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TAPESTRY OF PHILOSOPHY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S "MOVING ON"

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ABSTRACT

Moving is Shashi Deshpande's latest novel which reflects authors transition over a period of time through her myriad experience as a women writer. Moving On deals with lofty ideologies which felicitate human life and human issues. The novel perfectly presents the profound realities of human life and body through the character of Baba, father of Manjari the central character. Manjari's reading of her father's diary discloses multifarious secrets and facts of life that lie beneath every human life. Deshpande appreciates God's awesome creation (human being) through the character of Baba who has a passion for human body and its function. The impermanence of human body, inevitability of death, disintegration and disappointments in life are vividly manifested through Baba's connection with his fellow friends and relatives. He is enlightened on illusions of life with the death of his wife. He comprehends the reality of life and wholeness from his education. He learns a lot from the disintegrating nature of human body. Simultaneously the novel also brings forth the paramount significance of Faith in human life. The merit of birth and the principal aim to live it with a purpose is ultimately revealed through Baba's experiences. Baba educates his daughter Manjari to move on in life despite the disintegration and chaos through his records in his diary. As to the title of the novel, the reading of the novel imbibes the readers with confidence to face life despite misfortunes and to move on in life daringly, which is the ultimate panacea for man to survive on this earth.

Key words: lofty ideologies, impermanence, Faith, move on, panacea

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Moving On is Shashi Deshpande's latest novel which vividly manifests the gradual transformation of Deshpande's vision and perception of women and society. Deshpande envisions women's quest for identity in the male structured society in her previous novels like *The Dark Holds No Terror* and *That Long Silence*, while in *Moving on* she presents a more matured powerful self and state of single woman, Manjari. The novel upholds profound philosophies of life which in a way to heal the wounded psyche of the characters. In other words the novel is woven with tapestry of facts and philosophies of life. The characters are enabled to move on beyond

the illumined path through this tapestry of philosophies. "Deshpande shows in *Moving On* how to move on, how to make –remake one's life". (Joseph Anitha,C.Rajeswari,16)

Deshpande, through her extremely philosophical novel, has set a milestone in Indian women's writing in English, and has established herself as most acclaimed writer among her contemporaries. *Moving On* reveals Deshpande's elevated vision of life which she has obtained as a consequence of her myriad experiences, exploration and exposure. Multifarious philosophies reveal the transient, temporal natures of human creations which are substantiated through the plot and characters. Tagore highlights the immanence of creation, its transient, temporal as well as the rejuvenating nature of soul in *Gitanjali*. Similarly Deshpande also portrays the ideal aspect of human creation, its disintegration and generation through a set pattern.

The first few chapters depict the awe of Baba on human creation especially the human body with all its physical parts that render philosophy through its functional organs. The Second part of chapters exhibit the temporal and disintegrating nature of human body which is metaphoric of the nature's lesson (creation, destruction and rejuvenation). The last few chapters unveil the capacity of man to rejuvenate and the compulsion to move on in life with all its misfortunes. *Moving On* is Deshpande's fine novel with streams of philosophies which flow abundantly without any impediment.

Manjari, the educated protagonist is bold and courageous since her childhood. Being born as the daughter of educated parents she is independent, liberal and self-possessed. She is lovable and always has yearned for her parent's attention and concern. Manjari's nostalgia of her childhood reveals her self-willed, social behaviour which gain the confidence and love of her relatives and friends. Paradoxically her life is turned upside when she marries Shyam, a photographer. Manjari encounters innumerable catastrophes in her marital life. She returns to her parental home after a long gap to witness her parent's death, while she gets an opportunity to discover her parent's life as well as the profound secrets of life.

Manjari's father, a doctor by profession is highly fascinated by human creation and its mystics; a passionate lover of his wife, who prominently yearns for physical pleasure. Mai, mother of Manjari is rather contrasting in her belief of physical pleasure. Paradoxically she is a silent rebellion of her husband's oppressive action. Manjari since her childhood has been a silent observer of her parent's conflicting attitude. She witnesses the inner strength of Mai, who holds the whole family under her control in the name of love though a self-possessed woman. Her father's passionate love for Mai is boundless and unrestrained. Badrinath realizes the diminutive and transient state of pleasure and passion only when the whole family disintegrates. Badrinath envelops all his past impressions, transient events and disintegration of the family, ultimately the panacea, and philosophical enlightenment of reality in a diary. "Baba, Manjari's father, lays bare his father's past and his relations with and feeling about his wife Mai (Vasu) and his feeling towards Manjari and others in his neatly recorded events in his diary". (Sharma 27)

Manjari discloses the secret of her parent's life when she reads her father's diary on his request before his death. The pretentious life of her parents rarely shocks her as she has already witnessed it after the death of her sister Malu. Baba unearths valuable philosophies through his relationship with people who are innate and worth. He begins with his father's life and wonders at his love for his children which he realizes only as a father. His mother's untimely death and his brought up by his sister Gayathri has an impeccable influence on his life. "She was a pillar for so many of us; without her, our family life would have lost its centre, its source of light". (MO 11)

Baba is filled with questions of existence, infinite significance of 'I' and uniqueness of man soon after their father's death; he realizes the ultimate truth of life from the words of Upanishads, nama-rupa, "very differentiation...we can never be replaced. It seems to me that this is the price we pay for our more evolved state; we are the true ephemera of the universe". (MO 15) Baba realizes the insignificance of human life and its peripheral nature. He is quivered by the thoughtless search of man, his struggle towards a goal despite the truth that death is waiting for him. Spiritually the knowledge of death becomes the goal of human being. This knowledge endows man with the secret of creation. The knowledge of creation enables man to conquer the evanescence. Baba philosophises the ephemeral state of man more intellectually, which evokes the readers'

conscience. The following lines of Baba have an ability to evade ignorance of readers as they are wisdom filled. Deshpande through Baba records her extraordinary philosophical competence as a prolific writer. Baba says,

To know, to understand, to comprehend, is to become the creator. Through your knowledge you create a thing; without your knowledge, it is not. I think of Galileo's words: Eppur si muove. Still it moves. First, the knowledge, then the denial, the recanting, and then these words to reaffirm the knowledge. Eppur si muove. Still it moves, the truth remains. (MO 16)

Baba had absolute faith in the perfection of human body. He was filled with awe on the symmetry of human body. Baba's awe at the symmetry of human body reveals the lofty and mystic creation of God, which contemporary writers scarcely delineate in their writing. Deshpande's spiritual and intellectual perception of human body is her experience in her husband's profession. Baba visions human bones as not mere bones but as something significant and long lasting as concealed stories of human beings. "This remains when all is gone, this remains for centuries, for millenniums. It lasts, it survives, it carries our stories within it". (MO 24)

Deshpande's perception of human body and its close affinity with life, death and society is manifested through Baba's passion and his ultimate realization of inconsistent nature. The idea of body is subjected to a detailed analysis in the novel in order to understand its philosophical correlation with the universal phenomenon. Her notion of body as a temporal entity or a mere outer covering is parallel to Tagore's idea of human body as an empty vessel in *Gitanjali*. Deshpande's infinite knowledge of Indian myth (Upanishads) has administered her to move closer to the thoughts of Indians greatest writer Tagore. Deshpande's vision of body has transcended widely in *Moving On*. While in her previous novels she presents body as just an entity to fulfil human desires sexually, but in *Moving On* she presents body as an agent of human experiences of both joy and sorrow. Merry Baruah Bora and Liza Das opine on Deshpande's *Moving On* as , "with moving on Deshpande makes an effort to understand socio-cultural notions associated with the body, both male and female while employing the body as a medium of deeper philosophical speculation".(13)

Myriad philosophies are interwoven in *Moving On*. Deshpande presents an abundance of reality through manifestation of philosophies which lies beneath the pretentious and illusion filled life. Pragmatically her novels are illusion free and *Moving On* manifests it metaphorically. Death is the very fact of life which moves one towards enlightenment and disillusion. Deshpande's knowledge is similar to the idea of death in Hinduism. Death is otherwise the starting point of philosophy. Sri Swami Sivananda elucidates this idea in his book, *All about Hinduism*. He says,

The idea of death has ever been the strongest motive-power of religion and religious life. Man is afraid of death. Man does not want to die. He wants to live forever. This is the starting point of philosophy. Philosophy enquires and investigates. It boldly proclaims: "O man! Do not be afraid of death. There is an immortal abode. That is Brahman. That is your own Atman which dwells in the chamber of your heart. Purify your heart and meditate on this pure, immortal, changeless self. You will attain immortality." Death is the ultimate pointer to the transiency of all things and the existence of an ultimate Reality. (100)

When Mai dies (Baba's wife) he realizes the disintegration of the human body which happens at the moment of death. The meaningless, worthless pleasures through body have no significance for the existence of contentious life which is rarely lived by human beings. The marital relationship between Baba and Mai proved unsuccessful, when Baba realized the naked reality of body as a mere outer covering. The integral comprehension of Baba on various concept of life happens only due witness of death of his close relatives especially Mai.

With Vasu's death, her body gone and even her charred and bleached bones vanished into the depths of the river, I was left with nothingness. As a scientist I rejected the idea. Matter does not cease to exist, it changes form. Something remains. Reading the Upanishads with Ramachandra sir , I picked hopefully on the story of Svetakatu. I absorbed this body of the body being only the outer covering, within it the essence, the unseen formless essence, from which the long infinite thread of life unwinds. (MO 111-112)

Baba manifests the optimism in educated men; he desires to pass the same legacy to his heirs. Baba has belief in many factual/illusions of life. He is enlightened on illusions of life through the death of his relatives. He trusts on the idea of belief and faith which makes life to move on despite the tragedies of it. He believes in positive moment of everything in life, until the disintegration of his family. "Faith is the adhesive that holds all the seemingly disparate bits of life together. Without faith, everything flies apart. For my part, I faced disintegration, chaos." (MO 112) The disintegration does not despair him rather he comprehends the illusions. Baba loses faith after Mai's death, but reclaims it ultimately to move on with reality.

Baba realizes very fact of life that human being as an individual and a body is worthless in spite the supreme creation. His life becomes meaningful only in his relationship with others; mere DNA, bone and brains become worthless without his affinity with nature and society. Baba acquires this through his knowledge of DNA. His spiritual approach of human body and its segmentation is unique treatment of Deshpande. Baba's knowledge of human body is not just that of a doctor, it is something more elevated and sanctified outlook of body.

Now, I know that even with the encyclopaedia of the DNA, our knowledge is doomed to remain incomplete. The fact is that our identities do not contain just us, by ourselves we mean nothing.

An identity becomes active, positive and meaningful only in relation to others. The whole potential of who we are and what we are is realized only through our relationship with others. (MO, 56)

Baba a great thinker and a man of knowledge do not believe in fate or destiny. He had full hope of the life and the body that God has endowed man with. When his family encountered death, disintegration and loss, Baba realized that the control is not with human beings. Again Baba's idea parallels with Tagore's idea of inconsistency of human life. He considers human as a flute and God as flute player. They neither have control nor responsible for their actions, it is the will of God that actions happen in our life. Baba considers the life of human being as freak occurrence and that it has no choice but keeps going. He contemplates that life of man is mapped out and that it has to be accepted.

...that we come into this world with our lives mapped out for us. All that our actions, our struggles, are part of this map as well. We are not passive spectators of our own lives, we are not mute witness to the events in it. Yet, some of it remains beyond our control; at times, our own actions, our interactions with others, may work against our plans. We have to accept this. (MO, 54)

Ultimately, Baba understands the existence of great power which set things right and give penitence and absolution. Baba an educated man calls himself a man of ideal surrender to the will of God when he discovers the concept, 'Not to believe in God is to live in an orphaned universe'. (MO, 304) He identifies birth and death as inevitable cycle in the life of man. He acquires the knowledge of existence and liberates himself from ignorance of life. The knowledge of Baba on existence provides space for him to move on in his life. Knowledge enables him to detach himself from his obligation. Hence Baba attains renunciation.

Baba discovers the truth of wholeness of life from Ramachandra Sir who quoted from Isa Upanishad to explain the idea. The idea in Upanishad is similar to the Buddhist philosophy of Nirvana, which is discarding everything to attain harmony and peace. "We created God to embody the idea, the idea of a self that is complete in itself. This is the harmony that the astronomers of old dreamt of. To achieve this wholeness is the final state of evolution, it is nirvana. But for us, who are only a part of the wholeness, it is unattainable'. (MO 336) Paradoxically, man is in constant search of the part of the whole, but that is never complete. The search is doomed to failure'. But then things go on. Man has to accept it and move on to the next phase/level with faith. "But the story told in this novel is one of healing process. It is a novel in which the characters are capable of leaving behind past hurts and breaking through the chains of moral codes imposed upon them by the society." (Thakkar, 125)

Eventually, Baba's diary provides access to an abundant secrets and philosophies of life, it evades all despairs and offers pragmatic solutions for Manjari to identify her potential and realize the value of birth and human relationship. The flowering of Brahma Kamala at the end signifies the flowering or enlightenment of

Manjari through her experiences and reading of her father's diary. *Moving On* reveals rather panacea for human existence through the character of Baba.

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