CHAPTER-IV

STRUGGLE AGAINST PATRIARCHY:

SMALL REMEDIES and MOVING ON

With the beginning of Twentieth Century there emerged a new group of intellectual, who advocated the belief that it is not biological differences but psycho-social differences and the method to nurture the children of different sexes, which in later life play detrimental role in shaping the personality of children. Shashi Deshpande seems advocating this belief as she has portrayed new women who are no more ready to bear the torchers and torments by the society in submissive manners rather they would mould the society and its norms in their favour.

Through her novels, Shashi Deshpande claims a strong place among the feminist fiction writers of Indo Anglian Literature. Although she has refused categorically to be branded as a feminist, the sounds and rights of beaten womanhood echo throughout her novels. Before Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, one of India's major living authors, appears with her novels in which her female characters, especially protagonists suffer from the problem of self-alienation, maladjustment and lack of communication in their
married life, neurosis. Her female protagonist’s preterm to escape from the reality then to face it. But Shashi Deshpande appears with a more strong and developed conception of her women characters. She has given them new dimensions and complexities. They are more mature and mentally stable than the characters of Anita Desai. The reason behind this mental stability of women characters is their strong background, childhood memories, the love of their parents for them, their education and their good understanding of nature of human relationship.

Shashi Deshpande is a prolific writer. She is very much concerned about feministic issues in all most in her novels. In all her literary creations she writes something on one or the other serious problems regarding the status and identity of women in Indian society. Her That Long Silence and Dark Holds no Terrors are milestones which address the issues of silent suffering of women, that gradually smothers her creativity and her inborn talent. If Jaya in That Long Silence is a typical conventional woman Saritain Dark Holds no Terrors is self assured, self confident, independent doctor, Jaya, despite being an efficient creative writer stops writing when after her marriage, her husband develops inferiority complex in her while Sarita was victim of
sadomasochism of her husband and finds difficult to share this secret with anyone. At close of these novels both of them realize the necessity to revolt against the autocrat attitude of the husband and decide to express themselves. Thus That Long Silence and Dark Holds no Terrors depict remarkable journey of woman from silence to speech. This is great contribution of shashi Deshpande to feministic issues.

In Small Remedies Shashi Deshpande depicts the immense problems and obstacle women have to undergo only because of their sex and society's mental set up, segregation of roles by society etc. The theme of Small Remedies revolves around the life of Savitribai and Leela who are rebel in the real sense. Though they are not doing anything extraordinary or unethical but they are just pursuing their dreams, making a mark of their own and want to live a substantial life. But the price they have to pay in the form of living a secluded life, being treated as social outcaste and rejected by their own family. One of them was a rebel as she developed passion for music while the other married to a man of her choice.

Savitri once heard the music by Pandit Kashinath Bua and she was determined to learn music under his guidance. He kept refusing her for a long time. This persistent and constant
refusal to accept Savitri bai as a disciple has a direct bearings with the traditional patriarchal mindset. These activities, whether professional or immature are always discouraged by the traditional males who do not like any efforts by women to establish their individual identity, and to get recognized themselves distinctly as from being "the property of her husband." (Woolf, 51) Therefore under this same notion Kashinath Bua refused to teach Savitri Bai, "he thought music was no profession for a respectable married woman. Because he, a traditional man, did not want to encourage her to step out of her traditional role". (130)

Savitri Bai was initially refused to be accepted as a disciple by Kashinath Bua. By sheer perseverance and struggle she finally achieved success in persuading him to become her teacher. After severe illness he decided to spend the rest of his life in his native place Bhavanipur she followed him there, and only then he accepted her as a disciple. .. "had left her husband and house and was living with Ghulam Saab, (129) who used to be her tabla master.

That was the beginning of immense labour, besides traveling daily for 2 hours by shuttle train to and from Bhavanipur then from Railway station, Savitri Bai had to walk two miles to guruji's house. This way she
spent seven long years learning music from him. And then gradually she reached at the pinnacle of her success. Shashi Deshpande has narrated her success story but in totally different manner. Though other women writers also depict “the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world”. (Pathak, 12) But none of them has presented it such minutely. The torture, pain, insults that she might had to bear, remain unmentioned, all these things, very intelligently, are left for the imagination of readers. Savitri Bai never speaks about any of the obstacles she had to endure "she demises the sacrifice the articles about her invariably speak of, she minimize the struggle she sidesteps it. Even the problems she is supposed to have with other artists are never spoken of." (167) The realistic description and natural development of Savitri Bai's character is the real flavour of her art of narration. In this regard, she expresses her ideas to an interviewer:

“My characters take their own ways. I've heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing had to do with women as they are” (Literature Alive, 1/3 December 1987, 0.12)

Leela, born in a large family of six sisters was almost a "rebel in the wholly conventional, tradition bound family". (44) Defying contemporary social norms and family tradition, she remarried after death of her
husband. In her family her name became a symbol of someone who is bad, "a black sheep of the family". (44) Those people never gave any consideration to her other achievements. Her accomplishments they never spoke of those things. Deshpande has depicted her as a strong willed person, who was a social activist actively engaged in the welfare of factory workers and she also participated in freedom struggle and even faced imprisonment for that. After freedom she became a naxalite sympathizer, a communist who was again imprisoned during emergency. Though rejected by her own mother's family she was a continuous source of inspiration for other family members, the younger generation who would like to define themselves by their relation to her. She was so much popular among this new generation that they even introduced themselves to each-other, keeping her in the centre. She was the unseen bond that tied the family together in a knot. Hari was very enthusiastic about the active role Lela played during emergency. "Her involvement with the striking railway workers. With their families". (46) He tells Madhu "I heard about her and suddenly realized who she was. I felt good about it. Having someone in the family who was part of the resistance to the Emergency. I thought it was wonderful". (46) Deshpande has projected Leela as a modern, educated woman, who takes her decisions herself. She is self-reliant, strong willed, sacrificing and motivating figure. We cannot deny that in Leela, Deshpande presents "recurrent glorification of the wifely
and maternal role that Betty Friedan named 'the feminine mystique' (Singh, 2002 : 24) But Leela does not end up being a good mother devoted wife as she had no children of her own so in actual sense, she is not a mother. The fact stands that she nurtures three of her step children and her nice Madhu. She is complete in her self-does not rely on anybody for any kind of support emotional or otherwise. Her role as a social activist and her loving, caring nature and self-sacrificing spirit are the humane qualities. But beyond everything, she is an epitome of courage. The very next day, after her husband Joe's death, she shifted to a one-room chawl and the goons tried to frighten her, as they wanted to buy the whole place, but she with her unbending courage stayed there until her death.

In her next novel Moving On (2004), Shashi Deshpande has presented a number of female characters liked Manjari, Gayatri, Vasu, Suchi, Malvika 'Malu' etc. Manjari has played the role of narrator as well as of protagonist in the novel. She has been presented a widow of middle age who constantly struggles against “selected amnesia”( Meitei 1998 : 74). She has the pleasant memories of past of her childhood for which she always feels nostalgic. Manjari is the elder daughter of her parents Badri Naryan and Vasu. Her small
family with her parents and her younger sister is a happy family. The memories of her family and her childhood provide a base to her life. When she discovered her father's diary after so many years, she at once got back to her past and tried to get the answer how much she knew about her parents. Her parents had died. First she dared not to go through the diary of her dead father, but later on she realized that she “need to know her parent”. (31) She had a lots of doubts and questions about her changing relationship with her father whether he was happy to be with her in his last days, what was his views about their changing relationship.

She shared a good relationship with father before her marriage. And even after her disputed marriage, though her parents opposed her marriage with Shayam, she remained near them during the time of their death. Although she was quite aware of her changing relationship with her parents, she could not forget the memories of her childhood.

With each page, I recovered a few of those cell I had shed so painfully. But recreate myself. No, Baba, I could never do that, it was impossible. The old jiji
wouldn't let go, she held on, clinging like an iguaner to a rock. (245)

At another occasion she admits, “all our lives so entwined, so knitted together that I will never be able to separate them.” (270) Her Younger sister Malvika 'Malu' also got a especial place in her life because when she was born Manjari got the designation of 'jiji' and from then, she was called 'jiji' by everyone. “There is nothing before this memory, as if I had no existence before Malu's birth. Even my name jiji, came to me with Malu.”(23) Manjari proved a rebellious daughter to her parents. Against the wishes of her parents, she married Shyam when she was only 18 years old. Her parents tried their best to make her understood that she was too young to marry a person she should pursue her medical career, but she remained obstinate to her decision of marriage. I was more astonished than angry at Baba's and Mai's attitude. How could they be so obtuse! How was it they could not understood me. And there were moments of intense grief too, at slowly growing divide between us. (248) Even after the death of her husband, when she was only twenty one years old, she maintained no contact
with her parents. It was only Raja who informed her about her parents' being on verge to death both the time.

Inspite of her rebellious nature, she knew very well how to bring balance or how to make relationship stable. After her marriage when and she lived in her husbands’ house on rent, she never complained to her husband and her parents the indifferent and detached attitude of her in – law. Even she brought up the daughter of her sister "Malu' who was raped by her husband Shyam, just like her own daughter. She never told her past, about her marriage, to her children Anand and Saachi not to burden them with unpleasing memories of past. She never interfered with her daughter’s decision to sell the house. She gave them the freedom from their part.

Shashi Deshpande has presented Manjari as a woman who is constantly transforming herself. With the passage of time, she transformed from a young girl to a mature lady according to the need of time. She faced every difficulty of her life with great maturity and took every decision keeping the situation in mind. After her husband's death she took the responsibility of her two children on her shoulder and fought with every difficulty remained composed and mentally balanced. She led an unstable life to give a settled life to her children. She muses ,“Rolling stone, Raja called me. I wonder what I will say if a tell him about all the
jobs I’ve had- ayah in a school, sales girls, typist, P.T. teacher, nurse almost to an old man who salivated over me.” (215) When Raja, her childhood companion proposed her for marriage, like a mature woman she devise his proposal saying 'one doesn't marry for safety and security but for love. She always accepted the reality and never tried to escape from them. She gave a practical reason for her illegitimate relationship with Raman. When Raja objected such relationship, she said boldly. “I was twenty one when Shayam died, I remind him, twenty one. Think of that. Did he expect me to live the life of a chaste widow the rest of my life?” When intruders threatened her to sell her house, at first she feared but later on she decided not to sell the house and continued to live there. But then she thought, it seems to matter more that she would not “let the house fall in to the wrong hands” (74). Whatever then criminals wanted to achieve, they've certainly “made me align myself with Sachi. It is no longer Sachi’s house but mine.” (74)

Being a student of Anatomy, she always remained aware of the demands and desire of her body and she could't resist them. This gave complexity to her character and behaviour. When her mother tried to make her understand that her love for Shayam was not love but it was the outcome of the changes in her body. She rejected all the arguments and said that, “On the contrary, all the confusion had vanished. My body was
clear now about what it wanted, it wanted Shyam. (187) Even her actual relationship with Raman was the outcome of her bodily desire not of any love for him. As she admits herself that for her “it was just his body, nothing but his body” (187) what matters. She was so such engrossed in the demands of her body that most of the time, she never cared for the emotions of others her mother, Malu and Raja. Although she realized clumsiness latter on, the demands of her body always come first to her. Even she started yoga classes with Nirmala because such a profession could also fulfill the demands of her body them any other profession like teaching or typing. Yoga is the only activity that gives pleasure to her as it brings “harmony between mind and body, the ‘sense of peace that I have after it yes, it pleases me.’” (181) This element of her character gives her complexity which is hard to understand.

Gayatri, the other important character of the novel, was the sister of Manjari’s father. She was the centre of her family. She was or simple girl not much beautiful. Being motherless child, she always fulfilled her responsibilities towards her family. Inspite of being a bright student, she did not continue her education after her marriage because her family and her responsibilities were for more important to her then her education. Her married life led a smooth course. She showed a good relationship with her husband. Her marriage to R,K needs something more then the usual word...
'happy'. The case between them and their absolute intimacy was as if they had known each other for many of times. Her pleasing nature and her cozy acceptance of the rituals of in-laws family brought the success to their marriage. Like other female characters of Shashi Deshpande, she had moulded herself into that image which was expected from her brother wrote in his diary.

We'd grown up, the two of us, in a house in which there were no religious rituals. Our father positively hated them. But after her marriage, Gayatri, as the elder daughter-in-law of the family, had to perform all the rituals; she had quickly learned to drill. (57)

Gayatri was at ease not only with her brother but also with his wife. It was she who gave her approval to her brother with Vasu and when Vasu at her last time detached everyone it was only Gayatri with whom she interacted. It was always Gayatri who tried to bring an atmosphere of case and balance in her brother's family. As her brother wrote.

Our rift saddened Gayatri, but she made no attempt to become a bridge between us. Yet in creating a faced of a normal life, Gayatri actually began a slow healing process, normality itself is always healing. (58)
After Vasu's death, she arranged a tenant for her brother's house so that he might need feel alone. Even she read the stories of Vasu and her brother felt the presence of his wife in his house. Gayatri proved stranger them her brother in hearing the sorrow of her husband's death she was more composed and moved one. As Manjari said, “Here were two people, brother and sister both of whom lost a beloved partner midstream why is it Babu gave up so completely, while Gayatri managed to keep going?”(84) Although she was childless, she never made it an issue at all. She always tried to bestow her mutual love on her niece and nephew. She felt very happy in the company of children when they visited her home during their vacation. She used to make all arrangements to make their visit happy and kept planning and looking forward to it. But when Raja married Rukku, his mother Kamala held Gayatri responsible for taking her son away from her. This change hurt Gayatri deeply. “She made me feel ‘that I was are of those childless women who crew others children. I-I who never felt childless because of thought of your children, of her children, as my own.” (237) Gayatri helped at lot to keep the pregnancy of Malu a secret in order to save the however of nor brother’s family.

Through the character of Gayatri, Shashi Deshpande has presented the image of an ideal woman, one who is busy in “demystifying”(Bullock et.al. 1988 : 253) After her husband’s death, she not only made herself
strong but also remained socially active. Her example is the proof that “women are stronger and more resilient” (161) Gayatri never let her connections to other humans die out, she kept them intact and alive. She continued to be there, not only for her family, but for many others as well.

Vasu was also an important female character of the novel. She was the sister or two brothers one Bharat who was an engineer and second Laxman a criminal. She was brighter than both of her brothers. Her brother Laxman admired her very much. She was the cleverest of the three, he used to say “yes she was cleverer than Bharat…. She got married too early. She should have waited a little, gone to college, studied some more. She could have done much” (144).

Although her husband was the teacher of anatomy she never understood his passion for human body. Even it was very hard for her to consummate her marriage. She lived comfortably in her small family with her husband and two daughters. But the ease of relationship between husband and wife always remained invisible. Perhaps her husband's passion for human body was responsible for all this. She says, “I am grieved that I failed to convey to her the enormous tenderness I felt for her. That my passion, my urgent need of her body, erased all other message of love and tenderness.” (41) Yet she played the role of tender mother very well, She left her younger daughter Malu to her brother
Bharat so that her daughter's would get loving care and his brother’s loneliness would find a solace in her presence. She even tried her best to resist her elder daughter Manjari from marrying a person in an early age of eighteen. Her daughter Manjari admired her highly saying that her mother “did everything correctly, she did her duty as a mother as meticulously as she did everything else.” (254)

Vasu was a story writer and her stories used to publish in the magazines. But her writing was a secret business because family was always her priority and she couldn't neglect it for the sake of her career as a short story writer. But she was quite professional in her attitude and always fulfilled her commitments on time. She was not a great literary figure and whatever popularity she enjoyed, it was for a short time span when Manshi was filmed. Her stories were more popular then she was. ‘Aannapurnar’, ‘Chandrika,’ Madhuri’, ‘Blackout’ were some of her famous stories. Her stories were never based on the facts of her own life. As Manjari said, “If there is nothing of herself in her stories, I can recognize some bits of her life, of our family life, in them.” (126) She knew the limitations of writing as something personal. Yes, Mai knew what writing could do once you wrote a thing down, it became final, it was there forever, you could no longer ignore what had happened”…. (117) She had ignored passion for body even her stories depict her
complex attitude for the demands of body which was quite visible in her stories.

In her stories too, except for references to liquid eyes, rose-petal-soft or milk-white skin and delicate features, the characteristics of beauty demanded of heroines which she dutifully bestowed on them, she had ignored the body. As if the parts, when lifted out of the body, were safer. She stopped her writing after the death of her younger daughter Malu because she did not want to lessen her pain and burden by writing. She “blocked herself so effectively, so successfully, that it was a kind of literary suicide. She became wholly mute. I always thought this was the result of what happened to her daughter.” (200)

Vasu is the most mysterious character in the novel because she has been presented as the dead character. She was alive in the memories of her daughter Manjary and in the pages of diary of her husband which he started writing after her death. So certain questions relating to her life remain unanswered because she was not alive to answer them. She was Marathi and her husband was a South Indian Brahmin. Her family misunderstood him for a doctor and that’s why they gave him their acceptance for their marriage. Before their marriage, he cleared his situation before Vasu that he was the teacher of anatomy. After some years of their marriage he came to know she had not listened whatever he
told her that day. So the question arises, why did she marry him. Even she
did not tell her husband that she was a story writer and her stories used to
publish in magazine. Her husband came to know this later on. Perhaps her
shy and reserve nature was responsible for all these things. Yet she feels
happy at her home, as her daughter Manjari said, “Mai was shy woman;
her reserve and rather stern face concealed a shyness that male. If hard for
her to be among strangers.”(34)

The relationship between Vasu and her husband was not cozy and
smooth. Both couldn’t understand each other’s feelings and lack of
communication was also responsible for all this confusion. Vasu stopped
sharing her sorrow even after the death of her daughter. She concealed her
disease from her husband. Her husband accepted this fact in his diary.
Theirs (Gujatri S R K) was a companionship that could take place in all
the things that happened to them. Even death. Unlike “mine and Vasu’s.
All that had held us together come suddenly unraveled in one moment and
there was nothing left between us.” (202) Malu and her daughter Shuchi
were the most pathetic character of the novel. Malu in the beginning
suffered from Asthamma and later on she was respected by her sister’s
husband. After the birth of her daughter, she died. Shuchi who was
brought up by hermausi and was totally ignorant about her past. She had a
great desire to know about her dead father and the cause of her
grandfather’s handling of his house to her. The mysteries of her life had made her so disturbed that her behaviour towards her mother Manjari becomes rude but latter on, she mended it. But whatever she does, she also emerge as a strong, independent woman who wants to fight for her rights. The women characters in Moving on do not want to remain burdened with unpleasing memories of past. They would never live under the crumpling effect of past but rather acquire freedom from their past and move towards a better and more fulfilling life.

To sum up, the characterization of female characters in the novels is handled in a very well manner. The use of stream of consciousness technique brings a reality in their character. They have been presented through different perspectives. Deshpande consciously rejected the notion believing that “patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of feminity on all biological women” (Jefferson and Robey 1986 :209). Shashi Deshpande created this immortal character every India woman would like to identify with. She is a true feminist, but not from the western point of view. She is one who worked passionately to satisfy her inner desire. She defended what she seriously believed in and once she chose the path, nothing could ever bend her spirit. Through her protagonists Deshpande has portrayed the new Indian woman who understands herself and “to preserve her identity as wife, mother, and
above all, as a human being in the tradition bound, male-dominated Indian women and her dilemmas, her efforts to society". (Pathak, 1998 :19) and thus undoubtedly she has secured her place among the best fiction writers.
REFERENCES


