

Inner Voices Cry for Analysis : A Critical Approach to Shashi Deshpande's *Shadow Play*

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 October 2018

Keywords

Inner Voices, Re-birth

ABSTRACT

Under the title *Acknowledgements to Shadow Play* Shashi Deshpande accepts that the major characters of her earlier novel *A Matter of Time* (1996) continued to attract her memory for many years as if they needed further analysis and development. The ending of a *A Matter of Time* forced her for a new beginning and the result was that she started writing *Shadow Play* (2013) introducing the same Aru, Gopal, Seema, Charu, Chitra, Dr. Ramesh, Rao, Rohit, Hrishi etc. in new shades. Likes T.S. Eliot, she believes that every soul begins a new journey with death. Like E.M. Forster, she accepts that 'the novel does not end where it ends, it begins where it ends'. Future of these characters is in the hands of a divine force and that force guides her to develop them in new shades with vigour and zeal.

1. Introduction

Shadow Play reminds me of Shakespeare's famous saying that 'People are shadows running after shadows.' Macbeth tells Banquo :

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had lived a blessed time : for, from this instant,
There is nothing serious in mortality;
All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;
And the wine of life is drawn. (M-II, III 73-77)

In this serious novel the artist asserts the basic fact that life is worth-living and not an absurdity or 'tale told by an idiot signifying nothing'. The artist asserts the reality of *The World* with the words of Lord Denning :

The categories of cruelty are not closed. (Qtd. on p. 139)

Here Gopal tells Kasturi and her friends that terrorism is a kind of violence with a long history behind it. A lot of people were killed by Muslim invaders in the name of Islam after 11th century. The rulers of Slave Dynasty, Khilji Dynasty, Tughlaq Dynasty, Lodi Dynasty, Mughal Dynasty, etc. killed a lot of Hindus to establish Muslim empire in India and all of them settled here inspite of the sacrifices of native people.

Then the artist probes into the conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind of her characters so as to analyze their rational and irrational motives of life. Due to the death of Sumi, Gopal visits his three daughters and fulfils his duty as father. Of course, he continues to recollect his married life when he used to make love to Sumi for

personal pleasure. But the loving days are over and now he seeks friendship in Kasturi, the tenant of Aru. There is no sense of pride in him. But he still does not join any job to earn his living. Yet he is a major moral support to Seema and Aru. He recollects the poem *Ulysses* written by Alfred Tennyson in which the hero Ulysses starts his new journey to bring new knowledge to Ithaca. He is adventurous even in old age and his experiences of life are part and parcel of his existence. Resting is rusting for him and he wants to see the unknown world :

I am a part of all that I have met;
And yet all experience is an arch wherethro,
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I more. (U 18-21 Qtd. in SP)

Like other novels of Shashi Deshpande, this novel is also contemplative and remarkable for thoughtfulness. Here the artist makes the readers think of major contemporary social, political and economic issues such as rape, communal hatred, violence, unemployment, patriarchy, established authority of traditional institutions, evils of democracy, unfair elections, degeneration, growing use of unethical means, greed, growing number of divorce cases, miseries of uneducated women, problems of orphans, socio-economic problems of growing India etc. As a thinker she contemplates the causes and affects of these issues so as to establish a decent civilized society. As an optimist she does not want to attack the dignity of women and hence condemns rapes and adultery. Due to her strong faith in secularism she asserts the importance of communal harmony and describes the cordial relations between Aru and Nagma. With strong faith in democratic values she portrays the father of

Kasturi who, being a farmer, takes part in elections and makes speeches in favour of farmers. As an economist she believes in Gandhian economics and mentions the affective role of cottage industries. She does not want that all the rural folk should rush towards cities for jobs. Like Charles Dickens, she hates the dirty life of slums. Like a philosopher, she expresses her strong faith in Nehru's policy of mixed economy as he accepted the role of private industries along with public industries. Aru's husband Rohit works as an architect and has created his own job himself. He does not seek divorce from Aru as she fails to be a mother.

In the beginning of this novel she refers to the statement of King Janaka while entrusting Sita to Rama that she will follow the path of Dharma throughout her life and prove to be a virtuous wife. Let Rama accept her as his life partner. Then the artist describes the simple marriage of Rohit with Aru and of Hrishi with Charu. They make beginning of life with the blessings of Dr. Ramesh, Charu, Devika, Premi, Anil, Gopal etc. and promise to remain faithful to each other. The old ancestral building has been destroyed and three new apartments have been constructed for Aru — Rohit, Charu, Hrishi and Seema. Gopal is prepared to live with Seema and look after her interests. Aru does not relish the independent and free life of Kasturi and yet never quarrels with her. The building still retains its old name Vishwas and the trust among sisters does not shatter with their physical growth.

As bridegrooms, Rohit and Hrish smell the fragrance of 'desire and delight'. In this novel the artist asserts that hope is the basis of love and hence superior to all other emotions. It is hope for bright future of life that inspires people to come closer to each other and work with cheerfulness. As a feminist the artist asserts :

Except for these two things all the decisions about their wedding have been taken by the couple themselves. They are not puppets or pawns to be moved about; these are young people who know their own minds. (SP 8)

Here she indirectly refers to her theory of characterization that she does not control her characters with any string and they are free to move and act in their own way. They lead her to follow them and not that they are just puppets of her thoughts. She does not want to propagate any ism with them. After the death of Sumi, Shreepati and Kalyani, Aru becomes the head of the family and consults all the four before reaching any conclusion. The marriage priest reminds her that the knot of her is now tied with that of her husband. When Aru and Charu shed a few tears on this occasion, Gopal realizes that both the sisters are missing Sumi and Kalyani. Here the artist uses the word 'atonement'

through Gopal who has learnt many lessons from life such as patience, forgiveness, self-restraint, right conduct, mercy, generosity, etc. with the passage of time. Time has taught patience to Charu and perseverance is learnt by Aru. Gopal aptly realizes :

Death and grief had left no room for curiosity and questions. (SP 16)

Kalyani's death after major surgery makes them weep as they have lost their one more guardian. Sharmishta had a son Puru and not Gopal. With the title *The Home* (SP 23) the artist asserts that present and future evolve out of past. Kalyani wanted that her grand daughters should forget their past. How can they ignore their mother, grand father and grand mother who loved them so much? Yet they are not miserable financially on account of their hard labour, helpful fate, studies and heroic courage. In *The Tempest* and *As You Like It* William Shakespeare describes the bright side of reconciliation. Similarly daughters feel reconciled with Gopal and stop blaming him for his past detachment from the family. Charu and Hrishi have settled in U.S.A. and feel happy with their newly-born son Pavan. Aru feels delighted when Charu feeds naughty son Pavan with her breast. Here Hrishi makes a brief reference to violence that often breaks out in U.S.A. due to the terrorists as the memories of the fall of towers (9/11) are fresh in the minds of people. President Bush asserted his authority against Igaq and Afghanistan. Aru refers to feminist approach of her senior Surekha here. But Gopal says that the wise and prudent children forget the melancholy atmosphere created by three deaths in the family as 'life had to move on'. (SP 35) In spite of all internal and external turmoil, nothing stops and usual life goes on. Happiness and sorrows are the two sides of the coin of life. Aru advises Charu not to mind the suggestions and remarks of Hrishi's mother Lalita. When Charu suggests her the concept of 'a surrogate mother', the latter turns it down. After having worked on Lalita's boutique for some time, Seema plans for the job of a model. As a feminist she wants to be left to herself so as to rise in life. Her friend Leo helps her at every step.

As a feminist Aru feels tense because poor, uneducated, orthodox and rigid Indian women are still exploited in society and fail to get justice even in law courts. Surekha has already told her that law and justice are two different terms. Male members still remain intolerant, harsh, cruel, violent and false to women before and after marriage.

Time still remains their worst enemy. Aru wants to know the answer of a few questions such as — Why does divine system remain cruel to such unlucky women? Why does Seema feel proud of her young age and physical beauty? What will happen when age gives her diminishing return? Will she be able to keep

herself safe in the profession of modelling? Why does she not study for any professional degree? Why does she need a car without earning enough money? She forgets that everybody has her own interests. Here Shashi Deshpande follows Alfred Adler's theory that two persons differ from each other while working on the same project. Their achievements and motives are always different as they think differently. Here Charu does not talk with father Gopal and never seeks his help and blessings. In *A Matter of Time* Aru has given a threat of legal suit to him to seek compensation and maintenance. But Seema can afford to live with Gopal in the same apartment and does not blame him for his past carelessness towards them. Gopal gives full liberty to Seema and does not interfere in her plans. Let Seema enjoy her life with confidence, freedom, self-restraint and ideology. After all times have changed. If three daughters of Sumi miss her, he misses her too.

In his Char Dham Yatra he becomes a victim of accident and gets a fracture in his leg. Unknown surgeon Dr. Gandhi serves him sympathetically and he lives with strangers for a few months. This accident has taught him importance of tolerance, patience, faith, humanism, love for strangers etc. He is alone and yet feels that there is a divine force that manages the world and protects it from social chaos and economic anarchy. Now he has learnt the art of ignoring his pain as there is a lot of poverty on the hills. Dr. Gandhi calls himself a sinner and yet works for Swami ji. Gopal gets an opportunity to work for grand project of encyclopedia of Indian history. As a realist and philosopher Shashi Deshpande asserts that the writers are best source of inspiration for people struggling against cruel force of time. (SP 63) Here she mentions the bitter fact that even Aurangzeb repented for his cruel deeds against humanity. God had closed his eyes when he performed brutal deeds against mankind.

Here he felt attracted towards Kasturi. Both of them shared each other's grief. They talked on various subjects and enjoyed life in Jogipura. Her father was interested in Congress Party and contested elections for legislative assembly. He granted full liberty to her in life and she pursued her career in journalism as well as T.V. When Kasturi started loving Neil, he controlled her and imposed restrictions upon her. Neil came to meet her in Jogipura, enjoyed sex with her and died due to storm in the river. She became pregnant and mother of a son. Like Charles Dickens, the artist describes the miseries of children whose father and mother are dead. After that she becomes very intimate with Gopal and learns a few lessons of *The Bhagwadgita* from him in a light-hearted mood. He illustrates the principle of Lord Krishna that nobody can escape from the results of his actions. If a man performs evil deeds, he will be tortured by the divine forces definitely. Ravana is the best example. He explains :

'Krishna tells Arjuna : Stand up and fight, conquer your enemies, become victorious and enjoy your kingdom. As for your enemies, don't worry about them, they're already dead. I have killed them. You are — No, it's more positive than that, it's you be only the instrument'. (Qtd. from *Gita*, SP 187)

Quite for a few days Charu has a doubt in her mind regarding the conduct of Kasturi — Who is the man who visits her quite often? Whose car is parked outside her home? It was Rao who has been staying with her for some months. After the sudden death of Neil, she felt lonely and heart-broken for many months. Gopal and Rao prove to be source of consolation for her. Her neighbour Belinda, a widow and mother of Sonu, enjoys life as she does not want to neglect future. How can she ignore the pleasures of life? Death is nothing and life is everything. She remains smart, active, zealous and vigorous inspite of all oddities of life. Mira often feels impressed with her positive approach to life. She enjoys working in the college and her students feel satisfied with her lectures. Livvy, Delia and Mira are her daughters and feel independent in life. Here the artist refers to the importance of English language and grammar in brief. (SP 73) Belinda feels that the creative writer feels easy while expressing his thoughts in his native language. Since Shashi Deshpande mixed her creativity with spirituality, she created a place for herself in English fiction. Here she refers the fact that a few characters are remembered for many generations for the depth of their thoughts. In this novel the example of Julius Caesar is given in a light hearted mood.

As a psychologist and realist Surekha tells Aru and Nagma :

Some of the greatest cruelties of life are inflicted within families. These are the worst, because they so often remain shrouded in silence. More voices are silenced by families than by the State. (SP 79)

It means that children suffer due to the careless parents. Old parents suffer as they are neglected by young members of the families. Wife suffers mentally due to the hateful conduct of husband and so on. Here the artist refers to the approach of Henrick Ibsen as presented in *A Doll's House* where Nora suffers due to the doubtful nature of her husband. There was no limit to Sumi's sufferings when she returns her home with three daughters because Gopal has lost interest in job and children. Even litigations fail to solve family disputes and this is the reason that Hemingway used to say — 'Mental wounds are more deeper than physical wounds.'

Through Tressa, a helper in the office of Surekha, Shashi Deshpande supports feminism :

... a better world, one in which girls will be educated in the same way and to the same extent that boys are, in which women will not be punished for not bringing dowry into a marriage, a world in which they will not have to silently endure all the cruelty of a bad marriage. (SP 80)

But Tressa becomes the victim of bomb explosion and leaves Ramu and Gracy heart-broken. Gracy feels attached with Aru and seeks security in her home. Now Ramu's mother is prepared to look after Gracy as Geetha, as Hindu girl, not a Christian, at any cost. But Gracy does not feel at ease in the village as she loves her education. Here the artist laments the bitter fact that many marriages end in failure, frustration and legal suits. Love results in disappointment and hatred and the atmosphere of family becomes tense. There is nothing like 'absolute justice' as law does not consider many family tensions. In many cases the husbands are blamed for adultery though there is mental conflict between husband and wife. Now the number of legal cases is increasing because wife wants to take revenge from the husband with the help of I.P.C.

Often Aru feels tense as Rohit neglects her due to his busy schedule. She doubts that his love for her is diminishing though she herself fails to give time to her family life. The artist remarks that sex-play keeps the husband and wife enlivened and only mutual understanding can remove such doubts. There is a regular conflict between 'hope and disappointment' and the wise partners control their hatred to protect mutual love. Grief can be controlled by hope only. Without the child Aru feels herself a foreigner in the world of Rohit but he does not care for the lack of a child. She fails to enjoy sex with him as she can't produce a child and the whole intercourse appears a 'mockery' to her. Rohit shares her grief when she reveals her agony to him. Yet tension exists in the mind of Aru :

Not the shadow of a lost child this time, but the shadow of a child who is not yet born, who will, perhaps, never be born. (SP 99)

On the contrary Premi feels tense with the careless conduct of her son Nikhil who has withdrawn a huge amount of money from the bank. She fails to tolerate this action of her frivolous son who does not love his mother from the depth of heart. Here the artist refers to generation gap as the modern young men don't feel responsible towards parents and enjoy with their money carelessly. Actually Nikhil has joined the company of anti-social elements who extort money from him and enjoy at his cost.

The artist makes a brief reference to the working of Communist Party in India. Surekha and her husband feel that Communism presents the solution

of all economic problems of India. But both of them fail to understand that the roots of capitalism are very strong in the whole country and there are more than five thousand heavy industries in the country in the private sector. But the Communists are losing the ground in all the states except Kerala and West Bengal. Then they talk of the hypothesis — What will happen if we take birth again on earth? Shall we enjoy happily like Adam and Eve? Are we going to get salvation? They decide to concentrate upon Paradise and heavenly deeds if they wish to fulfil their dreams. Future remains uncertain inspite of our hard work. They accept the theological belief that this human life of nearly seventy years is a very short period, like a 'twitch, a blink of an eye.' (SP 117) Here the contribution of Pt. Nehru to Indian economy is asserted. The father of Kasturi regarded emergency rule necessary to solve the political crisis of 1975. Moreover, the author satirizes the corrupt political leaders who put on the mask of honesty, integrity and nationalism and misuse the public money in personal interest. Kasturi and Gopal feel intimate with each other and wish to enjoy their friendship even in future. Kasturi tells him that it is useless to talk of the dead and allow them to interfere in our lives now. Due to her sense of fear, she recollects her past when she became innocent victim of cruel friends. Here the artist exposes the new scientists who wish to challenge the working of Nature and provide pills to remain young forever. She makes it clear that nobody can defy Nature and future can't be challenged at any cost. How can one check the flow of Time — a universal factor that is, was, and will be active? Kasturi learns from Belinda that 'life' is a great teacher, philosopher, guide, preserver, destroyer, thinker, anthropologist etc. and has a lot of wisdom in its store. Of course, life has got to be led very thoughtfully for best results. Nobody can afford to be careless with life as it is uncertain like time. In a philosophical mood Gopal tells Aru :

What can even the good do against our own destinies, Aru? (SP 141)

He asks — Are human beings not puppets in the hands of destiny and fate? Are they allowed to fly freely in the void? Is there no unseen power to control the whole cosmos? Is there any certainty of second opportunity for life? He aptly says that a lot of factors influence human life such as — the actions of our previous life, our fate, our deeds, our thoughts, our desires, our mental and physical strength and above all divine will. Then the artist refers to material changes that have taken place in many urban areas of the country during the last thirty years. Sarcastically she says that violence is the by-product of globalization and prosperity. In other words, affluence and violence are allied with each other. The sad news of terrorist activity get published in newspapers and politicians make speeches against it. But usual life begins soon as if nothing has

happened. A very pertinent questions arise — What do the terrorists get with these explosions? How are people civilized if such inhuman activities take place on earth? Now even women are also part of such violent activities unfortunately. On the contrary we feel that women nurture humanity as creators and not as destroyers. With his contemplative moods Gopal controls his sense of loss and growing depression and remains a balanced person. His strong faith in the fundamentals of Indian Classics keeps him a hopeful person. His faith in hope, trust, harmony, bright future, family, society, nation etc. does not waver and Kasturi loves him for his enlightened approach to life. After all he has also lost his loving wife and suffered humiliation due to his daughters and students. He aptly advises Kasturi not to allow others to dominate her, to destroy her. One has to control oneself like Gandhiji and R.N. Tagore as self-illumination is very important. He admires creation at the cost of destruction. Why to feel oneself a victim of hopelessness and sad memories?

Here the artist satirizes the working of advertising agencies in India as it it has created world of illusion. This has nothing to do with ancient Indian culture. Seema is just proud of herself as she has become a butterfly of fashion, far away from the world of perfect womanhood. Gopal fails to interfere in her life and continues to play his allotted role in life. Here Nagma is shown as a broad-minded Muslim woman as she wants to make progress in this world. After all she has her own voice as a new woman of 21st century. Rao laments the bitter fact :

'None of us do our women justice'. (SP 185)

A very pertinent question has been raised here by the artist through Rao that many old people are victims of boredom. Why? Actually, they fail to pass their time because they don't keep themselves engaged in social activities and forget their duty to God. They don't read scriptures daily and fail to meditate everyday. They have to escape boredom with healthy deeds and help the needy people. Gopal reasserts the value of hope in life. Of course, *The Bhagwadgita* and the other scriptures are meant for all people of every age group and not only for old and retired people. Gopal tells Kasturi — Actions, reactions and their results are all interconnected and various laws of life are universal. Every Karma brings justice in the long run. Now Kasturi realizes the importance of detachment as one can feel homely everywhere and yet he/she belongs to nowhere. Let physical pleasures not be confused as real intellectual and spiritual pleasures. (SP 191) One has to rise above the physical pleasure derived from sex. Now situations bring new joys, new fears, new experiences, new relations, new feelings, new changes and one should accept them normally. Lonely Gracy makes Aru feel all this and like Dickens, she feels sympathy for her. Through Lalita the artist

asserts that people feel disappointment and grief when they expect something from others. (SP 212) It is human nature and one is advised not to expect anything from anybody. As an observer of people's psychology Kasturi remarks :

Truly, the human mind is unfathomable, it is the greatest mystery in the world, she thinks. (SP 222)

Yet Shashi Deshpande tries her best to analyze the subconscious and unconscious minds of her people and answers a few questions such as — What does Aru feel when Tressa becomes a victim of bomb explosion? How to look after Gracy in these uncertain and violent days? How to seek the love of a baby to satisfy her need of motherhood? How to satisfy Rohit as a wife? How to take care of careless Seema? How to maintain healthy relations with Nagma in the office? etc. Quite often she seeks the blessings of Lord Krishna to get delight in moments of tension. Gopal does not repent for writing his article for which he was badly hit by his students.

Even in his youth Gopal used to be conscious of the passing of time. When he is sixty years of age he thinks the same about time. Premi is fed up with her son Nikhil as he does not mend his ways. Towards the end of novel he is responsible for the gang rape of Seema as he takes her along with him only to please these goons. Gopal does not want to report the case to the police as it will spoil Seema's reputation. Premi fails to take any decision. Nikhil pleads that he is partly responsible for this rape. Yet he wishes to be forgiven for his misconduct. But his father Anil wants that the rapists must be handed over to law. Any how good sense prevails in the mind of members of the family and Seema regains conscious soon. Now they forget this agony as Aru and Rohit adopt a female infant of two and a half month.

The novel ends with a note of optimism as the artist asserts the importance of hope and love. Kasturi asks Gopal not to pay attention to his growing age and feel young at heart. Seema prepares herself for her routine job though the rape has left mental scars for her. All the members of the family meet in Vishwas apartment and feel cheerful with the arrival of new baby. Darkness withers away giving place to new hope. There is enlightenment after the departure of gloom. Kasturi and Gopal survive with hope and artist says :

The truth is that it is only hope even more than love, which can lighten the burden of parentage, it is hope, much more than love, which makes it possible for us to live, to go on living. (SP 302)

Thus, Shashi Deshpande is a committed artist and asserts the importance of action, movement, progress, success, achievement, rewards, love and hope in this complex world. All the time she trusts her mental strength and imparts a positive lesson to readers. She accepts the role of evils in this complex world where people will take some more time to become really civilized. She boldly asserts that the

world can be a decent place to survive if people give up greed, violence, lechery, pride, ignorance, ego, fundamentalism, regionalism, communalism and follow the path of wisdom and prudence. Like Plato, she believes that idea comes first and action comes after that. Let good ideas prevail in human minds so that brave new world may be established.

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