

Women Subjugation In Shashi Despande's A Matter Of Time: A Review**Amol Ashok Narwade**

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande, is a renowned novelist, has become known as a writer possessing deep insight into the female consciousness. Her novels are all about a various woman issues in a contemporary Indian society. Her novels also highlight subjugation, discrimination, silence domestic violence, familial tensions, patriarchy, loneliness, and rejection of women by her husband. Despande's novels suggest that compromise is more important for middle-class women in Indian marriage system. Incapable to challenge social conventions or traditional morality, the middle-class women themselves are entangling by requirements of male and traditional place of women in an Indian family. Her novels depict the female subjugation in a broad and realistically. As a woman she understands women issues and problems at micro level. Therefore, all in her novels we see women at the centre of the narrative. Her women characters belong to middle class family and victim of male domination.

Shashi Despande depicts women suffering and how men and patriarchal society is a responsible for women's predicament and existence. As far as women place in Indian society is concern they are always remain secondary in every walk of life. They have very limited place in public life. At home they always have to perform various roles. They have to take care of entire family. Even in the matters of decision making they have very limited space. The men in the family treat them as a secondary person.

The present research article explores the subjugation of women in the point of view of women characters in the Shashi Despande's A Matter of Time (1996). The subjugation of women is broadly discussed in at a familial level.

Keywords: *consciousness, discrimination, loneliness, patriarchy, predicament and subjugation.*

Introduction:

A *Matter of Time* (1996) is true Indian novel on women issues. It is written by feminist writer Shashi Despande, who is especially known for her writing on Indian marriage system, family life, and various familial issues of women. She also focuses on emancipation of women. *A Matter of Time* is widely focused on how women are facing subjugation in their day to day life and how it affects their individual life in broad way. This is an attempt of Shashi Despande to tell the Indian patriarchal society that how they treat their women brutally and negatively in day to day life. As a woman Despande tried to depicts the realistic state of affairs of Indian women. Even in Hindu holy books like *Manusmirti* women position were always considered as secondary and her entire responsibility is on men and

she made for only household responsibilities and taking care of her husband. There is verse in *Manusmirti* which indicates the place of women.

“Any women violating duty and code of conduct towards her husband are disgraced and become a patient of leprosy. After death, she enters womb of jackal.” 1 (Verse 22 *Manusmriti*)

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his book *Riddle of Rama and Krishna* cited one reference from Valmiki's *Ramayana*:

“I suspect your conduct. You must have been spoiled by Ravana. Your very sight is revolting to me. On you daughter of Janaka, I allow you to go anywhere you like. I have nothing to do with you. I conquered you back and I am content for that was my object. I cannot think that Ravana would

have failed to enjoy a woman as beautiful as you are” (Riddle’s of Rama and Krishna p.17)

Women’s position in Indian society is rather brutal compare to the other western societies. She is always treated as a secondary citizen. Her place is remained secondary. From Sita to contemporary women they are always given ill treatment by patriarchal society.

In most of her novels she tries at her level best to touch the real issues of women in various sectors. Her first novel *Roots and Shadows*, portrays middle class Indu’s suffering and suppression by the patriarchal society. The second *The Dark Hold No Terrors*, Shashi Deshpande tells the story of Saru. She is a doctor and financially independent, middle-class wife who is ill treated by her parents and husband. Especially her mother’s discrimination made her unloved and alienated. *That Long Silence* tells the story of Jaya who is a housewife. She was intelligent, curious and fairy different from conventions but, her grandmother used to tell her to act like a cultured girl in domestic chores. After some time Jaya got married with Mohan well to earn man. In due course of time things gets upside down and Mohan is allegation of forgery at his workplace. Due to this he lost his job and Jaya and his relationship is tensed. One day Mohan left the house living behind his wife and children. This gives Jaya a lot of trouble and loneliness. Lastly things get settled and Mohan and Jaya reunited. In *The Binding Vine* all the female

Characters experience sufferings because of the male domination

Subjugation of Women:

Shashi Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time* is a story of four generations women who were ill treated by their husbands and fathers. There is silence violence against women take place in all women’s lives in extensively. The women in the novel are belong to the upper caste family i.e. Brahmin, but their position in the family remain secondary because they are women and could not able to bear male heir to the family who can retains family’s property. The first generation woman character Manorama who was unable to bear male heir for the family. She was only born female child named kalyani and raised her and married with her own uncle named Shripati.

The second generation Kalyani was able to bear male child. As the custom in the Indian scenario is that when you bear male child then you will be free from many clutches. But unfortunately Manorama and Sumi unable to born male child and kalyani able to born a male child but unable to bring her only son Nikhil safely home. Kalyani lost her son at V.T. Station while she was coming. This incidence brought upheaval in the family and Kalyani’s husband became mad after his son’s being lost. He searched everywhere but unable to find him. Due to this Shripati and Kalyani’s relationship disturbed and her husband went missing because he lost his son. This incident forced Kalyani to come back to her parent’s house. Kalyani returned her father’s home as a rejected wife.

Life at his father’s home was quite unexpected, her mother Manorama gave secondary treatment to her own daughter and considered her responsible for everything. Even her mother Manorama denied coming near her father in his illness. This shows how Manorama is a traditional mind set up women and always abuses her daughter Kalyani unsympathetically. This kind of treatment indicates tense relationship between mother and daughter. When Kalyani’s father Vithalrao died at that time Manorama considered Kalyani is responsible for this incident. Manorama said heartbroken words which echoed in Kalyani’s ears every night:

‘You are my enemy; you were born to make my life miserable’ (AMOT P. 153)

This kind of remarks and behavior from own mother predicts that how woman is unsympathetic towards women. The subjugation of women is not only limited with men but also women is responsible for women’s suffering. As a mother Manorama has to support her own daughter in her bad days. Kalyani’s suffering was unlimited because she was double suppressed by her husband and her own mother Manorama. First of all she was rejected by her husband as a deserted wife. Second she was given secondary treatment by her own mother.

Here in this novel woman characters’ position remained secondary at familial level. As a mother Manorama has to understand pains of her daughter and need to give support of every kind, but actually speaking it was vice- versa. Kalyani’s

suppression was both ways. When her mother Manorama was fell ill in her last days, she only let Kalyani to look after her and always suspicious on Kalyani's behaviour and charging her with trying to kill Manorama as she had killed her father. This kind of mentality of mother gives Kalyani so much trouble and anguish. Kalyani tolerate all this because she is helpless and rejected wife. Shashi Despande has written reason behind kalyani's suffering:

"But Kalyani destroyed all this. When she returned home, a deserted wife, and as Manorama saw it, a disgrace to the family, Manorama gave up everything, she never took part in any public activities again." (AMOT- P.154)

Here in this novels woman is also responsible for woman's suffering and pain. Kalyani's mother Manorama has taken wrong decisions about her daughter's life like Kalyani's marriage with her won brother Shripati for family's property remains in the family. This decision affected Kalyani's life forever and finally her husband rejected her for not bring home their only mentally ill son Nikhil safely.

This novel is a fine study in subjugation of women in the point of view of yet another woman character, Sumi. She belongs to third generation woman, who was left alone by her own husband Gopal one night without any specific reason. In the novel, '*A Matter of Time*' Deshpande tries at her level best to narrate realistic life of Sumi at a centre. The novel is basically a story of three women from three generations of the same family and how they deal with the catastrophe that crushes them. The novel narrates the story of the urban middle-class Brahmin family from the point of view of three different generation's women who are facing silent domestic violence at familial level and how patriarchal society treats women indifferently. The subjugation of women not only existed in lower strata of the society but upper strata of the society at the same time. The nature of women subjugation is little bit different, but it practiced in every society indifferently. This is shameful thing for country like India where constitution provides equal rights for both men and women. The real thing is that we do not follow our constitution at familial level rather seriously. The subjugation of women was existed

even in our holy books like Ramayana, Mahabharata and Upanishads.

The present novel cited various examples of this sort. The three major women characters face subjugation at various levels. Manorama's subjugation takes place due to her strictly following traditional customs and neglecting her daughter Kalyani after rejection by her husband as a deserted wife. She has strong desire for male child but unfortunately she was unable to bore male child. She was always blaming Kalyani for the rejection of her husband Shripati because he lost his only son due to Kalyani. Manorama badly fails for not performing her role as a mother when kalyani returned at her parent's home. Manorama has given very mean kind of treatment to her daughter. Even she held responsible for her husband Vithalrao's death and suspicious for her daughter Kalyani will also kill her at a last day's illness. Being women she has to understand the problems of her daughter Kalyani at various ways. Manorama has to morally support her daughter Kalyani in her bad days. But she fails badly and treated her daughter as a secondarily.

The subjugation of the Central character of the novel Sumi takes place when her father gave secondary treatment and not talks with his daughters as most of the father do. She is a daughter of Kalyani and Shripati. She got married with her own choice with her tenant Gopal a university professor of history. Gopal is rather disturbed man and left the university job without specific reason. This indicates his mental strength and negligence. This man is also followed the same path as his father in law. Gopal is a son of a man who got married with his own brother's wife and Gopal was born of this coalition. This incident always hunts him day and night throughout his life and Gopal thinks too much on this matter. He cannot digest the fact and compares his story with Hamlet. Gopal's character is like a psychologically weak, practically imbalanced and morally weak. He left because he doesn't want to perform family responsibilities and rather prefers a free life like monk. Shashi Despande has quoted some lines from the Upanishads for Gopal.

'Maitreyi,' said Yajnavalkya, 'verily I am about to go forth from this state (of householder) Brhad – aranyaka Upanishad (II.4.1)

When someone has such kind of framework of mind cannot fully enjoy family life. Gopal is such a sort of mind. Though he married with his own choice, but unable to take care of his wife and three daughters in decent manner. He hardly had good dialogue with his wife and daughters. He always remains silence at home. Practically speaking, he was not taking active participation in family life. This man has given so many pains to his wife. One day he left his wife and daughters in trouble. A responsible person ever left his family in any circumstances. At least Gopal has to think seriously about his three daughters. Due to Gopal's decision his family caught in troubles. As for as Sumi is concern she has performs her duties seriously after the desertion by her husband.

The subjugation of Sumi became more severe when her husband Gopal deserted her and three daughters in the midnight without any reason. After that Sumi's father Shirpati came to Sumi's house and takes them all to his house. When Kalyani Sumi's mother came to know about the matter she yelled very loudly:

'No she cries out, 'no, my God, not again.'
(AMOT P. 12)

The sentence indicates that how the particular family is facing women subjugation from generations. Kalyani knows very well the pain of desertion as she has been faced same thing in her life when her husband deserts her when Kalyani lost their son Nikhil. Even she knows the deep meaning of desertion and its effects on woman's hardships, judgments and sufferings. Sumi's husband left her after twenty years marriage. After Gopal's desertion Sumi and her three daughters Aru, Charu and Seema suffers the pangs of pain of their fatherly love and concern. The daughters were innocent, needs financial and moral support in that age. When Sumi was with his father's house she was fear that her daughters will understand a strange relationship between her father and mother. Her daughter Aru once asked her mother about this.

"Why doesn't Baba ever come down? Why doesn't he have his meals here with the rest of us? Why doesn't he ever speak to Kalyani? She is his wife, isn't she? And why is she frightened of him? He rings the bell and she responds, he controls her from a distance.

What has Amma done to make him behave this way towards her? (AMOT P. 39)

The above lines are conveys how Kalyani is control by her husband like a slave. The husband was very strange towards his wife, daughters and grand-daughters. Here Shashi Deshpande gives details of woman subjugation in a broad ways and how men in the novel are responsible for women plight and subjugation. The men become so inhuman towards women. They don't have any kind of sympathy towards their counterparts and treat them like slaves. This is a very strange thing practiced by men for the punishment of women. The men in the novel are badly failed for not performing their responsibility in proper manner. Even they badly failed as a husband's and father's role. As a husband they have to share their love towards their wife. The male characters like Vithalrao, Shripati, and Gopal are very strange kind of people towards their counterparts. They were not succeeding for maintaining proper atmosphere at domestic level. They have to provide love affection, care and responsibility towards their wives and daughters rather seriously. These men were always busy in giving pains and trouble to their wives and daughters in every ways. As far as their male domination is concern they were unable to understand women issues. They cannot give love to their wives and daughters.

The very strange thing is about Shirpati a husband of Kalyani and father of two daughters Premi and Sumi. Who did not talk with his daughter Premi for ten years. He also sent Premi to Bombay for medical study in order to give pain to his wife Kalyani. He is a brutal man only talked his daughter Premi when she completed her medical finals. This man is crossed all the limits of fatherhood. He uses various tricks to punish his daughters and wife for strong desires for male child. Premi tells very shocking things about his father Shirpati is that how he first time talked with her.

"The first time he really talked to her was when she had completed her medical finals; he had called her up to his room then summoned her actually, to tell her she would be marrying Anil." (ATMO P.18)

Look at this man he does not have any kind of sympathy towards his daughter. In a matter like

marriage he has to take full consent of his daughter, but he was unable to do so. Even he always tries to give pains to his wife Kalyani by denying the physical love which she really deserved. Shripati never had good communication with his wife, daughters and grand- daughters. He always controls Kalyani from distance by ringing bell. Kalyani always fears him lot and respond him immediately after the bell rings. This is very strange thing for controlling his wife. The subjugation of Kalyani takes place due to passive and traditional role of wife in the family system and there was no resistance against suppression.

Well – known feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (Trans. English 1953) she has discussed various issues of women and her place in the patriarchal society. In the book she talks about man women relationship.

“Males and female are two types of individuals which are differentiated within a species for the function of reproduction; they can be defined only correlatively.” (The Second Sex 1953 p. 36).

Shashi Despande tells that how her women characters faces so many troubles of silence domestic violence, subjugation and ill treatment. Her protagonist Sumi in the novel *A Matter of Time* is a self reliant and overcame from all obstacles and performed her role very systematically. Sumi provides financial support to the family by doing teacher’s job at school. Here Despande narrates about sumi as a new woman who can earn her bread and butter. Sumi proves herself as a true emancipated woman. At her father’s home she has given ill treatment. Her father did not ask anything about her husband. He rarely has any conversation either with his granddaughters and daughters Sumi and premi. This indicates that all men character in the novel is irresponsible about their responsibilities. They were given mean treatments to their wives and daughters. The women characters in *A Matter of Time* are the most suffers in the male dominated society. Sumi accept lonely life and wants to do not share anything about her troubles and pangs of pain as a deserted wife. She knows very well that there is no use of telling anything to others. Sumi said:

“It takes time to get used to sharing your life with another person, now I

have to get used to being alone.” (AMOT- P. 23)

Sumi realizes that her husband will not return and hold the responsibility of the family. Therefore she tries her level to do her best and run her family in smooth way but she fears that her daughters will hold responsible for their father’s missing. Sumi asked herself:

“The three of them ranged against me. Am I the enemy? Do my daughters blame me for what Gopal has done? Do they think it is my fault? Why can’t I talk to them, tell them what I fell, how it was? Why can’t I open my heart to them? (AMOT P.23)

Sumi a mother of three daughters asks many questions to herself. Being a woman she thinks the society always considered women as a responsible for everything. In the county like India where women position is always remain secondary in family matter. All the women characters in the novel are victim of patriarchal system. Shashi Despande has provided the true picture of Indian society. The Central Character Sumi is in troubles due to her irresponsible husband. The novel *A Matter of Time* depicts the true subjugation faced by Sumi because she is deserted wife by her husband. In *That Long Silence* Shashi Despande has talked about the relation of man to women.

‘The relationship of man to woman is the most natural of one person to another.’ (TLS P.158)

In Shashi Despande’s *A Matter of Time*, there is very complex man and woman relationship. There is silence in man and woman relationship. Vithalrao and Manorama’s relationship was disturbed because both of them wanted male child but they were unable. The relationship between Shripati and Kalyani are tensed and they ever had good dialogue with each other nearly thirty seven year’s marriage life. The same thing happens with Sumi and Gopal’s relationship. There was absence of love and bondage between wives and husbands. Even the men in the novel are badly fail taking care of their wives and daughters. All men have bad relationship with women. At the last portion of the novel when there was some possibility to improve the relationship between Sumi (Sumitra) and her father Shripati but nature has something. When they

were having good dialogue on scooter unfortunately the brutal accident takes place and both Sumi and her father shripati died at the spot.

Conclusion:

A Matter of Time presents a realistic picture of Indian women and their matter of affairs at familial level. All women characters are victim of male domination and patriarchy. Their subjugation takes place due to respect to the traditional marriage system. They just perform a role of obedient wives. Their suffering takes place due to lack of resistance. The three major women characters are badly suffer in their married life. Their freedom was captured by their husbands. There is visible silence domestic violence against women has taken place in the novel. Shashi Despande tried her level best to portray a realistic depiction of women's subjugation at familial level. Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and premi are directly victim of male domination and Aru, Charu and Seema are indirectly victim of male domination. The real emancipation of women has taken place when Sumi earns her family's bread and butter. Finally the true emancipation of women achieved when Aru says her grandmother Kalyani 'I'm your daughter, Amma, I'm your son.' (AMOT P.244)

As a woman writer Shashi Despande tried at her level best to narrate realistic issues of women in the Indian society. The women subjugation is not new for Indian society, but the way she portrays is rather differently. Even in today's society women subjugation is existed in all over the world. But in Indian society it is rather strange thing practiced in all walks of life. In the current scenario the equation is not changed completely. Therefore, Shashi Despande has given solution for women subjugation is that women should earn her own bread and butter at her own level as Sumi did. Women subjugation is very bad for progressive society like India.

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