

Marital Relationship in Select Novels of Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract

This paper presents the marital relationship in select novels of Shashi Deshpande. Deshpande presents a gallery of women caught in the web of marital discord. There are different reasons like deprived child hood, socialization, tradition, culture and incompatibility that lead to the failure of these women as wives. Though she criticizes society, she is optimistic and creates fighting women who use their education and employment to fight and win in the end. Deshpande shows marriage as a patriarchal institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male domination. While revealing the travails of the educated married women in the contemporary Indian society.

KEYWORDS: Relationship, Marriage, society, domination

Marital relationship as a social necessity is at the centre of Indian novels. The woman hopefully looks at marriage as an escape route leading her towards attaining her freedom from bondage imposed on her in her parental family. In fact, the patriarchal domination is so deeply rooted in our culture that it is difficult for her escape from the trap of her ancestral home. The observation clearly highlights a woman's sexual subjectivity and her recognition as an object used by a man to fulfill his sexual hunger. The tragedy of a woman lies in the fact that she has to submit to her husband's sexual desire passively and ungrudgingly.

A man knows that he is the man and the woman the woman. A man's approach to everything in life seems to be dominating and aggressive whereas a woman's meek and submissive. Love and understandings, attachments and relationships play a vital role especially in the life of a woman. She is incomplete without her parents before marriage and without her husband after her marriage. Marriage is something that matters most in her life. She gives her husband almost everything. She plays a secondary role in a marital relationship. The works allotted to her after marriage are to satisfy her husband's sexual needs, to bear children to her family, and to take care of her husband, her children, her in-laws and her household.

Marriage is of greater benefit to a woman than to a man. It is also the beginning of her greater sacrifices in the form of her name, self, identity, independence, virginity, dreams and aspirations. She as we see in the case of Padmini, in *Roots and Shadows* is more for it than a man is because she considers marriage a passport of complete

happiness and freedom. But she comes to her senses when she understands that it is something that enslaves her. Simone de Beauvoir writes:

“The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness. There is no such thing as assurance in regard to happiness- but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine” (Beauvoir 496).

ShashiDeshpande holds an important place among the Indo-Anglian novelists. She is a prolific writer as she has written several books for children and five admirable novels. Her novel *That Long Silence*, has received positive reviews from the Times supplement as well as *New society*. The novelist has presented the episodes in retrospect. Man’s relationship with woman is most often the bond that exists between the master and a slave. Woman is an object and she is essential to man hopes to attain self-realization. Even in this modern period when women are said to have equal rights and opportunities with men, marriage and motherhood remain the main goals of the girl’s life, however liberated she may be. Her personal achievement, however great, pales down before her marital status implying her dependence on man.

ShashiDeshpande is essentially concerned about the problems related to marital relationships. She attempts to find out basic causes responsible for the unhappy and failed marriages. Nature has really played a trick on the woman by making her tolerate everything in the name of gender – discrimination and marriage. It has also played a trick on her by making her dream of seeking happiness only through a man. The belief that a husband and wife are to satisfy each other throughout their lives is monstrosity which gives rise to hypocrisy, lying, hostility and unhappiness.

In Indian social life, woman is conditioned to survive with the support of male desires only. Sarah Grimke observes:

Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to devote her to the rank she was created to fall. He has done all she could do to debase and enslave her mind. (Grimke: *Equality of the sexes*: 10)

Marital relationship has been the central theme of most novels by Indian women for those with a feminist stance; the emphasis is not on the development of the relationship but on the forces that combine to degrade the relationship into a farce. Deshpande shows marriage as a patriarchal institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male domination. While revealing the travails of the educated married women in the contemporary Indian society. She wants to expose the educated men who are snobs and chauvinistic. *Manu in the Dark Holds no Terrors*, *Mohan in that Long silence* and *Jayant in Roots and Shadows* are all examples to cite. They cannot see their wives as equals and expect them to be always docile, obliging and submissive.

ShashiDeshpande says that woman always identifies her interests with the interest of man but in spite of all his love and sympathy fails to identify him with the interests of woman. It is also a manifestation of insecurity and complexes hidden male psyche. The reverse of gender roles inspire women surrender their professional life to secure to stabilize their personal life. In professional success, a woman reconstructs her identity where her yielding to male autonomy is not essential.

Submission of the wife is ensured with the help of socialization that begins in early childhood and extends well into adolescence and adulthood. Girl children are trained to think, speak, dress and behave in such a way as to give importance to men around them. When they grow and get educated, their new sense of identity and equality clash with the internalized sense of submission and docility. When they get married later, their marriages threaten to fall apart.

Deshpande's novels show the socialization and the stultifying effects of culturally determined ideas of marriage and wifehood on Indian women. Saru, Jaya and Indu all desperately try to fit themselves to the prescribed image before they learn to question the image itself. Our society visualizes women as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives. She presents marriage as a farce and in the whole gamut of her writing not one marriage is presented as a success. Here marriage is only a trap to lure women into a life of denial and suffocation, in the service of men, with no promise of anything for her. She vacillates between thoughts of submission and rejection and finds marriage is to be degenerating with no involvement except sex. As a result of marriage becomes meaningless and sex alone seems to sustain man – woman relationship. But the lack of love and communion makes even sex meaningless and there is nothing else to sustain marriage. This lack of sexual involvement and the resultant emptiness is seen in the lives of Saru, Jaya and Indu.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru finds her married life unbearable and feels desperation of a trapped animal. The initial years of her marriage are sheer bliss when she thinks she is the luckiest woman on earth. Manohar is her romantic hero who saves her from her insecure, wooden life in her parental home. After marriage she reveals in the act of love with a wild abandon. But Saru realizes happiness is only an illusion. As long as she was a medical student her husband the bread winner there was calm at home. The issues arose when she began to get recognition as a doctor. She remembers the event that was the turning point. Once there was a fire in the factory nearby and she helped the victims late into the night and returned home in her bloodstained coat. The news spread that she was a doctor and people started paying more attention to her than to Manohar. This unsettled him and Saru did not notice the slow change in him.

“But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband”.(42)

In the early days of her married life, She is physically aroused with Manohar's infinite capacity for loving. Through Saru's wild passion for Manu, Shashi Deshpande affirms that each woman has an inherent desire for seeking the pleasure of male companionship. Saru enjoys the pleasure of the company of Manohar and seeks emotional satisfaction in his company. But subsequently in sexual relationship also, she finds herself discontent because she demands the confirmation of it with the repeated act of loving. It is more fulfillment of her insecurity rather than the exhibition of faith and love.

Saru is soon disappointed with her husband Manu, who promised to become another Shelly; she had imagined herself as Harriet. Her marriage to Manu is a means of that love and security which she had always lacked in life. He is the ideal romantic hero who has come to rescue her from the insecure, loveless existence. And she is hungry for love. I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted.

With her growing status as a doctor the chasm between her and Manu widened their marriage, degenerated into a sham with her growing reluctance to share physical intimacy with Manu.

The farcical side of marriage is further developed in that long silence. Marital relations largely depend on how the marriage was settled in somewhat different way. Her father had died and her elder brother was in a way forced by the uncles to discharge his duty to his younger sister. Mohan knew nothing about Jaya, nor did Jaya know Mohan before marriage-both were strangers to each other.

Mohan had nothing to desire from his wife except that she should be fluent in English. Jaya had fulfilled that qualification. Therefore Mohan decided to marry with Jaya the first day he saw her. Jaya, like all other young girls, had no particular idea about a good husband. Perhaps Jaya wanted to know about Mohan's concepts of life. Nobody cared to know how Jaya's nature, her ideals, etc. were different from Mohan's.

Differences in the natures and habits of the wife and husband are to appear soon. Marriage only throws her into confusion and alienation. Jaya is optimistic and full of life and creative vigour. She is aware of her potential and poetic talent. But Mohan was crude and abrupt. For him, they were husband and wife from day one. So everything was permissible. He didn't try to know his wife's mind, nor did he persuade her for it.

Jaya realized that all those vogue longings, all those suppressed thoughts, all those whispers, the hints, even the things, that she had called love and romance, were only the things of poems and stories-they had to place in real life. Her dreams of life were dashed to pieces. The feelings of sensual pleasure in a routine way did not make up for love.

Jaya had imagined that love-making would culminate in the act, but it happened the other way; it was devoid of love and romance. Jaya had learnt that the things a different turn in her life. The desire for each other was the only things that they had experienced and they knew not that love had any other meaning.

Indu, in *Roots and shadows*, also faces a similar situation for different reasons, though there is no physical violence. Her marriage with Jayant was love at first sight. But she soon realizes that she is mistaken and tries to hide her feelings. Her Womanhood is suppressed and marriage turns dissatisfying, as Jayant always wants her to submit. Even in sex she is not expected to take initiative and whenever she takes initiative he always puts it off. A marriage that suppressed her femininity and smothered her human emotions forces her to seek fulfillment in sex with her cousin, Naren. According to Indu there is not much difference between a wedding and a funeral. Wedding implies the death of the women, as she has to kill all her individuality and independence and accept the yoke of independence.

Female sexuality is traditionally centered around the function of reproduction. Familial, cultural, social and religious codes of behavior impose control over women's sexuality by prescribing their dress, behavior, talk, mobility, and general appearance. A natural expression of woman's sexuality, whether it be inside marriage or outside, is branded as immoral. Women learns to suppress her sexuality.

In *Deshpande* marital disharmony and the resultant frustration create three types of women: the dominating, the succumbing and the fighting. The mother of saru was a dominating one and she left no room for compromise. The succumbing types are the vulnerable women like kusum, Mohan's mother and, his sister, vimala, in that long

silence. Both kusum and Mohan's mother lack the strength to oppose the social set-up and turn that protect against themselves bringing self-destruction. Kusum was a "Poor, frightened, defeated women, whose urge for destruction had been turned inwards". (20) She was an "Unwanted, neglected, emotionally deprived child." (22) Who got no security even in marriage as her husband abandoned her.

The fighting types are the most successful women that shashiDeshpande has portrayed. She portrayed women who fight unto the last, defying the odds, and emerge victorious in spite of taking severe blows. Saru, Jaya and Indu belong to this Category. Saru survived the savage discrimination of her mother, in her childhood, and the cruel and psychotic sexuality of her husband in marriage. But the fighter in her refuses to succumb and she decides to go to her parental house after a very long gap. There she does not get the help she expected from her father but gets a much more valuable realization that on is responsible for one's life.

Jaya is a woman who fights and wins in a battle. She was brought up by her father with a great sense of independence and individuality. But marriage throws her into troubles waters. Mohan is a man rooted in tradition and wants Jaya to yield her independence she obliges him in order to build a home according to conventions. Mohan storms out and does not return for a few days. Jaya is in a hopeless situation. The two or three days she gets for herself, with her mind and she writes her thoughts in the form of the novel. The writing clarifies her thoughts and she decides to break the long seventeen years of silence.

Indu is a modern, romantic and sensuous woman who defies Akka and leaves the big house to live with Jayant. It does not take her long to realize that a woman has no identify in Jayant's philosophy. A woman is not supposed to get angry or reveal her sexuality. This emotional distance from Jayant takes her nearer to Naren.

Deshpande presents a gallery of women caught in the web of marital discord. There are different reasons like deprived child hood, socialization, tradition, culture and incompatibility that lead to the failure of these women as wives. Though she criticizes society, she is optimistic and creates fighting women who use their education and employment to fight and win in the end.

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