

ShashiDeshpande:Enabling Humanness of Women

Dr. Rajesh Sagu

Lecturer in English,

Department of English

GSSS Burak

Hisar, Haryana, India

Abstract

ShashiDeshpande's fiction is remarkably a life affirming fiction and aims to create immense possibilities for holistic life not only for women but also for entire humanity. The novelist's primary motive is to explore the meaningfulness of human relationships, indeed family relationships which determine the structure of human bonds and bondages. Her novels reflect genuine humanistic concerns, spill out of human relationships in the form of several human emotions. In her novels, the foremost concern appears to be woman's predicament as 'humanistic concern'.

Keywords: ShashiDeshpande, Fiction, Enabling Humanness of Women

As a critical humanist, the reality that Deshpande portrays is the "lived" lives of human beings in their triumphs and failure.

C.K. Nayak

Introduction

Indian Society is based on the family relationship and these relationships have always been playing a crucial role in this world of human affairs in dissipating the social isolation and loneliness. The nature of

Indian society is such that its roots are embedded in family relationship. As Banabhatta in his classical biography of King, Harshatitled *Harsacharita*, says that the human bonds and bondages are stronger than iron chains. In the view of ShashiDeshpande, human beings are destined to abide by the rules and regulationsof interpersonal relationships which not only govern it, but also form human bonds and bondages. While living in society, one cannot escape the complex web of relationship. That is why, the probably, ShashiDeshpande suggests,

"It is necessary for women to live within relationships, But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing, what I don't agree with the idealisation of motherhood- the false and sentimental notes that accompany it."(*Writing from Margin and Other Essay* 10)

Humanism and Indian Writing in English

Humanism aims to allow human values to guide one's course of action in life and affirm the "universal humanistic values" that surpass

dogmatism and parochialism. It counters all types of authoritarianism, intolerance, loss of self, alienation and annihilation, deterioration and deprivation. As the father of Secular-Humanism, Paul Kurtz rightly asserts that humanism is life affirming and not life denying. In humanism, the welfare of human beings is the prime motive in all the writings especially, Indian Writing in English. After the euphoria of independence evaporated, the focus shifted from to social-political front to the exploration of individual's interior world and existential dilemma. The traits of humanism in one form or other form are found in the works of the novelist of Indian Writing in English, viz. 'the big three'(MulkrajAnand, R. K Narayan and Raja Rao), Khuswant Singh, Malgonkar, ChamanNahal, Bhabani Bhattacharya , Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya , Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy. In locating humanistic traits in Indian Writing English, the contribution of women writers is bound to come up for serious consideration. The earlier name which figures in this regard is of Kamala Markandaya. While Kamala Markandaya focuses her lenses on external events and their ramifications, Anita Desai turns her gaze inward to discover the strengths and weakness, ShashiDeshpande explores the interiors of a woman's psyche that longs for communication and desires freedom from humiliating silence, of what go on to the making of the modern Indian middle-class woman. More than covert actions, the inner mental and spiritual conflicts of the individual conscience trying to come to terms with the dictates of tradition and patriarchal authority occupy their attention. NamitaGokle, BhartiMukherji, Gita hariharan, ShamaFutehally are the other a few names of woman writers who has successfully explored the multidimensional regions of a woman's world and highlight the intricacies and complexities of a woman's existence in an essentially male dominated

world. ShashiDeshpande intends to subscribe to the views of humanism as her characters despite being urban,modern and well educated, are firmly rooted in centuries old Indian culture and tradition. She has undoubtedly carved out a reputation for herself in revealing the human feeling and thoughts and feeling of the urban and educated woman who happens to be from middle class society. Although NayantaraSehgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandya and Kamala Das have all embarked into this kind of writing, but it is ShashiDeshpande who has pursued it devotedly with mastery of artistic perfection. She is essentially interested not only in the issues pertaining to women but to the whole humanity. In spite of her vehement denial, she has been bracketed as a 'woman writer', rather than a writer who deals with 'humanistic issues' that are of common interest to whole humanity. This, she clarified in one of her article:

"I have been put into the slot of woman writer; my writing has been categorised as 'writing about women' or 'feminist' writing. In this process, much in it has been missed. I have been denied the place and dignity of a writer who is dealing with issues that are human issues, of interest of all humanity."(*Of Concerns, Of Anxieties* 100)

Tracing Humanism in Deshpande's Novels

In the present article, novels namely *Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence*, *Roots and Shadows*, *A Matter of Time*, *The Binding Vine* and *Small Remedies* have been taken up with an aim to discuss ShashiDeshpande as a humanist writer. The present article also tries to look into the novelist's own stand of 'human impulse' backing her fictional

ideology more prominently than the issues of feminism in her novels. An earnest attempt is also made to arrive at an understanding of how ShashiDeshpande's humanistic vision or humanism paves ways for her women protagonists to seek a meaningful and humane pattern in their family relationship.

The Dark Holds No Terrors

The Dark Hold No Terror, ShashiDeshpande's favourite novel is an impressive portrayal of woman's fight for survival and revival in a world that offers no easy way outs. Saru, the protagonist of the novel a woman of strong human-will makes a conscious decision of her own life: medical education, choice of life mate from a low caste to defy social codes of society. Saru a strong-willed girl, against all odds and in adverse circumstances of her childhood, realises her potential by taking up a challenge of becoming a doctor, "That had seemed impossible. But she had done it." (*The Dark Hold No Terrors* 139) Saru after achieving her goal owes it, humbly to her father. It shows her strong will, moral courage and maturity of her soul which are essential traits of humanism in the novel. Saru's mother gives preferential treatment to her son, Dhurva over Saru. Saru being ill-treated by her mother, does not like her and believe in defying her always. Seema Suneel points out non-feministic stance of novel, "The thrust here is not on man's cruelty to woman but woman's cruelty to woman." (113) A moment comes in the life of Saru, after the death of Dhurva, when she accepted the cruelty in her behaviour, somewhere in subconscious mind, towards her brother Dhurva, and mother. As the novel says, "Sibling jealousy. And it always frightened her." (*The Dark Hold No Terrors* 72) As G. Dominic Savio writes, "Dhurva's demise had always been her subconscious desire." (31) The acceptance of ill-will is reflection of humanistic trait. In the

novel the attempt of Saru for freedom, to escape from the terror, marries Manu, a teacher, but it proves to be another trapping of dark holding deeper terrors as, "Everything in a girl's life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male." (*The Dark Hold No Terrors* 163) Her married life becomes bad to worse in the want of love, compassion and companionship and she begins to suffer silently, as she tries to live her life at her own terms by resisting what went against it. Saru's life reflects deep feeling of alienation as she has been deprived of love and compassion throughout her life and a deep human cry can be heard from stony silence of her life. The novelist arouses deep human sympathy at her struggle to survive, "The urge to confide in someone to talk to someone, was growing in her.... I am alone. That there was no one who could comfort her." (43) Saru, throughout her life shows un-satiated crave for belongingness, "The childish grief of being unwanted swamped her unreasonably again and again. Nobody likes me, Nobody cares for me. Nobody wants me." (83) Saru, even being a realist, finds loneliness as a painful but inescapable human condition, She realises that the suffering of multitudes does not lessen one's own suffering in any way. She comes to know that the dependence on other is misery and independence is happiness. She realises the truth of human life and learns to cope up it with fortitude. The alienated soul cries out in despair, "Would it always be a failure, any attempt to reach out to another human being? Had she been chimera all her life, hoping for someone? Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone." (219) This is a realisation on the part of Saru, which reflects the traits of humanism.

Saru, with an emerging new self, the turmoil and distaste which has filled her, slowly begins to seep out of her. She refused to be a

victim. The novelist makes Saru to integrate the conflicting views of life and strive for wholeness of all things. Saru utilises her enlightened self-awareness to derive personal meaning and purpose from all physical and mental experiences of life so as to master a life purpose. Saru realises:

“[A]ll those selves she rejected so resolutely at first, so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She has to accept these selves to become whole again.” (220)

That Long Silence

The autobiographical novel *That Long Silence* is a saga of human compassion, human suffering and understanding of human relationship. In the novel, Jaya, the protagonist represents not only one half of humanity but also human suffering. In the novel Mohan's mother had been a classical example of painful suffering of an Indian wife, not only uncomplaining but also bearing the burden of her husband's idiosyncrasies over household work. Waiting seems to have become a sole business for the women in the novel. The eternal dependence of women on men exposes human misery and suffering in their life. Her father has been acting like master, demands fresh and hot food for meal whatever time he decided to return home. The sight and sound of beaten women repeats through the novel and creates an impression of never ending sadness. Shashi Deshpande paints a picture of male domination and male power over women. This unequal power equation tilted in favour of men in Indian family arouses anger and deep humanistic concern in the novel. Man considers the meaningless-suffering of women is a part and parcel of

her life and considers it to be the symbol of their strength. “She is still waiting there in front of the fire, silent, motionless.” (*That Long Silence* 36) In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande delineates women's silence like silences of mother, daughter, sister, widow, a young girl. Jaya's experiences of pain, silent suffering and discrimination reflected in varied shapes in the conditions of other women in the novel invites deep human sympathy. Kusum drives herself to suicide for her keen desire to have a male child; Jeeja is beaten up by her husband for failing to give him a child; her step son Rajaram's wife is beaten up by her drunkard husband. They all suffer silently. Their in-human treatment creates deep humanistic sympathy in the novel. Silence in the life of these women symbolises hopelessness and despondency of their lives. Their knowledge of the lack of choice in their lives makes them to suffer silently in their lives. And there, this attitude results in their subordination and helps in establishing patriarchal pattern in society. This unending despondency and hopelessness with stony silence in life of women arouse sympathy but this silence becomes an act of an operation of power and helps Jaya in preserving herself from total loss. Jaya, due to silent suffering finds herself broken into fragmented selves but she due to her introspection and strong inner-self raise her consciousness and rejuvenates her inner self. Existential humanism in the novel is revealed through fragmentation of human existence and human suffering due to alienation. At the last, Sanskrit words “Yachechhasitathakuru.” (192) written in Appa's diary confers human wisdom and enlightenment about life on her, “Krishna confers humanness on Arjuna. ‘I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire.’” (192) Here the novelist expressed her humanistic vision by showing her faith in

human ability of the protagonist, Jaya to solve her problems of life at her own by making choices in life in responsible manner. Jaya, reflects to reconcile towards the close of the novel:

“Two bullocks yoked together- that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It’s wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I’ve always thought- there’s only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life there are so many crossroads, so many choices. ... But we can always hope. Without that life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible.”(192-193)

The novel ends with a note of optimism again reflects novelist’s humanistic vision and her faith in human relationship which is essential for peaceful co-existence of man and woman in a meaningful pattern of family relationship. The Feminist readings of the novel arrive at general and obvious interpretation of woman point of view and family relationship but Deshpande uses it as a tool to transcend general interpretation and to reach at a much deeper understanding of culture and tradition which has its root in humanism. Kamini Dinesh, though considers *That Long Silence* a feminist novel but also brings out traces of humanism in the novel as she says , [W]ife is not a rebel but a redeemed wife-one who has broken the silence... She is a wife reconceptualised as a woman and an individual.”(PalekarShalmalee 61)

ShashiDeshpande, unlike feminist, does make her protagonist, Jaya to rebel so as to occupy more personal space in family relationship. She rebels to protect her basic humanness. Her rebellion does not go up to that extent, when the novel lends into a feminist reading. She, rather makes her renewed understanding of herself as well as of the world she lives in, as she has begun to see and face the world differently probably more sportingly. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan finds, “*That Long Silence* to be overly individualized and family-oriented in its evocation and resolution of the problems of Indian women and, therefore, inadequate as a feminist critique.”(Rajan 71-92)

Roots and Shadows

Roots and Shadows, ShashiDeshpande’s first full length novel is another tale of women’s predicament. The novel begins with return of Indu, the protagonist to her roots- ancestral house. Indu is a modern, educated and career-conscious middle class woman who is brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka, an old tyrannical childless matriarch. Akka’s married life was not less than that of a caged animal. She was married at twelve with a tall, bulky man of more than thirty years of age. She went to her husband’s house after six month. By the time she was thirteen, she made two abortive attempts to run away, but her mother-in-law whipped her and kept her starved by locking her up in a room for three days. Then she was sent to husband room, there, she cried and clung to her mother-in-law by saying, “Lock me up again, and lock me up.”(*Roots and Shadows* 77) But she could not escape from a husband marital tyranny even then. Marital sex was not less than a punishment for child brides against which they could do nothing and continued in fearful silence. Here, the novel presents a barbaric and in-human way of male’s domination over woman in Indian society. This incident in the novel shakes human conscience to stir the

deepest human sympathy and emotions-is perhaps sufficient reason to call Deshpande, a writer with deep humanist concern. Y.S. Sunita Reddy argue that, "Sex as a punishment was perhaps, how it was viewed by such brides who never-the less did not raise any banner of revolt but on other hand continued to suffer and helped to perpetuate such oppression."(35) Indu like other protagonists of ShashiDeshpande has also been caught up in a conflict between traditional norms of family and professional roles, social demands and personal inspiration since childhood. Indu speaks in anger:

"As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a Girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. ... Because you are a female. You must do everything even in defeat, with grace because you are a girl, it is only way, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive."(158)

Indu painfully collects the idea of her womanhood thrust upon her, " My woman hood ... I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up." (87) Indu revolts against Akka, and her traditional world and her rigid norms and marries Jayant. In order to have a new and meaningful pattern of family relationship with self- identity, she keeps on seeking one pattern of family relationship to other pattern of family relationship. Her disillusioned and humiliating experiences of childhood and suppressing demands of the marital relationship arouse deep humanistic sympathy in the novel for Indu. She becomes completely dissatisfied with Jayant as he suppresses her humane demands and wants her total submission to him, "It shocks him to find passion in a woman. ... I've learnt my

lesson now."(83) Owing to repressing rage of her sexuality in her married life, Induendeavours to assert through an extramarital relationship with Naren. Indu asserts, " I don't need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado." (152) This bold assertion of Indu, that raises a humanistic concerns, which can be best explained in the words of P. Rama Moorthy:

"This shed a brilliant light on Indu's awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu's exploration into herself but it moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of human existence."(124)

Her arrival at parental home, helps her to understand the meaning of life as a human being. Her relationship with Naren infuses a sense of freedom, which along with her quest for self identity makes her feel trapped between traditional demands and modern aspiration. The problem of Indu in the novel is that, neither she can live with Jayant, happily, nor she can live without him happily, "This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself.Until I had met Jayant. I had not know it ... that there was, somewhere outside me a Part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant... lost the ability to be alone."(*Roots and Shadows* 31) She needs to find middle path where she can have institutional social security of 'marriage' with Jayant in traditional home by discovering her own- self identity and realising her human potential, the potential what she think, she is worth of. As Maria Mies makes an apt statement about Indu's modern human inspirations:

"The non-conforming conduct of the women is not

the consequence of an external necessity but of changed conscious. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman, but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives.”(Mies 29)

Here, Maria seems to pointing out toward the humanistic stance, evolves out of predicament of human existence. Indu contends her position as a human being not necessarily equal to that of a man but for personal growth and self fulfillment. She is averse to any undue submission to anyone dictates. Although Indu is deep rooted in Indian traditional culture but also influenced by western scientific rationalism also. As we know human value now a days are measured at the altar of western scientific rationalism and Indian traditional spiritualism. The meek and docile Indu of early days, finally becoming a bold, courageous and self conscious, and through reconciliation, finds a meaningful pattern in her family relationship. The novel needs to interpreted as ShashiDeshpande's attempt to critique the dominant cultural values which provide a institutional frame to marriage and family relationship which generally contain deep multiple layers of oppression and slavery mental, physical, within it. ShashiDeshpande through her realistic depiction of feelings of suffering and basic human aspirations the women, has tried to make a humble contribution to the cause of women, by virtue of which a scope is created for her fiction to fall in the line of feminism, which is probably, the deeper study of her novels, do not reveal as she does not make her women characters stronger than they actually are in real life situations and her assertion for selfhood and fulfillment of

human potentialities lie with in existing socio-cultural set up of society. In an interview, she has denied to have written as a feminist writer. She claims that her writing does not convey the message of feminism, as her enduring interest as well as concern is 'human' which she delves into human relationship. Socio-cultural traditions govern this relationship and one cannot pigeon-hole her novels as feminist as for her, the fact that, “ [W]e are human is more important than that we are men or women”, (Sree 2) she is more concerned with “humanness of women”, (Sree 2) rather than theory of feminism in her writing. Her novels are reflection of her humanistic vision which is deep rooted in Indian socio-cultural values.

GunjanSushil's comment seems to suit the end of the novel as well as the discussion of novel in the present study , “ShashiDeshpande makes her heroine choose (social) security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is ... harmony and understanding between two opposite idea and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude”(SushilGunjan 22), based on humanistic vision of the novelist.

A Matter of Time

A Matter of Time depicts the human predicament of three women (Manorama, Kalyani and Sumi) of three generation in the same family under one roof. It is also a novel of analysis and penetration of very predicament of human existence and solutions for riddle of life. The novel is a journey of self- searching and self-examination. The novel is fantastic exposition of how human resilience and courage can change hopelessness to hopefulness in life. In the novel, Gopal, walks out of his house leaving his wife Sumi and three daughters: Aru, Charu and Seema to suffer helplessly. Gopal's desertion for no obvious reason makes Sumi to experience trauma of a deserted wife and deep disgrace of an isolated partner of Indian

middle class family. Gopal's desertion of his wife is another kind of betrayal and cruelty to women, says Vijay Guttal. He further says, "Gopal's desertion... of family leaving despair-filled hearts behind. It is like a death in the family, 'a death without body.'" (Guttal 173) ShashiDeshpande reveals the real fear of the deserted family, "The fear of losing face, Gopal's desertion is not a tragedy, it is both a shame and a disgrace." (*A Matter of Time* 137) At this juncture in the novel, a deep humanistic sympathy is aroused at the pathetic condition of Sumi and her three young daughters and the cruel act of Gopal's desertion has put their survival at stake. In Indian scheme of life, it can be termed as Gopal's existential dilemma which makes him to run off from his social responsibility and pushing her family in a miserable condition of living. Kalyani's own deprivation- her estrangement from her husband- she is so actively void in her own life. The novel's protagonist Sumi, even having being wronged, suppressed and suffered due to desertion of Gopal and not yet raising a single question to him, moves this novel beyond the realm of feminism to humanism. These are the ideas of existentialistic-humanism in the novel, *A Matter of Time*, remarks N. ShanthaNaik (112) It is first time that the novelist gives voice to male characters and has shown them feeling pressure of domestic life as Gopal and Shripati found wanting in fulfilling their domestic responsibility. UshaBande (195) considers the novel more than a tear-soaked tale of human suffering and endurance. Gopal leaves behind everything due to unexplained existential derive and Shripati out of frustration and despair has put stop against all communication. Sumi through her determined efforts and struggle gains self-sufficiency and made the life possible without Gopal. As a result of Gopal's desertion, there comes an emphasis on her woman-ness and thus confrontation with denial of humanness that

she faces bravely and successfully in her life. When Sumi's father takes them to parental home, for Sumi's mother, it is not only a great tragedy but also a matter of social disgrace. She cries, "No, no my god not again: she began to cry, sounding so much like a animal." (*A Matter of Time* 12) An interesting and positive change occurs in the novel on Sumi's death, when reconciliation takes place between Aru and her grand mother. They never try to understand each other but, when Sumi dies, the grandmother break down and Aru offers healing touch to her grandmother by taking the initiation and coming closer to as her son/daughter to fill the void of her mother and making human life possible for the future. The novel is triumph of Sumi's restrained resistance that her existentialist husband longs to possess her. Her silence becomes powerful tool of resistance in social relations as her struggle succeeds in finding her own way and her own voice before she dies prematurely. To make the survival of women possible through the painful experiences of distress and silent sufferance, the novel is bound to arouse deep humanistic feeling and sympathy. The novel ends, with an important message comes through Gopal's realisation:

"If it is indeed true that we are bound to our destinies, that there is no point struggling against them, even then this remain- that we do not submit passively or cravenly, but with dignity and strength. Surely, this, to some extent, frees us from our bonds" (246)

ShashiDeshpande considers Sumi as a most important character created so far. The novelist is also very fond of her and her daughter, Aru. So expressed her unhappiness over death of Sumi in the novel as she has achieved the stage of self-sufficiency and becomes a new hope for women in society. The novelist talks about the traits of humanism in the novel, "We have both birth and death.

So the novel contains a slice of human life, birth is there, death is there.” (*Women in the Novels of ShashiDeshpande: A Study* 153)

The Binding Vine

The Binding Vine is a story of the lives of three women who are haunted by fears, secrets, multiple misunderstandings and deep sorrows but still bound together by strands of human life and hope of a binding vine of love, mutual concern and link that spreads across chasms of time, social class, and even death. The novel is an analysis of several human tragedies in the lives of different women. Urmi, while trying to cope up with the death of her daughter, Anu, suffered a hysterical breakdown and thus unable to feel pain of death. As ShashiDeshpande arouses deep human sympathy over loss of life:

“[H]ow could a person cry so soundlessly? ...Has Anu taken all my capacity to feel away with her? I began to bang my head against the wall. I can hear the dull rhythmic thud. There’s nothing else. No pain at all.” (*The Binding Vine* 14)

The pain of Urmi is so pinching that she hears the thumping sound of his head against the wall again and again but no pain. It creates humanistic feeling for pathetic condition of mother. The feeling of deep sense of personal loss over the death of her daughter sets the ground for initiation of a journey for self-discovery. Another instance of arousing great humanistic feeling is that of Shakutai, abandoned by her husband, in household chores to sustain her family. Yet another human misery strikes in the form of brutal rape of her daughter, Kalpana who is not only raped but beaten also and news became public. Urmi, due to fearful shock and social disgrace, at the news of her daughter’s accident in hospital, “She’s fainted. (56)

If the news of her daughter’s rape comes in press, it would multiply Shakutai’s misery in manifold and as a result the marriage of her daughter becomes difficult due to social disgrace. The novelist arouses genuine anger in showing, “a clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she marries.”(63) After this, Mira dies of over bleeding during the childbirth after four years of loveless marriage is the real incident that arouse a deep humanistic concern in the novel as her body turned black due shortage of blood in the body. Mira symbolises the grief-stricken and hopeless condition of numerous Indian women who suffered silently in their suffocating married life, restricting their human potentiality and denying them their humanness just by emphasising their women-ness. Now, here a question arises, that whether the novel reveals the feminist concerns or the humanistic sympathy. Mira in this novel, like other women characters in other novels suffers from number of weakness and the feminism also demands much broader definition that it becomes difficult to label the novel as a study of feminism, but a reflection of humanistic concern in the novel. Siddhartha Sharma very aptly says about the novelist,

“ShashiDeshpande attempts at satirizing Pseudo- feminisms like Priti, who are over – enthusiastic about fighting for equal rights for women, but harboured displaced notions about women’s freedom. In a case filed by her husband against his wife for restitution of conjugal rights, the court had ruled that the husband couldn’t force the wife into physical relationship against her will. Pritti is extremely

excited whereas Urmi remains sober.” (54-55)

Priti says “Isn’t it radical, absolutely earthshaking in this country I mean? Can you imagine the consequence?” (*The Binding Vine* 37) Thus, by making a jab at pseudo-feminists like Priti, ShashiDeshpande not only shows her averseness to theory of feminism but also reflects her own humanistic concerns in the novel. Throughout the novel Urmi, despite her suffering, does never show hatredness towards males and thus remain optimistic about emerging of new and happy family relationship. She never intends to seek a life without men as she has male friends: DrBhaskar, Dr. Jain and Malcom who have not only a humanistic outlook towards Urmi but also have great respect for her. Urmi’s approach is different from Priti as she wants the women to follow pragmatic and holistic approach towards their problems of life. Another interesting aspect of the novel which critics tend to overlook is evolving need for human bonding through female companionship. In Urmi’s attempt to find about her dead mother-in-law probably lies her desire to connect herself with another woman past as Urmi ruminates:

“ I have come to the end of Mira’s poems. This has been like a parting too. And yet it is no parting, because Mira in some strange way stays with me. I know she will never go. All these days I have been imagining myself the hunter and Meera my prey I have been filled with the excitement of the hunter each time I approached her. Suddenly our relationship changed. It Meera now who is taking my hand and leading me...” (125)

According to A. G. Khan (162), the novel can be read as work of projection of women’s solidarity, female bonding and value of sisterhood in a male dominated social order,

the basis of their bonding, however, being shared oppression and victimisation- a human concern. Thus, one can also say that while dealing with women’s problem through her fiction may reflect feminine concerns based on Indian values of culture and tradition, but her main concern in her novels is human only. A deeper study of her female characters cannot be attributed to formal feminist description but a cultural humanism. It can be demonstrated through the advice of Shakutai gives at the end of novel, “ You can never opt out, you can never lay it down, the burden of belonging to the human race. There is only one way out of this Chakravayuha, Abhimanyu had to die, there is no other way out he could have got out.” (*The Binding Vine* 202) It calls for human trait of indomitable human will, to face it, not to give up against the odds of life with never die optimism get on the business of living. Another life- sustaining message to Urmi, “ The main urge is always to survive.” (203) On deeper analysis of a study of *The Binding Vine* in a volume titled ShashiDeshpande by Amrita Bhalla, one could sense shades of humanism elicited implicitly, “[*The Binding Vine*] is about life and living, about love and possession, about death and... the novel is also about controlling women’s minds and bodies.” (Bhalla 49)

Small Remedy

The novel, *Small Remedy* is a sensitive portrayal of human struggle through individual striving. The epigraph to the novel from Rigveda, itself speaks of human dilemma of searching God for help:

Father of the earth,
protect us;
Father of the sky,
protect us;
Father of the great and shining
waters,
protect us,

*-To which God shall we offer
our worship?*

Above lines illustrate humanistic vision of the novelist as there is no protection from the disasters of life. We human beings do not have to look always beyond the little acts of human kindness (small remedies) that people around them extend help to us. In the beginning of novel, there is human tragedy which arouses deepest human sympathy and an ardent appeal when the protagonist of novel is found grieving over the death of her only son, Aditya:

“Death is not an event, it’s an end. It’s like a nuclear devastation; there is nothing left. Som and I are moving through the rubble of our devastated lives, searching for something, for any bits and pieces of our past but there is something, for any bits and pieces of our past but there is nothing.”(*Small Remedies* 211)

A deep sense of guilt and depression takes over her mental world and death of her child makes her a disturbed human being. Madhu being mentally disturbed perceives that one cannot come to know the answers of question come across in one’s life, “ That what we call truth has nothing to do with the truth that emerges through words.” (255) With this understanding, she realised that life has to lived on, even at darkest hour, one has to have hope and look forward only. She contemplates, “So many of us walking this earth with our pain, our sorrow concealed within ourselves, so many of us hiding our suffering, going about as if all is well, so many of us surviving our loss, our grief. It’s miracle.” (315) These stances in the novel are finest exponents of ‘human-will’ to resist, endure and survive in life. N. ShantaNaik remarks, “ these all are the good examples of ShashiDeshpande’s

existential-humanism.”(112) UshaBende too opines, “a profound piece of writing about love and loss, grief and hope, rebellion and sacrifice, and above all about the Promethean will to resist, endure and survive.” (27-29) Savitribai undergoes tortuous experience on the account of a small deviation of her from the existing social mores, and which brings her social contempt and ridicule. As she is a woman who left her husband home and a station director who did many favours to her is presumed to be her lover. The torture and predicament she undergo arouses deep sympathy in the novel, “But the subtle cruelty of persistent hostility leaves deeper wounds. There’s always the temptations to succumb, to be back to normal path and be accepted. To resist the temptation speaks of great courage.” (*Small Remedies* 221) She shows courageous spirit to sustain in the life by defying the odds alike Leela and Hasina.

The novel *Small Remedy* encompasses the plurality and diversity of Indian composite culture by drawing male as well as female characters from different communities and professions. ShashiDeshpande reflects in this novel, social cohesion, an important trait required for basic goodness of humanity. ShashiDeshpande reflects that the human relationships are as important as human dignity, human faith and human identity, since these traits are the foundation of human relationships. Though the novel deals with women’s oppression and it is not ShashiDeshpande’s feminism paves way for women, but it is her humanistic vision paves way for women. It also paves for meaningful pattern in human relationship in the novel. ShashiDeshpande again reflects the traits of humanism through the character, Leela, as “To Leela all human beings were equal. She was dead against making difference on the basis of class. She was also against the superior status her family gave itself. She was creative and wanted to do things on her

own and saw no wisdom behind her family's holding on to the land they had inherited." (Sharma 70) The discussion on novel can be best summed up with the comment of Ruby Malhotra:

"[I]t is a book about writing a book with reflections on the impossibility of ever capturing in words the truth about any life. It examines, in retrieving memory, the complexities in encapsulating the life of SavitriIndorekar, the classical singer of Gwalior Gharana, who is devoted to music. It's through Madhu's version that we get to know the dark corners of Savitribai's life and the illuminating saga of Leela. In portraying the struggles of these women for identities, no overt attitudes of feminism are drawn." (196)

Deshpande's Novels: A falling short of the Feminist ideology

The freedom and liberation of Deshpande's women protagonists within institutional framework of marriage, is an attempt by the novelist in the process, by which they are not 'womanised' (Palekar 61) but also humanised; thereby leaving her novels a short of feminist ideology. Despite novelist's vehement denial, her work is viewed from narrow lense of feminism and she is termed as a feminist writer. It is true that she predominately writes about women and women problems but her concerns are humanistic as she explores human relationship in a given socio-cultural milieu. Since she deals with women predicament, reviewers tend to ignore her deeper concern of humanism and read her work with narrow angle of feminism and miss out the core of it. She has categorically denied of being a feminist and her work is not allowed to carry the message of feminism. But

she agrees to be feminist in her personal life as on this issue ShashiDeshpande elaborates:

I am feminist, I'm a very staunch feminist in my personal life... My idea of feminism is like what I told you. A woman is also an individual like man with lot of capabilities and potentials. She has every right to develop all that. She should not be oppressed just because she is a female. Like a man she also has her own qualities. She has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decisions, to be independent, and to take charge of her own destiny. So all these things to me are part of my being a feminist. I don't mean by that this false idea of liberation that you don't need a family. You don't need parents. We are all part of society and we need some ties. It may not be a husband. You may want to have a child without having a marriage- all these things also part of it. I don't deny that, but that's not important to me. The important thing to me is that you are incharge of your own destiny, but nobody should oppress you. Cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders. This is my idea of feminism. I am a feminist very much, and I strongly react against any kind of cruelty or oppression against women or any kind of denial of opportunities to women because they are women. We are all human

beings and we should all have the right to live our lives. But as a writer I'm not going to use my novel to carry the message of feminism. Then it becomes propaganda. I consider novel as a piece of art and as a piece of art, it can't carry message. There are struggles of being women, in this patriarchal society, it is hard. So this is the picture I present in my novels. I am not telling you what to do nor I am spelling out the message of feminism. I am not a feminist writer, if you call me a feminist writer, you are wronging me, because I see people as human beings. In my novels you will not see bad men, good women. All of us have both the qualities in ourselves, some good and some bad and you know it is all there in my novels and in my characters." (*New Perspective* 154-155)

ShashiDeshpande's feminism is deeply rooted in its traditional and cultural values of society which give it a different colour and taste than that of the West. Thus her feminism tries to find a place within the community and family relations in which a woman can seek for an identity within the circle of family and social acquaintances, by discharging the duties to those whom she owes. This is a unique feature to Indian culture in which an Indian woman wants to succeed in her goal of liberation within the familial context. In feminism the issue of individual identity and rights are given prominence but Indian society was premised upon the notion of duty and responsibility and there is concept of independent individuality or self identity but within the purview of marriage and family,

one's identity was always bound up with kinship, whether man or woman, it is not of a much importance. Another important aspect in this regard need one's attention to what ShalmaleePalekar says:

"It is never easy for women in societies like in India to break away from traditional notions of womanhood, especially there is no widespread system of support available, such as women's support groups.... This is probably reason for majority of modern, educated women like Deshpande's protagonists choose to submit and endure- staying, rather than leaving, the easier choice in this context." (64)

The Indian traditional notion of marriage, womanhood and family relationship act as the social security support systems for women, which is not there in the West. Deshpande's protagonists want to avail best out of both, tradition as well as modernity. Women in India, particularly in Hindu religion believe to have an enduring and understanding marital bond or a loving family. But in the West, no such importance is given to family as a unit or binding force as that of Indian marriage. Western feminists like Germaine Greer and radicals like Adrienne Rich and others recognise the family as a unit of oppression of woman. In India women swear by the inter-relatedness in a family, which they find hard to give up. One can find an essential difference between the Indian and western concept of motherhood. In the west, feminists like Adrienne Riche takes motherhood as a burden, as a weapon for enslaving and oppressing women. That's why women fight for right against sexual politics and issues related to reproductive rights. But in India, most women welcome motherhood that accords them much status in their families. In India, more importance is given to the role of a mother

than that of a wife. Once she attains the stature of a mother, an Indian woman gives less importance to physical relations. The state of motherhood is exalted in Indian conditions, a mother is very much revered in India. This is probably the reason for ShashiDeshpande's reluctance to posit an alternative to the institutional concept of marriage and family relationship. Her novels present a social world of web of relationships where men and women are living lives in their different age groups, classes and gender by performing social assigned roles. ShashiDeshpande's women are found struggling in the process of redefining and rediscovering their roles, and pattern of relationship under the burden of patriarchy. It is not destructive or disintegrating view but the humanistic view, to speak from within world of women. The novelist uses this humanistic vision not only to depict the social reality but also critiques the hegemonic cultural practices prevalent in society which restrict their humanness of women just on the pretext of their women-ness. Her novels have the characters from different strata, having different behavioural patterns due to the different reasons and purposes. Her male characters shows little development compared to her female characters, but it seems to improve in her later novels. Admittedly, the novelist desires to write about male characters as she write about women characters. Her women characters are real life living characters with their strength and weakness. But more importantly ShashiDeshpande, as social realist and humanist, mirrors the complexities of human relationships to "bring out human emotions like fear, frustration and anguish that lie in the innermost recesses of her women characters' mind." (Sinha&Jindial 99) Her novels are as Avadesh Kumar Singh says, "serious reflections on human condition with particular focus on the perils and predicament of her sex in their world." (116) ShashiDeshpande is extremely realistic and

does not belong merely to the fictitious and make believe world. For example, Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, reasons out for marital-silent-sufferance is, "[W]e're frightened of dark, frightened of being alone It's not that life is cruel, but in that process of birth we submit to life cruelty" (*The Long Silence* 102) The novelist comments, "My writing comes out of my consciousness of conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea the society has of me as a woman." (*Of Concerns, Of Anxieties* 100) But ShashiDeshpande expresses her urge to write about issues which concerns the whole humanity, as she remarks, "[B]asically it is the human predicament and moral values. It is search in every human being, something more than mere mundane life." (Pathak 156) In other interview, she has expressed her belief in 'companionship' and 'sisterhood' the important traits of humanism, "Men and women should live in a more friendly way. That is a solution that is not going to come through sisterhood. There must be good companionship between men and women." (*A Study* 149)

Since the Deshpande's novels have predominately woman characters in lead roles, and due to themes on women's discrimination and exploitation, it may appear superficially feminist in approach but this should not mean that the novelist is feminist, as the fact is much deeper and wider, as the novelist conceives of her woman characters as "an individual, a human being, a woman- I never saw a class called woman." (*Writing from Margin* 10) While revealing her humanistic stance in an interview given to Gita Vishwanath: "... I would like them to read... not as feminist novelist or woman writer... [t]here are other things that matters to me do come into my writing. I mean human relationships, not just women but what human beings in general are like..." (Vishwanath Gita 228) Feminism defines women always through difference ,

always in relation to man or patriarchy, but not through companionship between men and women. Although at one stage it had been important, in fact necessary, to do so in order to expose the patriarchal network, but it should not become a goal or end in itself. One has to go beyond the facts of oppression, to be free of bitterness and to go on to one's positive achievements. Instead of defining herself in relation to man, woman has to define herself positively and rise above the binaries of gender and being a woman should mean an acceptance of one's womanhood as a positive thing, not as a sort of lack. It should also lead to the joy and celebration of womanhood in itself, a joy and triumph for being oneself rather than being someone else. Similarly, innumerable traits of humanism can very well be traced in ShashiDeshpande's novels and the novelist not only emancipate her women within the frame of traditional marriage but also discover the actual process through which woman are 'womanised' and also 'humanised'. SidharathSharma in the preface of his volume entitled *ShashiDeshpande' Novels A Feministic Study* says that she is writer with humanistic outlook.

In the view above illustrations and discussions, it can be said that ShashiDeshpande is humanist writer and her enduring concern is human that she delves it into human relationship and which are nevertheless governed by socio-cultural norms. Her woman protagonists emerge out to be thinking, questioning and rational being, which are the essential traits of humanism. We can say that ShashiDeshpande tries to provide new ideals for meaningful man-woman relationship, thus widen the scope of women's survival. To the novelist traditions are value of harmony and co-existence that represents Indian way of life, which seems to provide, in the words of KalidasMisra, "the necessary space to marriage and motherhood in a woman's world."(35)ShashiDeshpande's

concern is to project such a world where human beings (men and women) live as social beings in cohesion and by preserving their human-ness. In her essay "On the writing of a novel she had written, "To love another and to retain yourself intact ... To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate? " (*On Writing a Novel* 35) Most of the critics and the scholars have tried to explore the feministic undercurrents that run across her fiction and to judge her achievements as a novelist in the light of her philosophical ideas. It is interesting to note that despite strong denial of the novelist, yet she is being looked as feminist writer and the critics interpret her works with narrow feminist perspective. It is also interesting to note that while carrying out the feministic reading of her novels, these critics tend to evolve out simultaneously, the traces of humanism, and also agree to the fact that she is not formal feminist. The except a few critics, namely Jasbir Jain, Adesh Pal, Kabir Mishra, J.P. Tripathi and Chanchala K. Naik, no one probably could come out of the frame of the stereotyped, feminist interpretation of her novels. In the light of above illustrations on humanism in her novels and novelist's repeated objections on feministic reading of her novels, now, it has become imperative to liberate ShashiDeshpande's fiction from the confining limits of feminism and view her novels without blinker of feminism but afresh, to explore humanistic concerns in her works as her humanistic impulse behind her work is bigger than the women's question. Moreover feminists have failed to read the deeper import of her novels.

Certainly, her work seeks to engage upon a creative journey that would open the avenues for a fresh knowledge of our lives and cultural

significance with equally vital realisation that our ideals are equally important elements for our meaningful socio-cultural existence. Her fiction is really a life affirming fiction and certainly aims to create immense possibilities for holistic life not only for women but also for whole humanity. And now the time has come to liberate ShashiDeshpande's novels from the narrow prismatic interpretation of feminism. The purpose of her novels is essentially the enhancement of life and propagation of human values. Probably the best way to sum up the discussion of the chapter is to quote what Chanchala K. Naik says about ShashiDeshpande, "As a critical humanist, the reality that Deshpande portrays is the 'lived' lives of human beings in their triumphs and failure." (ChanchalaNaik 21)

References

- Bande, Usha, "Resistance and Reconciliation: ShashiDeshpande's *Matter of Time and Small Remedies*", *Writing Difference: The Novels of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Delhi: Pencraft, Print.
- Bhalla, Amrita. ShashiDeshpande. United Kingdom: Northcote House, 2006, Print
- Chanchala K. Naik, "Introduction", *Writing Difference: The Novels of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Delhi: Pencraft. Print.
- Deshpande Shashi, *That Long Silence*, Penguin, New Delhi: Penguin. 1989. Print.
- *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Delhi: Vikas 1980. Print.
- *Roots and Shadows*, New Delhi: Disha Books 1983. Print.
- *A Matter of Time*, Penguin, India, New Delhi, 1996. Print.
- *The Binding Vine*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1992. Print.
- *Small Remedies*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2000. Print.
- *Writing from Margin and Other Essays*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2003. Print.
- Interview by Gangadharan, Geeta, "Denying the Otherness", *The Fiction of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. R. S. Pathak, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997. Print.
- Interview by Holmstrom Lakshmi, "ShashiDeshpande: Talks to Lakshmi Holmstrom", *The Fiction of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. R. S. Pathak, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997. Print.
- Interview by Viswantha Vanamala, "A Woman World... All the way!" *The Fiction of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. R. S. Pathak, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997. Print.
- Interview by Viswanath Gita, "In Conversation with Shashi Deshpande," *Writing Difference: The Novels of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Pencraft International, Delhi, 2005. Print.
- "The Keynote Address" *Indian Woman Writing in English: New Perspectives*, ed. by Sree S. Parasanna, Sarup & Sons, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2005. Print.
- G. Dominic Savio, "A Woman's Heritage of Common Wealth: A Study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*," *Women in the novels of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. Sumanbala, New Delhi: KPH, 2001. Print.
- Gangadharan, Geeta, "Denying the Otherness", *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. R. S. Pathak, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997. Print.

- Gutal, Vijay, "ShashiDeshpande's *The Binding Vine and Matter of Time: A Reading in the Postcolonial Context*", *Writing Difference: The Novels of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Delhi: Pencraft, p.173, Print.
- http: //www.Americanhumanist.org., Humanist Philosophy in Perspective, Chapter Seven, 15 Jan 2016. Web
- Indian communicator*, 20 Nov. 1994, Print.
- Khan, A. G., "The *Binding Vine: The Multt-Storied Misunderstandings*", *Writing Difference: The Novels of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Delhi: Pencraft, Print.
- Malohtra Ruby, "ShashiDeshpande's *Small Remedies: A Women Quest for Refuge: A Reappraisal*." *ShashiDeshpande: A Critical Elucidation*. ed. Amar Nath Prasad, New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2008, Print.
- Mies, Maria. *Indian women and Patriarchy, Conflict and Dilemmas of Students and Working Women*, Delhi: Concept 1980, Print.
- Misra Kalidas, "Writing a Narrative and a Self in Silence", *Writing Difference: The Novels of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Delhi: Pencraft. Print.
- N. Shantha Naik, "A Comparative Study of The Novels of ShashiDeshpande and M Indira: *A Social and Cultural Perspective*," Jaipur: Book Enclave, 2010, Print.
- Palekar Shalmalee, "Gender, Feminism, and Postcoloniality", *Writing Difference: The Novels of shashiDeshpande*. ed. C. K. Naik, Delhi: Pencraft International, 2005, Print.
- Pandey Krishna Mohan, "Dimensional Depth of female Conciousness: ShashiDeshpande's *The Binding Vine*." *ShashiDeshpande: A Critical Elucidation*. ed. Amar Nath Prasad, New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2008, Print
- Panigrahi, Mira, *Humanism and Culture*, New Delhi: Concept, 2001, Print
- Pathak R. S. "A Matter of Time :Of Human Bonds Bondages" *The Fiction of ShashiDeshpande*, ed. R. S. Pathak, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997, Print
- Radhakrishnan S, *Fundamental Unity - Women in Indian Culture*, October 1983, 17 Sep 2016, Web.
- Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. "The Feminist Plot and the Nationalist Allegory: Home and World in Two Indian Women's Novels in English." *Modern Fiction Studies* 39.1 (Spring 1993), Print. (See, also chakardhar Arnab, *Of Houses and Canon: Reading the Novels of ShashiDeshpande*, Notes, 20.) Print.
- Rama Moorthy, P. "My life is My Own. A Study of ShashiDeshpande's Women" *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English*, ed. Sushila Singh, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991, Print
- Reddy, Y. S. Sunita, "A Feminist Perspective in the novels of ShashiDeshpande", New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2001,
- Rose L. Ernestine, *Second National Convention, Friends of Women Suffrage*, 1851, History of Human Suffrage, 1881, Print
- Sharma Siddhartha, *ShashiDeshpande's Novels: A feminist Study*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher & Distributers (P) Ltd., 2011. Print.

Sinha U. & Jindial G. P. "Breaking of The Silence: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande", *Studies in Women Writers in English*, Vol VI, ed. Ray & Kundu, New Delhi: Atlantic, 2007, p. 192 XXXIX, Oct 1996. Print.

Pathak, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1997. Print.

Singh Avadhesh Kumar, "Reading into If I Die Today", *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. Chanchala K. Naik, Delhi: Pencraft, Print

SreePrasanna, "In Conversation with Shashi Deshpande", *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study*, Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2003. Print

Suneel, Seema. "Marriage, a compromise- A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *The Dark Hold No Terrors*", *Man-Woman Relationship in Indian Fiction*, New Delhi: Prestige, 1995. Print

Sushil, Gunjan, "Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows: A Feminist Study*", *Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Elucidation*. ed. Amar Nath Prasad, New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers, 2008. Print.

See, Chakardhar Arnab, *Of Houses and Canon: Reading the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, Bibliography, p96. Print

Tripathi J. P., *Humanistic Trends in Contemporary Indo-English Fiction*, *The Indian Writing in English: A Critical Study* ed. K. A. Agrawal, New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher and Distributors, 2003. Print

Viswantha, Vanamala, "A Woman's Word... All the Way!" (Interview), *The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande*, ed. R. S.