

## CHAPTER-IV

### **The Theme of Man-Woman Relationship**

There are many relationships in the family like husband-wife, mother-daughter, daughter-father, and sister-brother. In all these relationships the relationship between the man and woman has always occupied a central place. Mutual understanding, love, faith are the basic pillars in the relationships. The problem arises when they are one-sided. They break the relationships.

The man-woman relationship in the modern context has undergone a change. Formerly, the Indian woman was only a shadow of man. She had not any individual identity. Now days the relationship seems quite changing. The women are considered equal to men. But the situation is not totally changed. The society till is not ready to give an equal status to woman. She is still treated as an object.

The man-woman relationship is a recurring theme in the literature. The fiction has focused on this theme “bringing about social awareness, unraveling the changes in the social sphere and the effect on it of several subterranean forces”.<sup>1</sup> The Literature reflects as Seema points out,

“the complex interpersonal relationships between men and women, the social conditioning in their formation and vis-à-vis and an author’s attitude to these relationships”.<sup>2</sup>

Many writers have written about the problems of women against the changing social, cultural, political, economic background. But few writers have mainly dealt with the theme of man-woman relationship in their works. Anita Desai, Jai Nimbkar and Shashi Deshpande are some of them.

Shashi Deshpande, though her main concern is the struggle of woman in the context of contemporary Indian society to search for their identity not only as woman but also as human being, given the central place to this theme in her short stories. The relationships between husband-wife, daughter-father and woman's relationship with another man in extra marital affair are seen in her short stories. The following stories are taken for study under this theme, *An Antidote to Boredom*, *It Was the Nightingale*, *The Inner Rooms*, *My Beloved Charioteer*, *The Intrusion*, *A Man and a Woman*, *The Awakening*.

There are three main characters in the story *An Antidote to Boredom*, protagonist, her husband and another widower with whom she keeps an extra marital affair. The relationship of protagonist and her husband is a habit as she says. There is no love, care between the relationship. Her husband is not wicked but is unable to love and understand her.

In the story the protagonist and her husband are living a married life for twelve years. The protagonist is bored with the dull and routine behaviour of her husband. Her day starts with the routine works like making tea, breakfast for her husband, to clean the home and so on. She knows each and every action of her husband. She is well known about what he would do after finishing his breakfast. "He would wash his hands, rinse his mouth and sit down with the newspaper for exactly five minutes" (54) But the wife is restless because she wishes that he would go away so that she could get on with her day's work. After five minutes

he goes to office saying see you in the evening. In the evening he asks his routine questions like, "Any letters, Rahul home? What's for tea?" (54) and she answers only yea or no, no more conversation than this takes place in both of them. Wife wants to tell him everything about her work, how she missed him when he was not at home but she can't. She knows his reaction on this. She says, "But I knew what his reaction to that would be. He would be painfully, horribly embarrassed." (54) But now she is familiar with his behaviour. Wife is bored with the dull and routine behavior of her husband. She is married but neglected by her husband. In the relationship of husband and wife there is no affection, the only things holding them together are the habit and their child. There is a sense of boredom and dissatisfaction in protagonist's life. Because of her uncommunicative husband her life is tiresome.

Once she goes to the school of her son. She sees a boy who always comes with his father. She curiously asks to him about the mother of the boy. She comes to know that she is dead. After that she often meets that widower man. She finds him interesting. A kind of bond is formed between them. She finds life interesting and exciting after meeting him. He takes care of her every feeling. His frank admiration is refreshing to her as cold water on a hot day. She thinks that her affair is an antidote to boredom. Her husband denies her nothing but there is not just one thing they had done together. "The man gives her everything that she hungers for love, attention, appreciation and understanding".<sup>3</sup> He cares for her every feeling. Her husband is not cruel or harsh man, only unperceptive and dull. And dullness to her is an unforgivable crime. She thinks her extra-marital affair an antidote to boredom. She does not feel guilty for her extra marital relationship. The relationship between both is based on love, care and understanding.

She tries to escape from her dull and routine role, works as wife. When her husband comes to know about the affair he warns her of the consequences. Woman feels guilty not for her husband but for her son, Rahul. She returns to routine roles of wife and mother; she does not want to break the marriage.

Lack of mutual understanding and neglectance of husband towards his wife causes tension between both of them. But the attention, appreciation, understanding and love create a good relationship between the protagonist and the widower man. The story emphasizes the need to continue the marriage, for the son. It also suggests that there is a need to change the traditional attitude towards the marriage. Marriage is not only the union of two persons, rather in modern days love, affection, attention appreciation and proper understanding of each other should form the basis of marriage; which will lesson the tension in man –woman relationship and will be useful to lead a happy married life.

The story *It Was the Nightingale* is about how a woman's ambitious nature causes the tension between the protagonist and her husband. The story portrays the man-woman relationship beautifully. There are two characters in the story, Jayu and her husband. Jayu is an educated, careerist and modern woman. She is torn between her ambition and her love for husband.

Jayu and her husband love each other. There is a perfect mutual understanding between them. The husband is not a dominating male. Jaya is a careerist woman. She always gives priority to her career. Jaya and her husband love each other. There is no quarrel between them. He understands his wife's coming late at home from office. He often manages dinner for both of them when she is late at home. Jaya wants to go to abroad for her better career. She thinks she will get bigger salary after returning from abroad. Her husband does not want to let her go. But

he does not prevent her. He agrees to let her go but shows his resentment. He thinks it is unnecessary to work hard for a new bride. He tells her that this is the time to make other plans, plan about to have a child. But Jaya does not want the child now. She is not ready to sacrifice her own identity. To preserve her identity she feels it is necessary to go abroad. Jaya fears that if she surrenders towards her husband's will, she will walk the road of self abnegation forever. Jaya does not want to live her life like her mother. Her mother lived her life for her husband and daughters. And Jaya does not want to do that. She loves her husband, she cares him but she is not ready to sacrifice her career for him. She says, "Our lives are intertwined, yet they are two distinct strands. They are like two lights that shine more brightly together, but to keep my light burning is my responsibility and mine alone". (66) To preserve her identity, she feels it is necessary to go abroad. However, Jaya feels guilty because she loves her husband. She thinks that throughout the life she will carry the burden of the guilt and is aware that the things will never be the same again for both of them. Jaya wants that her husband should refuse to let her go, asserting his male-hood to let her ambition play a second role. But he does not do that because he loves her too.

There are no quarrels, no exaggerated emotions in this story. On the contrary Jaya resents why he does not refuse to let her go. The man-woman relationship appears to have reversed in this story. It seems the stubbornness of woman weakens the fabric of the relationship. The story also highlights how a modern woman prefers career to raising a family, which is one of the emerging characteristics of the modern society.

*The Inner Rooms* is woven around the legendary character of Amba in Mahabharata. Salva, Bhishma, Vichitravirya are other characters in the story. Amba is treated like an object by every male in the story. Amba is treated as an object of honor by every male.

Amba is a princess of Kashi. She loves Salva, the king of Saubha. She wants to marry him. But Bhishma abducts Amba, Ambika and Ambalika for his brother Vichitravirya's marriage. Ambika and Ambalika accept it silently but Amba denies to marry him. She bravely makes it clear that she loves Salva and she wants to marry him, she had already promised him. After listening that every one has nodded his head in reluctant approval and looking at them Bhishma allows her to go to Salva. Amba thinks that she is a winner. Happily she goes to Salva and says that now they can marry. But Salva is a king and it is dishonorable for him to marry Amba because Bhishma defeated him. So, now Amba belongs to him and he will be dishonored if he takes her as a wife. Amba is shocked and goes back to Vichitravirya but he too refuses to accept her. He says, "The king of Saubha refused you? And so you come back to me. But I can't marry you. How can I when you have loved, when you still love maybe, another man?" Again every one nodded his head in acceptance and said, "He is right, what he says is honorable". (91) At last Amba pleads Bhishma to marry her. But he refuses to marry her because of his vow of celibacy. If he breaks the vow it will be dishonor for him. She can not return to her father because it will be dishonorable for him too. At last Amba commits suicide which is the only thing of her own choice.

It is dishonorable for each of them to accept Amba. No one feels it necessary to think about the honor of Amba because she is a woman. There is no place to a woman in the male dominated society. Honor of woman is only concern with the honor of man. Because of the wrong decisions taken by males the life of Amba becomes meaningless as she can not become anyone's wife, mother. The males are controllers of her life. She has not the right to take any decision about her own life. The

man-woman relationship in this story is not based upon equality. The man is considered superior and the woman is inferior.

The story of Amba narrates the situation of women in ancient India. The man-woman relationship in ancient India is always based on superior-inferior status. Amba during her last moments recapitulates the humiliation of her by Salva, Vichitravirya and Bhishma. No one of them think about her feelings. Atrey observes,

“She had been tossed from one man to another like a football on a playground. The men have used her as a pawn in their own power game, justifying their actions with quaint ideas of honor. When each of them refuses to marry her, she is left a social outcaste”.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the story brings out how the male dominance in ancient India destroys the identity of Amba not only as a woman but also as a human being.

*My Beloved Charioteer* is a story about two widows- mother and mother. The protagonist, her daughter Arti, and her granddaughter Priti are the characters in the story. Arti is lost in her own grief in such an extent that she neglects Priti's needs. The old protagonist tries her best to establish the good relationship with her daughter. But the daughter feels comfort in her dead father's room. There is a strong influence of her father on Arti. The father-daughter relationship was based upon affection and care for each other.

Mother attempts to communicate with her daughter. She uses her last weapon to make her daughter talk. She recalls the memories of

her dead husband. The relationship of man-woman (husband-wife) is like master and slave. She asks a question to Arti, "He was your father. But what was he of mine?"(188). She has lived twenty five years married life with her husband. She has taken care of his every need and requirement. She never has thought about herself, her wills and her happiness while fulfilling her husband's needs. She has avoided every that thing which her husband did not like. She never has done any act which he hates. Even at her two baby boy's death she wept alone and in secret because he hated tears. She always has worn the saris of the colors which she hated. But she has accepted it because he has brought those saris for her. At night when he wanted her he said "come here" and when he finished he said "you can go". (189). She was always available for him in his each and every need. But in return she got nothing even the credit of this. When her husband was alive she was dominated by her husband.

The woman in the story is a devoted Indian wife. She was a sex object for her husband. The relationship between wife and husband was not healthy one. The husband has always treated his wife as a slave. He has always treated his wife like a machine to fulfilling his wills and needs. He never felt it necessary to care for her wills, feelings and she never complained about it.

This story portrays the dark picture of an incompatible married life. Despite the sexual and emotional oppression for twenty five years from her husband, she is not broken like her daughter after the widowhood.

*The Intrusion* is a beautiful story of a young couple. Husband and wife are the characters in the story. Lack of mutual understanding and patience weakens the delicate fabric of the relationship of husband and wife.



The story is regarding a newly married couple. The young bride is strained and forced to come for honeymoon. She unwillingly goes into the room of hotel. While sitting in the room she recalls the past memories. She remembers that what her mother-in-law said, "We are looking for a girl simple but sophisticated. My son is working in a foreign company. His wife must be able to entertain and mix with foreigners". (203) No one asks her if she is agree or not, it had been taken for granted. Her mother says that there is nothing wrong with him to reject the proposal. Her father says that he has two more daughters to be married. So the girl is ready for this marriage. On the honeymoon her husband tries to come close to her but she avoids it every time. At last angrily he asks her that why she is behaving like this? Why she is avoiding him? She answers, "We scarcely know each other". Her husband replies, "Know each other? What has that to do with it? Aren't we married now? And how will we start getting to know each other if you put on such a touch-me-not air". (207) She wants to tell him that she wants to know him, to tell him that she is homesick but she can not say anything of these things to him. At night her sex hungry husband virtually rapes her when she is asleep. The husband uses his power to fulfilling his sexual hunger. The bride cries not for the physical pain but for the intrusion into her privacy, the violation of her right to herself.

The story portrays the picture of a helpless and trapped wife who resists the first sexual overture of her sex hungry husband because for her he is a stranger in a strange room.<sup>5</sup> Wife wants to know him, understand him, his likes-dislikes and so on. But husband does not feel it necessary. The fact that they are married is enough for him. They are like parallel lines which never merge into one another. He can't get into her mind. There remains only a physical relationship between them.

She is virtually raped by her husband when she is asleep. The bride is very much hurt by the violation of her privacy, the violation of her right to herself. The husband makes the use of force to fulfill his sexual hunger. It amounts to a legitimized rape and the negation of selfhood. The honeymoon trip is for developing the friendly intimacy and for “establishing amiable acquaintance rather than unleashing the thorn into flesh”.<sup>6</sup> But the lack of mutual understanding and impatience results into the unpleasant experience. The husband treats his wife as a sex object. He does not feel it necessary to care for his wife’s opinions.

The husband –wife relationship is one of the important man-woman relationships. The story focuses the need to strengthen the husband-wife relationship by developing mutual understanding before the physical relationship.

An another story *A Man and A Woman* runs around the three main characters, Lalita-a young and beautiful widow, her seventeen years brother in law-Ajit and her dead husband’s friend-Manu. Shashi Deshpande through this story focuses on the woman’s relationship with three different men on three different levels.

Lalita is a beautiful young widow. Now she is living with her family. Ajit, her seventeen years brother-in-law is also living with them. It is difficult for Lalita to control her physical needs. One day at a hot afternoon she comes into physical contact with Ajit to satisfy her sexual hunger. For Ajit too it is only to prove his manhood.

Lalita confesses her guilt to her husband’s friend Manu. Manu is a cripple man. She recalls her memories of marriage with her husband, Jayanta. She says that there was something lacking in their marriage. She does not know even a moment of pure happiness in her three years married life. She says maybe it was she who did not understand Jayanta. She never knew him really. She knew only his body. He never touched

Lalita with love, affection. It was only a physical hunger. When Jayanta dies Lalita felt sorry for him to lose the life at that age. Manu relives Lalita of this guilt. He says that it is a natural desire like hunger and thirst. "You should be able to satisfy it with as little guilt as you do these things. Do you feel ashamed to say I'm thirsty? I need a glass of water?" (211) He assures Lalita that she has not done any crime. Manu advises her to get away from this place, this is no place for her. But she asks where shall she go? She has no place to go because her parents are dead; she does not want to live with her brothers. She is incapable of living herself because she is mere B.A. When she decides to earn money her family members do not allow her. They ask her to go to the 'Mahila Mandal' but Lalita does not want to go there. She becomes helpless.

Manu suggests the solution of remarriage to this problem. She asks that who will marry a widow. Manu says he is ready to marry her. But Lalita though she is willing to marry denies his proposal, because she fears that people will accuse her.

The relation between Jayanta and Lalita was emotionless. After her husband's death, Lalita to fulfill her physical needs comes into physical contact with her brother-in-law, Ajit. Her relationship with Ajit is emerged from satisfying physical needs. There is no any emotional attachment between them. For Ajit too it is only to prove his manhood. He does not feel any attachment towards Lalita, his dead brother's wife. He was the boy of seventeen and morality does not mean anything to a boy of seventeen. At first there was only a school boy's sense of guilt at wrongdoing, the fear of being caught, of being punished and shamed. Yet there is a happiness, pride and exaltation and joy for he felt that he had become a man. There was only an adolescent boy's physical attraction towards a woman and for Lalita it was only to satisfy her physical needs.

The relation between them is based only on satisfaction of their sexual needs.

Lalita is emotionally attached to Manu, her dead husband's friend. She seeks comfort in his company. He is Jayanta's friend since school days. Lalita expresses her every feeling to Manu. She also tells him about the immoral relationship with Ajit and the burden of the guilt that will accompany her lifelong. It is Manu who relieves her of this guilt. He proposes Lalita to marry him. He is the only man who understands Lalita's feelings. There is a great mutual understanding between them. He gives emotional support to Lalita which she has expected from her husband.

Lalita's relationship with her husband was like a bond, because she is married to him. Her relationship with Ajit is based on fulfilling physical needs. Her relationship with Manu is based on emotional attachment. Thus, the story highlights the need of mutual understanding, giving emotional supports to lead a successful life by husband and wife.

The story brings out the problem faced by Lalita -a widow that despite her willingness to marry with Manu the social pressure compels her to avoid the remarriage. Thus, Lalita could not rebel even she is an educated woman –a graduate.

In the story *The Awakening* there is a beautiful portrayal of the relationship between the father and daughter. Alka is the protagonist in the story. Her father is a postal clerk. Her mother, sister and brother are other characters in the story.

Alka's father is a postal clerk and only earning member in the family. Alka wants to take higher education and a job of good salary. She does not want to live the life like her clerk father. She wants to come out from the life of chawl and to live a luxurious life. Though Alka is a brilliant girl her mother wants her to work as typist and earn some money

for her family instead of going to college. But Alka refuses to do so. She looks at Baba for help but he can't help her. Alka thinks about her Baba that his only aim in life is to avoid conflicts. In quarrel with her mother Alka says her Baba is a saint. He tries to talk from Alka's side but fails. He knows Alka is a brilliant girl and she will do something in her life. Suddenly her father dies by a heart attack. Alka has no alternative than to take up a job as a typist for helping her family. After the death of father Alka is angry on him. She thinks he does wrong her by dying. There are only incomplete duties behind him. She says that his life and death both are failure.

The story ends on an optimistic note. After reading the letter from father's briefcase Alka starts crying. In the letter father confesses his guilt to force Alka to take up job as a typist. He has faith in the brilliance and abilities of Alka. And he is also sure that Alka will become successful in her life. The letter of Baba awakens the feeling of responsibility and her ability to achieve her aim. Alka feels respect for father and blames herself for taking her father wrong. Her father through the letter awakens Alka's feeling of responsibility and her ability to achieve her aim. Not in his life but after death, he is successful in developing the good relationship with his daughter. The letter of father plays an important role in developing the relationship. A scholar of the short stories of Shashi Deshpande Abha Shukla Kaushik says,

“The letter restores her faith and gives her courage to continue working not only to share her father's burdens and responsibilities but also to realize her own dreams”.<sup>7</sup>

Shashi Deshpande, in these seven stories deals with the man-woman relationship. She states the man-woman relationship in ancient time and in modern context and stresses that there has been no considerable change in the relationship. Where there is a beginning of change some new problems arise. Every time a woman, and not a man, has to face some problem.

.....

## References

1. Singh, Jyoti, "Autonomy and Moral Values", *Indian Women Novelists A Feminist Psychoanalytical Study*, Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2007, p-96.
2. Seema, Suneel, "Man-Woman Relationship in Indian Fiction", New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1995, p-8.
3. Atrey Mukta, Vinay Kirpal, "Women in Indian Society", Shashi Deshpande A Feminist Study of Her Fiction, (ed) Dwivedi, A.N, New Delhi: D.K. Publishers, 1998, p-98.
4. Ibid, p-108.
5. Adhikari, Madhumalti, "The Female Protagonist's Journey From Periphery to Centre in Shashi Deshpande's *The Intrusion and Other Stories*", (ed) Shawan, R.K, New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1995, p-69.
6. Sondkar, M.D, "The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande A Study", A Ph.D. thesis submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 2007, p-194.
7. Abha Shukla Kaushik, "Mother-Daughter Relationship in the Short Stories of Shashi Deshpande", *New Perspectives on Indian English writings* (ed) Agrawal Malti, New Delhi: Atlantic Publications, 2007, p-84.