

## An Exploration of Shashi Deshpande's Art of Writing

Navesh Kumar

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Dr. J.M. College, Muzaffarpur, (Bihar) India*

### Abstract

Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent place in Indian writing in English. Her language has often been called simple, realistic and transparent. It neither draws attention to itself nor confuses the reader in any way. It probably fits itself to all situations. She expresses stories in a very complicated structure. They have digressive pattern, with the present juxtaposed with flashbacks technique from the past.

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Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent place in Indian writing in English. Her language has often been called simple, realistic and transparent. It neither draws attention to itself nor confuses the reader in any way. It probably fits itself to all situations. Ms. Deshpande's primary stress is upon the middle-class ethos and her language reflects this concern. She uses English of middle-class individual who knows English besides his mother tongue, and sometime the language is little incorrect, by the standards of British English. This "middle-class English" is a characteristic quality of Shashi Deshpande's work. Her short stories follow a conventional linear narrative structure, often in the first person's narrative. G.S.B. Gupta observes:

"Her recurrent use of first-person narration  
Lends a ring of authenticity of her writing"<sup>1</sup>

She expresses stories in a very complicated structure. They have digressive pattern, with the present juxtaposed with flashbacks

technique from the past. As in 'the first Lady' we see;

"suddenly, standing there in the midst of the Reception, all solemnity and no spontaneity. The memory of the first Independence day comes Back to vividly".<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Deshpande presents a technique similar to that of Indian regional cinema. The narrative moves in flashback, from past to present, creating the background through minute's details and picking up a single moment or experience from closer scrutiny. Mrs. Deshpande utters:

May be that is the way I work... to  
The end of one incident, but then I  
have to go back  
Because it links on to something else.  
I'm interested,  
I think, with what we do with our past  
as well as  
What our past does to us.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most important characteristic of Shashi Deshpande's art of narration is the use of metaphor in the fictions. The recurring metaphors used in her fictions are "dark", "sunlight", "death" and "life". Though these metaphors are not too much in number but they have very significant role in the stories. They clearly reveal the inner workings of the protagonists' minds and the emotional waves in their hearts. The metaphor of dark is used in her story 'It was Dark'. The story brings out the miserable condition of an unmarried girl having been seduced by an unknown young man. It results in an unspeakable shock to her owing to an illegal pregnancy. In the story the man is identified with "the dark" or with "the evil".

The narrative technique employed by the novelists is also gaining importance, considering the gradual increase in the different methods of storytelling. Plain narrative or story telling is still the most common method employed by the novelist who is omnipresent and omniscient in this type of writing. The first person narrative is usually employed by the novelist to make his story appear more realistic and more credible. While novels written in such a manner have a ring of authenticity to them, they do not enable the novelist to look deep into the minds and motives of the rest of the characters. Shashi Deshpande overcomes this problem by using a combination of the first person and third person narrative coupled with flashback devices to lend force and realism to the novel. A chronological analysis of Deshpande's development as a novelist requires a keen study of the narrative techniques employed by her, beginning with her first full length novel,

roots and shadow. The novel essentially deals with the protagonist Indu's painful self-analysis. The author also tries to encompass several other themes in this slim novel. A part from the obvious and central theme of Indu's relentless probing to discover herself, there is the theme of bohemianism in the person of Naren in stark contrast to the middle-class values of Indu's family. There is the theme of woman's fate in general which is brought to the reader's notice, unobtrusively, in the form of Indu's observations. There is also the theme of the old order giving way to the new-symbolized by the demolition of the old house to construct a hotel. As Shama observes: "this slender novel attempts, and is enable to develop them beyond making reflections on each which are almost in the nature of asides".<sup>4</sup> Other critics like Madhu Sings, however, are highly appreciative of her skill in interweaving myriad themes into a coherent whole. Comparing *Roots and shadow* with that long silence, Madhu Singh point out that the former "is the more powerful of the two. In its succinctness lie its strength and the puch."<sup>5</sup>

The *Dark Hold No Terrors* is commendable for its honest portrayal of the psychological problems faced by the protagonist, Sarita, a career woman, who achieves a rare level of authenticity because of the use of a double perspective-the shifting of the narrative from the first person to the third person in every alternate chapter.

The Sahitya Akademi Award winning *That Long Silence* is a complex novel of despair and triumph, of suppression and freedom, all played out for the better part in the heroine's mind through memories and recollections. The narrative moves back and forth between

Saptagirl (presumably in Karnataka), and Ambegaon (again presumably in Maharashtra) and Dadar in Bombay. Mrs. Deshpande also establishes her ethos through Kannad terms of address such as Avva (father) and description of ceremonies and rituals such as the Mangalagauri Pooja and Hartalika, both rituals performed by women to ensure the longevity of the husband.

The narrative of That Long Silence is based on flashback technique.

“is not a forbidding stream of consciousness

Probe in the Virginia Woolf tradition.

It is very

Much a conventional tale full of social realism

Evoked by links of memory. Not misty recollection

But clear-eyed story telling.<sup>6</sup>

The narration achieves a kind of catharsis by an objective analysis of what went wrong with her marriage and why she had failed as a writer. According to the reviewer Rita Joshi,

‘The method is reminiscent of Samuel Becket in Plays such as that time where the character sits

Centre stage. While three voices go over his past<sup>7</sup>.

The Binding Vine differs in its mode of narration from her earlier novels. The narrative structure in Roots and shadows, the dark holds no terrors and that long silence does not progress chronologically, but instead moves back and forth thematically, gradually relating one incident after the other until the entire story is revealed. In the Binding Vine, however,

individual plots of three different stories are interwoven bringing together three women separated by age, status and education.

Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande’s most recent novel, works at different levels-the personal, the worldly, women’s rights, communal violence, motherhood etc. it vacillates between the present and the past, delving into the lives of Savitribai, Leela, Munni, and the narrator Madhu herself. It is structured as a biography within a biography, with the writer, Madhu, often in a dilemma about how to tell her story.

Mrs. Deshpande’s art of narration lies in her clear realistic description of the middle-class existence in small towns in the metropolis. Her description of Bombay, for instance, draws not up to glamour and glitter of the metropolis but upon the degraded and irritable quality of its numerous issues.

The motif of enclosure and confinement recurs in Shashi Deshpande’s short stories. It is employed, both to signify the lack of freedom and the restricted existence of the middle-class woman as well as to reflect the disaffection and loneliness that often set into a marriage.

It must be observed that Shashi Deshpande makes a sparing use of irony, satire or even humour which are the ingredients of the great works of art. Flashes of irony are evident in one or two incidents in a couple of novels but they do not seem to be included intentionally by the writer. The most obvious example which comes to mind is the scene in that long silence where Mohan, Jaya’s husband, accuses her of avoiding him during the crucial period when they are in hiding because of the fear of corruption charges is leveled at him. It is

during this period that Jaya herself is facing a traumatic time and needs support. Her husband's accusation, therefore, seems

highly ironical and throws her off balance for sometimes.

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