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The Protagonist's Exploration of Inner Space in Deshpande's Novel "Time Issue"

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Abstract: ***This paper seeks to work out the notion of 'inner space' followed by a brief discussion of the concept of 'self as its natural corollary. It shows how despite all odds, Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists constantly search for inner space. The way they resist and question their family situations characterized by gender discrimination, and male domination, and negotiate the socio-cultural and patriarchal setup, will be a special point of focus. The extent to which the protagonists succeed in procuring individual space for themselves will be ascertained on the basis of available textual evidence. An attempt will also be made to lucidly work out the stages of growth on the part of the protagonists in the process of their search for inner space (i.e. actualization of the self), which is completely infringed by patriarchal dictates and culturally prescriptive code evolved especially to tame, exploit, subdue and dominate women.***

Keywords: inner space, actualisation of the self, moving on

The notion of inner space stands for the mental realm within a person, her/his inner, spiritual, and psychological self. One's inner space may be contrasted with her/ his outer space. In an article on "The Psychology of Inner and Outer Space," Ruth M. Armstrong observes that inner space comprises emotions, feelings, thoughts, dreams and attitudes whereas outer space signifies everything belonging to the external environment. If a person is not integrated, which implies that s/he has no residual thoughts, repressed emotions and feelings, and is without right (positive) attitude towards life, it will affect the society s/he lives in adversely because the external world mirrors the harmony/ turmoil of one's inner space/ world. As such, owing to their relationship with the concept of inner space, various humanistic concepts like "life space," "personal space," and "emotional space" have come into being (Armstrong). Humanist psychologists, in fact, view the true quality of human nature optimistically as they believe in its creative potentialities. As a result of this orientation, "many humanistic psychologists have been associated with promoting a higher self-realization or actualization through expanding consciousness and acquiring awareness of inner being" (Armstrong 161). Inner space is also equated with the human psyche and the subconscious.

In Augustinian thought, inner space is "conceived as a kind of space, or dimension of being proper to the soul." Not that it is literal space; it may rather be likened to "the inner world of representations." Nevertheless, "Augustine's psychology of the inner self is always accompanied by a theological project of inward turn." Despite this, it has wider psychological implications as words, gestures, speeches and smiles are taken as "outward, bodily signs by which human beings express what lies within their private inner space" (Fitzerald 454-55).

In his essay on "Womanhood and the Inner Space" (1963), Erik Erikson emphasized that "anatomy is destiny" and that a woman is "never not a woman." This view has been denounced by feminists as well as students for its essentialist slant. His understanding of the notion of "inner space" typifies girls as opposed to "outer space" which characterize boys:

He feels that these phenomena cannot be explained by socialization alone, but also must be understood by the contribution of intrapsychic factors. Erikson postulates that girls have a considerable attachment to their "inner potential," which arises from "solidarity" with womanliness. He rejects the hypothesis that girls accept their femininity only after resolving their feelings of anger at their mother for being narcissistically damaged by lacking a penis. (Schuker and Levinson 80)

As stated earlier, Erikson's views on womanhood and "inner space" have drawn sharp responses from critics. His observations regarding girls' focus on "inner space" owing to their "peaceful" and "passive" activities as opposed to boys' "aggressive" and "intrusive" thrust on the "outer space," have been critiqued vigorously. Another statement by Erikson that has been attacked is when he observes that "the problem of identity definition for women must wait until a suitable partner is found and 'welcomed to the inner space'" (Kroger 34-35).

The inner space has a natural connection with/ an inclination toward the concept of self, which must be explored so that the psychological hurdles encumbering one's holistic inner growth may be removed and integrated growth of the personality be ensured. Literally, the term 'self' implies the awareness of one's distinctly unique identity. In broader terms, self may be construed as sum total of the characteristic qualities in a person that impart her/him a distinctive identity. The concept of self is also understood as the idea of an integrated individual who has actualized his potentialities.

A neo-Freudian and a leading American exponent of humanistic psychology, Abraham Harold Maslow postulates that people have an intrinsic tendency towards self-actualization which is innately ingrained in human organisms. His concept of "self- actualization" implies a tendency, need to fully develop one's potential and also "a desire for self-fulfillment." This tendency might be phrased as "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow 7). It creates a sense of integration within the

person and may be attained after fulfilling the other four needs spiraling upwards from physiological to safety to belongingness to self esteem. Maslow's theory of Basic Needs (in view of Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, which is one of the commonly accepted models for human development) is generally portrayed as a fairly rigid hierarchy, even though he found that the fulfillment of these needs does not always follow the same sequence. Nevertheless, when the lower needs are met, one is free to focus on the higher ones and attain self-actualization. It is a process of growth or a movement towards "full humanness" which Maslow terms as "metamotivation."

C. G. Jung considers "self" as one of the archetypes of the collective unconsciousness. The archetype of "self" is symbolic of wholeness, totality of being, and also analogous to the archetypes of "meaning" and "wholeness." It is actualized upon completing the individuation process (comprising four stages of catharsis, elucidation, education and transformation). ' Jung observes: "I use the term 'individuation' to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is a separate, indivisible unity or whole" (Jung 275). Jungian individuation is viewed by Robert A. Segal as an "ideal psychological state" (Segal 262). It, in fact, is in the service of attaining selfhood:

Individuation is a psychological "growing up" process of discovering those aspects of one's self that make one an individual different from other members of his species. It is essentially a process of recognition—that is, as he matures, the individual must consciously recognize the various aspects, unfavorable as well as favorable, of his total self. Self recognition requires extraordinary courage and honesty but is absolutely essential if one is to become a well-balanced individual. (Guerin, et al 137)

In other words, self may also be explained as the outcome of one's awareness of herself as an individual who experiences her own integrity and identity with herself in relation to the lived past, present and future. In this sense, self-actualization may be described as the human desire to maximally reveal and develop one's personal potential. Brammer, Lawerence M. and Everett L. Shostrom define self as "the individual's dynamic organization of concepts, values, goals and ideals, which determine the ways in which [s/]he should behave" (Brammer and Shostrom 48). They further explain that it is the individual's consistent picture of himself and is best represented by what he calls "1" or "me." Self is also described as a personality construct and various phrases such as 'concept of self,' 'self image,' 'self concept' and 'self structure' are used to describe it. Carl R. Rogers, in his book Counseling and Psychology (1942) emphasizes on the human capacity for inner peace and happiness. According to him, the fully functioning person lives in harmony with his or her deepest feelings and impulses.

The female protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's novels may be examined in the light of the foregoing analysis of the concepts of inner space and self. Jungian postulation of the archetype of the self along with Maslowian notion of self-actualization may be further ramified to include Showalter's idea of 'personhood' vis-a-vis woman who upon realizing her self (potential) does not spurn the family or the society but rather includes and them in a newer light. Deshpande's protagonists go beyond what Elaine Showalter calls the "female phase" which is a phase of "self-discovery, a turning inward, freed from the dependence of opposition, a search for identity" (Showalter 13). They doubtlessly discover themselves but the quest does not end there. It could be mentioned here that they are not feminists in the first but in the second stage which cannot be viewed in terms of women alone but also in terms of the 'separate personhood' or equality with men. The second stage involves coming to new terms with the family, with love and work (Frieden 28). The return of Deshpande's protagonists to home is not defeatism of any sort, but the triumph of the independence of women. They learn to live in society. Their change in their perception is best expressed in the words of Virginia Woolf when she writes in A Room of One's Own: "There is no gate, no loci<, no bolt, that can set upon the freedom of my mind."(Woolf76)

Michael Rosenthal's statement in Virginia Woof regarding Mrs. Ramsay and Lily can also be extended to describe the state of mind of the heroines of Shashi Deshpande upon attaining selfhood/ wholeness of being: "What unites .. . them, despite their vast personal differences, however, is their mutual reverence for life and their desire to make something ordered and whole out of the flux around them" (Rosenthal 113). Women in Deshpande's fictional world "establish themselves as independent beings free from the restrictions imposed by patriarchal society, culture, nature and also from their own fears and guilt" (Sethuraman 191). It is only through rigorous self-scrutiny, self-analysis, self-understanding, self-awareness and courage that "they can begin to change their lives. They will have to fight their own battles, nobody is going to do it for them" (Palkar 134). G.

A Matter of Time deals with the sufferings and agonies of a deserted woman namely Sumi. She has to live a helpless and miserable life at the age of forty with her teenage daughters, Arundhati, Charu and Seema. But in spite of all her troubles, Sumi is not broken. Deserted by her husband for no fault of hers, Sumi learns to pick up the threads of her life and fights her own battle to assert her individuality. In spite of this, "Sumi does not contemplate a divorce as she considers this to be of no use to her. Divorce frees a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily." (Sree 108-109).

Sumi is a self-respecting woman. She does not want to return to her father's house and be a parasite on her parents. She prefers to face the harsh reality of life boldly, maintaining that "He's going his way and I have to go mine" (161). She wants her daughters' life to be unchequered by unhappiness and therefore refuses to accept any kind of financial assistance either from her parents or from Premi, her doctor sister, or from Ramesh who is Gopal's nephew.

She takes up a temporary job in a school in order to support her family. She is even looking for a rented house so that she could move into it as soon as possible. Analyzing Sumi psychologically, Deshpande in an interview with Vimala Ramarao comments:

Sumi's acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself, she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity, she would do anything for pride. She distances even her husband. The point is, they are both unusual. People are puzzled by the abandoned wife not feeling bad. (Ramarao 256)

After Gopal walks away, Sumi's creativity gets revived and there is change in her as she suddenly wants to do so many things (231). Her play The Gardener's Son, staged in the inter-school competition, is very much appreciated. She even decides to rewrite the story of Surpanakha (a female character in The Ramayana) from her own view point of view, who in the novel is a symbol of female sexuality:

Female sexuality. We're ashamed of owning it, we can't speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it—it is this Surpanakha I'm going to write about. (191)

Thus, the above revisioning of Surpanakha episode speaks of Sumi's eagerness to prove that "man-woman relationship should be sound, equal and non-partisan" (Sree 117). This shows her modernity of thought and the progressive outlook of women who want to assert their individuality in this male-dominated world.

Sumi has a deep understanding of her husband and therefore she allows him his space while others are busy with their wild guesses. Sumi very well knows the reason why Gopal leaves her, "the reason lies inside him, the reason is him" (24). Sumi recalls how once she and Gopal had argued over the meaning of the word Sa-hriday (24) and Gopal had said:

There's no word in English that can fit the concept. English is a practical language, it has no words for the impossible. Sa-hriday in the sense of oneness is an impossible concept.

Then, abruptly, he pulled her close to himself and said, 'Listen, can you hear? It's two hearts beating. They can never beat in such unison that there's only one sound. Hear that?" (23-24)

Now, Sumi realizes that those interpretations were the hints telling her that it was always there in Gopal—the potential to walk out on her and the children. Later when Gopal actually leaves, Sumi feels that the time of togetherness in their life is over. She is shattered initially but soon rejects these feelings and works her way toward a new horizon. Gopal himself admits to have been frightened by his own inner "emptiness" (52). It seemed to him that "there was a truth that lay at the end of the road, waiting to be revealed to him." But it does not take him long to realize "the futility of this hope" (98-99). Thus Sumi, according to R. S. Pathak, is a woman who has been "conceived without a trace of sentimentality by the novelist. Right from childhood she has been beautiful and graceful. Even in crisis, she can leave the impression of her grace, courage and "old vivacity" (172). She is a tremendously self-restraint and has the capacity to talk about Gopal's act of desertion with great equanimity (Pathak 159). Pathak's opinion is endorsed by Suvarna Shinde who remarks thus:

The understanding between Gopal and Sumi makes their relationship unique in Shashi Deshpande's fictional world. All the man-woman relationships in her novels are oppressive, strange, uncomfortable or silent. Sumi and Gopal stand uniquely in spite of the fact that Gopal leaves them for something unattainable. (Shinde 143)

Sumi identifies her relationship with Gopal in a maturer way and recognizes that Gopal's life always has a different curve, a different direction as she says, ".. . our journeys are always separate, that's how they're meant to be. If we travel together for a while, that's only a coincidence." (212)

Sumi starts afresh and learns to ride a scooter and even gets a job in a residential school at Devpuri. She is an embodiment of motherly love, care and concern. She is worried about her grown up daughters. She fervently hopes for a better life for her daughters. She says regarding Aru thus: "1 want her to enjoy the good things in life, 1 want her to taste life, 1 want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter" (220). But fate has decided something else for her. She dies along with her father in a road accident. R. S. Pathak notes that "By removing Sumi prematurely from the fictional scene, the novelist had denied herself the opportunity of bringing in the important issue of women's economic empowerment" (Pathak 106). No doubt, Sumi dies but before that she has achieved everything which is almost difficult for an ordinary woman in this male- dominated society to accomplish. Parsanna Sree appreciates Sumi for her courage that helps her overcome all odds in her life:

Modern and liberal in outlook, Sumi, defies the outdated social opinion and orthodox treatment of a woman subjected to desertion by her husband. She has the courage to rise above the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliations and frustrations. She has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bond without venting ill-feeling. (Sree 118)

Sumi, thus moved on in life without making any compromises with her dignity and individuality intact. She comes a long way from her predecessors like Saru, Jaya and Indu for whom marriage is the most important event in their life. They feared failure in marital relationships and finally went back to their spouses with a relatively mature understanding. Urmi comparatively shows an inimitable sense of fortitude even when her husband deserts her and reaches a stage of self- sufficiency, self- fulfillment and self-actualization in Maslow's sense.

Sumi evolves from utter desolation and bitterness caused by patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. Sumi thus comes a long way from Indu, Jaya, and Saru for whom marriage is the most important event in life. She is confident of her capabilities to make choices and assume control over her life. After Gopal deserts her, Sumi does not show any signs of outward distress nor does she grieve absurdly; she rather plans how to shoulder the responsibilities that have

come upon her. She wants to give the best to her teenage daughters namely Aru, Charu and Seema. Initially she takes up a temporary job and gets a permanent job later in residential school. She understands every single nuance of Gopal's decision of walking out on them and therefore sets him free. On account of her mellowness and mature understanding of interpersonal relationships, Sumi does not harbor any rancor against Gopal who meets her as a good friend after he has left. She does not intend to seek any explanation from him. Sumi gradually emancipates herself as an independent woman, but her premature death snatches from her the opportunity to become financially independent. Had she lived for a longer while, she would certainly have actualized her potential to the fullest.

Deshpande's novels present the contemporary woman's struggle to define and attain an autonomous self-hood. Her protagonists are not frozen in time; they rather grow, evolve and change with the flux of life. Attainment of "selfhood" is her primary focus in most of her fictional ventures as Jasbir Jain observes: "Deshpande's novels are all about growing up—not through an adolescent period, but growing up into selfhood" (Jain 264). As such, Deshpande's focus is self-realization on the part of her protagonists who are women embedded in real life situations.

Most of the women in Deshpande's fiction have to grapple with traditional and conventional clutches. But once they get the opportunity to move out of the traditional environment which tames and chokes them thereby impeding their growth, they have the capacity to confront the outer world and negotiate it with a new vision after learning from their sufferings and diverse range of experiences in a patriarchal setup. In almost all the novels, the protagonists return to their parental home (or a home away from where they live) which proves to be a blessing in disguise. Here they introspect, contemplate and relive their past via recapitulating their lived past, and it enables them to develop a better understanding of their life in the present. Jasbir Jain pertinently remarks:

"Homecomings signify a return to the past, to the world of memories. They also mark a still point in time where individuals are trying to take a stock of their lives and arc involved in some measure in an observer- status, where, through the act of return, they begin a process of dissection. The past is very important for these characters. They begin to see how it has influenced their decisions and responses, and how, no matter how much they exclude themselves from it, it impinges on their lives. (Jain 124)

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