

Optimistic Changes in the Characters of Shashi Deshpande's in *A Matter of Time*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande focuses the need of human beings of present generation to be optimistic in the fast moving planetary as human life across the world is turning bleak time and again. In modern society, people fail to train their minds to be positive, they intentionally or unintentionally give space for emotions and thoughts to torture their thoughts perhaps and that leads to mental illness and carries malicious reflection in individuals, families and societies. Shashi Deshpande does a complete analysis on the rational thinking process of human beings to create happiness and to experience the power of one's creation in this cosmic. Through her characters, Shashi Deshpande makes the readers understand that to enhance and empower their role in life, they must learn to unlearn negative thoughts and fill their minds with positive thoughts.

Keywords: Positive Thinking, Resilience, Re- Discover, Faith, Wisdom

Shashi Deshpande is expressive and persuasive in making her readers travel from despair to hope and from darkness to the light and helps them in understanding the value of life. She imparts to the readers the importance in the creation of a positive environment through her novels. For Shashi Deshpande, the ability to think positive is the key for every

human being to survive with happiness as the murky mind set of humans is mostly filled with revenge, anger, domination, contempt, dislike and disrespect for one another which ruin the happiness of life. The problems that people create for themselves and for the society urges Shashi Deshpande to bring awareness of being positive minded. The love, respect, compassion, resilience, reconciliation, hope, justice, discipline and knowledge in human beings are the most important themes of Shashi Deshpande's novels.

Sumi, the central character of the novel *A Matter of Time*, and her children Aru, Charu and Seema become more confident through their travails and miseries and also support their family members with their experiences in life. Shashi Deshpande believes that accepting failures and mistakes in life will help people in enhancing their skills. It will also motivate them to work harder and failures will become a driving force to attain success. She brings the importance of patience in one's life like the holy Bible asserts that there is a time for everything in human life. So, it is important for human beings to possess the quality of being patient to see the positive results that time gives. *The Bible* advocates:

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; and a time to plant, a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill and time to heal; and time to break down, a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and time together ; and time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing ; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend ,and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak ; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

(*KJV, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*)

Therefore, Shashi Deshpande asserts that people must acknowledge that if things are not falling in place, they must have patience, so that time will put everything in place. One

must learn to respond to situations and to people rather than reacting, because only responding will aid people in moralising their thoughts. Everyone in the family felt gloomy for Sumi, but she lives with resilience. She does not want to cut a sorry figure in the family. There is an occasion when Devi, her cousin cries for her life, but Sumi is so wise in telling her that she does not cry for herself, so she does not want anyone else also to cry for her and she has hope that she would face the spring season in her life though she suffers at present.

Sumi in *A Matter of Time* starts working as a teacher to save her children and to educate them. She is happy being employed as a teacher in a school; her passion for learning and writing is evidenced when she writes the story the *Gardener's son* in two nights which had been narrated to her by Goda, her aunt, when she was a kid. Sumi makes a big fuss to eat curd rice when she was young. In order to make her eat it, Goda told Sumi that the king's only loveable daughter ate curd rice every day and washed her hands after each meal in the tree that grows in the backyard of the house. The princess grows into a beautiful lady; she tells her father that she likes to get married to the man who has the intelligence to identify the tree in which she has been washing her hands since childhood.

The gardener's son who has been watching the princess every day mentions the name of the tree as 'Rice and Curds' instantly. The princess immediately falls in love with him. Sumi observes and enjoys the tactfulness that her aunt Goda possesses when she narrates the story. She senses her aunt's wisdom. Her aunt wants her to make her eat rice, but she does not force her, she has done her work in a very diplomatic way by re-directing Sumi's thoughts. Sumi uses the knowledge and wisdom of her aunt Goda and the history of her family to make her students have a better understanding of their basic roles at school as students. Though it is not Sumi's childhood dream to work as a teacher, she develops her passion for teaching when situation demands. She becomes one of the best teachers by

grooming her teaching skills. Marcus Buckingham, a well-known British motivational speaker, asserts:

Your strengths are not ‘what you’re already good at ‘but what make you feel strong and fulfilled in that moment. It could be anything from writing a poem in English class or cooking dinner for the kids. I stress: it doesn’t matter if you think you suck at it. What matters is that the activity in and of itself gives you that deep, settled, calm feeling. That bliss feeling. It restores and invigorates you. (Qtd in. “How to grow your own passion”)

People have to adapt to changes that come their way with an open and positive mind and should be ready to learn new skills like the characters of Shashi Deshpande.

Sumi loves rehearsing the story with the students for the competition. The students enjoy the fairy tale that is narrated by Sumi and also raise questions. Students ask her when the gardener’s son will become a king. Sumi envisages the conclusion part deeply and says: “It’s a good thing fairy-tales end where they do. Wisdom lies in where to stop” (MOT 158). Sumi turns to be wise; she does not want the students to be engrossed with the rivalry between the king and the gardener’s son. So she plans to end with ‘shubham’, by leaving the princess and the gardener’s son to enjoy their lives like Sanskrit plays where the conclusion is peppered with happiness and not with rivalry.

Sumi brings a few lines from a Sanskrit drama that states: “There should be no tragedy. If we are to construct a world, why not shape one with the hopelessness left out, why not end with the hope of happiness, the promise of realisation?” (MOT 158) She becomes more confident and wise through her struggles and sufferings in life. Confucius, a Chinese teacher, remarks: “By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest, second, by imitation, which is easiest and third by experience that is bitterest.” Sumi

with a bitter experience of her separation from her husband learns what wisdom is and also the value of harmony in family.

Though Sumi faces upheavals in her daily life, she never gives up the art of writing. The writing and rewriting of the story, 'The Gardeners' encourage and enrich her with confidence and knowledge and it is the success of this particular play on the stage that gives Sumi the wisdom to shape her second play '*Supanaka*'. Shashi Deshpande highlights the importance of perseverance and its positive effect in life through Sumi. In the modern materialistic world, people ought to have persistence in their hobbies as hobbies help people in leading a stress-free life.

Sumi's intellect in understanding the exquisiteness of life is proved at the end of the story when she tells Gopal that she has started looking at life differently: "It's all mixed up with the seasons and festivals and flowers and fruits. It's a cycle. Nothing is over; things keep coming back over and over again. They all are connected" (MOT 219). She gives an example saying that everything in life is connected like: "Ganapati and the rains, Dushhara and marigolds, Diwali and wintry feelings, Tulsilagna and Tamarinds" (MOT 219).

Sumi proves that she has become judicious and cogent enough in understanding life. She insists to Gopal that she wants their daughter's life to be easy and comfortable and want them to relish it and not to spit it out as it is bitter. She also advocates to him that she has become so bold even to face death unlike her mother. She considers dying as an art like Sylvia Path, an American poet and novelist, who opines in her poem *Lady Lazarus*, Dying Is an art, like everything else, I do it exceptionally well" (Lines 43-46).

Gopal remains hopeless and tells Sumi on an occasion: "It's two hearts beating and it can never beat in such unison" (MOT 24). He also fights for the word 'sa-hriday' which means: "oneness is impossible that there's only one sound" (MOT 24). Sumi is only eighteen

years old when she listens to all these invaluable cliché's from Gopal. If a married couple thinks that oneness is possible between them, it is possible; so it wholly depends on the attitude of the couple. Shobaa De, an Indian columnist and novelist, states in *Spouse*: "Marriage is what people make of it". She also says: "Marriage is for those who believe in it, who actively want it, who enjoy it" (De xii). Gopal is unable to find his own reason for abandoning his family and undergoes a great suffering in making others understand his problems. He struggles to accept humiliation and asserts: "It's a kind of illness, a virus, perhaps which makes me incapable of functioning as a full human being, as a husband and father" (MOT 41). He also expresses to Sumi that he has stopped believing in life and everything seems to be so unreal to him and feels that he cannot go on with life anymore and leaves the house without any regard for his wife and daughters. Through Gopal, Shashi Deshpande advocates that people must be responsible for making the right choices and have to be prepared to face the consequences in life without being intimidated.

Aru, Gopal's daughter, meets him and questions him rudely regarding his expel from the family and makes him feel low. He becomes speechless and realises the love and respect that his wife has for him. Gopal says: "I knew I needed her, her warmth, her humanness, her womaness" (MOT 68). He also senses that Sumi is the only person with whom he can share everything and waits eagerly for Sumi to come and meet him. These memoirs of him prove the care and love that he has created for his wife and family with time and experience.

Mandy Hale, a researcher opines: "A season of loneliness and isolation is when the caterpillar gets its wings" (Brainy Quotes). Similarly, the loneliness in Gopal's life makes him apprehend his own complications and especially the value of his loved ones. But later as time rolled by, he understands the love that he has for his family; he starts missing Sumi and understands the value of their relationship. Gopal says that "I knew I needed her, her warmth, her humanness, her womaness". (42) Each picture he visualizes reminds him of Sumi time

and again. He goes to Dilwara temple, he sees the glowing idol of Parvathi and recollects the face of his wife Sumi and finds the reason behind his life.

‘We are searching for the truth; you, O bee, have found it’.

Found it? Yes, for a while it was that way. After years of blundering I had found the truth in my feelings for Sumi, my love for my children. But now I know I had only lost myself in that beautiful, den green foliage (45).

Yamuna Bai, one of the prominent characters in *A Matter of Time* gets married into a wealthy family, but, unfortunately, she returns to her parent’s house as a widow. She holds a vision that women should not be treated as child bearing machines and should be educated in order to help them in seeing the beauty of the world. She feels that education is a tool, with which she can achieve her dreams. Yamuna Bai starts teaching girls in a cow shed and becomes comfortable even with the obnoxious smell of cow dung. She strongly believes that teachers hold the future of young people and it is the responsibility of the teachers to enhance the spirit of the students as Dr.S. Radha Krishnan, an Indian philosopher and the second president of India advocates in *An Ideal before the Youth*:“Our future destiny as a nation depends on our spiritual strength rather than upon our material wealth. The greatest asset of a nation is the spirit of its people” (Rao and Appasamy 41). So, Yamuna remains dedicated and honest to her work and believes that the center of gravity of her life is the passion that she has for her job.

Yamuna Bai is interested in the welfare of students and has great desire for her work and also imparts the importance of education in life to the students as youngsters set the central framework of the society. Yamuna Bai’s letter to one of her students proves the unconditional love that she has for her students. She states in the letter that she has no kid at home but has many kids at school.

Shashi Deshpande teaches people to be passionate in all their initiatives in life and requests people to be ambitious and to give their best to achieve their aims in life like Yamuna Bai. Yamuna Bai also substantiates to be an embodiment of 'Great Spirit' for young teachers and students.

Conclusion

Thus, the author expresses that if people perform their roles exceptionally well when they live, they will be satisfied and will not be scared of dying. Similarly, Shashi Deshpande expresses in *A Matter of Time* that life is: "Like a bird that flies in, Perches in the courtyard And then flies away The very same instant. So should one live" (84). Shashi Deshpande conveys to the readers that human beings should learn that each one has his or her own opinion, ideas and views. As Swami Vivekananda says: "We see the people as we are, but not as they are" (Brainy Quotes). So people must know to respect every one's opinion and accept their own weaknesses and must also learn to handle situations judiciously and rationally.

Shashi Deshpande uses metaphors like darkness and sunlight, death and life, problem and remedy, creation and destruction, wisdom and ignorance. These metaphors prove that the world has two sides like a coin in positive aspects and negative aspects, both created by human beings. She proves herself to be a best author by chiseling each character meticulously so that each character serves as a moral police that guides the readers. According to her, in order to lead a successful life it is important for individuals and families to create good, positive thoughts and ignore negative ones

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