

A Study on Conjugal Conflicts in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*

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Abstract

The paper titled “A study on Conjugal Conflicts in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*” mainly focuses on the relationship between man and women. Every individual wants to be enjoyed and valued by others. Women need more love than men, whereas a man prefers being respected by others especially by women. The study focuses deep into the female psyche that concentrates on various angles based on the relationship between the conjugal couples. The study explores the relational struggles and the vicious circle in relationships. This conflict arises not only because of misunderstandings but also because of the difference between the desires of man and women.

Keywords: Relationships, Conjugal conflicts.

Literature is an expression of life. The writers draw substances from life and present it vividly for others to feel and enjoy it. The vital relationship between literature and life depicted in literature brings into contact with fresh, strong and magnetic personalities who embody themselves in world's great books. A good work of literature is the mirror that reflects the society of a particular period. So the relation between literature and life is reciprocal and not mechanical. According to Mehta, “Literature is the art of written book.”

Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language would be one of the numerous languages of India. One of such writers is Shashi Deshpande. Her novel *A Matter of Time* (1996) is an exploration of feminine experience. Through this novel, she takes the themes of silence

gender differences, passive sufferings, familial relationship into much deeper realm and lays bare a story which excites.

The present study aimed to analyse the situation that precipitate and intensify conflict in the conjugal relationship. In daily life, conjugal violence possesses a view that circles with three different stages beginning in a period of conflicts, which leads to tension between the couple, followed by the phase of the violence itself, in which the aggressor loses emotional and physical control followed by the phase of reconciliation. In life everybody has to live within relationship, for there is no other way. The underlying theme in this study is conjugal conflicts. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the relationships have been portrayed in a very realistic and transparent way with the joys and sorrows that accompany everyday life and nobody can escape what life offers and this in turn has an impact on the individual's future course of life.

This paper tries to bring out the idea of women explicating herself and emerging out of the cocoon of self-pity to spread her wings of self-confidence. According to Beauvoir, "One is not born but rather becomes, a woman, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, described as a feminine" (267). Shashi Deshpande gives minute details in her novels about the women belonging to Indian middle class – who are brought up in a traditional and are struggling to liberate themselves and seek their self-identity and independence.

Deshpande is mainly interested in the clash of tradition and modernity, as reflected in the generation gap and conflict among women. She deals with the women's psyche and the way she is made to feel an inferior being, an unwanted child, a burden on the family, for instance, Kalyani in *A Matter of Time*. In this novel Kalyani – Sumi and Sumi- Aru are fascinating relationships. the complexities of man-woman relationships specially in the context of marriage, the trauma of a disturb adolescence, the attempt to break traditional moulds in which women are trapped, sexual discrimination, the rejection of the dependency syndrome and introspection are some of the concerns which give the novel a feminist bent.

The study discusses about the issues and problems of contemporary middle class women. More than being a feminist Deshpande is a humanist. She expresses her desire to be a humanist in an interview given to vanamala viswanatha. In this interview, Deshpande denotes that, "I want to reach a stage where I can write about human being and not about women in relation to men. I don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective, it's only a coincidence" (237).

The study deals with the portrayal of conjugal conflicts of the second generation pair, Kalyani and Shripati, Deshpande depicts the predicament of women who are confined in the frame work of traditional marriage and lead a life of self-denial and suffering. Kalyani is the only daughter of her parents. She is not allowed to complete her studies because marriage is the main

consideration for her mother. She has to accept her uncle as her husband. This is the main reason of “the hopelessness that lay within the relationship that doomed it from the start” (143).

Manorama’s better attitude towards Kalyani gets soft when Kalyani gives birth to a son. But this child turns out to be mentally retarded. Kalyani loses this child at the railway station while going to his paternal home. With this, her married life comes to an end. She is never forgiven by her husband for being responsible for the loss of her male child. She has to suffer because of the loss of her male child and the ruthless with drawl of her husband thereafter. Kalyani returns home as a deserted wife. This is considered to be a disgrace to the family. Shripatsi comes back after two months, but he never speaks to Kalyani. They live like strangers under the same roof. She consider her situation better than widows Sumi, her daughter, questions this kind of existence. “It is enough to have a husband and never mind the fact that he has not looked your face for years, never mind the fact that he had not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifhood make up for everything for the deprivation of a man’s love” (167).

Kalyani finds herself in a situation in which she has no choice but to accept the pain of loneliness. The lack of communication between Shripati and Kalyani raises various issues related to matrimony. In spite of all this, Kalyani does not turn bitter to other family members, rather she becomes the support for the rest of the family. She brings up her daughters alone. She fears a similar fate to her daughter, Sumi. She becomes very upset when she comes to know about Gopal’s decision of leaving Sumi. She never wants that her daughter should suffer like her. She cries, “No, no my God not again”(12). She goes to Gopal and takes the entire responsibility of Sumi’s marriage, Kalyani doesn’t turn pessimistic. She is very bright and has optimistic attitude towards life. She is very enthusiastic about getting a good match for Aru, her granddaughter. With Shripati’s death, Kalyani’s hope of reconciliation and her hopeless marriage both come to an end. Though Shripati had no feelings for her, she cries bitter after his death.

As stated earlier, the husband-wife relationship does not exist in isolation. It gets affected by myriad factors. ‘Manorama never relented in her anger towards her daughter. There was more to it than the disgrace of her coming back home, a rejected wife Manorama’s treatment of her daughter adversely affected her relationship with Vithalrao and the rift between them never healed. Vithalrao had a stroke soon after and for this, too, Manorama held her daughter responsible.

Kalyani has turned the very weapon employed against her into her armour. Her silence is a mode of resistance which is highly potent because it doesn’t allow anyone even a glimpse of her feelings or thought process. It puzzles Aru to distraction as she attempts to understand the inscrutable nature of Kalyani and try to accept her contradictory attitudes towards her. Aru is in some ways the heroin of the novel as the omniscient narrator herself admits, “Is Aru the heroin? Why not? ... Perhaps there’s this too, this above all, that Aru is trying to make sense of what is

happening, her consciousness moving outside herself and reaching out to the others as well as embracing, in fact, the whole of what is happening”(185).

In her attempt at making sense of the situation, Kalyani gradually moves towards an understanding that perhaps, she has come to terms with the past and she remains Sumi of a spider she had seen a few days ago, spinning an intricate delicate web into a beautiful design because of the variety of relationships she has. As the narrator says the family does not seem to realize that, “the real miracle is Kalyani herself, Kalyani who survived intact, in spite of what Shripati did to her, Kalyani who survived Manorama’s myriad act of cruelty” (151). Shashi Deshpande insists upon a ‘space’ for women. If the ‘self’ of women is disregarded, through the ‘unwritten story’. Women will record her protest and create character in real life like Kalyani, Sumi and Aru to challenge the stereotyped images of women. This novel weaves an intricate pattern of relationship within an extended family spanning across generations.

It is clear that Shripati suspected Kalyani of deliberately losing the mentally retarded child whom she found difficult to manage. Kalyani and her daughters didn’t see Shripati for nearly two months as he went on searching around the city like a madman for his lost son. Even though he was distraught and frantic for his son it was an act of public desertion as he left Kalyani and her daughters on the platform, surrounded by curious strangers. Later on Kalyani like Sumi went with her daughters to the ancestral home. After being forced by Manorama on her death bed, Shripati returned back to Kalyani after more than two months. However, he stayed in his room and never spoke to her again. Like Premi told Ani, “My father never spoke to me until I was ten... the truth was a father who stayed in his room, who never came out, never spoke to you” (197). The first time he really talked to her was after her medical exams when he summoned her to his room to tell her that she was getting married to Anil.

During a conversation, the talk veers towards a person who was interested in God and who died a year later. At this point God shudders involuntarily prompting Sumi to wonder whether it is this that helped Kalyani to wonder whether it is this that helped Kalyani to endure everything the fact that Kalyani has the right to all the privilege of the wife of a living husband. After Shripati’s death, they find in his will that he has left the house to Kalyani, daughter of Manorama and Vithalrao. God has looked anxiously at Kalyani, daughter of Manorama and Vithalrao. God has looked anxiously at Kalyani when Anil read the will, but for Kalyani, clearly here was no sting in the words that took away her marital status: “On the contrary, it is as if the words have given her something more than the house, restored something she had lost; they seem in fact, to have strengthened her” (189). The words that have given her back her identities are suddenly killed in an accident along with Shripati. It is interesting that the accident takes place when they have just mentioned Madhav, the lost son. In fact, Sumi takes a while to realize that Shripati is referring to the lost boy. She is surprised that he is talking about the child to her and turns around and sees a look of brooding tenderness on his face. It is the only time that father and

daughter utter his name and both die with it on their lips. As Ritu Menon notes, it is ironical that Kalyani's silence is broken with the deaths of Shripats Sumi.

Even since he had left Kalyani's story from Premi, after initial tumult she had been left with two images; a omen, her two daughters by her side, frozen into an image of endurance and desperation and a man moving all over the city tirelessly searching for his lost son. Even when Kalyani learnt about Sumi's death and cried out "I lost my child God"(234), Aru couldn't help wondering whether it was a declaration of innocence when it was too late and don't matter anymore or was she referring to Sumi. But when she saw God an envelope her in the folds of her love and compassion she realized that it did not matter. Forgiveness has no place in this relationship, acceptance is all.

In her earlier as well as later novels, it is not the aim of Shashi Deshpande to merely document female resistance to patriarchal ideologies, but also to focus on the strategies of readjustments for female protagonist undertake in order to forge an identity of their own. Her women characters struggle to learn to become one's own refuge and value the fellowship of other women. The women of Shashi Deshpande face formidable challenges to gain their rightful place in the society, which considers women as silent characters, whose role is to serve the members of her family without expecting anything. At last women try to come out of the shackles of servitude, in which she was chained for ages.

Shashi Deshpande through this novel went deep into the insight of female psyche. It is focused through the marital relationship in which she exposes the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. The novel reveals the man-made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian women in being a part of them. Women are always associated with the word like an ideal woman, that means self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. In the select novel *A Matter of Time*, it is an exploration of the female characters like Kalyani, Sumi and her daughter Aru.

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