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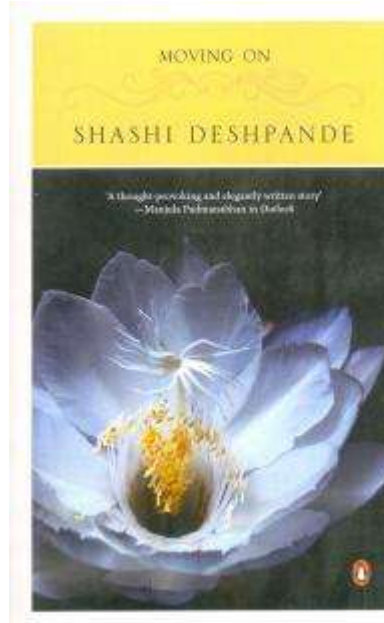
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Different Phases of Women in Shashi Deshpande's Novel *Moving On*

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Abstract

The Indian society has gone through a lot of changes in recent times regarding women's position. New situations demand women's active participation in various roles. While making choices women experience various problems, which create opportunity for women to transcend their traditional role. This is well captured by Indian women writers and portrayed in their novels. The present paper is motivated by such prevailing conditions and particularly focuses on the developmental phases of women in Shashi Deshpande's novel, *Moving On* (2004) (here after referred to as M.O).

Introduction



Shashi Deshpande

Courtesy: <http://www.penguinbooksindia.com/en/content/shashi-deshpande>

Shashi Deshpande as a writer takes it as her concern to set a direction for the modern Indian women to gain confidence to make her own choices. She can at best be called an articulator of women who are caught at the crossroads of change in a society, which is under going the birth pangs of transition from tradition to modernity. Her attempt to give an honest portrayal of changes in women's position with all their sufferings, disappointments and frustrations makes her novel unique. She concentrates on four major issues that are indispensable for the liberation of woman: education, financial dependence, control over her sexuality and the moral choice.

Moving On

The novel, *Moving On*, taken for analysis here, is in many ways, a departure from her earlier novels. The paper analyses how Shashi Deshpande's women characters like Gayatri, Mai, grandmother, Jiji and Sachi portray the developmental phases of women at the turn of twenty-first century. Deshpande also examines the environment and the negative factors in their environment that incapacitates the Indian women's efforts towards empowerment. The analysis would elucidate this fact.

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Before Independence

For a long time, women were not treated equally and considered only as secondary to men. Baba's grandmother is portrayed as a typical example of the status of Indian women before independence. Her helpless situation is clearly portrayed when her son who was expected to enhance the family's prestige with his foreign degree came back not only as a Gandhian but also decided to marry a Harijan girl.

His father threatened, his mother wept, the family was in turmoil, but my father remained firm. He walked out There was a complete severance between my father and his family; not even his mother could find any excuse for what he had done (*M.O*: 6).

Baba's father married an orphan Harijan girl, but he was bound by convention which did not encourage men to address their wives by name. There were also other traditional ways in which deterred women from developing their individuality.

While this situation continues even in today in most parts of the country, Indian Independence has brought with it many changes among various classes of people, especially in towns and cities in India.

After Independence

Even after independence women had to go by the dictum of traditional norms. Though Gayatri and Mai had their own individuality in thinking, society suppressed their feelings and they had to be part of the familial bonds. Mai and Gayatri experienced the power of freedom because their father brought them up imbibing in them a desire for freedom.

"The greater freedom our father permitted us made it possible for us to have a mixed group of boys and girls" (*M.O*: 9).

In this changing situation, where chaos is created between traditional expectations and new challenges in the role performances of women, Gayatri opts for the traditional expectations. Gayatri decides to quit her education for her husband's family. Though she receives support from parental home as well as her husband she denies all freedom for herself and decides herself to perform her role as a

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tradition-bound “good” wife and a “good” daughter-in-law. Gayatri, unlike Baba’s grandmother, comes out with her desires, making positive sign towards her self as individual.

Unlike Gayatri, Mai, by her writings, comes out of her daily chores and develops her contact with the reading public. Among Mai and Baba, Baba was the admirer and she was the one who let him admire her. He always behaved as,

“I am the master in my house and I have wife’s permission to say so” (*M.O*: 26).

Mai’s profession did not affect her family routine. Her boldness and thirst for freedom portrays her as being caught in the roads of change in a society, which is undergoing the birth pangs of transition from tradition to modernity. She tries to unshackle herself from the centuries of bondage to social norms and pre-ordained roles. Through Mai’s character Deshpande portrays that women have the capacity to determine their priorities for self-discovery and still weave the fabric of family harmony. After Mai’s death, Baba proved to be a man of emptiness, in the world of nothingness.

“Yet without her I was incomplete” (*M.O*: 112).

Accordingly through the characters of Gayatri and Mai, Deshpande shows that, even after independence, the impact of society and tradition influenced them much on their individuality.

At the Turn of Twenty-First Century

At the turn of the twenty-first century Jiji seems to go by Deshpande’s vision that women must assert. They must not succumb to the pressures of patriarchy in the domestic arena. Jiji disowns a ritualistic and tradition-bound life in order to explore her true self concerned with a woman’s external quest for an authentic selfhood and understanding of the existential problems of life. She once decides her future, stays firm even when it was against her parents wish. Transcending her traditional role is only to redefine a new identity.

Jiji is the eldest child of Mai and Baba. Her real name is Manjari Ahuja. Her life before marriage with her parents is full of bliss and contentment. Jiji’s marriage with Shyam makes her position in the family upside down.

”But that Jiji was part of the ‘Baba-Mai-Malu-and-I’ entity. Once that disappeared, the old Jiji vanished too” (*M.O*: 40).

Neglecting all the support of the family she decides her own life at the displeasure of her parents. She never surrenders herself to fate and stands all alone.”Yet, I wanted Shyam too, Shyam above all

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things, Shyam more than anyone else” (*M.O*: 99). Though Mai disagrees she remains rigid in her verdict. Even after Shyam’s death she does not accept any support from her parents, and manages to live alone and to take care of her own children.

Following Baba’s death there was only blankness in her life. In the quest for survival she says, “Yes, I want to live” (*M.O*: 167). She says that she has never regretted for anything in her life. “You’ll regret it, Baba said. I never did, no never. There’s at least this left among the ruins: I never regretted anything” (*M.O*: 235). Even when Raja desires to marry Jiji, she decides never to go into the situation of marriage again, staking everything, her life and her future. In the journey into herself to a conclusion, she learns to free herself of guilt, shame, humiliation and she is also initiated into the mystery of human existence.

Jiji perceives marriage as an alternative to the bondage imposed by parental family and when opting for marriage, she realizes that one restrictive setup is replaced by another. The analysis of the self enables her to understand and solve her problems. She finally frees herself from the centuries of bondage to social norms and pre-ordained roles. She takes a lesson out of the life and finds solace for her own problems. Being responsible for their actions and courage to face the eventualities in the face of change characterize the modern women in Deshpande’s novel.

Conclusion

Deshpande with her women characters present that every individual is a full-fledged human being full of potential. With the support of family and men, these skills which remained mute without any encouragement could come out and determine a new identity. After breaking from traditional roles, women characters engage in creating a new self-hood. Thus, the new space that Shashi Deshpande has created gives ample scope for Indian women to assert their self, find their identity, extend their compassion to the society, excel in performances and enjoy the freedom and responsibility.

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