



FRACTURED MEMORIES IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S A MATTER OF TIME

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Abstract:

Fractured memories are comparable to the broken memories. As the broken mirrors can't get the original shape with no fault in them the broken relationship of the three women characters cannot be set right. All the three protagonist of the novel have been destined to suffer in isolation. The marriage of all three is on the rocks. Women's status and position in the male dominated Indian society is very much precarious. *A Matter of Time* deals with the human predicament of three women representing three generations of the same family. This novel of Deshpande is different from her other novels in the sense that it is related not only to feminism but also to humanism. Being a realist, the novelist has depicted the weaknesses and shortcomings of both males and females. This novel also portrays the picture of a lady, namely, Sumi, who is not exploited by her husband directly, but she suffers due to sudden and selfish escape of her husband, Gopal, leaving all responsibilities of the family upon her shoulders. The novel narrates the story of Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru. The relation women characters share with their men is filled with silence, absence or indifference. This analysis of the novel a matter of the time registered the heart beats of the three women – Sumi, Kalyani and Manorama.

Key Words: Human Predicaments, Isolation, Fractured Memories, Male Domination, Victimization, Sheltering tree, Renunciation of life & Bondage of Love

Fractured Memories in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*:

Memory is a store house of all experiences, bitter and sweet. Sumi's life is one of losing battle to win in an abiding place in the heart of her husband, Gopal. For no fault of her husband Gopal left the family never to return, forcing Sumi to fend for herself by taking care of graph gets, branded on her memory, parallel to those of Manorama and Kalyani. Sripathy, who deserts his wife but lives in the same house within no exchange of any conversation. Shashi Deshpande applies the calipers of humanistic feminism to make a study of the fractured memories of the characters in *A Matter of Time*.

This chapter is devoted to fractured memories caused by the desertion of Sumi by her husband Gopal, of Manorama by her husband Vithal Rao and Kalyani by Shripathy. These torn memories turn out to be unhealed wounds in the lives of Sumi and Kalyani and Manorama. Fractured memories are comparable to the broken memories. As the broken mirrors can't get the original shape with no fault in them the broken relationship of the three women characters cannot be set right. All the three protagonist of the novel have been destined to suffer in isolation. The marriage of all three is on the rocks. Women's status and position in the male dominated Indian society is very much precarious.

The women's conditions especially in the lower section of the society are more vulnerable due to lack of education and social consciousness. The compulsion before them is to keep their marriage intact. They are taught from the beginning that the husband is the 'sheltering tree', 'symbol of *kumkum*' and protector of '*mangalsutra*'. Shashi Deshpande, a novelist of deep insight, themselves the problems of the Indian women and reflects fiat through her novel, *A Matter of Time*, which portrays the picture of the women who despite intolerable torture and vulnerable negligence of their husbands remain silent forever.

A Matter of Time deals with the human predicament of three women representing three generations of the same family. This novel of Deshpande is different from her other novels in the sense that it is related not only to feminism but also to humanism. Being a realist, the novelist has depicted the weaknesses and shortcomings of both males and females. However, as usual her attention has gone much to the pain, agony, suffering and endurance of married women in this novel also.

It is all because Deshpande champions the cause of the Indian women who are the subjects of suppression, exploitation, victimization and negligence even among the members of family. Her concern has been to expose the sufferings of women in the hands of their own members of family including their husbands. This novel also portrays the picture of a lady, namely, Sumi, who is not exploited by her husband directly, but she suffers due to sudden and selfish escape of her husband, Gopal, leaving all responsibilities of the family upon her shoulders.

The novel revolves round an urban middle class family consisting of Gopal and Sumi and their three daughters: Aru, Chant and Seema. Sumi is the protagonist who can put up with the adverse circumstances maintaining long silence and without complaining against anyone. Gopal, husband of Sumi, maintains cordial relations with his wife and daughters so long as he lives with them, but he forsakes them suddenly for the reason not known to other, even Gopal. Among the daughters Aru is the eldest one who proves herself more intelligent,

wise and dutiful towards her whole family including her grand-father and grand-mother. Sumi, an educated lady, who is matured enough to know the reality of life and truth of the world, is prepared to face any re-verse situation without any complaint to anybody.

The novel narrates the story of Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru. The relation women characters share with their men is filled with silence, absence or indifference. The family saga opens up when one evening Sumi's world is torpedoed as her husband Gopal walks out on her and their three daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema without any explanation. Gopal's desertion creates a vacuum in Sumi's life. She tries to trace out eventually the clues in the past acts and utterances of Gopal. He had once said that, *Sa-hriday*, is for those who accept the traditional Hindu view of marriage, where God unites both the hearts; and believe that the husband and wife are described as two halves of one total being. But somehow he realizes that he was utterly failing the idealistic expectations of the institution of marriage.

He could not feel himself a *Sa-hriday* with Sumi and was getting out of step with her. Sumi's marriage was a failure and had circumscribed her in an unexpected situation. No doubt that, Gopal's absence leaves her in a state of vast emptiness, yet, from the depth of her despair that she struggles hard to transform her emptiness into meaning in order to redefine her identity. She does not become a passive person, but an active agent. Sumi, like her mother, Kalyani, is a suffering oppressed and wronged woman. Yet, Sumi does not question the man, her oppressor- Gopal. She enacts no scene, no drama.

At one point in the novel, Gopal reaches very near the definition of existential fury. Deshpande's simple yet powerful prose reads like a grandmother's tale that pierces deep into heart and settles there. In one point the use of omniscient narration teases the reader as the speaker claims to foresee events but is not ready to share until time and plot unfolds it, at other end there is a sudden revelation of plot for poignant appeal.

The novel revolves around four generations of women Manorama, who is dead, but her presence is felt through her portrait, second generation is Kalyani and the third is Sumi and the fourth generation is Aru. Manorama, Kalyani's mother, always wants a son to be born, but Kalyani is born and Kalyani becomes an invisible symbol of her failure to have a son, now, that, she has a daughter, she wants her to be beautiful, accomplished in all walks of life, and wants to celebrate a wonderful marriage of Kalyani.

For Sumi's daughters, the situation is embarrassing as well as hurting because their father is not with them and the mother is silent. Each movement at the door makes them feel that Gopal has returned, but Sumi, unlike her daughters, has no fear of his death. She is sure that Gopal is living somewhere.

Deshpande is at her best using allusions to portray the development and inner turmoil of her characters. Her feminine concern makes the novel an all- female utopia where men are introduced either as product of memory, understood and reproduced from the point of view of women in the novel, or if present are shut out from the plot and from the reader's understanding of them. In spite of being rooted in a particular region, milieu, culture and gender, Deshpande's novel appeals because of its universal theme.

Manorama, could never get over her fear that her husband might marry again; because, she could never give him a son. Kalyani, though not so beautiful yet intelligent and good in studies. Because of her mother's insecurities she was not allowed to complete her studies. Her education was stopped abruptly and was married to Manorama's only brother Shripati. This marriage was also fretfully devised to keep the property in the family and, so she forces Shripati to marry Kalyani.

Sumi is a lady who has the commitment to live for her children and also stamina to work for them. After Gopal's walk out, Sumi without any grudge or grumbling and without any sign of distress soon she assumes the responsibility as the family guardian. She is courageous enough to endure the fate and flight amidst the adverse circumstances. Hence she becomes more alert and active so that daughters who need parental care should not suffer. Sumi allows the children no time for melancholy or nostalgia. She sets to work almost immediately and the girls follow her. She learns even to ride the scooter.

Aru, Sumi's elder daughter, is so upset and angry with her father that she wants Sumi to file a case against Gopal. In a court of law Sumi disagrees and tells Aru: "I just want to get on with my life she puts an arm around Aru's shoulder: "let him go, Aru, just let him go. This is not good for you"(61). With these words, she allows Gopal to have his own space, to carry out on his own decision, and to free himself from the bondage of love as he needs his freedom.

Sumi looks at the desertion as *Sanyasa*, (Renunciation of life) but the word *Sanyasa* cannot be equated to the Vedic renunciation. Sumi makes a casual remark. When, one studies Gopal's childhood to know the reason for his desertion, we see that Gopal's childhood was not a normal one. He painfully remembers that this father had married his own brother's wife, and he was born out of that marriage. In his adolescent period when he heard about this fact, somehow, his mind had not accepted this concept, and he thinks of several possible reasons for this marriage.

Sumi reveals essentially an optimistic vision of life. She demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She never wants to end her life like that of her mother. She introspects her relation with Gopal in a more matured way and recognizes that Gopal's life and its concept have always different identity from those of hers "Our journeys are always separate, that's how they're meant to be. If we travel together for a while, that's

only a coincidence” (212).

The novel comes to a full circle with Aru. During Gopal's desertion, Aru is in a state of confusion and defiance. She still wants to be a child to that state of happy, carefree existence, they had enjoyed in the family. Now, with her grandmother, initially she resents Kalyani's oppressive love and the way she looked at her and her sisters. But when she comes to know Kalyani from close quarters her attitude changes into a special relationship. It is Aru, who articulates the feminist voice in the novel, and, it is she who questions the injustices against women. Aru joins a computer class and becomes a part of a women's activist group.

The novel, *A Matter of Time*, moves beyond feminist concerns, in that it raises the existentialist question itself. It tries to penetrate and analyze the very predicament of human existence and solve the riddle of life. It is only through a process of self-examination and self-searching; through courage and resilience, that one can change one's situation from despair to hope.

Sudden desertion of Gopal and that also without any weakness or shortcoming of his wife and his children is, in fact, a big gap on the part of educated Gopal.

Gopal who has no intention of making a mystery of his whereabouts lives a few miles away from his family members with a student of his own. Ramesh, a close relative of Sumi. Gopal knows that while meeting Ramesh, he will have to answer many of his questions. But he finds no suitable answer to satisfy Ramesh.

Aru asks her father to change his mind and return assuming the responsibility. However, Gopal who has his mind to follow what he has decided, is not ready to realize his act and change his mind. However, the question put to him by his own daughter penetrates deep into Gopal's mind and compels him to find out the answer after the departure of Aru from his room. He thinks whether it is as Kalyani believes that the root cause of all happenings is fate. Everything is predestined. So he thinks that what happened in his life from the very beginning and his marriage with Sumi and his desertion may be the result of his destiny.

Deshpande is of the view that the Indian women are such that they are always ready to live with their husbands even at the cost of their self-respect. The husbands of such women are lucky enough to be proud of their wives while the latter are compelled to rely upon the mercy of their husbands. If there is any family feud, the wife should come ahead for apology even for the wrong cause.

Manju's mother-in-law represents such a type of Indian women. So she suggests to Sumi for her good sake to return to her husband by tendering apology. Since Gopal is good by nature even after relinquishing his duties towards his family, he will forgive her.

Deshpande's women characters have the realization and understanding of their sufferings, no doubt, but they lack the courage as well as stamina "to purge society of its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory" (Sree 2006: 134). Sumi is not an exception. She knows that her troubles have multiplied owing to irresponsible behavior of her husband. She also knows what Gopal has done by deserting her and her children cannot be justified.

Even the most popular and sacred Hindu's religious scriptures, The Shri Bhagavat Gita talks that a Karmic Ogin obtain salvation by performing his bonded assignments honestly without indulging in the worldly lusts. A sudden jump towards renunciation makes someone sufferer. Who suffers? The wife and children are sufferers. After Gopal's sudden desertion or his escape from the life, it is forty year old Sumi and her immature children who suffer.

Escaping from the life is not the essence of the life. The essence lies in the fulfillment of the assigned duty. The family is a chariot which must be pulled on by both wife and husband being equally responsible. Sumi remembers the tense relationship between her father and mother-Shripati and Kalyani respectively.

Kalyani-Shripati marriage is at the centre of this novel. Kalyani's plight is no way less poignant than that of Sumi's. Deshpande depicts Kalyani as an intelligent girl with a promising future, who had been allowed to pursue her studies. But the circumstances led her to be married to Shripati because Kalyani's mother Manorama had failed to beget a male heir to their property and feared that her husband would marry a second time.

She was opposed to Kalyani marrying into a new family so that the property would then have gone to them. It is under such impervious circumstances that she gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati just to keep the property within the family. Three children are born of this marriage-Sumi, Premi and Madhav.

Deshpande reflects that the mother-son bond is so deeply rooted in man's psyche that it is nearly impossible to extricate oneself from it. It is evident from the inclination of Shankar to his mother who is very much rough to his wife. The logic which he advances in defence of not protecting his wife from his mother's rough behaviour is: "She gave me birth, she brought me up, she looked after me." (216)

The view of the novelist regarding immortality is true. The survival of the mankind or even any type of creature in this world is through their offsprings. Birth as well death is an unceasing circle. Man dies but life yet survives in different forms. No one accurately knows what immortality is. The term itself is vague and the location of salvation is unknown. Yes, life is a battle, a struggle, but not against death, but against survival. One has to survive, one has to face difficulties, and one has to make life convenient. Escapism from life is not a solution.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande's novel, *A Matter of Time*, articulates the agony, pain, doubts and fear of her characters male and female alike. In this novel her plot is related to three women representing three generations of the same family. All these three women are subjected to victimization by their husbands. All of them have to pass through mental agony and distress. Manorma is victimized by Vithalrao because she has no son.

The novel reflects the truth that the Indian women belonging to a male dominated society based on the traditional moorings, have no way out other than to endure insult, humiliation and negligence meted out to them by none but by their husbands. It proves that Deshpande's writings reflect the gross gender discrimination and women's victimization prevalent in the Indian society. Her realistic approach and reasonable views related to women's victimization and sufferings penetrate into India's social structure where women are found treated differently.

Thus Sumi, after a lot of suffering and self-introspection, do come to terms with their present with an understanding and acceptance of their past and are ready now to march ahead with this new acceptance of life.

A common factor among these three women is they are in no way responsible for the sufferings, they encounter in life and they in all silence with no protest, suffers the injustice done to them.

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