

Feminist Mode : A Study of Major Novels of Shashi Deshpande

Dr. Vipin Pratap Singh

P.G.D.A.V. College (Evening), University of Delhi

Dr. Ravindra Kumar Singh

K.K.P.G. College, Etawah (UP)

Shashi Deshpande is one of the leading Indian Novelists who have focused their attention on the study of the New Indian Women and her life problems in the context of gender and disparity and patriarchy as rampant in Indian middle families. She also brought out the anguish and pain, success and failures of the New Indian Women struggling for independence in all the novels of Shashi Deshpande, the New Indian Woman with all her family problems is at the centre and the man is on the periphery. Her novel '**A Matter of Time**' is no exception to this. In this novel she appears as a promoter of feminine sensibility. As a true promoter of feminine sensibility in the context of Indian patriarchy. She has been successful in carving sufficient niche for herself as a feminist writer by articulating the anguish, agony and conflict of the modern, educated middle-class Indian women caught between tradition and modernity, struggle for self expression and individuality. '*A Matter of Time*' (1996) expounds the human predicament of four women; Manorama, Kalyani, Sumitra and Arundhati, representing four generations of the same family. Besides that the novel also deals with motherhood, husband-wife relationship, mother-daughter relationship, problems of Indian joint-families, marriage, mental and physical trauma of women, sex and sexuality, etc. The novel is a fine expression of the pain rampant in the lives of the leading women, their suffering at domestic and social levels and the imposed endurance in marriage. The novel voices a scathing

aspect of Indian institutions like marriage or family, orthodox expectations from Hindu wife, suffocation experienced by the women protagonists and symptomatic of the emerging "new-woman" who struggle to overcome her domestic plight with "dignity and strength".

Shashi Deshpande's novel '*A Matter of Time*' veers around the urban, middle-class family of Gopal and Sumi with their three daughters – Arundhati (Aru), Charulata (Charu) and Seema and opens midway with Gopal's walking out of their marriage confronting mental agony and suffering to the each member of the family. Sumi, being the ultimate and foremost victim of her husband's desertion lapses into complete silence and provides a chance to the novelist and the readers as well to have an intense introspection of feminine consciousness in respect with the four leading women characters. The story leads us to have a quick and miserable glance at the family and its crumbled history where we find the marginalization of women either for honour of dominant traditional patriarchy and bounding. After Gopal's desertion, Shripati, Sumi's father brings her to "Big House" – the parental home. But it becomes a matter of "shame and disgust" for her mother Kalyani, who herself being "a girl", was the cause of "dissatisfaction" for her mother Manorama, the representative woman protagonist of earlier generation. Manorama, the confident matriarch of the first generation came from a humble background, but

her self-assurance and intelligence had led her marriage with the rich Vithalrao. The sudden rise in her status had added to her confidence but she grew insecure when she would not produce a “male heir” to the family. For Manorama, Kalyani is a great disappointment as she gives birth to baby-girls. Thus failed to beget a male heir to their property and feared that her husband would marry a second time, Manorama manages to have Kalyani’s marriage with her own brother Shripati. Though an intelligent girl with a promising future Kalyani is, her marriage into a new family is opposed as the property would then go to them.

Kalyani’s plight in marriage and prolonged silence of her husband are in no way less heartrending than that of Sumi’s downfall in married life, Kalyani finds an echo of the same miseries of which she has been suffering from. She gives a poignant cry: *“No, no, my God, not again. She begins to cry, sounding so much like an animal.”* Aru, the representative woman of the fourth generation of the family and a new woman in true sense, is one more mouth-piece of Shashi Deshpande through whom the novelist throws flood light on various social and domestic issues. Being the eldest daughter of Sumi, Aru minutely observes the marriages of three women of the family belonging to three different generations– Manorama, Kalyani and Sumi. She observes Manorama as domineering, Kalyani as enduring and Sumi as indifferent in marriage. With the knowledge of their marital experiences, Aru steps into her womanhood, ready to take life as it comes to her lot.

Through Aru’s voice, Deshpande reveals the gross injustice meted out in women in matters of property ownership and responsibilities of parents towards their children vis-à-vis. Kalyani had every right to the ownership of the ancestral property, but the same is denied to her. Further, Aru is surprised to know that women find no mention in the family tree, although they went through thick and thin while discharging their respective duties to the family. Aru gets disappointed when she comes to know the tragedy

of her grand-mother. Even she gets annoyed by her mother’s indifference in her marriage. She is critical of to sum up, ‘A Matter of Time’ is a composite study in feminine sensibility and human relationships of all sorts, human bonds and bondages. Gopal-Sumi, Shripati-Kalyani, Vithalrao-Manorama. Kalyani-Sumi, Sumi-Aru, etc. relationships are the most rewarding things in it. It is a family saga that focuses on the four women belonging to a middle-class family. However, the novel makes several comments on relationship of all kinds within marriage, with siblings, family relationships, generational slipovers and relationships with one’s self. The novel is a fine feminine document that renders the issues like marriage, sex and sexuality, mother-daughter relationship, womanhood, trauma of a deserted wife, gross injustice meted out to women in matters of property ownership, marginalization of women, etc. To cap it all, though Shashi Deshpande over the years is considered as a “middle-class writer”, but her fifth novel ‘A Matter of Time’ marks her as a pre-eminently a feminist writer and feminine sensibility as the preoccupation of the novel.

References

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