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PSYCHOANALYSIS OF SOME CHARACTERS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE



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ABSTRACT :

Psychoanalytic approach helps us with better appreciation of the human situation, of the characters of the women novelists and sharpens our understanding of and enhances our sympathy for them. At the time when the opinion that one has reached the limits of critical possibility in the field of 'Indian Writing in English' is gradually settling, the endeavor to study the neurotic characters using psychoanalytic insights promises to reveal the new depths in the fiction of Indian English women writers. These depths need to be further fathomed and critically accounted for.



KEYWORDS : *Psychoanalysis, women novelists and sharpens, 'Indian Writing in English'.*

INTRODUCTION:

The second generation Indian English women novelists have favorably responded to the changed psychological realities of Indian life after Independence. In doing so, they seem to have been guided by the age-old experience of repression by Indian women. Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande and Nargis Dalal, who constitute this group, are emotionally and intellectually well equipped to give an authentic treatment of this situation.

The personal background and intellectual training of these novelists seem to have endowed the specialty, which their fictional products bear. Their wide acquaintances with the vagaries and nuances of life, both in the east and the west, and their achievement of often high educational and intellectual standards have given a sharp edge to their observation. Their natural feminine sensibility and introspection have imparted to their observation, a humane touch and a psychological depth. Shashi Deshpande is a prominent novelist among them.

Shashi Deshpande's 'That Long Silence', 'Roots and Shadows', 'A Matter of Time' portray sensitive individuals in their moments of intense struggle and in their efforts to seek neurotic solutions to their problems. In the course of the ordeal called living the protagonists of these novels find themselves at odds with society and undergo various degrees, of psychological transformation. Both as a physical reality outside and a psychic agent within, society which we take to mean the essence of one's relationship with others plays a crucial role in bringing about this change for the worse forcing

these sensitive people to seek neurotic solutions to their problems.

Their 'idealism' is not born of their volition or of a genuine change of heart but of an attitude of revenge and necessitated by an inner compulsion to escape. Neurosis, however, has a sobering effect on the other group of characters. Jaya of 'That Long Silence' makes important discoveries about herself during her neurotic suffering and in the last analysis, she finds a measure of fulfillment in her relation to the world.

Jaya - Jaya of '*That Long Silence*' gradually emerges as a confident individual fully in control of herself and refuses to be led by nose. A stereotyped house wife initially neurotic and needing male help and support all the time she understands that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and work out her own strategy. It also shows how with this new confidence, Jaya becomes emancipated without rejecting outright the cultural and social background.

Jaya1, a modern woman rooted in tradition, experience an impulsive desire to be emancipated and, at the same time an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. As a result, she tries simultaneously to be a suitable wife and to retain her identity as an individual. However, in order to fulfill her roles as wife and mother, as Mohan wants her to be; she gradually transforms herself to be a stereotyped housewife always trying to please her husband. But slowly she begins to realize that her very compromise shatters her individuality. She realizes that women have allowed themselves to be victimized instead of bargaining for partnership and that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and work out her own strategy. Accordingly, she decides that she will live afterwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She, no doubt, makes some adjustment of her own volition, taking care to see that she does not lapse into servility. Her decision to have her own way gives a new confidence to her and this confidence brings her emancipation.

Saru - Saru of '*The Dark Holds No Terrors*', who seeks freedom without impinging on her obligations and responsibilities, achieves harmony in life. It shows how she undergoes a mental trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life and how boldly she stands up to the situation and audaciously accepts the challenges of her own protégé.

Saru2 of is the representative of middle-class working women in modern India, rebelling against traditions but ultimately trying to compromise with existing reality When her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life, she undergoes a mental trauma, but eventually stands up to the situation. She realizes that escapism is never a solution and that she is her own refuge. She succeeds in realizing her selfhood through her profession and proves to the world that economically independent women like her can bring change in the society and that woman as individuals can have some significant control over their relationships and professions. Her promise of reconciliation with her husband is not her defeat or submission but her newfound confidence to confront reality. Thus, she achieves freedom and harmony in life without compromising on her obligations and responsibilities.

Sumi - Sumi3 of '*A Matter of Time*' gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from the utter desolation and mental trauma or neurotic condition of being a deserted wife. At the age of forty deserted by her husband, she stands alone and helpless along with her three teenage daughters. But she is not emotionally shattered as is common with housewives, without economic independence. On the other hand, she demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She displays rare courage and self confidence in trying to cope with the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliation and frustrations, all by her. Unlike any other in her place, she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds, without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion, instead of making her an emotional wreck, has surprisingly brought out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent and asserts her identity. She revives even her creativity. She,

thus, comes a long way from Indu, Jaya, Saru and even Urmi for whom marriage is mostly the be-all and end-all of their existence. The 'courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit'⁴ displayed by her, proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. Though unfortunately cut off in the prime of her life, through her daughter Aru, Shashi Deshpande seems to look hopefully at the younger generation to restore equality between the sexes and achieve harmony.

Deshpande has very ably treated the neurotic phenomenon in the Indian context, by creating extremely interesting personages. Through this endeavor, she has been able to lay bare the oppressive and 'anti-human' value system of the society. Through the sensitive portrayal of the psychic conflicts and the psychological contours of helpless people the novelist seems to underline the importance of subverting the established values and replacing them with those values which are more amenable to human nature and which promote happiness. For this purpose the steely frame of the social machine, which forges and fosters these values, needs an overhaul. Deshpande brings home this point by subtly indicating that the society is often indifferent and vindictive towards sensitive and suffering people while actually it should be rushing to their help.

The argument here is not to prove that, Shashi Deshpande's concern has been exclusively with the inner life of their characters. She has dealt with cultural, political and social issues in a good number of her novels, but the focus has always been on the human condition and it has been artistically rendered with a deep sense of compassion for the characters. In the novels mentioned earlier this concern has reached its pinnacle, leading to the creation of the psychologically most interesting personages — neurotic characters. In this endeavor, she has superbly succeeded. Indian women, in view of their limited freedom and insular mode of life, have shown for ages a marked tendency towards growing introspective quality, which is a prelude for the neurotic reaction. This sort of feminine sensibility has a close relation to neurosis, at least in the Indian context. Neurosis almost always results from a compulsion to repress one's feelings and desires, because they are not in consonance with the accepted norms of society. Women are mercilessly denied opportunities for open expression of their true feelings in the tradition-bound Indian society. In this respect and in many other respects they are at great disadvantage when compared to men.

In spite of their privileged position, the women novelists have gone through conflicts, which are not at great variance with those of other Indian women. Conflicts of a qualitatively different nature have always characterized the life of every freedom-conscious woman in India, including the novelists. These novelists have therefore naturally created characters that are capable of close and sensitive experience of life as they themselves are.

The characters of the novels mentioned above, face problems of predominantly personal nature and they seek to resolve them at the personal level. The religious element has been placed in proper perspective by the women novelists who are helped by an admirable understanding of the vagaries and travails of the human psyche.

Psychoanalytic thinkers from Freud onwards have not only viewed religion cynically but dubbed it as an instrument of oppression. Freud thinks religion to be "patently infantile, so foreign to reality."⁵ As one with a friendly attitude to humanity he finds it painful that the great majority of people will continue to believe the falsehoods propagated in the name of religion. He therefore interprets it as a collective childhood neurosis of mankind. Erich Fromm puts it the other way round: "We can interpret neurosis as a private form of religion, more specifically, as a regression to primitive forms of religion conflicting with officially recognized patterns of religious thought."⁶ The women novelists have shown an almost uncanny awareness of the untenable claims of religion and exposed them by creating neurotic characters who seek religious solution. In the process neurosis and religion become

indistinguishable, thus proving the contention of psychoanalysis without ever intending to do so.

Further the novelists' higher education has given them a deep insight into the human psyche and a clear critical perspective to re-examine tradition. They shed their inhibitions in a marvelous fashion and showed surprising frankness, boldness and honesty in the fictional treatment of the workings of the human psyche. Even the men novelists have not been so frank. They have instinctively slued away from such matters as sex, while the women have elaborately but artistically treated them.

Whatever one would expect in view of the oppressive, male-dominated social codes operative in India, the feminist considerations do not appear prominently in the novels of these writers. While their foreign counterpart, like Margaret Atwood, has lent invaluable support to the feminist movement by her fictional endeavor, these writers seem to be content to render in fictional terms the human condition, barely discriminating between the sexes. Their characters are aware of themselves first as human beings and only then as women or men. One feels that more of great value emerges from such fictional endeavor than from the text-book demonstration of the degradation of women at the hands of men and the battle-crimes against male domination which are so characteristic of the feminist writers of the West. In certain of Shashi Deshpande's novels, feminist concerns do emerge but only incidentally. Their protagonists are acutely aware of themselves as women. However, the apologists to feminism believe that "reading, as well as writing, is a gendered activity; and that the positioning of the reader, male or female, as a woman, is one of the most significant revisions in the gender-genre-modernism line."⁷ Their neurotic characters too have been often explained away in terms of 'feminism'⁸, while the truth is that they suffer from inexplicable and deeply felt psychic conflicts. The application of feminist theories to the study of the neurotic characters in fact proves to be counter-productive. It helps neither in studying the characters at a deeper level nor in examining the real issues. Deshpande's characters, Jaya, Saru and Sumi approve that feminism does form a significant strand in the fictional tapestry of the women novelists. But the fact is that, Jaya is neurotically reacting to a particularly painful situation rather than consciously exercising her will to be independent and assertive.

Although the women characters' urge for self assertion is made to be felt, it is never properly articulated in these novels. It is expressed only symbolically through neurosis. The novelists themselves do not seem to be making an enthusiastic effort to espouse the cause of the women. They stop at the point of authenticating the human predicament. Feminism usually takes off from there. Bringing a feminist perspective to these writers is therefore very likely to lead one into a blind alley. Feminist approach thus proves to be of little value to the study of these novelists, especially for the study of the neurotic characters.

A comprehensive psychoanalytic approach to these novelists has been long overdue. The neurotic picture behind the actions of Jaya, Sarita and Sumi, in the novels of Shashi Deshpande comes to light only when it is studied, in the light of the psychology of the individual characters. The reason for this situation appears to be that the neurotic reaction of these characters coincides with the prevailing cultural practices of India.

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