

## INTRICACIES OF HUMAN LIFE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S

### *MOVING ON*

**Dr. Madhavi Nikam**

Associate Professor

PG Department of English

R. K. Talreja College, Ulhasnagar (Mumbai)

#### **Abstract**

*Shashi Deshpande's Moving On (2004) is a story of families interwoven with each other. It depicts the moving of life in spite of all the difficulties and problems. The novel moves in between past and present revealing the lives of the characters through diaries, writing, past memories and incidents. It depicts the true human intricacies. Deshpande's characters ruminate the past to know and understand the future. Introspection, return to the childhood memories and evaluating the past incidences are seen in all her novels. A few months after Gayatri's marriage Baba suffers a severe heart attack. Deshpande's almost all the heroines are married against the parental wish. Marathi festivals, language, tradition, custom and culture find a place in the novel Moving On.*

**Key Words : Moving, tradition, custom, culture,**

**INTRICACIES OF HUMAN LIFE IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S**

***MOVING ON***

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**S**hashi Deshpande's *Moving On* (2004) is a story of families interwoven with each other. It depicts the moving of life in spite of all the difficulties and problems. The novel moves in between past and present revealing the lives of the characters through diaries, writing, past memories and incidents. It depicts the true human intricacies. Unveiling the personal lives of the characters the plot moves on making the incidents clear and vivid. The novel portrays the lives of the characters like Badri Narayan (Baba) who is an anatomist; his wife Vasu (Mai) is a writer, their daughters Manjari (Jiji) who is the narrator and protagonist of the novel and Malvika (Malu) the youngest daughter who meets an untimely death.

The novel depicts the life of the dead and the alive. It deals with the growth of character on the past memories and future plannings. The narrator plays various roles like a daughter, sister, wife and mother. As precisely pointed out by Rashmi Gaur, "*Moving On* underlines the societal expectations from women while living through their various roles" (Gaur 31). Deshpande has brought to forefront various issues related to one's personal life like marriage, sex, love, death and children. The difficulties a woman has to face in her life like emotional, psychological, social, physical and mental after her husband's death is reflected in *Moving On*. The harsh reality of death and widowhood dominates the novel.

The novel opens with the past memories of the grandsons of Baba's patron, Ramakrishna (RK) and Balakrishna (BK). They are daily visitors to Baba's house and RK is attracted towards Gayatri, Baba's sister. She though not beautiful was "an attractive girl- slender, tall and vivacious."(10) RK is attracted to Gayatri and proposes her for. Baba is confused but Gayatri without any fuss accepts the proposal. Baba gives his consent as RK is a very estimable young man, with a promising future. They are married and understand each other's needs and requirements. They lead a happy life in spite of being childless: "The fact that they never felt, or at least, never showed that they felt the lack of children, is an indication what they were to each other. Their relationship was complete even without children" (Deshpande 12).

Deshpande's characters ruminate the past to know and understand the future. Introspection, return to the childhood memories and evaluating the past incidences are seen in all her novels. A few months after Gayatri's marriage Baba suffers a severe heart attack. Discovering her father's diary after his death, she sets to evaluate her life retrospectively in view of Baba's revelations that show past events in a new light. She searches for clues in her childhood spent with her anatomist father, who shares his fascination for the human body with Jiji.

The novels *That Long Silence*, *Small Remedies*, *Roots and Shadows* and *Moving On* have female characters who are writers and Deshpande tries to give outlet to their feelings, emotions and experiences. Along with Mai, who writes impossibly perfect, romantic stories for popular magazines, they form a cozy threesome that adores the younger daughter, Malu. Jiji thinks that she will find a note in the diary saying that Malu was loved more and cared for more than her. She expects to hear

well about her from her parents but she never hears it. She looks in for a 'good girl' approving pat. Jiji feels like reading the diaries because they are kept on the table as if Baba saying, "This is for you, and she knew" reading them would not be an intrusion." (18) She is unable to decide whether to read the diaries or not. But she wants to know more about herself. Self-discovery becomes an obsession which she feels can be satisfied through her Baba's diaries. She wants to review her past through her father's eyes. One of the scholars of Deshpande, SharadaIyer says thus:

The role of early life experiences, the role of education, closeness to parents, sibling relationships are some very crucial elements that go a long way in creating a woman's personality. (Iyer 48)

All of a sudden Jiji's problem is solved. It comes to her as the magic moment comes to all of us; the secret is to recognise it when it comes, to hold on to the revelation. She hears a dialogue on the television,

You are wronging our son. He must know his father. We need to know our parents. Without this knowledge we can not go on, we will always remain incomplete. (19)

Autobiographical details are found in this novel to a greater extent. Deshpande's husband is a pathologist and one finds a lot of medical terms and references in this novel. Baba suffers from cancer. Raja, BK's son writes to Jiji and tells her about the illness. He deals freely with his death. In spite of knowing the facts of his last moments he accepted things in his own stride. But the impending death always accompanies him. He works as a lecturer in a medical college. He is a gentle, loving, caring, energetic and humorous. He is called a 'Haddi Doctor'. He is

obsessed with body believes in, "You can not turn your back on things, you've got to face them." (21)

Father-daughter relationship portrayed by Deshpande is more appreciating and smooth. Jiji remembers Baba and his admiration for human body. She feels fascinated with how his knowledge of human bones is perfect. He believes bones survive and is passionate about it. Jiji remembers the words of Max Muller: "There has to be some passion in life, otherwise life becomes humdrum."(25)

Jiji clears Baba's house with the help of Mounappa, as his name suggest is a person who keeps mouni.e.quiet. The things accumulated from years are cleared but a few selected are kept back like Baba's books and Magazines in which Mai's, stories are published. She realises: "It looks like we're doomed to be ancestor worshipper; relics of our parents' lives become suddenly precious after they're dead. And we think; no, I can not do this, let someone else do it."(33)

Females get emotionally involved in things. Raja suggests Jiji to donate the books and magazines to a library or to let them lie in a corner. He is a person who is very close and intimate with Jiji. He proposes her for marriage but she rejects giving him many excuses like, they are almost like cousins, they grew together and that he had treated Malu and Jiji as he had treated his own sisters Premi and Hemi. She wants to say but holds herself saying, "I do not want to get married but I do not mind sex, though." (70) Jiji thinks of her past more than her future. She is trapped too much in her old memories and the Baba-Mai-Malu and I entity. She thinks of how things changed after Malu's birth.

Jiji thinks more about the dead than the alive. She broods over the lives of Mai, Malu, Gayatri, Baba, Shyam, RK, and Rukku who are already dead. She thinks while

reading the diaries: “The dead have no right to privacy; they lose that right the moment they die.”(46) The gap created between her and her father was somewhat connected through the diaries. His illness is like a link between them. Anand and Sachi, Jiji’s children visit him which gives him some moments of joy. Anand is a hope and he reminds Baba of his youth. After Anand leaves Baba’s condition deteriorates and, “Within a fortnight he was dead.” (61)

Baba’s death leaves Jiji in a state of anarchy. She plans to run a yoga class along with her friend Nirmala. She also plans to purchase a car and turn it into a taxi, but “plans evaporate like mist in sunshine.”(66) She decides to buy a computer and so her tenant, Abhishek’s friend Shridhar installs a computer for her. Suddenly she starts receiving threatening calls asking her to sell the house but she refuses to do so. She remembers the moments of sorrow and death associated with the house. She thinks: “The finality of death keeps your memories chained to a place. With birth, there is a moving on, a going ahead, memories piling up, diluting the original ones.” (75) The calls continue but Jiji does not give up. The caller does not reveal his identity but attacks her femininity by telling her not forget that she is a woman. The same night there is an intruder in her house. He attacks her physically, bruises her and scares her to death. She fights back and at last is able to free herself. She immediately calls Raja who comes and checks the house. He informs the police and a constable is left to guard the house. Raja also informs his cousin, Venkat, R.K.’s sister’s son, who is a D. I. G. The investigating officer guesses that the prime property is the reason for the attack. Jiji’s house is with, “A large plot, with main road on the right and a quiet, dead-end street in front. An open piece of ground beyond the main road.”(140) Deshpande has added detective element to the novel. Intruders, blank calls, investigation and suicide are some of the found in the novel.

Deshpande highlights the contemporary world of corruption, underworld criminals, smugglers and violence. Laxman, Jiji's maternal uncle comes to her mind. He is a criminal and throws people out of their houses. Jiji remembers how as a criminal he scares people and then himself became the victim of fear. The act, the terror boomeranged on him. He shifts from a one room in Marutichawl to AmbaSadan, a big spacious flat and later he shifts to Worli where he buys not only a flat but the whole building. But in spite of the economic prosperity he has no mental peace. He is shot dead and when Jiji goes to meet him she asks about his wife Mangal. He shrugs his shoulder which clearly reflects that he has no connection and relation with her and does not know much about her. Jiji also thinks about how Mai loves and cares for both her brothers Bharat and Laxman. Bharat is an engineer and works in Pune. He is a sophisticated person and leads a peaceful life with his wife Medha. They are childless and so when Malu has severe asthematic attacks she is kept in Pune with them. She becomes a part of their life and family. Jiji felt sorry about Malu staying away from the house and the laughter and excitement in her life has vanished. Malu's illness is a reason for the family disturbance and Malu becomes self-absorbed.

Deshpande's almost all the heroines are married against the parental wish. Marathi festivals, language, tradition, custom and culture find a place in the novel *Moving On*. Jiji who has married Shyam in spite of parental opposition is invited home for Mangala Gauri. Jiji stays with her in-laws in Ocean Vista after staying separate. Her father-in-law is a frustrated man; his mother is a muslim who is killed during the partition by her own people for marrying a Hindu. Shyam's brother is a lawyer. Jiji is only eighteen when she marries and Shyam was barely twenty-one

when he died. Baba and Mai visit her along with Malu. Malu stays with Jiji for some days.

Extra-marital relationship is seen in this novel also like Deshpande's other novels. Sexual gratification for women is not permitted by the society. The awakening of the physical needs and sexual desires makes her surrender to Raman, her new tenant. Deshpande highlights this phenomenon in *The Hindu* thus:

For one thing, this is a novel in which the body is the focus. Therefore, the physical could not in any way be left out or merely hinted at. Doesn't Manjari speak of "meeting Mr. Bones head on"? And does she not criticise her mother for not doing so? And do not forget that Manjari's father, the anatomist, instilled in her an acceptance of the human body and its needs.

The inspector comes on visit in the intruder case. He inquires about Raman because a man who is Raman's friend dies in an accident. The inspector doubts that it is not an accident. Jiji tells him to vacate the house. Raja comes to know of Jiji's relation with Raman and their relation stretches. Raja meets an accident and BK comes to his place. Sachi and Jiji looks after him. Almost for a year Jiji and Raja do not speak properly with each other. They even try to avoid each other.

Jiji speaks with him and confesses many things about her life. She tells him how loving, delicate Malu suddenly became depressed and reserved. The truth is that she is pregnant. It is Shyam, who makes Malu pregnant. Jiji feels: "I felt betrayed, shamed. Nevertheless, I refused to believe the rest of what Malu had told Mai- that Shyam had raped her. "(317) Jiji recollects how Shyam leaves it to her to decide whether to stay with him or not. He says, "I won't come here again. You have to

come to me if you want me.” (320) The condition of Mai and Baba is desperate. Malu gives birth to a girl and becomes hysterical. She screams when she sees Jiji. She dies a few days later after giving birth to Sachi. She has died of post-natal complication. Gayatri suggests and requests Jiji to take care of Sachi. Jiji also recollects Shyam’s death, his suicide by drowning himself. Jiji thought,

His suicide had seemed the final betrayal, his dying in the sea, the sea by which we had lived those days of perfect happiness, the worst treachery. (327)

The loss is too much for Jiji. Their death creates a vacuum in her life. Raja patiently listens to her. She empties her secret box in front of him. She who suffers a lot and sacrifices, at last finds herself contented with her life.

Through Baba's diary we come to know of the painful death of Vasu due to diabetes. Her leg is amputated and she lies stinking and her body suffering the wound of gangerine, full of pus. we discover how Baba himself copes with cancer, we witness his fears, eternal questions on what life is, what death leads into, we read about how Baba feels during his last days that he fails both as a father and as a husband. Through Jiji'sreminiscensing about what she reads in Baba's dairy, we finally understand what sort of woman Jiji is, we get to know the sort of life she has led hitherto. Baba has written about how he fails to do justice to Jiji and convince his wife Vasu of his love and concern for her. How Mai suffers silently and never expresses her feelings. Theirs is a intercaste marriage. Laxman whom Baba hates and never talks to arranges their marriage. Mai loves her brother intensely and trusts him. It is Laxman who helps Mai with things. Baba confesses that Mai drifts away from him mentally, emotionally and psychologically and never shares her grief

for Malu's death. She suffers her illness quietly without telling anybody. It is Gayatri who finds her in miserable condition and feels sorry about Mai's not telling her ailment.

The diaries written by Baba reveal various facets of the lives of Gayatri, Vasu, Jiji, RK, BK, Shyam and others. The diaries speak of the dying man's feelings for his family members and friends. They help the reader know more about his analysis of the people around him. Deshpande has used different techniques in the novel *Moving On*. In the newspaper, *The Hindu* she said so about technique:

Technique is something I have to think about a lot. Yes, technique is very important. I have a story to tell. So how do I tell it? This is as much a part of the story as the people, the events and the language I use. At the same time, the technique is something one has to work at consciously. Each novel demands its own technique; the material dictates the way you present it. There is a lot of exploration and searching before I find the right way.

In *Moving On*, Manjari has her own voice which Deshpande has to consciously work at to differentiate it for her Baba's. She has used various techniques like monologues, diaries and memories. Sub-narratives are also found in the novel and for the very first time she has presented a novel in parts. Like the recurring features, here too home coming is seen. Memories and pictures of the past, dreams, hopes and plans for the future are focused in this novel. Deshpande has used many marathi words in this novel like, ammchi Mai, khulli, annadasukhibhava, porietc which shows an affinity to Marathi language and culture. In this novel she has reflected more on male characters than in any other except *A Matter of Time*. *Moving On* is an exploration of relationships within families. Deshpande ventures into the territory

of mind exploring various issues. Thus, she has touched all the possible situations existing in domestic life of an individual. Her novels are loaded with domestic issues and status of women in the family and the society.

Deshpande's novels have a few common elements like the protagonist in her novels like *That Long Silence*, *The Roots and Shadows* and *Small Remedies* are writers working under the social and the husband's pressure. All the male characters in the novel are depicted as one unable to understand the emotional security, mental peace, mutual love and understanding and physical desires which leads to marital discord. The only novel which differs is *The Binding Vine*, as the protagonist does not fight for herself but for the social upliftment, the protagonist does not have extramarital relationship as found in all other novels, she does not crave for a son like Vandana nor does she neglect motherhood like Indu in *The Roots and Shadows*.

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