

COMPROMISE: A SENSE OF EMOTIONAL ISOLATION OF THE FEMALE PROTAGONISTS AS REFLECTED IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S A MATTER OF TIME

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ABSTRACT

The basic theme of the novel *A Matter of Time* revolves around three generations of women under one roof, living and reliving the miseries and mysteries of life as they come their way, the one, Kalyani is silently enduring, drawing satisfaction from the only fact that she is the wife of a living husband, Sripati, the other, Sumi, trying to remain indifferent and dignified; while the third, Aru, boldly questioning and fighting against the odds in her life. The three protagonists (belong to three generation in the same family) Kalyani, Sumi and Aru represented as possessed, plundered and enslaved by the patriarchy, the cultural present of our society. Deshpande is preoccupied with the female characters, but treat them as the members of the family and the society. It is the responsibility of the society and its members to consider the female cohabitants on equal terms so that they can survive with their identity. Her depiction of women's world is authentic, realistic and credible. *A Matter of Time* is an exploration of a woman's inner life. Here the inner life of woman, emotionally isolated from her family, is reflected in the embryonic women represented by her daughters. Thus the novel is about women whose lives are dominated by the shame and guilt caused by the actions of their spouses and parents.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchal Domination, Sacrifice, Struggle, Dejection, Abuse, Feminism

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* deals with a woman's inner life and has exclusively distinctive vision of feminist issues. As most women writers, Deshpande is at her best when she explores the thoughts and feelings of her characters; especially her female ones. The novelist does not believe in offering readymade solutions, but the conviction that life can be made more tolerable, speaks of a genuinely positive attitude to life. Shashi's protagonists' finally try their best to conform to their roles, and the novels end with an optimistic note with the possibility of some happiness in future. The author emerges in them as a bridge – builder between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. Her novels are of immense value for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it.

The paper highlights on how the protagonists of the novel, *A Matter of Time* emotionally isolated from their family and learn in due course how to arrive at a compromise and find a sense of balance in life. R.S.Pathak considers the novel to be, "...a bitter commentary on marriage and married life, which have lost their original sanctity and compatibility and are reduced to a level of a façade or shame" (158). Shashi does believe that she is a feminist and her concerns are universal. She writes about silent, unhappy women, mothers, daughters and many other female characters. Though the author has given much space for a male protagonist, she ends up the novel by exposing the silent, suffering women, who, being living, and breathing individuals, occupy the backgrounds of most of the past and contemporary Indian families and societies.

The first protagonist of the novel is Kalyani, Manorama's daughter, who is doomed to the life of a mute sufferer. She has innumerable sorrows but no consolations; like a monument of patience, she silently endures and compromise through the long journey from childhood till the end. Thus, Kalyani's childhood is marred by a strong feeling of inferiority complex, confidence and self – esteem lessens with the passage of time in the form of negotiation. Even her mother Manorama fires on her when she receives anonymous letters of courtship. It is a consolation for Kalyani whereas these love letters are an unforgivable sin for her mother. Kalyani was shut up in the house and her schooling was put to an end by marrying her uncle, Sripati whom she dreaded, N.B.Masai aptly remarks, "Deshpande deals with a woman's psyche and the way she is made to feel an inferior being, an unwanted child, a burden on the family" (144). There is a sort of depression alone exist in the life of Kalyani even after her married life. It is all her ignorance and lack of education matters in front of a family of intellectuals. Sripati married his niece not for his sake but for her sister, Manorama, who had financed his education. He failed to keep up his loyalty till the end of his life as a true and caring husband. There compromise begins, Kalyani emotionally isolated and get into a life of extreme pain and torture. She happens to be blamed by her husband, when they lost their retarded son in the crowded railway station, both are responsible for his lost, not Kalyani alone. This sort of patriarchal domination exist even now in India, women are often be blamed by men folk for all their deeds. They are thinking that once if they traditionally tied the three holy knot of marriage thread, men assume themselves that they have got a slave to execute all their and their family members' whereabouts and abruptly by not giving any respect and recognition in their course of life.

If Kalyani raised her voice and tried to protest herself, without compromise and self consolation, she might have had a better life and find some solution for all her problems (and traditionally for the forthcoming generations of women too) and at least she might not have had a mental trauma and emotional isolation throughout her life. Through the character of Kalyani, the readers may find that choosing the life partner decides the destiny of women in balancing their emotional factors which is the root cause for all physical and mental problems. Women must have some awareness on their own by means of others giving, respect, treatment, false love and care, victimization and many more to her. Anyhow, one way or other, once if they both become life partners, they must have some sort of understanding, friendliness, compromise and sacrifice until certain phase otherwise life itself finds no meaning and it becomes sacrificial and ends in failure. Men always thinks that women must be a head down always in front of them as if they assume themselves are more intellectual, talented or powered than women. To add N.B.Masai's comment again,

Kalyani's fear is based on patriarchal oppression that condemns women to the margins of silence. She is made to realise that while losing her son, a male heir, she had abandoned her motherhood as well as her right as a wife. (147)

Here Kalyani's punishment and compromise are that she has to live with this psychic wound. If Sripati really wants to give tribute to his sister, he might have done anything else than spoiling the life of a woman by accepting to marry her and hit into the hell of silence. It seems that the man, who has loathsome feeling towards her, wantedly put blame on her to bias the relationship. He is the whole cause for the destruction of her life. Sumi feels an odd; uneasy sensation and it somehow seems wrong and unnatural to her. Deshpande evidently examines that, "...to see them together, even in a picture, gives me an odd, uneasy feeling. It seems wrong. Somehow, unnatural, even slightly obscene!" (39). In spite of all her sorrows, Kalyani still holds affection for the rest of the family. Infact, she is the anchor in an ill-starred family. Thus, the character, Kalyani is a faithful representation of self – compromising women of the older generation.

The second protagonist of *A Matter of Time* is Sumi, Kalyani's daughter, who is married to Gopal, a professor. She becomes an epitome of silent suffering and passive resistance. She is so self-respecting and believes in getting on with life. Deshpande clearly observes, when her husband deserts her for no apparent reason, Sumi asks him only a single question:

What is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession, walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because...it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn you back on everything in your life?(27)

Gopal's desertion of Sumi is a manifestation of the fact that man can choose his own path but the responsibility of his weaknesses, essentially, falls on the shoulders of woman. The attitude of Gopal shows that the man can desert the family and can make spaces for independent self by negating the obligations towards family and society whereas the woman has no other option but to tolerate its consequences, leave apart choosing her own path.

Sumi has to go through the same predicament as that of Kalyani in her marital life when after twenty years of married life; Gopal suddenly declares his decision of renunciation, leaving Sumi in a shocked silence. Though the Big House provides shelter and safety for Sumi and her daughters yet she experiences a sense of homelessness and rootlessness. Even in moments of crisis, she conducts herself with admirable self-control and balances the emotion. It is not loneliness that is Sumi's rival, but a sense of alienation and compromise, which are got aggravated by her children's accusation of her not caring about the irresponsible behavior of their father. Hence, while others are pondering over possible reasons, Sumi knows that "the reason lies inside him, the reason is him" (24). Sumi confirms boundless patience, accepts sympathy and loyalty too. She remarkably maintains her cool, compromising and matter of fact attitude.

Sumi compromises herself and become silent and calm, of course she remembers the promise they had made just after their wedding night that if any one of them wanted to opt out the relationship, the other will set him/her free. Therefore, she obliges and accepts the promises they made. Even she was humiliated by her neighbours when she was deserted by her husband as if she is the cause for being abandoned. She stands as a loser, a woman deserted by her husband for incomprehensible reasons and three daughters to look after, financially crippled and emotionally lonely. Y.S.Sunita Reddy has aptly brought out the emotional agony of Kalyani's daughter, "Sumi copes quite admirably with the humiliation and disgrace of being a deserted wife. She does not rave or rant but surrounds herself with a death-like silence. Her very silence, however, conveys her pain more effectively than words can" (11).

Sumi does not run away from loneliness, but it is the sense of alienation from her daughters haunts her:

The three of them ranged around me. Am I the enemy? Do my daughters blame me for what Gopal has done? Do they think it is my fault? Why Can't I talk to them, tell them what I feel, how it was? Why I can't I open my heart to them?(43)

Ironically, it is the woman who has to bear the consequences of rejection of marital life by her husband not only through denial of her physical and emotional fulfilment but also in the form of social alienation. Although Sumi had never felt as much affection for her parental home as like her sisters, Premi and Devaki, now realises that this was the last night in the house, the flood of memory gushed into her mind, paralyzing her composure and weakening her emotions. Feeling like a parasite living in her father's house, Sumi goes out to hunt for a house of her own, but in vain. She is aware of the bliss of

human relationships, but she accepts the harsh facts of life boldly. Emotionally balancing Gopal and she have to lead their separate ways. This proves the fact that Sumi is matured enough to realise that life is not a bed of roses, and the only way in which one can survive is to maintain a sensible and balanced attitude. Her only wish is that her daughters' life should be a comparatively happy one. Deshpande aptly quotes, "I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to taste life. I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter" (220). Another admirable quality in Sumi is her ability to relate herself to the world. She balances the emotional state of her mind after Gopal's neglect, she resumes the creativity and writes a play called *The Gardiner's son* and proposes to write another. This makes her get relieved from emotional isolation, feels good and wants to write the story of Surpanakha from an original point of view:

Female sensibility. We're ashamed of owning it, we can't speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And, therefore, where the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? ... Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuawomanlity, not frightened of displaying it – it is this Surpanakha I am going to write about.(191)

This shows her broad – mindedness and her eager emotional sense to place man – woman relationships on a sound and impartial footing. There is an end for all her compassion that Sumi dies suddenly of an accident, just before taking up a job to support herself and her daughters. Thus, had she lived, she would have become an economically independent woman with modern and matured outlook towards life, and at the same time, a loving and responsible mother.

The third protagonist of *A Matter of Time* is Sumi's daughter, Arundhati or Aru. She can be called as the focal point of the novel for she observes everything and everyone objectively and holds a moral scale against which she would measure everyone, including herself. Shashi Deshpande considers Aru to be the heroine of the story, based on her evaluations on the norms prescribed in the *Natyashastra*. She is young, beautiful and noble. Aru's sensitivity makes her the most likable character in the novel that silently reaches out to others and feels their predicament keenly. She emotionally gets angry and reacts angrily to her mother's stoic acceptance. She even consoles Kalyani by telling her that she will look after her just like a son. By observing the unbalancing life style of her parents and grand -parents, she considers marriage in India to be the most coveted relationship, does not have a place in Aru's life. Deshpande is of the view that Aru is quick enough to perceive " ...new dimensions of betrayal and cruelty in the man – woman relationship."(145). However one can say that marriage life is not always like Kalyani and Sumi as Deshpande commented, Aru fails to appreciate the beauty of marriage, but this may be because of her immaturity and bitter experience of marriages like those of her parents and grand – parents. Obviously Aru is entirely different from the first two protagonists by nature, character and approach. Only at the end of the novels, Gopal notices a striking resemblance between Aru and Kalyani

Thus, the readers find that the protagonists of Deshpande ever maintain dignity, strength and balancing the emotions. They make allowances for others, adjust and accommodate emotional shackles but without compromising their individual character. It is only through a process of self examination and self – searching; through courage and resilience, one can change one's situation from despair to hope.

On the whole, in the modernized society, women are equally shouldering the burden of the family, socially, economically, physically and what not by all means. But they are so far considered and treated as inferior and sacrificial being in front of patriarchal society. Women easily get melted and ever volunteers in compromising many in life for the sake of men, there her flaw starts. To the above mentioned protagonists, marriage is the most important happening in a

woman's life. Obviously it is proved that it is both a problem and a solution to life's problem, it differs depends upon the life style of both men and women.

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