

CHAPTER – III

The Theme of Mother-Daughter Relationship

In the modern society the place of mother and the place of daughter has been rapidly changing. They have their own realms to wander. They have their own problems. Formerly education was not given to women in the Indian society. But as the time changed efforts have been made by various personalities to include women into the process of education. Since then she has been experiencing a new world with new problems to face. Modernity at large has shattered the faith of a common man in the family life. There are many reasons for this but vast scale spread of education may not be neglected. Unfortunately only rights have been learnt by the learners, and they seem to have forgotten to learn about their duties. And hence problems seem to have been appearing in the society.

Formerly mothers were lovable, ready to sacrifice their everything for their children, family. As women were less educated or illiterate they didn't know the world beyond their husband, children, household duties and familial responsibilities. But as the time changed the so called image of mother has been broken. Because of the education women become aware of their own rights, desires, ambitions and needs. She has given priority to economic independence, career, self-respect and self identity. It affects the every relationship. Even the sacred relationship of mother and daughter is not escaped from it. Such reflections are found in the writing of Shashi Deshpande. She has highlighted the changing relationships amongst the members of the family. Especially the changing relationship of mother and daughter is seen in her short stories. Shashi Deshpande deals with the middleclass Maharashtrian woman and her

problems. Usha Bande points out,

“Her stories depict a picture of women and their exploitation in a conventional male dominated society”.¹

Sita, Savitri have been treated as an ideals of loyalty in the Indian society. The society does not accept a woman as a person. It seems that the society does not allow any woman to live without the labels like a mother, daughter, sister, wife, mother-in-law, and daughter-in-law. While playing these roles woman has forgotten herself as a human being. Shashi Deshpande portrays the picture of this woman. She deals with the problems of women like loneliness, quest for identity, sexual violence. Perhaps she compares the past with the present conditions of women in her short stories.

There is a focus on the theme of mother-daughter relationship in her short stories. Protagonists of Shashi Deshpande are well educated, economically independent, career oriented middle class women with independent views. But they have a clash with their mothers. Because mothers are traditional, oppressed and tied with social norms. The relationship of mother and daughter is laid on hatred not on love. Mother is not a lovable, traditional mother for the daughter. Deshpande portrays a conflict between the daughter and the mother. It is quite natural that such conflict does exist. Daughter is considered as a responsibility of mother. Mother tries to restrict the behavior of the daughter in many respects for her better future. While showing the daughter-mother relationship Shashi

Deshpande concentrates on the traditional view of mother. Deshpande wants to present the woman as an individual than as in any role.

Atrey Mukta says,

“Deshpande’s portrayal of the mother also seems to be a reaction to the idealized depiction of the mother and motherhood in mythology and other Indian literature. She wants to depict woman as an individual rather than as cast in a particular mould or role”.²

Her protagonists are closer to their fathers than to their mothers.

According to Atrey Mukta,

“Fathers are perceived as lenient by the daughters who feels who feel oppressed by their mother strictures. The patriarchy of fathers remains hidden as the women act on their behalf to condition the daughters. Since theirs is a remote control, the conflict between mother and daughter becomes direct. This is reflected in almost all the mother-daughter relationships in her work”.³

The following stories are taken for the study under this theme,
Why A Robin? The Awakening, My Beloved Charioteer, It Was Dark, And Then...? The Cruelty Game, Madhu.

In the story *Why A Robin?* mother is successful in establishing the warm relationship with her daughter. In this story the mother-daughter relationship depends on fulfillment of the child's wishes, needs and requirements.

The story runs around the three characters mother, daughter and father. The daughter is close to her father than her mother. Though the woman and her husband never quarrel there is a kind of emptiness in their relationship. One day, for the first time, the girl asks mother to help her in the writing an essay on a robin. Mother has minimum knowledge about the bird. So she insists on writing an essay about a peacock, myna or any other bird. But the girl says her teacher has told to write an essay on robin. The mother can not help her daughter. Daughter becomes angry and decides to take help of her father. The mother feels guilty because she is unable to help the daughter. Daughter now goes to her father and asks him about a robin. She listens eagerly him telling about the robin. Mother is sitting in a corner of a room. But she is totally ignored by them. She is unable to communicate successfully with both of them. She realizes that she has forgotten her self. At one night she hears the sound of crying from the daughter's room. At first she hesitates to intrude but the sound disturbs her and she runs to daughter's room. She goes near the daughter and calls her name but she does not respond. She asks her, "Shall I call Papa?" (51) remembering how, when she had the measles, she had wanted him all the time. This time the daughter does not want her father's help. Suddenly her eyes fill with tears. She has given herself totally to grief. Mother sits down and put her arms around her and asks, "What is it?" (51) Then she comes to know about the attainment of

puberty of her daughter. She feels very joyous. Mother talks to her gently. She tells her that it is natural, a part of growing up, something to be welcomed, accepted. Daughter listens to her silently. Daughter feels pain so mother tells her what is to be done. After giving a cup of hot milk mother asks her to go to sleep. But daughter says, "No, don't go. Talk to me, talk to me about something" (52) Mother thinks what she can talk to her. Then on daughter's insistence, the mother tells about the grandmother. Mother tells her how she went to the temple with her grandmother everyday and how one day she saw the peacock dance and the beauty of it. She also tells the daughter that she still has the peacock's feather. Daughter asks her to show that tomorrow. Daughter says that she will ask the teacher why she can't write an essay on peacock and mother says why we can't write on robin. The mother feels joyous because she has found the key to open the door of daughter's heart.

Mother in this story feels that her existence in the home is neglected. Daughter feels that mother is incapable to help her in many things and she is quite sure that her father will help her in every problem. When mother is failed to help her in writing an essay on robin, the girl turns her back to mother and goes to her father. The daughter says, "I'll ask Papa. He's sure to know, he'll help me". (46). Instead of helping the girl in writing a composition on robin mother insists on writing an essay on peacock.

Deshpande, in the story symbolically presents the conflict between the old and the new through the peacock and robin.

Mother in the story feels guilty because she is a failure as a wife, a companion, as a mother. There is emptiness in the relationship of ~~the~~ husband and wife. Even with her daughter she is helpless because she can not cope with her fits of excitement, her questions, her rage, her tantrums, her ideas. The woman is totally ignored by both-the daughter and the

husband. She is unable to communicate successfully with both of them. Lack of good communication creates a gap between relations. The woman thinks that her daughter and husband are two locked rooms which she can not enter in. she does not have the key to open these rooms. She feels outsider in her own house. The discussion of the daughter and father about the robin goes above and around her, leaving her untouched. The woman sacrifices her identity and all her needs, desires and ambitions for her family. She thinks that she will have to live whole life to say what she wants and even then she is unable to frame it in words. She realizes that she has no wants because she has whittled them out of fear. It seems that while thinking this the woman searches for her self-identity. She says, "I think I do not have by self abnegation. Instead, I have dwindled. Without wants, there is no 'I'. That is why they so often look at me without seeing me". (50). She becomes aware of the fact that she has forgotten her 'self'.

With the attainment of puberty mother provides the necessary comfort to the daughter. For the first time daughter denies the help of her father. Mother feels joyous and exalted as she has found the key to open the daughter's heart. She tells daughter that she also has undergone the same experience. The daughter asks mother to show her peacock's feather the next morning. Mother thinks that the gap between them is building up. The daughter decides to ask her teacher why we can't write an essay on robin. Daughter and mother share the same thoughts and share the same experience. Both try to take steps to understand each other.

Attainment of womanhood bridges the gap between the mother and daughter. The feeling of the same sufferings helps them to come together. It comes to know from this story that the nature has made an arrangement of maintaining the mother – daughter relationship.

In *My Beloved Charioteer* Shashi Deshpande portrays the three generations, mother, daughter and grand-daughter. The relationship of the grandmother and grand-daughter Priti is based on love, care and understanding. But the relationship of the mother Arti and the daughter Priti is not on the same base. The mother-daughter relationship in this story develops at the end as both understand each others needs, requirements. Both need each others emotional support.

In the story an old widow is living her lonely life peacefully. Her daughter Aarti, with her daughter Priti comes to live with her after the death of her husband. Old mother is living alone for seven years after her husband's death but now daughter and granddaughter come to live with her. The mother lives her life happily but is unable to make widow daughter live happily. Mother says she has used to live with this silence in the last seven years. It had never seemed terrible to her. The silence was the friendly silence, filled with the ghosts of so many voices in her life - the voices of her late younger brother, late aunt who loved her when she was a child, late two infant sons who never grew up come back to keep her company. She further says that since the arrival of her daughter, the friendly ghosts have all gone. Because of the sad demise of husband Arti is grief stricken. Mother loves Aarti so much that she makes all possible efforts to make her happy. She hopes that Aarti will talk and laugh again one day. In every minor act she thinks about the happiness of Aarti. She remembers the day when Aarti laughed loudly. That laughter frightened mother. When mother asked the reason Aarti said, "I always used to think I was very different from you. And look at us now, both of us alike. A pair of widows". (184) It hurts mother very much. The mother hopes that Arti will come out of grief one day, but all efforts went in vain.

Aarti spends her whole day in her father's room. Aarti loves her father more than her mother. It also hurts mother very much. Father was

everything for Aarti always. One day while sitting in his room the photograph of her late father is accidentally broken by Aarti. At that time mother tells her about how was her relationship with husband. She has lived twenty five years married life with her husband. She has taken care of all his needs, wants. She even not thought of herself, her happiness, and her wants while fulfilling her husband's needs. She has avoided every that thing which he did not like or hate. Even at her two baby's deaths she wept alone and in secret. At night when he wanted her he says, "Come here" and when he finished said, "You can go" (189) Mother was always available for him in his each and every need. But in return she got nothing. Aarti comes to know about her mother's real relationship with her father.

In the story the old widow is living her lonely life peacefully, but is unable to make her widow daughter to live happily in the same situation. Arti, the widow daughter of the woman is lost in her own grief in such an extent that she neglects the needs of her daughter, Priti. The mother finds comfort in her grand-daughter Priti. Priti is a ray of hope in her meaningless life. Mother can't see grief-stricken Arti. She tries at her best to bring her back to the happiness but is a failure. She hopes that Arti will talk and laugh again one day. The mother wants to share the sufferings, sorrows of her daughter but can not. Mother is hurt by calling of Arti herself a widow. It hurts mother that Arti can find her comfort from her dead father and not from her living mother. Mother thinks that the fault is hers if her daughter hates the people who are happy. The incident of breaking the glass on her late fathers photograph comes like an opportunity to mother. Arti always has loved her father than mother. But now mother introduces Arti to her father's latent traits of character. The mother tells Arti that she was always dominated by her husband. At the end mother is happy because she makes her daughter to look at her.

She does not bother whether there will be change in attitude of Arti towards her. She is satisfied because the locked door of the communication is opened.

Arti comes to know that her mother is “a victim of gender based oppression and patriarchal socialization”.⁴ At last the mother is successful to bring back her daughter to this living world again. Mother feels that the daughter is with her now, giving her new strength for new battle. Arti becomes the beloved charioteer of her mother.

The story *It Was Dark* is woven around the three characters, mother, daughter and father. The mother in this story is a strong woman. She protects the future of her daughter and decides to change conservative views about the rape. Mother decides to help her daughter to come out of this ditch. Without mothers help daughter would not have been able to live happy life again.

The story is about a fourteen years girl who is living with her mother and father. One day while returning from the school she takes lift from the unknown and falls prey to his wrong deeds. She is kidnapped and raped by the man. After three days she has been brought back to home. After that everything changes for all of them. Her father gets angry on her mother for not warning about the dangers as she is a girl. He thinks that anything worst can happen to her because she is a girl. But the mother tells him that we can't rage against the inevitable. Mother is worried about future of the daughter, about the pregnancy. The incident of rape leaves deep impact on the mind of the girl. She lies in bed and stares at the ceiling. She does not talk to anyone even a word, only eats and drinks what was given to her. She herself never asks for something. Her husband tells her that the girl should go to police station to identify that man so he may be punished by the police. Mother goes to daughter's room and asks her about that man and the incident. The only cold

response is, "It was dark". (131) suddenly mother pulls down the curtain and sunlight poured into the room. Daughter's eyes move from ceiling to her mother.

The girl is kidnapped and raped by an unknown man. After her coming back to home everything is changed for her and her parents too. The girl is shocked and is nervous. She is suffering on social and psychological level. Her mother is completely shaken after knowing the reality. She is very much fearful about the future of her daughter. The doctor has told them about the possibility of pregnancy. Mother is unable to face this reality and cries out for help.

The incident of the rape of the daughter takes back the mother to her past. When she was eleven years old and had seen what her suitor has willed her to see. Since then she has

"the fear of violence which
continued even after marriage."⁵

Even after the marriage sometimes sex can be a rape. Both mother and daughter share the same experience. The difference between the experience of the both is that in daughter's case it comes before marriage.⁶ But the feeling of being humiliate, physical and psychological violence is the same.

In a panic mother suddenly goes to the daughters room where she lies motionless, staring at the ceiling. She asks so any questions to daughter about that man and what did he do? The only cold response to all these questions is, "It Was Dark". (131). Mother for a moment stared at daughter and suddenly pulls back the curtains from the window and sunlight poured into the room, fills the room with brightness. Now daughter moves her eyes from ceiling to a glimmering, moving circle of light on another part of ceiling. It symbolizes that the darkness in the mind of girl is wiping out and soon her life will again fill up with the

brightness i.e. happiness. At last she moves her eyes from there to her mother. Mother feels happy and satisfied because at last she has made her daughter to look at her. The strong efforts and determination of mother brings daughter back to life.

The story ends on an optimistic tone. The mother assures her daughter that everything will become normal again. She decides to fight against the conservative norms for her daughter. According to Sondkar,

“Symbolically the mother refuses to submit before the dark forces of conventional morality that deconstructive and instrumental in marginalizing a woman, in this case her daughter”.⁷

In another story *And Then...?* mother is not totally sacrificing mother. The daughter and the son are everything for her. But for the children she is not everything and she is well known about this fact. In her own son's home she feels like an outsider.

In this story, the widow mother lives with her daughter Anju. Her son is settled away. Daughter is the only companion of the old lady. Anju one day announces her decision of going abroad for her further studies and career. Mother does not want to live lonely life. She makes all possible efforts to prevent Anju from going abroad. Finally she uses her last and powerful weapon; she says to Anju that her father would not have liked her going abroad without getting married. But Anju says that she had talked about this with her father and he understood her point of view. Both use the dead man as a weapon. Mother finally calls selfish to Anju. Anju makes it clear that she wants to live her life as she wants. She

asks her mother, “Amma, would you really like me to sacrifice myself for you?” (175) The daughter goes away leaving the mother behind.

Then the mother decides to stay with her son, daughter in law and Deepali-granddaughter. The woman seeks comfort in her granddaughter’s Deepali’s company. While she is lost in her past memories she looks at Deepali. But she warns herself, “She is not mine, not mine. My husband, I had said and he went away leaving me alone. My Vishwa I had thought and now I am just a burden and a responsibility to him. My Anju, I had cried out and she walked away from me without compunction or pity”. (173) She thinks that her husband, son and daughter, no one is hers.

Mother makes all possible efforts to prevent Anju from going abroad. She does not want to live lonely life. She remembers the first day of Anju’s school. She was crying and saying to her mother to don’t leave her alone. Mother thinks that now it’s her time to plead. She says, “don’t go away, don’t leave me alone and go away, don’t leave me alone here, I am frightened...” (174). Finally she uses her dead husband as a powerful weapon but fails. Mother calls Anju ‘selfish’. Anju feels that it is better to be selfish rather than to become like her mother. She thinks that it’s her life and she will live it as she wants. The daughter goes away leaving the old mother behind alone. Mother was always there for her children’s needs but when she needs them they become selfish and think only about themselves.

There is a grief of loneliness in the mind of a mother, and, perhaps from that point of view she does not allow Anju to go abroad. It seems that the mother is seeking for support and a person to look after her in her old age. A scholar of short stories of Shashi Deshpande Abha Shukla Kaushik states,

“Deshpande takes a more realistic view of motherhood exposing not

only the excitement and wonder of being a mother but also the frustrations and dissappointents”⁸.

The Cruelty Game is a story about a young widow Pramila and her fatherless child Sharu. In the story there is a picture of the cruelty of children and the mother-daughter relationship. There are needs and expectations of a child from parents. In the story conservative approach of society about remarriage of a widow weakens the relationship of mother and daughter.

Pramila, her husband and daughter Sharu were living in Bombay. But after the death of Pramila's husband they come to live in the joint family. The atmosphere is totally changed for Sharu and Pramila. Children in the family are used to tease Sharu till she turns into tears. Pramila's mother-in-law has no sympathy for Pramila and Sharu. Other women in the family never talk good about Pramila. Pramila is quite different from all mothers in the family. She is quite unlike the other mothers, calm, imperturbable and unfussy. Pramila decides to go back to Bombay, to take up job and to remarry with her husband's friend Jagdish. Sharu comes to know that her mother is remarrying. All children in the home tease her that her widow mother is remarrying. Sharu does not like her mother's decision and she is not ready to go with her. She runs to her grandmother and clings to her legs, hoping that her grandmother will help her; she will prevent Pramila from taking Sharu to Bombay. But grandmother says nothing to Pramila or Sharu. Sharu becomes helpless and goes crying with her mother unwillingly. Pramila being Sharu's mother understands her feelings.

Shashi Deshpande, through the story puts forth the problem of widowhood, the problem of widow's life. Through the character of

Pramila Deshpande gives the solution of remarriage of widow with economic independence to this problem.

Sharu and other children through their behaviour with Pramila show conservative approach. In this story unlike the other stories mother has been shown in a non-traditional role. However, the tension between the mother and the daughter exists in this story as found in most of the stories of Deshpande. The two aspects, the solution to the problem of a widow and the unwillingness of Sharu to accompany the remarrying mother bring out that the fate plays a cruel game and creates tension in mother – daughter relationship.

Mother in the story *The Awakening* is an aggressive woman. Alka is a protagonist of the story. Her mother thinks that the position of girl is secondary and the position of boy is primary. She always gives priority to her son. Alka makes fun of the omni-present existence of mothers. She says, “God made mothers because he couldn’t be everywhere himself. What nonsense! There are mothers and mothers and mothers. Mine is a woman with a heavy, sullen face and a tongue like a serrated knife”. (114-115).

Alka is living with her family in a chawl. Her father is a clerk and only earning member in the family. Before living in chawl Alka and her sister Rekha were living in her grandfather’s house in Poona, which was heaven compared to one room in the chawl. In Poona they had gone to good school, wore beautiful uniforms and black shoes. Now it seems only a dream to Alka. Her mother is an aggressive woman and wants Alka to take up a job of typist. Alka is not ready to do that. She really hates the life style of clerks. She doesn’t like the type of typists because they look dull. But her mother goes on insisting to take that job. Alka knows no one will understand her. She wants to come out of the ugly life of chawl. She wants to go to college, attend the lectures and take down

the notes and read more and more. She wants to pass the examination with distinctions, go abroad for further studies, come back and to take up a job of good salary. She wants to put up her hair and wear glasses and crisp ironed saris like the girl she sees at bus stop every day. But now she thinks that all this is the bubble blow out of soapy water, as her mother wants her to take up a job of a typist for helping her family. This is the reason of quarrel between mother and daughter. Her father knows that Alka is brilliant girl so he wants that Alka should complete her studies. He does not want to force Alka to take up the job. However, he is in hard times since Shirish fell ill. So the helpless father tries to persuade Alka to take up the job of typist.

Her father suddenly dies because of heart attack. Alka has no alternative than to take up a job of typist for the betterment of her family. She thinks that her father's life is a total failure. There are only incomplete duties, responsibilities behind him. One day Alka finds the briefcase of her father. She opens it and finds two letters. She opens the letter and reads it. In the letter father has confessed his guilt to force Alka to take up the job of typist. He is sure that Alka will become successful in her life. After reading the letter Alka starts crying. But the tears are not childhood tears but the first tears of adulthood, bitter, salty and painful.

The story ends on an optimistic note. After reading the letter from father's briefcase Alka starts crying. The letter awakens the feeling of responsibility and her ability to achieve her aim. Kaushik points out,

“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”.⁹

Alka achieves maturity after reading the letter. The letter indirectly supports the mother's stand and thus the tension in the mother-daughter relationship is released.

There are four characters in the story *Madhu*. Madhu is a young girl. It seems that there is a gap of natural and mutual understanding between the mother and the daughter. Lalita - Madhu's mother feels unable to understand her daughter. Madhu is a careless, casual, impertinent, impatient, and intolerant of her parents. Madhu's father too complains about her behavior. Lalita speaks reluctantly about Madhu. At the birth of Madhu Lalita was very happy because she thought Madhu will become her friend. They both will do any things together. But now the only thing they do together is fight. Lalita tells the narrator that Madhu doesn't tell her anything even the names of her friends. She feels funny as her daughter treats her like a stranger. Mother is displeased with both of her children. She thinks parents give everything to their children and expect only care and affection from them. But children even don't give them that. Children never think of them. (96). On the other hand Madhu has the complaint that her mother never understands her.

Behaviour of Madhu suddenly changes when her father is hospitalized. She behaves very obediently and maturely. In her father's illness she realizes her duties and responsibilities. She cares and loves her father so much that she is ready to sacrifice anything for him. She believes in "I'll sacrifice something I like very much, and may be I'll get the other thing". (99). So she sacrifices her long, beautiful hair which she has very much proud on, to get her father. Her mother unknown to the

reason is very grief-stricken by seeing Madhu with very short hair. She feels very sad that Madhu has cut off her hair without asking her.

Madhu is a representative of the new generation and Lalita is of old generation. Madhu has her own ways to care and love her parents. But her parents fail to understand her. The lack of mutual understanding and generation gap weakens the relationship of mother and daughter.

Shashi Deshpande portrays a realistic and authentic picture of woman in her stories. As Abha Shukla Kaushik points out,

“These characters are not just mothers, daughters or even women; first they are human beings living in different circumstances, conditions and personalities”.¹⁰

In above seven stories Shashi Deshpande deals with the mother and daughter relationship. Often she compares the present with the past and shows that in the modern context there has been change in the relationship. She sometimes sarcastically comments on the situation. She also brings out the helplessness of human beings in situations like death and its impact on the changing relationship between mother and daughter. She portrays the restrictions imposed by traditional mothers on the daughters who are born in comparatively modern atmosphere and the modernity is responsible for creating tension between the relationship.

.....

References

1. Bande Usha, Atma Ram, "Women in Indian Short Stories: Feminist Perspective", Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 2003, p-48.
2. Atrey Mukta, Vinay Kirpal, "Shashi Deshpande A Feminist Study of Her Fiction", Indian Writers Series(ed) A.N. Dwivedi, New Delhi: R.K. Publishers, 1998, p-78.
3. Ibid, p-78.
4. Ibid, p-78.
5. Pathak R.S., "The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande", New Delhi, Creative Books, 1998.
6. <http://www.authorsden.com>.
7. Sondkar M.D, "The Fiction of Shashi Deashpande A Study." A Ph. D. Thesis submitted to Shivaji University, Kolhapur, 2007, p-188.
8. Abha Shukla Kaushik, "Mother-Daughter Relationship in the Stories of Shashi Deshpande", New Perspectives on Indian English Writings(ed), Agrawal, Malti, New Delhi: Atlantic Publications, 2007, p-85.
9. Ibid, p-84.
10. Ibid, p-85.