

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Vol. 7, Issue-5 (October 2016)

The Criterion 

7th Year of Open Access

Editor-in-Chief
Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Rejuvenating the Self through Deshpande's *Ships that Pass*: A Meditation on the Nature of Love and Marriage

S. Prithvika

Ph.D Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Central University of Rajasthan.

Abstract:

As Shashi Deshpande in the Author's note to the novel says 'Though the world has changed, India has changed, the decades did not seem to matter, because human beings are the same and the mystery of the human mind still remains the greatest mystery of all.' Shashi Deshpande, in her later novels focuses on the 'human', rather than the 'woman'. The post modern era paves a glimpse at the human psyche through the characters of Tara and Radhika, in the novella *Ships that Pass* and the notion of human relationship explored through marriage. The era emphasizes on transcending restraining factors and walk beyond the walls of gender bifurcation. Though the writer instilled optimism into the writings of women yet the need to necessitate such writings for liberation and to initiate it for a cause in the present day era, will be the quest of the paper. Self Analysis serves as a tool to establish the view that while life may seldom turn out as expected, the only hope lies in finding the courage to take one's chances. It also ponders on the thin sublime line which underlies all living. Analyzing the novella *Ships that pass*, all the way through the lens of the self, opens the closed boundaries of the traditional society for women and addresses the predicament of human existence, thus elevating the issue to a higher level.

Keywords: feminist implications, liberation, transcending , human psyche, hope

The word 'woman' has enveloped within itself myriad symbolic interpretations. This era paves a neat path for women writers to take stand in order to portray their world honestly. Women writing and the world of women have been left stereotyped just to traditionalism; but their world has more to offer apart from their surrender to their relative selves. Relative selves, here implies, their role as a mother, daughter, daughter in law, wife and sister. The new women writing has stepped across these laid down borders to penetrate deep within the selves of women in particular which had been masqued till now. The stream of consciousness technique celebrates this notion of the writers and assists them in leading within the 'inside' of a woman. These new generations of writers wish their story to be heard independently without being adulterated by chauvinistic and orthodox barriers. Women have a tale to tell. It has been very convenient to drag the writers on grounds of being emotionally weak and sentimentally attached. But instead their tale is a truthful rendering of the happenings in their heart. Such stories might not contribute to physical environment significantly in general but does embellish upon the readers a world which had not been traversed until then. The women strive for liberation and feel the essential need within themselves to breathe a free air and to lead a life of purpose governed by their own self.

One such new women writer who has established her stand in the new age women writing is Shashi Deshpande. Shashi Deshpande marks herself as a unique writer in establishing an optimistic perspective for her characters. In the novels which she writes, there is a sense of dilemma within them to break free from their cloistered walls and to step further into a world of

light. The novels are a depiction of this conflict and the effort which the character takes to resolve these rifts. The protagonists go through this serious ordeal to understand their place with respect to such circumstances and to pave a clear path of understanding to survive within a hostile environment. This paper takes up the novel *Ships that Pass* to unveil the mystery of the human mind in understanding relationships. The novel also speaks of marriage and breaks free from the construction of an idealized image of marriage. Marriage had been considered to be the certified hallmark for having finally settled down. But quite contrastingly, the writer says Marriage is not the end but instead the beginning of a new life altogether. Thus the quest would be to embark upon a journey in imbibing what the mind confers upon in the aspect of love and marriage. Radhika, as she ponders upon the changed view on marriage says,

“I thought of my own idea of marriage –it seemed so puerile now...How far I’d travelled from that silly girl who thought marriage was a solution to problems. On the contrary, it was the beginning of problems, some so bad that they could never be resolved.”(Deshpande 68)

Ships that Pass was initially serialized in *Eve’s Weekly* in 1980 which was intended to be a crime story but turned out to be more on people and their secretive selves. Three decades later the writer carried forward this story and developed it into a novella, by focusing upon the idea of love and marriage. The main character around whom the novel revolves is the protagonist, Radhika. Radhika, who has just completed her graduation, feels perturbed by the question which would arise in the family next. “And so you’ve done your BA. What next? Hell!”(5) Radhika gives an astonishing statement to her family that she will get married and only then will pursue for higher education. The writer appoints the stream of consciousness technique to understand the happenings deep within the mind of the protagonist. It is a beautiful technique which she uses to portray the mind of a woman in an honest manner. The society demands certain behavioural etiquettes from a girl, but what the girl desires and wishes is always considered to be secondary. The writer also implies the theme of distancing oneself from the situation to accommodate and perceive clarity for her life.

Radhika decides that she would get married. This leads us on to understand the society in general and its implications on our life. Marriage is a social construct and especially when the society demands of that one duty which all the individuals are consciously or unconsciously bound or weaved into, is marriage.

Radhika’s elder sister Tara had the opportunity to fall in love and hence there wasn’t that whole process of groom hunting. The idea of marriage instills an unsaid fulfillment which, even upon pursuing the best streamline in a career cannot seem to match. The society for long had pursued the thought that it is marriage which legalizes certain affairs which cannot be pulled along without the prescription of marriage. On one side we have Radhika, who glorifies marriage and fantasizes with it. “I was more occupied with wondering when we would hold hands. And would he try to kiss me.”(18) Though quite evidently, after meeting Ghanshyam, she could not make out what was that one thing which still made her feel edgy about marriage. She could not bring herself to a clear understanding whether her choice to finish off this societal responsibility was a sane one or not.

“Was it Ghanshyam? Or marriage? Ghanshyam was alright, nothing wrong with him. A young man like many others. If-no, when – I married him, he would be a responsible

husband, like Dada, and I would have to become a responsible wife and we would lead a good life.”(21)

This is the most illusory foundation upon which the pillar of marriage is laid down . It is mainly the physical appearances and the doings of the person(job positioning) which makes up our choice. The inside is a masque and kept hidden in every move. The illusory effect which is cast aloud by a person creates the sense of idealness of the situation. Instead, quite in a contrast manner, when the cast falls off, and when the inside proclaims itself, the true identity of a person is revealed, which might be different from what the other person had perceived uptill now. This construct and mirage of the groom and bride, their false talks and showy moves, hold back their real selves. Thus, the foundation stone for marriage is laid upon shaky roots.

Illustrating this aspect, in the novel too, we realize that Radhika, felt she could solve the greatest certainty in her life, that is marriage. She goes for an arranged marriage and dreams about a fairy tale date when Ghanshyam and she are there together. But nothing dreamy actually happens. So when the egg shell cracks open, we see the futilities involved in marriage. Deshpande has also very subtly pointed out that an ideal marriage is limited to the picture frames.

“Studio portraits of newly weds. Parsi couples, the men in their amazing caps, the women in their beautiful bordered saris. Maharashtrian couples, she in a nine-yard sari, sitting in a chair, no, almost cowering in it, with a nath-surely, the worst ornament ever devised for women-hanging from her nose and a frightened look on her face. And he, in a dhoti, black cap on head, standing by her, looking as if the women by his side did not exist.(They made me want to cry, somehow, these joyless couples.) And then there were Christian couples, looking as if they belonged to today, the same stiff suit for man, the same white dress and veil for the woman, only the hairstyles different.”(6-7)

With this the woman writer sheds light on highly fantasized aspect of marriage. The idea of a picture perfect marriage is limited to the photo frames only. The society which glorifies this, also keeps up the fake outlook which the picture of a marriage can render. How can a few rituals and the fake physical appearances of a partner and few rosy words decide the course of one's future? It is the matter of the inside which needs to be settled. There should be a space created for our very own self to develop which would be the sign of a successful marriage.

Deshpande has pondered upon the aspect of love through Tara and Shaantanu. There was no uncertainty in their marriage. It was destined that they wanted to be with one another. But somehow their marriage crumbles. It is a matter of pretence which exists between the two of them. There's was a perfect marriage but things changed after the death of their child Geetu. All the promises of love got transformed and there was silence between the two souls.

What does one fathom in this endeavour of love and marriage? Radhika understands the notion of life and marriage when she observes the so called perfect marriage life of her sister and brother in law. How certain they were with what they wanted in their lives. But ultimately, the same well woven marriage was a pessimistic one for Tara and an optimistic one for Radhika. Deshpande rests love and marriage and their tenure on the base of friendship.

“One thing I’m sure of is that, as long as we’re together, I don’t care where we are. With this man, I know I can be myself. I’d thought, after Shaan and Akka, that I had lost faith in love. But no, I haven’t. I believe in love- if friendship is part of it. Like it is with us. And since we began living together, I wake up in the mornings with a sense of anticipation; each day is a new beginning. Why didn’t anyone tell me marriage could be like this?”(136)

Like mentioned earlier, Deshpande makes her characters well aware of the situation into which they are wound, but still there lies a smile within them after a hard taxing process which they would have undergone to come to certain conclusions. In this case too, Ghanshyam taught Radhika that the foundations of marriage are laid not on the stone of farce. Radhika understood the dilemma within her and found her “Right Guy”, Ram Mohan. When Shaantanu invited Radhika at his place, she was battling within herself whether her choice of marriage before education was a right one. Secondly, even if it cannot be altered, but yet whether Ghanshyam, was the guy with whom she could spend her future with. At the cross roads of turmoil, she received an opportunity, to move from her location to another to perceive clarity. What she had imagined of Tara was broken down when she spent time with them. She could move away from the fairy tale view of marriage and look around her own household to find the perfect match for her. Thus, displacement of Radhika from her own home to her sister’s home lent her a better vision about the notions of love and marriage. In many of Shashi Deshpande’s novels the main protagonist shuttles between her past and her present to place herself better for her near future. She emerges victorious having undergone this process of Catharsis. Radhika grabs the whole idea of marriage in a nut shell through Ram Mohan’s words “Marriage is a very strange thing. It’s a very public institution, it’s meant to tell the world that two people are going to live together, to declare that their children will be legal, that these children can inherit their property. It’s meant for social living, to ensure that some rules are observed, so that men and women don’t cross the lines drawn for them. At the same time, marriage is an intensely private affair. No outsider will ever know what goes on in a marriage, no outsider will know the state of someone else’s marriage. It’s a closed room, a locked room..”(61)

One major theme, when Deshpande outrightly points out that though this novella is underlined with a mysterious crime story, yet the main plotline is in understanding the thin line which passes through all relationships. This brings us to the most sublime concept of the post modern era, that is the self. Upon reading the novel one might even fathom that, the writing does not incorporate much of the physical descriptions, be it of the person, place or the situation which is under light. Through, self, the writer has majorly pondered upon the concept of death. Self deprived of gender brings us to the humanitarian sphere of anguish. One major theme in relevance to death is Fear. It is one omnipresent feel which is there through out each and every event. Fear first makes its presence felt when Radhika sensed creepiness between Tara and shaan.

“Fear. It isn’t always made up of creaking boards, of darkness and shadows and footsteps following you. It doesn’t always come from outside; often, it’s lurking within us, waiting to emerge at odd times, taking us unawares.” (44)

This Fear was the first sign of lurking danger. Later when untoward circumstances lead to the death of Tara, Fear leaps up once again. “The Ghosts are inside us, they’re not outside.”(115)

This incident happens when they return to Tara's home after her death. Radhika hesitates to be back once gain to the same home where her sister is no more.

Tara too expressed fear when later her sister read the words in her diary "To live in fear of a thing is quite different from it happening" Tara had a deep fear within herself that she might die. And a much deeper fear within herself that Shaan might not want her in his life anymore. Tara fears Shaan . She even throws away the tea served by Shaan, fearing that it could be poisoned. The writer has explored this innate nature of fear in all the three characters. This fear happens to be one expression of her 'self'. Women writing has explored new domains of discussion. The description of Self through subtle tones marks a beginning to explore a more grave truth. In an interview with Prasanna Sree, published as *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, Shashi Deshpande comments:

"I don't consider that the revolution comes out of escaping the situation, but facing the situation with a different idea of "What I am"...this is to me the biggest revolution. I know what I am now, I am going to live my life knowing what I am. There is no greater revolution than that.(146)

Radhika did not escape from her doubts about Ghanshyam, she gave herself the needful time to stay calm and understand her present stance. And for that matter even Ghanshyam's family too withdrew from this relation when they realized that a murder had happened in their family. Quite unconsciously, Radhika too found her unsaid support from her initial stay at her sister's place, in Ram Mohan. When we ponder upon marriage , the trending thought is for a man who can fill up all the incomplete spaces in our lives. But it's a relationship of mutual giving and taking and not on the basis of hierarchy, which is the difference Deshpande puts across. "Ram Mohan is a fine man and he'll make you happy."(132) said Shaan. For which, Radhu replied, "I am equally sure I can make him happy as well."(132)

This was the ultimate transformation the writer was driving at. To understand marriage as a strife and effort from both the individuals, to let there be growth within their relation and independently for themselves as well. "Keep Yourself alive. When you marry, whoever you marry-or is it whomever- keep yourself intact"(91)One needs to listen to their inner voice and never restrict its breathing. Women and their problems can have a better reception when seen through a deeper insight of the self. The self analysis can help surpass superficial problems. The writer has also portrayed the image of a stereotypical women through the eyes of a society, be it in the terms of a behavior of a women which is bound to change with marriage but has also opened our minds regarding certain clichéd notions about the same. Marriage perceived as the symbol of ultimatum, needs to viewed from a unique lens to let breathe the women who too happen to be a part of the same social construction.

Works Cited:

- Bhalla, Amrita. *Writers And Their Work: Shashi Deshpande* .New Delhi: Northcote House, 2009. Print.
- Deshpande, Shashi. *Ships That Pass*. New Delhi: Rain Tree, 2012. Print.
- Dhawan, B.K. *Indian Women Analysis and Psychoanalysis*. New Delhi: Arise Publishers and Distributors, 2011. Print.

Geethamala, Ellenore. *The Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Evaluation*. New Delhi: Creative Publisher, 2009.Print.

Sree, S. Prasanna. *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons Publishers, 2003.Print.