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NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Dr. PRIYA SHARMA

Assistant Professor

Department of English Jazan University, Jazan
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



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ABSTRACT

In the fictional world 'idea' and 'technique' reciprocate each other. Narrative techniques supplies deeper meaning and interpretation for the readers and help them to use vision to envisage characters and situations. The literary elements in narratives include theme, character portrayal, structure of narrative, manipulation of images and symbols along with the dexterity of language as literary techniques are best captered in the context of one of these elements. Shashi Deshpande has applied various forms of technique to express her ideas effectively. The present paper discusses her reflections on various techniques depicted in her selected novels.

Key Words- idea, technique, structure ,form, psychoanalytical techniques, symbols, images.

In the fictional art 'idea' and 'technique' are the complementary of each other. The totality of human experiences with a comprehensive realization of the innumerable variables integrated in the text must be organized with a strong command over technique. It includes theme, character portrayal, structure of narrative, manipulation of images and symbols along with the dexterity of language. Sundell in his analysis of the distinction of the language of science and the language of fiction accepts the "transformational power" of the language of fiction. To quote :

Whereas the language of science seeks to describe the evidences of human experience and generalize them into universal laws, fictional literature attempts to represent and to recreate concrete human experience in such a way and with such an impact as to bring out meanings invisible to the strictly scientific observer. (Sundell : 7)

The structure of fiction depends on the writer's natural and social environment. However literary technique and structural conventions provide a rare internal harmony to the raw material drawn from life and make a literary work, a work of art. It is said, "The basic structures of human emotions and feelings demand suitable techniques and patterns of expression in the work of art" (Pandey : 1) Joseph Conrad in his critical formulations stresses the mimetic element in his novels rather than the formal. The inherent unity of different elements with the central theme makes a work of fiction authentic and artistic. Joseph Conrad in his "Preface" to *The Nigger of Narcissus* defines fictional art as, "a single minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one underlying its every aspect." (17) The

structure of novel or romance expresses some kind of quest whether with romantic tonalities as in romance proper with ironic tonalities in parodist adaptations of the structure in a more realistic context. The structure of the novel as a whole has rhythm in E.M. Forster's sense "repetition plus variation." (Forster : 149) George Orwell looks forward in the form of synthesis of perception of beauty and the desire to share experience as the basis of the art of fiction. "Perception of beauty, external world or on the other hand in words and their arrangement. Pleasure in the impact of one sound on other, in the firmness of good phrase or the rhyme of good story. Desire to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed." (Orwell: 183) Orwell's emphasis on the idea "to share an experience" suggests that the technique in the narrative must establish a balance between the social reality and emotional reality springing from the consciousness of the reader and the consciousness of the character. In this context Legget emphasizes, author's capacity of judgment. Francis Vivian acknowledges the importance of nine elements in narrative fiction - title, opening, paragraph, theme, motif, situation, character, setting and climatic paragraph. (57) The cumulative conclusion of these critical foundations of fiction suggests that writer can achieve desired aim of his text with the balance and harmony of these elements corresponding with the central idea of novel. In modern fiction with the advent of psycho-analytical paradigms of fiction, critics also admit the importance of the unconventional language, the position of the narrator and the dexterous use of symbols and images.

Shashi Deshpande with her pre-occupation with the predicament of women made serious efforts to organize the authentic experiences with a fine control on the various dimensions of narrative including the structure of the plot, shifting of the time, growth of the character, easy sweep of language and the suggestive use of images and symbols to externalize the hidden terrains of feminine consciousness.

Shashi Deshpande in her novels creates the world of feminine experiences beyond the myths and romantic fantasies. She ventures to explore the struggle of feminine psyche to acknowledge and to establish her human identity against male constructed social order. Such a vision requires an unconventional strategy of narrative pattern that can explore and establish the authenticity of the internal experience in context of concrete social reality. As a writer she admits that a novelist can achieve richness and profundity only through the involvement in human emotions. She admits :

It is through my imagination that I enter another world. And my desire to enter that world begins with a strong emotion. A strong emotion and an ignited imagination these are the two things that open the door into other world. (Deshpande : *Margin*, 8)

Within the texture of narrative, she constructs, deconstructs and reconstructs the human identity of her female protagonists. She confesses, "To become a complex living person the character needs to be born or reborn within the writer's imagination." (*Margin* : 16) In her character centered novels, her narrative structure seems to have become a voyage within the conscience and consciousness of her character. She conceives the vision that writer is a creator, creator of the real life experiences with the synthesis of social reality and emotional reality operating within the conscience of characters. She makes a confession :

Each novel is a voyage of discovery for me, a discovery of myself, of other humans of our universe. There has never been any huge enlightenment, only an understanding of the fact that as we go on living, we learn to hope becoming each day a little more understanding of human frailty, a little more compassionate. (Deshpande : *Margin*, 29)

To construct the humanity of her female protagonists, she transgresses the stereotype canons of religion and morality. She denies the category as woman's writing. For her the writing about a woman is a process of self realization and self actualization. She admits :

When I write of women, am I writing of something less than human? I don't think so. It is through an understanding of our own individual selves that we get glimpses of our human condition. Ultimately we need to move on – and we will move on – but not necessarily to reject what we leave behind. (Deshpande : *Margin*, 155)

To make social reality more universal and convincing, Deshpande makes use of myths. Myths are the part of social and religious faiths and therefore they are closely associated with human psyche, "Myths are the part of human psyche, part of our cultural histories. Myths conditions our ideas so greatly that often it is difficult to entangle the reality of what we perceive from what we learn of our selves through them, our behaviour is often and to a great extent, dictated to by them." (Deshpande : *Margin*, 88)

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande in order to make a "revelation" of feminine consciousness follows unconventional narrative strategies. In order to articulate the voice of woman, she makes extensive use of first persons' narration with the occasional interference of second and third person narrative. To have generalized speculation on issue of female oppression and the exploitation of female sexuality, she mingles first person narration with the "point of view" technique. The first person narration promotes dramatic objectivity and helps to constitute "self reflective mode" in narration. Sundell, the eminent critic of fiction writers, "In the stories that focus on the psychology of characters, the protagonist and antagonistic forces may be aspects of the same character, in which case, the conflict is internal." (Sundell : *The Art of Fiction*, 83) The narrative is arranged to trace the growth of social realism affecting the 'psychological realism' of gender politics. In her novels, 'Hostility and resistance, conventionalism and radicalism, patience and protest go together.' (Agarwal : 208) To enhance the authenticity and reliability of her narratives, she makes extensive use of images and symbols to unveil the hidden conscience of the characters. The feminine perspective in her fictional world admits of the following elements that can be appreciated as a part of her narrative strategy :

- (a) Position of the narrator
- (b) Strategy for the growth of novel
- (c) Use of psychoanalytical techniques
- (d) Use of myths
- (e) Use of images and symbols
- (f) Language used as symbolic order
- (g) Flux of the movement of time
- (h) Use of Leitmotif.

The plot of the novel *The Dark Hold No Terrors* is constructed as a voyage to explore the dilemma of identities of the protagonist Saru. In this novel Shashi Deshpande follows a "circular vision" to constitute the fluidity of female identity. The plot of the novel revolves round the struggle of Saru who constructs alternative identities to overcome the dark shadows of gender based power politics. Present, past and future go simultaneously corresponding with the dilemma of her life. Saru shares the experiences of childhood insecurity in her father's home. To overcome the trauma of these experiences, she plans strategy for her future involving her ambitions of professional life and personal relationship. In the present conditions, she reflects on her own experiences. The reflections makes text of the novel self exploratory tracing the fluidity of past to define the nature of present. She records the bitter arguments of her mother and became a permanent part of her consciousness. In the background of these experiences, she evaluates her personal relationship with her husband Manohar. In this respect, in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, past and present are integrated through the consciousness of Saru to decode the imperishable horrors of gender discrimination operating upon the consciousness feminine psyche. In her confessions and reflections, on the futility of her relationship, there are the distinctive shadows of child hood insecurity hidden in her consciousness. Saru's recollections of memories contribute to trace the growth of the text. "Darkness" here works as a major metaphor, as a suggestive background to expose the light of the hidden terrains of feminine consciousness. It was more a matter of the 'darkness' surrounding her identity and illusion of love and security in her marital relationship. Besides of 'darkness', she presents her conventional and suffocated marital life as "trapped animal". This image of trapped animal suggests the idea of defiance, oppression with the irresistible urge for retaliation. In the *The Dark Holds No Terror*, to resolve the personal crisis of Saru, Deshpande manipulates 'point of view technique'. She makes

analysis of the life conditions of Sunita, Nalu and Anju. In this analysis, 'Home' and domesticity emerged as a major image to expose the distinction of spaces and binarism existing in man and woman relationship. What Saru witnessed in the household of Manohar, the foundation of it had already been laid in her childhood. Fear, insecurity and anxiety motive echo again and again to redefine her position. In this respect past and present becomes a complete unit leading to "wholeness" out of the fragmented experiences.

In the novel *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Shashi Deshpande exposes "the long smothered wall of the fragmental psyche of her female protagonist." (Agarwal : 50) Indu, an educated and enlightened woman makes search to settle the contradictory commitment of womanhood and individuality. Here narrative moves between past and present with the possibilities of future based on the individual choices challenging the cramped conventions of social order. At the present time, Indu identifies herself with the suffering of Mini whose marriage is to be settled without her choice. In the investigation of Mini's life, Indu reconstructs the life of Akka, the grandmother who used to be the pillar of authority in the family. Indu against the will of Akka arranged a marriage of her own choice with Jayant. However in marital relationship, she finds that she has no autonomy of her own. Her aversion toward mechanical married life has been suggested through the image of "trap". She calls, "marriage a cage with two trapped animals, glaring hatred at each other... isn't so good after all. And it is not joke but tragedy. But that animal would cage itself." (*Roots and Shadows* : 61) The image of "cage" and "trapped animal" vitalizes the aversion towards personal relationship. In the reflections of Indu, Shashi Deshpande seems to employ the technique of identification and projection. Each reflection of memory works as stimulus to stir the consciousness of Indu against her own miserable condition. Each event of the past becomes an episode for the present. Unfolding of the layers of the suppressed consciousness makes Indu aware of her own 'self' and 'identity'. This gradual unfolding of consciousness revealed in terms of present scenario, seems to fulfill the purpose of the narrative structure of the novel. Indu in this self reflective mode of narrative unfolding of her own consciousness also becomes an instrument to articulate the voice of those who are marginalized, tortured and humiliated. In this respect the narrative structure seems to fulfill the condition of post colonial paradigms of fiction. The flux of the narrative between past and present comes to the final conclusion of the helplessness of man against the existing social order.

In the novel *That Long Silence* (1988), Deshpande again adopts the pattern of unfolding the psyche of the protagonist. The narrative is constructed through the consciousness of Jaya who during the seventeen years of her marriage bears the apathy and humiliation of her husband's authority. The novel is structured on the lines of Freud's idea of suppression of instincts. Suppression is not elimination. The consistent suppression of Jaya leads to violent eruptions of emotional volcano. 'Diary' in the novel becomes the leitmotif to give sweep to her stream of consciousness. The plot has no organic whole with the logical organization of incidents. Each event mentioned in the diary becomes the nebulous of the whole episode. The isolated episodes have an inward unity to reconstruct the wretchedness of the life of Jaya against the ideology of patriarchal social structure. In the novel *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande on the lines of the technique of stream of consciousness constructs the past of Jaya to draw conclusions about the possibilities of the present. The individual crisis has been contextualized in terms of the universal annals of female exploitation and silencing of woman community. It is a novel written from the point of the first person narrator. Self revelation is done by Jaya to give a voice to her own silence. About the novel Shashi Deshpande comments :

And then I wrote *That Long Silence* almost entirely a woman's novel, nevertheless a book about the silencing of one half of humanity, a life time of introspection went into the novel, the one closest to me personally, the thinking about ideas in this are closest to my own. (Shashi Deshpande : Vol. I, 1993)

The turbulent flow of consciousness of Jaya in *That Long Silence* has become a metaphor for the silent resistance of the women in Indian society struggling against the hegemony of male autonomy. In the novel Shashi Deshpande besides her dexterity in penetrating into feminine psyche, maintains her grip on the shift of narrative corresponding with the events of past and present. The plot in the narrative is controlled at two levels. One part forms the inner consciousness of Jaya and other what is being happened to Jaya in her present life. "It is the profundity of the fictional art of Shashi Deshpande that she thrusts psycho realism to seek arguments in support of social realisms." (Agarwal : 70) In order to construct the inner psyche of Jaya on certain feminist issues,

Deshpande has used projection technique. The reactions of Jaya looking at pregnant Nayana are an objective manifestation of her aversion against the absurdity of forced pregnancy. To express her resentment against the mechanical mode of personal relationship, she uses the image of “a pair of bullocks yoked together.” (*That Long Silence*: 8) It indicates the oppressive mechanism working upon the consciousness of Jaya. In another reference she refers to “Crow and Sparrow” story of childhood days and this story is still rooted in her sub consciousness. The whole metaphor is suggestive to expose the power relations and the demarcation of spaces for man and woman. She declares :

In sufferable priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their homes, their babies ... and to hell with the rest of the world – stay at home – look after your babies keep out the rest of the world and you are safe. (17)

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya makes a contextual retrieval of the past. Jaya turns the pages of diary and each page becomes a stimulus to stir the impressions rooted in her consciousness about her relationship with Mohan. Diary becomes a focal point to unite the diverse experiences in a single whole. It is therefore in spite of post modern fragmentation of order; the plot follows an underlying unity leading to a collective unit. The novel *That Long Silence* is a novel of complex structure making search for female experiencing along with the future possibilities of the spaces of woman’s potential in the main stream of life. In context of post colonial argument, Deshpande has followed the track from silence to speech, from self negation to self- affirmation and from the acknowledgement of femininity to the assertion of humanity.

The novel *The Binding Vine* (1993) is also a text designed to expose the accumulated oppression on woman in male-centered power structure. Here too the narrative is controlled at two levels – one is the flow of the consciousness of the protagonist and other is the exposure of the bitterness and horrors of social reality revealed in terms of rape and sexual harassment. The protagonist is tortured and agonized but more than falling into the self reflection, she moves with a journalistic vision to expose the horrors of male chauvinism effecting the life and sensibility of women. Here too Deshpande tries to co-ordinate the incidents of past and present to establish that sexual colonialism based on binary gender relationship has been a common phenomenon during all ages and all sections of society. It has a complex structure with multiple layers of suggestions focusing on the illusions existing in the nature of man and woman relationship. Urmi, the narrator is placed in the centre that reflects on the conditions of her mother in law Mira and also makes desperate efforts to expose the misery of the life of Kalpana, an innocent rape victim. In *The Binding Vine*, three time dimensions of past, present and future are suggested through the consciousness of three characters – Mira – the past, Urmi – the present and Kalpana – the future and these three generations with their experiences frame a complete ‘whole’, a strong dramatic structure to establish the pattern of oppression working in society. Urmi in her narration identifies herself with the suffering of Mira and Kalpana. It is remarkable that in *The Binding Vine* both Mira and Kalpana remain silent and invisible identity but they become the articulator of the reality with which Urmi is struggling. Mira’s personal diary with the inscription “strictly private and confidential” works as method to reveal her unexpressed suffering and it works as a stimulus to make Urmi investigate the personal life of Mira. In *The Binding Vine* “Darkness” and “Silence” are employed as two strong backgrounds to expose the power politics and sexual politics working in the society. In the texture of the novel, the involvement of the agencies like hospital administration, police and legal redress give a journalistic flavour to the issue of sexual exploitation of society. It is evident that Mira, Urmi and Kalpana are associated with one single idea of sexual colonialism in Indian society. Besides in context of the paradigms of ‘motherhood’, the narrative in the novel follows the three distinctive dimensions of mother and daughter relationship. Mira seeks the fulfillment of her life in the image of her mother, Shakutai in the suffering of Kalpana and Urmi in the form of the loss of Anu. The novel *The Binding Vine* has a compact structure, with the central motif of the sexual harassment and sexual violence not as an “outsider” but a partaker of the whole phenomenon. About *The Binding Vine*, it is said, “The fine fusion of the psychological suffering, physical pain and the exposition of social reality makes this text as a perfect voice of subaltern who pass through the stage of silence to self realization.” (Agarwal : 98) Like a post modern text, the novel has an open ending but such open ending is a suggestive mechanism to raise consciousness against the issue that seems to have no definite end.

A Matter of Time is the only male centered novel of Shashi Deshpande with the family and familial relationship as the essential background of narrative structure. Still the conflict of the three generations is organized in such a way that helps to construct the idea that human bonds in the form of personal relationship often become prelude to unsettle the structure of social harmony. In this novel also, Shashi Deshpande weaves the fabric of her narrative with a more complex vision where she intends to explore the insecurity rooted in male consciousness to face the oppressive gender discrimination. Gopal, the protagonist leaves his family out of the insecurity of being father of three young daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. Aru, the eldest one seems to have a realization of the wearisome silence of her mother Sumi. In order to expose the secret cause behind Gopal's act of desertion, again Shashi Deshpande adopts point of view technique. Different characters like Sumi, Ramesh, Kalyani and even Aru make interactions with Gopal. In *A Matter of Time*, more than the shifting of past and present, Deshpande focuses on the crisis of the relationship of three generations. Sumi and Gopal, Kalyani and Baba, Aru and her friend. Sumi in the background of her own suffering has to reconcile with the pain of Kalyani and insecurity of Aru. In *A Matter of Time* the guilt is not with Sumi but with Gopal and the narrative is organized to unveil the cause and the consequences of Gopal's suffering. As a part of the narrative strategy, the novelist arranges the meetings of different characters with Gopal to peel out the inner layers of his consciousness. The different meetings with different characters are like the different scenes organized in the dramatic structure. It helps to give sweep to the events to maintain the control over the central plot. Gopal's conversation with different characters suggests that his anger was directed not against any specific member of the family but against his own unfortified consciousness. In *A Matter of Time*, the narrative does not move in regressive order but moves in a forward direction. Sumi no longer adopts withdrawal as a mechanism to save her ego and self, from being disillusioned.

In the novel *Small Remedies* Shashi Deshpande adopts a distinctive pattern of the development of the narrative. It takes into account four dimensions of the consciousness of the chief characters moving and operative in a unified direction. Instead of reflective and self revelation mode adopted in earlier novels, in *Small Remedies*, she follows the autobiographical mode of writing for both the characters – the narrator and the subject of her investigation. The narrator is an aggrieved mother who is frustrated out of the complexity of man and woman relationship. The fraction is out of the contradictory commitments of motherhood and womanhood. As a journalist, she determines to investigate the secret of the life of a professional classical singer Savitribai Indorekar. The revelations of the personal life of Savitribai become a background for the trauma of her life. The two levels of consciousness follow one identical pattern to complete the design of narrative. It is said, "In her latest novel, *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande seems to have used her skills to perfection. Her protagonist is still the urban middle aged and educated woman, but canvas has broadened to encompass cross section of people who belong to different communities, professions and levels of society." (Reddy : 2001, 123) The biographical investigations carried on by the protagonist become a method of the investigation of her consciousness. Such narrative structure in *Small Remedies* is significant to construct the social reality based on gender politics from women's point of view. Madhu in her interview with Savitribai unconsciously starts unfolding the layers of her own dilemma, "Shashi Deshpande in *Small Remedies* maintains a fine dexterity in narration by mingling past and present corresponding with personal and impersonal issues with the life of the narrator." (Agarwal : 120) The narrator and the spectator become one in *Small Remedies*. The fabric of the plot of the novel primarily takes up two issues : the concept of motherhood and the complexity of man and woman relationship. Savitribai endowed with the gift of singing resisting the norm of patriarchy, family traditions, caste centric prejudices and even neglecting the claims of motherhood constructs her identity as a singer because for her music was the other name of identity and recognition. In the background of the life of Bai as a "woman" and Bai as a "singer", she discerns conclusion that woman has to pay a lot to make her own spaces. Madhu, the investigator feels that Adit was the culmination of desires of Madhu and untimely death of Adit was the cause of discontent in her personal life. She is so possessive that unconsciously she considers herself responsible for Adit's death. The emotional reality revealed in terms of social constructs imparts an exceptional authenticity and reliability to the entire structure.

Shashi Deshpande with her pre-occupation with feminine sensibility made serious efforts to organize the authentic experiences with a fine control on the technique. The following inferences can be drawn out of this study :

- a. Shashi Deshpande has adopted self-reflective mode and have used first person narration. Woman in her novels occupies the position of subject and not a silent object.
- b. In order to have a generalized speculation on the issue of female oppression and exploitation of female sexuality Shashi Deshpande mingles first person narrative with point of view technique. The protagonists survey their lives and lives of other women around there and draw conclusions.
- c. The plot of Shashi Deshpande's novels is simple and she operates within the limits of family and familial relationships.
- d. Shashi Deshpande uses wide range of symbolism as feminine experiences are a part of deeper psychological consequences. They use symbols and metaphors which reveal their inner psyche – marriage as a 'cage', married couple as 'two bullocks yoked together', 'darkness' etc.
- e. Shashi Deshpande adopts projection technique for suppressed desires and identity. The protagonists assert their identity not only by speaking but by adopting various other means.
- f. The character portrayals of Shashi Deshpande are wider as she depicts the woman characters of different classes, generations and culture.
- g. Shashi Deshpande contextualizes feminine experiences in relation with different woman.

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