as a novel, not as a work that intends to propagate feminism" *159

Shashi Deshpande is fully conscious of the claims of art and has nicely balanced the claims of art with the claims of reality. She knows that aesthetics is an important part of literature. How an author says is no less significant than what he says or what he wants to say. But at the same time form without content is like a bubble, gone in a moment. The truth is that style comes out of the content. Shashi Deshpande pays equal attention both to form and content. Like a great novelist she shows equal

fidelity to her vision of life and to the form of art. In this respect she praises Jane Austen because she discovers integrity in her. We readers, discover the same integrity in Shashi Deshpande as a novelist.

As a conscious artist she says in the best possible manner what she has to say. She is not satisfied with just saying things. She chooses proper words and places them at proper places so as to liberate her own self as an artist and also the psyche of the characters in the novel. As a novelist she is always conscious of the 'Double Position' she occupies as a woman and as a novelist. She says about Jaya the protagonist in "That Long Silence" that some of Jaya's desperation were mine and also her silences were mine. She knows that in articulating the silence of woman she has broken her own silence.

Despite the fact that she always intended to be original both in tenor and tone, she was greatly influenced by Maugham, the novelist, particularly in respect of knowledge and style. She has also learnt about craft of writing from great masters like O. Henry and Maupassant. She owes her indebtedness to Earnest Gower's book *The Complete Plain Words*. It is in course of writing that she made her own discovery about how and where to begin a story and how to end. With the completion of the story *An Intrusion*, she developed perfect control over both her subject and the technique. From Here starts the story of her original creation. She shows perfection in articulating her depth of emotion with her original voice.

Most important fact about Shashi Deshpande as a writer is that she writes a story not because she has to write a story but because she has a story to tell. The story is about the life and position of women in the Indian middle class family. She has given tongue to women who have been suffering silently the laceration of both their body and mind. For the first time we hear a heart-rending story of cruelty and injustice meted out to them on the ground of gender discrimination through the voice of a woman.

As a writer she was very careful about the selection of words for proper and touching description. Many a time she wrote a story or a novel over and over again till she was fully satisfied with it. The first hundred pages of "That Long Silence" were written at least ten times. She alternated between Mohan's Voice and Jaya's and sometimes she used both their voices, finally she decided it to be Jaya's voice because it was Jaya's story she says

"This was Jaya's Story : it was not a novel about Jaya, it was Jaya's novel.

To use a real person seems to her that it spells out paucity of imagination on the part of the author. So, with her fertile imagination she develops a memory-picture into a full-fledged character. She wrote "A Matter of Time" when she heard from her friend about a young girl fighting her father for maintenance of her deserted mother. "The Binding Vine" was the first novel which came out of real incident, a real person it is based on the rape of a young girls whom she knew full well. She named her Kalyani in her novel to narrate the story of a young nurse who was raped by her own Mousaji. Much of what is said, is wrenched out of her memory. It is also true that much of what is said comes out of her hidden self which she would never have said aloud as a woman.

Where Kamla Markande has taken her woman characters from rural India, Naintara Sahgal, Sobha De and Namita Gokhale have taken women character from the upper strata of the Indian society, Shashi Deshpande has taken her women character from young educated women in the Indian middle class family in quest of career.

Indu (*Roots and Shadows*), Saru (*Dark Holds No Terror*), Jaya (*That Long Silence*), Urmila (*The Binding Vine*), and Sumi (*A Matter of Time*) – all are young educated career women from the Indian middle class family. Through the window of family life Shashi Deshpande peeps into dear personal life and lays bare the simmering discontent against man's attitude towards them in their psyche in touching language.

She has also laid bare the conflict in their heart between their emotional self and intellectual self, the conflict between their familial obligations and professional obligations and the conflict between their personal aspirations and traditional role they are expected to play in a highly poetic language. It is this conflict in their heart which shapes the story of their lives and gives plot to the novels.

As an artist, she breaks the general into the particular and with the particular she shows the general. Her novels are stories of any woman or every woman in the social life of India.

Indu in *Roots and Shadow*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Sumi in *A matter of Time*, Urmila in *The Binding Vine*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror* and Savitri Bai in *Small Remedies* are different women. Each struggles to realize her hopes and aspirations in her own way. They are all individuals and achieve personhood in their own way. Herein lies the fundamental difference between the western feminist and Shashi Deshpande.

Like Jane Austen, Shashi Deshpande does not go beyond the field of her practical experience. She takes her women characters from Maharashtra and Karnataka where she lived and worked. Despite being a regional novelist she reveals truth of universal significance regarding woman in general all over India. Like a great artist she passes from particular to general.

Apart from delineating young educated woman in her novels she has taken her characters from uneducated women of older generation to emphasise the continuity of the woeful tale of suffering of women down the ages. “ we have Akka, the old guardian of the house, Narmada a poor childless widow in *Roots and Shadows*, Meera the mother-in-law of Urmila in *The Binding Vine*, Shakutai whose daughter Kalpana is raped by her Mousaji and Kalyani the mother of Sumi in *A matter of Time* and Savitri Bai in *Small Remedies*” *248

. Both the young and the old have one and the same story to tell. This shows that she has given a comprehensive picture of woman suffering through the portrayal of her women characters in her novels.

As a creative artist she does not create characters that are larger than life. She never creates strong woman characters, because she believes in presenting them as they are. Her women protagonists are neither revolutionary nor hysterical like most of the heroines of Anita Desai “ they are ordinary woman caught in certain situations that make them view and review their past life. by doing so, they realized the most important truth of life that they suffer because they let themselves to be so” *248.

A significant fact about her women protagonist is that they pass from ignorance to knowledge. In the light of experience they gather in course of living. They take courage and confidence through the study of the Indian scriptures. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror* takes lesson from *The Dharmapad*, the Buddhist scripture : You are your own refuge. There is no other refuge” *221.

Jaya in *That Long Silence* takes lesson from the advice of Lord Krishna to Arjuna in *Srimad Bhagavad Geeta* “ Yathechesi tatha Kuru” *192 Lord Krishna says , I have given you knowledge now you make the choice. The choice is yours. *192

This is true about all her protagonists. That is why all her women protagonists appear triumphant at the end. Finally, they are able to hold the rein of life and start for a new beginning. With the realization that life is a matter of compromise and adjustment, they try to make a space for themselves in the turbulent house of their husbands. Like the novels of Jane Austen, her novels belong to the class of novels which is called Bildungsroman.

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