

## Projection of Women Characters in *A Matter of Time* by Shashi Deshpande

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### Abstract

This research paper is an attempt to study the projection of women characters in the novel *A Matter of Time* by Shashi Deshpande. Literature is a mirror to society. Indian women Writers have described women characters in the novels, short stories and poems. Shashi Deshpande has provided a real picture of an educated middle class woman. Her heroines are highly educated and try to come out of the conflict of tradition verses modernity. *A Matter of Time* novel represents four generations of women; Manorama, Kalayani, Sumi and Aru. These four generations women represent the problems of gender discrimination, sex and sexuality, domestic violence etc.... Sumi is the main character of the novel lives with her husband Gopal and her three daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. Sumi's husband Gopal left suddenly from home without any reason. Sumi and her three daughters are not capable of paying rent of the flat where they are living so they have decided to go to big house where Kalayani and her husband lives since thirty-five years in silent. Sumi has a positive attitude towards a life. She has found a job as a teacher and also learns a scooter at the age of forty. Sumi's daughter Aru always supported her mother.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender discrimination, desertion, self- Independence, narcissism.

### Introduction:

Contemporary Indian English writers have portrayed female characters and their status and position in male dominated society in English Literature. These Indian women writers are Anita Desai, Bharti Mukharji, Kiran Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Nair, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur. These writers have written on female characters in their works. Shashi Deshpande is also a well known contemporary Indian English writer. She has to her credit nine short story collections, twelve novels and four books for children. She has been awarded the Padam Shri in 2008. Shashi Deshpande has projected a modern, educated middle class woman in her novels. Most of her heroines in the novels are writers or journalist.

Our life is full of uncertainties. Every day is different from another day. Every moment, there is uncertainty in the life. *A Matter of Time* explores the intricate relationships within an extended family, encompassing four generations of men and women. The novel shows four generations of women- first generation Manorama, second generation is Kalayani, third generation is Sumi and last generation is Aru. Sumi, a central character of the novel *A Matter of Time* is deserted by her husband at the age of forty with her three daughters. She is alone and helpless and she has no idea regarding her husband's sudden move from home. As an ordinary housewife she is not shaken by this sudden change though she is not financially independent. She shows a great courage and accepts this fact boldly. Sumi's husband Gopal deserted her without any solid reason. Sumi remains silent and engage herself in empowering herself. Sumi is a housewife though she is educated but she is not working for the welfare and takes care of family members. In her family he lives with her husband

Gopal and three daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. Sumi is very optimistic. She never gives up in her life. She is always ready to learn new things. She learns to drive a scooter at the age of forty. She always tries to help her family members.

In *A Matter of Time* Shashi Deshpande has discussed issues of motherhood, domestic violence, sex and sexuality, gender discrimination etc... Shashi Deshpande has portrayed different women characters and their problems. These women characters belong to middle class family. Shashi Deshpande has discussed different issues related to ritual and traditions regarding women and how these women characters come out of the conflict of traditions verses modernity.

Shashi Deshpande has described the importance of economically independent woman by situation of Sumi. Sumi has no source of income. She is totally dependent on her husband. She is not able to pay even the rent of her flat. So she decided to go at her maternal home. Shashi Deshpande has described the problems and suffering of women who are totally dependent on their husband. As Simone De Beauvoir states in her chapter Independent woman,

“The system based on her dependence collapses as soon as she ceases to be a parasite; there is no longer need for a masculine mediator between her and the universe. The curse on the woman vassal is that she is not allowed to do anything; so she stubbornly pursues the impossible quest for being through narcissism, love, or religion; when she is productive and active, she regain her transcendence; she affirms herself concretely as subject in her projects; she senses her responsibility relative to the goals she pursues and to the money and rights she appropriates.” (Beauvoir 813)

#### **Manorama:**

Manorama is a grandmother of Aru represents the first generation of the family. She is dead but her problems and life presented in the novel. She has no son and only one daughter Kalyani. She wishes to have an heir for their property. She cannot give property to anyone else. So she decided to marry her daughter with her brother. So the property remains in the family.

#### **Character of Kalayani:**

Kalayani is a daughter of Manorama and presents a second generation of the novel. She is the only child of Vithalrao and Manorama. Kalayani's parents were not blessed with a son. She is not allowed to complete her studies because marriage is the main consideration for her mother. She has to accept her uncle as a husband in order to prevent the property from going away in the hands of others. This is the main reason of

“the hopelessness that lay within the relationship that doomed it from the start” (Deshpande *A Matter of Time* 143)

Manorama's bitter attitude towards Kalyani gets soft when Kalyani gives birth to a son. But this child turns out to be mentally retarded. Kalyani loses this child at the railway station while going to her parental home. With this, her married life comes to an end. She is never forgiven by her husband for being responsible for the loss of her male child. She has to suffer because of the loss of her male child and the ruthless withdrawal of her husband thereafter. Kalyani returns home as a deserted wife. This is considered to be a disgrace to the family. Kalyani's father, a man of science, turns

from science to astrology to know about her daughter's future life. He is hurt to see the misery of his daughter. Shripati comes back after two months, but he never speaks to Kalyani. They live like strangers under the same roof. She considers her situation better than widows. Sumi, her daughter, questions this kind of existence:

“Is it enough to have a husband, and never mind the fact that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifehood make up for everything, for the deprivation of a man's love ...” (Deshpande *A Matter of Time* 167)

### **Sumi:**

Sumi is mature and has a good presence of mind. She accepts the havoc created in her life after her husband Gopal's desertion. She is unlike other women characters like Jaya and Indu and thinks out of the circle of marriage. She knows there is another world for a woman without a husband. She starts her journey again and starts to search for a job. She becomes self-independent. She finds a way to create her own identity. She finds a job as a teacher.

Sumi is a very silent and suffering woman. She has easily accepted the desertion of her husband and tries to balance the situation without making any complaint to anyone. No doubt, she is very much shocked by the sudden separation of Gopal her husband. She talked with her daughters next morning and tries to manage the situation. She is unable to pay the rent of the flat in which she is living so she decides to live at her maternal home. This is not the easiest decision for her to take but she has taken due to financial crisis. She always tries to resolve the problems. She never complains to anyone for her position and never tells anything to her daughters.

Most of Deshpande's heroines, even as they overcome familial obstacles, rarely stray out of the domestic arena. For a while, Sumi seems to be succeeding in gaining a small degree of personal independence. She starts teaching, writes a play that earns plaudits, and even learns to drive a scooter, in a land where few women are seen in the driver's seat.

Sumi is different from other protagonists of Shashi Deshpande, because she straight away makes up her mind to face the facts squarely. Gopal, after twenty-three years of marriage with Sumi, a history lecturer in a local college, one evening, for reasons he could not speak, in a very casual way walks out and very easily unburdens his responsibilities as a husband and father of three grown-up daughters. Even before Sumi could realize the seriousness of the situation and the burden thrust on her, everything ends leaving Sumi in a shell-shocked silence.

Sumi's father Sripathi refuses to let his daughter Sumi and her daughters stay all by themselves. Hence Sumi along with her three daughters came to her parental home, to the shelter of the Big House, where her parents Kalyani and Sripathi are living in a strange oppressive silence. They have not spoken to each other for thirty-five years. There is a distinct parallel between Sripathi's desertion of Kalyani and Gopal's desertion of Sumi. What is significant is that without men and women come to their own and show the potential to shed the dependency syndrome. That Big House became a historical place to the people of that city.

In the novel, Gopal abandons his wife and children because,

"I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on".  
(Deshpande *A Matter of Time* 41)

**Conclusion:**

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the women characters with their problems, their mental trauma and the evils related to gender discrimination prevalent in the society. Sumi has found her own identity before her death. She finds a new way to life out of marriage. Manorama, Kalayani and Sumi live life of suffering and they tolerated due to not having a son. Aru, Charu and Seema are daughters of Sumi. They are very educated and try to balance a married life. Aru is going to be a lawyer and Charu is going to be a doctor.

**Work cited**

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