

Psychological Identity in Shashi Deshpande's 'Moving On'



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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande a renowned Indian novelist honestly depicts the life of the middle class women. Manjari the protagonist of the novel 'Moving On' enjoyed freedom in the family, but crises occur in her life after the death of her husband Shyam and she tries to introspect her life and surroundings and rediscover her own self. Her psychological traits, like suppression, conflict of soul and mind, and depression enables her to search for her strength and her real self to survive in the traditional society. Deshpande targets the Indian patriarchal culture and the position of women. This paper aims at exploring these psychological traits and their realization to delve into one's own life.

Keywords: Suppression, Courage, Conflict, Self-Discovery, Freedom

Introduction

Psychoanalytic theory suggests that all behaviour is driven by psychological factors such as unconscious drives. The reasons of how we behave often lie in our unconscious. According to Colman (2006) "no psychological phenomena, not even dreams, symptoms or parapraxes, occur by chance. They can always be assigned definite causes." Sigmund Freud (1943), a pivotal figure in the field of psychoanalysis, writes: "I have already taken the liberty of pointing out to you that there is within you a deeply rooted belief in psychic freedom and choice, that this belief is quite unscientific, and that it must give ground before the claims of a determinism which governs even mental life. Small things like slips of tongue are not accidental but an expression of our unconscious over which we have no control and Manjari the protagonist of novel 'Moving On' is guided by these psychological traits.

Review of Literature

Bhatt (2012) states that Shashi Deshpande, a renowned novelist has delve through women psyche and 'fight for the recognition of women as individual'. Her fiction projects the position of a woman in the family, in the society and also shows that her psychological growth determines her personality. In the novel 'Moving On' a new generation women shows the capacity to decide things for her life. She is intellectual enough to take her decisions. She shows enormous courage gives up her studies and marries Shyam, and after the death of her sister Malu and husband Shyam she faces lot of pain and struggle boldly. In words of Simon de Beauvoir (1989) 'One is not born, but rather becomes a women'.

Archana Bhatnagar (2004) states that 'Manjari keeps deliberating the different roles she can adopt for asserting her independence and keeping herself busy after her husband's death and when her children move out of the city for the purpose of study. She worked earlier as PRO, now she thinks of taking yoga classes with Nirmala, or putting her car in business as taxi or becoming a typist'. So Manjari her protagonist emerges as individual in her own rights.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this paper is to explore various psychological traits with respect to one's introspection to live life well. It explores certain psychological traits like suppression, depression and conflict of mind and soul of Shashi Deshpande's protagonist Manjari in the novel 'Moving On' and also reveals how she manages to come out of these conflicts.

Shashi Deshpande novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self, an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life. Her protagonist of the novel 'Moving On', Manjari reflects over her own life and her relationships with her family members and through a process of self-discovery finds her own identity as an individual like all the other protagonists. The novelist moves away from her typical treatment of her protagonists, who were subjected to discrimination or rigid rules of a patriarchal set-up. Women, who were dissatisfied with such a

set-up and go through the painful journey of self-discovery and a search for their identity. In this novel the family set-up is rather liberated one and in which the girls and women of the family enjoyed a great deal of freedom. Manjari, the protagonist's father is a doctor and the mother Vasu (Mai) is a housewife and a writer. The parents shower lot of love and affection on their daughters, Manjari (Jiji) and her younger sister Malu. Manjari also loves Malu. Besides they also enjoyed the privileges of being the daughters of a doctor. There are no bitter memories. She has in fact, happy memories of her childhood days:

We loved her because she was Malu, not because of what she did. In our house, she came first, she mattered more than anyone else; I understood this too, for was I not part of the conspiracy to keep Malu always happy, always satisfied? And she was a little tyrant who knew her power, who used it to get what she wanted. It was her choice that dictated our Sunday special lunch, she who chose which movie we could see. She was the leader and I was the follower. But outside the house, it was the other way round. There, I was the leader, the captain who got to choose her own team; whatever the game we played, I was the one who made the rules....It was like a little kingdom, this campus.... We knew, both Malu and I, our place in this little kingdom, we knew we were specially privileged as a doctor's children. (ShashiDeshpande's, 2004, p. 44-45).

The girls enjoyed complete freedom as compared to her other protagonists. There is a total feeling of frankness in the relationship between Manjari and Baba, her father. The psychological behavior of the parents reveals them to be different from the other traditionally bound parent who discriminates among their children on the basis of gender. Manjari is quite affectionate to her father (baba). She comes home when her father is sick. She and her siblings enjoyed their life freely, without any boundations as, Saturday evenings were a kind of ritual with Raja taking drinks in the presence of Baba. Manjari became part of this ritual without any objection from her father much to the astonishment of Raja:

'What will you have?' He asked me the first time.
'A gin? Gin and Limca if you have it?'
He looked at Baba's deadpan face, then at mine and said,
'sure.' But later, when we were getting things together in the
Kitchen, he hissed at me, 'How could you?'
'How could I what?'
'Ask for a drink with your father right there.'
'You mean I can drink out of his sight, but not when he's
with me? Isn't that terrible hypocrisy, Raja?'
'It's not hypocrisy. It's just-why do you have to go out of your way to displease

him? You're trying to prove what a rebel you are. You always were a show-off.'

I went swiftly to Baba at that and asked him, 'Baba, do you mind my having a drink?'

'Why should I?'

'This...this... orthodox Brahmin thinks I shouldn't be drinking. Not in your presence, he says.' (ShashiDeshpande's, 2004, p. 63-64)

So, there is an open and frank relationship between the father and the daughter and also between the mother and the daughter. However, a time comes in her life when her parents do not approve of her marriage with Shyam. According to Naik (2004), Deshpande demonstrates the man-woman relationship by analysing the Manjari's character from a psychoanalytical perspective and shows her close emotional relationship, wounds and interruptions. However, a time comes in her life when her parents do not approve of her marriage with Shyam. Manjari resists the patriarchal ideology and marries against the will of her family. Rebellious nature is inherited from her father who too broke many of the family rules. He followed Gandhian philosophy and married a Harijan girl. It created a great turmoil in the family. He was forced to change his decision, but he remained adamant. Likewise Manjari's freedom is impaired only when she decides to marry Shyam but she marries against the will of the family. Her married life in the beginning was happy but with the birth of Anand the requirements increased, Shyam could not excel professionally which lead to tensions in their married life and it created a vacuum in their mutual understanding and love, as she says:

"Closeted in one small room though we were, we seemed to be living on two different continents. In bed, we lay close, but without touching. It was like the game of pebbles. I'd played as a girl. A game in which, if two pebbles touched, you were out. (ShashiDeshpande's, 2004, p. 290)

She left her family for Shyam but later she undergoes the shame and humiliation of marrying a man who deceives her by having sex with her younger sister Malu. She becomes pregnant and gives birth to a daughter, Sachi, who is brought up by Manjari as both Malu and Shyam die. Manjari widowed at twenty one, becomes a burden to herself. After her husband's death, she rejects all her body needs and rhythm as she was faithful to Shyam's soul. But later she develops physical relationship with Raman a tenant in her house. Manjari's true love and faithfulness for Shyam vanishes. For years, she had suppressed her physical desires but the rigid restrictions of the society could not stop the desires of the body as well as the mind. According to Freud (1943) suppression is a psychological mechanism; here we force the unwanted information out of our awareness. We consciously choose not to indulge in a conscious thought, feeling or action even though we are aware of it. This permits us to focus on our affairs without being distracted by every impulse that arises,

and without having to act on those impulses. We get suppressed because of the impulse's in appropriateness with regard to the situation or because of time constraints in which we feel that "I just can't deal with that right now." In case of Manjari too, we witness such a situation. After that she is totally confused and she herself feels that how her body which is unknown to her all these years is suddenly burned as she feels "It's my body that frightens me, it's my body that is suddenly my enemy" (Shashi Deshpande's, 2004, p. 226) So Manjari is disturbed and there is conflict of soul and mind. She struggles to control her physical demands.

Manjari unlike other protagonists does not actually attempt to make a niche for herself in the society. Her freedom is impaired only when she decides to marry Shyam. She is also seeking her individual self, her identity, which has lost somewhere in the tragic deaths in the family. She finds her identity not as a writer or as a doctor but in her 'self-assertion' as an ordinary being who had for long felt that she had been set "apart from humankind" and "no longer belonged to the world of ordinary people, ordinary living" (Shashi Deshpande's, 2004, p. 326) and she comes out of the dark tunnel into which she had slipped and not only survives but also grows as a human being- a woman full of understanding and compassion. Raja notices that she has changed and tells her, "You've changed, Jiji, you've changed enormously." And she replies, "Yes, I've changed, Raja. I couldn't have survived if I hadn't changed." (Shashi Deshpande's, 2004, p. 69) As an ordinary human being she regains her lost dignity and respect which obviously followed the pregnancy of Malu. This is her identity as an individual- ordinary but one who has learnt to survive and live with dignity.

Manjari also portrays various other traits like courage and determination to do what she wanted rather than get swayed away by others like Raja who raises a question when Manjari wanted to fulfil her "middle-class dream" of having her own car. Male mentality is reflected in Raja words when he objects to her decision and says 'But why do you need a car?' Manjari replies, "I bet if, I were a man, you'd never have asked that question" (Shashi Deshpande's, 2004, p. 65). She feels that the Indian mind set discriminates between the luxuries that a man and woman should be endowed with, but Manjari objects to this discrimination and has the courage to argue. So it reflects one of the personality traits to take bold decision in life without being guided away by the male counter parts.

She exhibits courage at the same time she receives phone calls from the Mafia gang to sell her house. They warned her "we don't want to hurt you, but....you're a woman, don't forget that" (Shashi Deshpande's, 2004, p.167). This infuriates Manjari and makes her realise her "vulnerability" to suppress her. Manjari a bold modern woman takes her decision of not to sell the house, and at the same time reveals an inner strength to face the dangerous situation courageously and boldly.

Deshpande's protagonists go on a journey of self-discovery and by recalling their lives and all the

significant incidents they not only discover the truth but also their identity. They emerge as strong and confident women. She has brought to light the face of the New Woman who is different from the mythical women as they break their silence to confront a traditional society and the changing realities of man-woman relationship. In Shashi Deshpande's (2003) book *Writing from the Margin* she quotes from the Mahabharata:

When they entered the land of the Yadavas, the favourite wife of Krishna, Satyabhama, asked Draupadi in private, 'How do you manage to please your husbands so well? Why are they never angry with you? Why are they so eager to fulfill every wish of yours? Are there drugs, mantras, cosmetics?' Draupadi said, 'Satyabhama, clever women know many ways.' And then, after scoring the use of mantras, cosmetics and drugs, Draupadi tells Satyabhama about all the things she does. '... I neither bathe nor eat nor sleep till my husband has; in fact, our servants have. When he returns from the town or forest, I have water and a seat ready for him...' And so on. After which she goes on to speak of the many things that a husband gives a woman. So, 'Why not act in a way that will make him feel she really loves me?' She suggests artfully. And then, finally, she gets to the punch line – or what I think is the punch line. She says, 'Be silent about what you think'. Be silent. There it is, the advice for all womankind, not just on 'how you please a husband', but on how to survive. This injunction of silence weighs down the entire history of women; in fact, it explains the huge blank that is women's history. A huge blank, actually, in human history. (181-182)

Deshpande's novels are about women who have been silent for long and the word 'silent' is scattered in all her novels except in 'Moving On'.

Conclusion

Her women are not like the mythical women who remained suppressed, silent and struggled in various phases of life. They break the silence to free themselves from this stifling subordinate position and fulfil their own desires. They are intelligent women who discover their strengths and weaknesses through introspection and forge ahead to build their homes and pursue their careers as well. Their journey of self-discovery through introspection helps them to see the truth and removes all their doubts, confusions and misconceptions. The novelist projects the strength of her protagonist who shapes their life accordingly to their potential.

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