

Relevance of Shashi Deshpande in the Twenty First Century

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Abstract

The relevance and appeal of Shashi Deshpande is fast diminishing as the expectations of the readers and the exposure of the modern world has taken the people to the next level of life where sentimentalism, emotionalism and feelings have almost dried up. Moreover the novels and stories of Deshpande is not as deep to be termed as an unfathomable work like Shakespeare and his ilk. Like the latter one it does not offer a possible multidimensional study. So, naturally the lure of such an author is slowly diminishing but the blandness and plainness seen in her works makes her the queen of researchers and even today any supervisor would advocate his scholars to choose Shashi Deshpande for completing his/her doctorate in a comfortable way. In this article it would be prudent to identify the reasons that slow down the interest of the readers on an author who was once a queen of Indian writing in English.

As a writer, Shashi Deshpande emerged in the period of late 1970s and early 1980s when the so called “Mass Media” was literally absent. Print was the only mode of communication and the readers were more or less confined to the readable printed materials without any diversion. This naturally disallows their ability to think critically and as a result the reader would be able to accept texts of the same essence despite knowing that there are lots of parallelisms in it. This Passivism observed in readers made writers like Shashi Deshpande literally the masters as they wrote as they wished and made their readers to accept what they wrote willingly. Is this the case with the present day readers? No, not at all, as the present day readers have lot of diversions which naturally make them think a lot and as a result would never accept similarities in any medium. The popularity of news channel is mainly due to this mindset. This changed situation has made the author a passive one and it is the readers who are active.

Taking “That Long Silence” as a sample, it is an easy task to trace the movement of the plot that is considerably slow and would certainly not fulfill the tastes of the youth in India. Times have changed and the life style that Shashi Deshpande saw is almost dead as the youth of the present day are after fast paced movement. Jaya of the above mentioned novel is a dull character who tries to darken the atmosphere through her negativism. She is a doctor who is unable to find a solution to her problem. Her problem is more of a psychic one as she is unable to realize her idealism in life. This makes her somber and leaves her married life unsatisfied. Her husband is not an active guy and his earnings are not up to the mark. This makes her dull and confused. The most pathetic aspect of this character is that she does not take refuge even in her children. Shashi Deshpande’s characters do not exhibit love nor affection towards others. The aspect of romance is almost nil and it makes the work least attractive to the young people. In those days, the number of readers might have been more, but in the twenty first century the numbers have drastically fallen due to the onslaught of mass media. Television, computer system, face book and whatsapp have brought the whole mass of people unto their grab. The present day people would have come across thousands of Jayas in their lives both in real life and net life. They would

certainly spite her for her indecisiveness as the present day society loves life living-together than the age old tradition of married one. In such a society, Shashi Deshpande will never be appealing and only the likes of Shashi Tharoor and Chetan Bhagat are expected to survive. One more defect in Shashi Deshpande's works is that it is a closed is a closed one with the least exposure of the locale. It is almost a type of Greek drama where few characters lament about their past and present life without finding a solution.

Likewise society is almost absent in her novel as the characters like Jaya deal more with their family than the external situation. Even if it is presented, it is done in a very subtle manner without taking a subjective view on anything. Politics finds no place in her works and naturally a small Jane Austenian type of society where one major female character is surrounded by other minor characters pre occupies the space. Saru enters her father's home after a long gap and finds her father alone as his wife – her mother- had passed away. There is no sentimentalism and it is a sort of disinterested meeting with both the characters refusing to show any curiosity and love towards others. Thus the very beginning of the novel is dull without any punch. Readers ought to compare this beginning with the introductory scene of Hamlet where the sentinels are busy with change of guard and Hamlet along with Horatio are anxious to meet the ghost. Every reader and the spectator would be at their edge to know the unknowing. So, the very first scene or to be more precise the very first chapter should have the necessary punch to attract the readers. Shakespeare is still appealing for this very reason. But Shashi Deshpande is for that age alone and she stands empty in the twenty first century. Her words have lost its breath.

The flash back scene of her brother Dhruv who dies due to the carelessness of Saru is a bit interesting. But the repetition or hatred that it sows in the mind of her mother makes her mentally narrow. Probably, it could be the reason why she becomes detached towards everyone including her children. Her father, mother, husband, children, brother and few of her relatives alone make her story. To know about other's family might have been interesting for the readers of eighties, but for the twenty first century readers, it is a clear violation of privacy. Life had changed a lot in India and society has changed with the people.

But though Shashi Deshpande's novels might not be bought by the general readers, there are class of people famed research scholars who would often settle with this author for their research study as her writings are very simple and uncomplicated without any touch of sentimentality. Moreover, all her novels are more or less same except for the character names and these scholars could easily understand or at least predict the story even before reading the subsequent novels. Moreover there is no need for them to grapple with the sensitive social and political issues that would sometime land them in trouble. Thus she might be right choice for research scholar but alas! her validity has a prominent or at least an appealing author to the public has faded with years.

Some may defend this fall with the status of other writers like R.K. Narayan, but it should be remembered that R.K. Narayan has an appeal which no Indian author has. Even though his plots are simple, nevertheless are they appealing to the general public. Not only in twenty first century, but for eternity he would be a popular writer. But Shashi Deshpande is a writer with limited resources and her language is simple without any arithmetic this language does not have any unconventional aspects into

that might sound appealing to the youngsters. Thus both plot wise as well as language wise, Shashi Deshpande has retired and her works have certainly lost its relevance.

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