

SYMBOLIC AND SUGGESTIVE TITLES OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

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Abstract: The works of Shashi Deshpande focus on the subservient position of a wife and mother, the subjection of women in all areas of life, and the discrepancy between what a woman wants to be and what society expects of her. Despite the author's works' recurring topics and style, there is a great deal of variation in their titles. Their function in drawing the reader into the novel's secrets is crucial. Additionally, they help the reader in better comprehending the text. Examining the titles closely also reveals that Shashi Deshpande did not create her titles by just combining words; rather, each word adds to the title's strong suggestion. The present study tries to unravel the relevance of the titles of select novels of Shashi Deshpande.

Key words: titles, suggestive, symbolic, relevance,

Shashi Deshpande's novels carry titles that are not only eye-catching but also symbolic and suggestive. They play a vital role in leading the reader deep into the mysteries of the novel. They also help the reader in understanding the novel better. A close study of the titles also tells us that Shashi Deshpande has not coined her titles by merely putting some words together but each word in the title contributes towards making the title highly suggestive. For example, it is not just "Long Silence" but *That Long Silence* where "that" refers to the "silence" of women which they are used to. The emphasis is on the word "that", if "that silence" of women is broken, then the emancipation of women from suppression and subjugation would be possible. For Deshpande, a world without frightened, dependent, trapped, frustrated women, is a better world for all of us to live in. As there is a profound thought and message hidden in the titles, they deserve to be used out of the context as quotations like *The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence etc.*

Some of the common themes of Shashi Deshpande's novels are the disparity between what a woman aspires to be and what society expects of a woman, subjugation of woman in different spheres of life and the submissive role of a wife and mother. Though the themes and style of the author's novels are repetitive, the titles of the novels have a rich variety. Moreover, the freshness and the vibrancy of the titles initiate a good beginning to the novel.

The Dark Holds No Terrors, the author's first and 'dearest' novel, speaks of the dark psyche of the protagonist, at different levels. The terror caused by this 'enclosed psyche' is highlighted at the end of the novel and the protagonist is convinced about the inner strength which keeps her strong and uncrushed at the time of crisis. We observe that through the title, even before the novel begins

there are suggestions of 'terrors' the darkness that causes terrors'. Thus, the title through the words 'dark' and 'terrors' gives a clue to the reader regarding what is imminent in the novel.

Saru, the protagonist, throughout the novel is haunted by terrors' mainly due to the nightmarish experience of rape at night by her husband Manohar who otherwise is a normal person, secondly the guilt of being responsible for her brother Dhruv's death and thirdly her mother's cold and revengeful behaviour towards Saru especially after her brother's death for which mother holds her to be responsible.

As an escape from the traumas of marital life, the protagonists returning to the paternal homes is a common feature in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is not an exception to this. As Robert Frost puts it in 'The Death of a Hired Man' - 'Home is the place where when you have to go there, they have to take you in'. Saru is taken by her father. The confession of her 'terrors' on the other hand leads towards the liberation of Saru's terrors by the revelation of her inner strength. This is suggestive in the title by the word of negation 'no' and hence *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

R. S. Pathak bringing in a comparison between Jane Austen and Shashi Deshpande's novels says that they are more or less a fictionalization of personal experiences. Most of Shashi Deshpande's novels present a middle-class housewife's life. Deshpande's main concern is the urge to find oneself, to create space for oneself and to grow on one's own. Her novels generally move around family relationships particularly the relationship between husband and wife and the later dilemma and conflicts.

According to Deshpande, everybody has to live within relationships and there is no other way. "It's needed", she writes:

"It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you would 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 is the idealization of motherhood the false and sentimental notes that accompany it¹."

In *Roots and Shadows*, the protagonist fails to separate herself from her 'roots'. 'Roots' are like our shadows which follow us wherever we go and also monitor our present and future. Shashi Deshpande suggests in *Roots and Shadows* that a change in the upbringing of a girl child is required. Only then she would be liberated from the mores preserved for women since ages. The novel ends with a positive note with the hope of a liberation of women from the conventions and norms established by the society which restricts them from exhibiting their true self. The mode and style of their upbringing inculcates in them submissiveness, silence and passiveness. As the title aptly suggests our life is intra- woven between 'Roots' and 'Shadows' which have a strong hold on their psyche²,

The quest for self is another significant feature of Shashi Deshpande's novels. Her protagonists are in search of selfhood. S.P. Swain in "Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's Novels" says that the quest is an attempt to asset human values, to affirm their rights as human beings. Deshpande says:

I know from my experience that while wifhood and motherhood were a great and important part of my life, even before I became a wife and mother there already was a self, a clear developed self that was me, a self even distinct from the different roles that I played³.

This quest for selfhood again flowers and finds an artistic expression in *That Long Silence*. Jaya, the protagonist, is a wife, a mother and everything, but Jaya herself was nowhere. The woman sacrifices her personality for the sake of her husband and children, yet she has to remain subordinate to them by their silence. Jaya had to accept silently whatever her husband did and at the end she is held responsible for his misdeeds. This is all because of her 'silence' which she is taught to practice. *That Long Silence* is responsible for this misery. Hence, in the end of the novel Jaya realizes the cause of her suffering and she says "I will have to speak, to listen, to erase silence between us". Shashi Deshpande wants a companionship between wife and husband, man and woman. The manner in which the author proceeds in the novel to reveal her message is very convincing. Nowhere she deviates from the hard realities of life. It is this element of realism which mainly contributes to the success of Shashi Deshpande's novels. Raymond Williams rightly observed in his essay entitled 'Realism and the Contemporary Novel' that a new kind of realism has to be discovered if the novel today is to find creative directions. The novel, he said, cannot be realistic after the manner of great tradition, and it cannot be completely devoid of social reality. The life and breath of the novel is found essentially in the tension and balance between the personal and social. And Shashi Deshpande's analyses of the problems of new women which has emerged in this postmodern Indian Society is realistic.

All the leading women characters of Shashi Deshpande's novels learn in due course how to face the situation in which they find themselves. At the end of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru, goes back home with

all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... all persons spiked with guilt. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. But she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and so much more⁴.

R.S. Pathak says that This behaviour on the part of Saru is meaningfully different from that of the like of Nora of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Even Urmila in *The Binding Vine* who thinks that human nature is the "hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept. (and) to live with, does not remain unaffected by the healing touch of love"⁵. The protagonists are always optimists. We see Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* remarking at the end of the novel -

I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible.... 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. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I have always thought there's only one life, no chance o a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life, itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices. *Yatheccchasi tatha kuru...*' If I have to plug that hole in the heart', I will have to erase the silence between us... We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time.

Be 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 possible⁶.

So, the author's key message to the reader is "we can always hope" and that "life has always to be made possible". This positive attitude towards life would bring all the change in a woman's life is the message of the author and it is this which makes her novels of immense value. The titles of her novels also play a key role in imparting this message.

Thus, the concept of new woman or *stree-shakti* is eloquently depicted in Shashi Deshpande's novels. Each novel, though the themes and style are repetitive, is a voyage into the hard realities of a woman's life. In this connection, the titles of her novels play a significant role. Though Shashi Deshpande's message is revealed through the protagonists of the novel, Shashi Deshpande deliberately avoids choosing the names of the protagonists (eg. Jaya, Indu, Saru, etc.) as titles for her novels. This is because the protagonist represents the whole class of women and not an individual. The novel highlights a universal message of 'New Woman' to the whole class of women. All the thoughtfully worded 'titles' of Shashi Deshpande's novels are very appropriate and relevant.

Works Cited:

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