

The defensive facade and True self – Is the transformation real ? Exploring the prominent characters of Shashi Deshpande

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines the selected novels of Shashi Deshpande under the clinical dimension of British psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott's psychoanalytic premises. The research is done on the integration of psychology, gender studies and Indian literature. Though early studies have explored the extension of both interdisciplinary realms, no integrative work has focused on Winnicottian view of Selfhood and woman in literature. Therefore, there is a need to address the actual psychological transformation that occurs in the personas of literatures in Winnicottian perspective. Postmodern writings especially Indian discourse in English literature also demonstrates an exemplary responsiveness to self-complexity. A psychoanalytic explanation is crucial to analyze the plot construction as well as its developmental conceptualization. Winnicottian framework to the present study attributes a clinical sensitivity over the narrative and thematic dimensions of self-experience. Winnicott's concept of self and transitional space has more application to the gender issue of woman in its base of psychological structure.

The tension between the liberating and constraining views of selfhood is exemplified by the living dynamic Indian woman writer, Shashi Deshpande to create an entire body of fiction. Her writings are based not only on observations of external behavior but also on Deshpande. The study attempts to illustrate a thematic and theoretical framework of the the internal journey of feminine sensibilities. The inner turmoil of a woman resulted as a clash between her own knowledge and social reality is portrayed as major theme in the works of Shashi 'struggled self' of woman in between her psychological growth and societal constraints. It is a straight journey into the psyche of Indian women characters that are torn by the discord between the individual and the surrounding. In the scenario, the present study is primarily concerned upon the female protagonists of Deshpande's selected novels that include Indu in 'Roots and Shadows'; Saru in 'The Dark Holds No Terror'; Jaya in 'That Long Silence'; Sumi in 'A Matter of Time' and Urmila in 'The Binding Vine' respectively.

TRUE SELF, FALSE SELF – A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

True and false self are concepts introduced into psychoanalysis in 1960 by D.W.Winnicott. The 'buried True self' as termed by Winnicott is the authentic spontaneous self, aware and comfortable with his or her uniqueness. It gives a feeling of being alive or having a real self. Though the belief in

the notion of True self holds great popularity in Indian culture, the quest for it is often misguided and limiting. The True Self is rooted from early infancy in the experience of being alive, including blood pumping and lungs breathing. Out of it, the baby creates a sense of reality, a sense that life is worth living. The baby's spontaneous, nonverbal gestures derive from that instinctual sense, and if responded to by the mother, become the basis for the continuing development of the True Self. The infant's spontaneity was in danger of being encroached on by the need for compliance with the parents' wishes or expectations. The result for Winnicott is the creation of False Self, where other people's expectations can become of overriding importance. It contradicts the original sense of self, the one connected to the very roots of one's being. The danger he saw was that "through this False Self, the infant builds up a false set of relationships, and by means of introjections even attains a show of being real", while in fact merely concealing a barren emptiness behind an independent-seeming façade. The false self is composed of the mother's expectations with which the infant identifies to survive, always at the cost of the development of the true self. As a result, the infant perceives his or her needs, wants, and desires as unacceptable and bad. The false self protects the infant from the internalized bad objects by over-identifying with the good objects in a compensatory manner.

TRANSITIONAL SPACE

Winnicott states the false self as a care taker for the True self which is frozen and goes into hiding. The False self-mode of living is impoverished, characterised by compliance, imitation, inauthenticity, unaliveness, neglect of psychosomatic existence. Transitional space allows for the expression of true self. The false self is a result of the lack of transitional space. Hence transitional space is called as an adequate holding environment - psychological space within which the self-experiments fantasy and reality. It gives the individual, the capacity to be alone. It is the place creativity comes from. It takes place as the self emerges through the process of internalising the presence of an emotionally attuned but non-demanding other. It is the third area where new objects or new models of relationships are internalised in place of old ones. The ultimate intra and inter personal transformation occurs in transitional space. It is a stage between the "hallucinatory omnipotence" of the individual and "objective reality". (Greenberg & Mitchell. 1983)

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS IN BRIEF

The section presents theoretical understanding of Shashi Deshpande's protagonists using concepts from Winnicott's true and false self. The selected concepts are used to explore psychological transformations that occur in the transitional space. Winnicott's conceptualisation of selfhood is applied to analyse how protagonists' traumatic experiences initiates the process of self discovery and leads to their fresh perception of life.

Shashi Deshpande portrays in her works, modern, educated and career-oriented middle class women who are sensitive to the changing time and situations. They are aware of the social and cultural disabilities to which they are subjected in the male-dominated society. They want to rebel against them in search for freedom and identity, but they find themselves up against well-established social inertia. Deshpande's women stand at the cross-roads of traditions. They seek change, but within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them but merely to make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Shashi Deshpande poignantly expresses the true and false self of her protagonists who are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role in society. They challenge their victimisation and seek a new balance of power in an intermediate area between the true self and false self

Indu in Shashi Despande's first published novel, *Roots and Shadows*, is one who in her quest to be independent, realises that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. The novelist exposes the absurdity of rituals and customs which only helps to perpetuate the protagonist's constructed false self. Though her fragment of true self remain inaccessible and unknown to the outside world, it shows how a woman grows between a transition of 'self-surrender' to assert her newly emerged identity.

Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the representative of middle-class working women in modern India, rebelling against traditions but ultimately trying to compromise her true self with existing reality. She realises that escapism is never a solution when she undergoes a trauma in her married life. She succeeds in discovering her true self through her profession. Her promise of reconciliation with her husband is not her defeat or submission but her newfound confidence to confront reality.

Jaya in 'That Long Silence' is a modern woman rooted in tradition and at the same time experience an impulsive desire to be emancipated. In order to fulfil her roles as wife and mother, she transforms with her false self to be a stereo-typed house wife always trying to please her husband. But slowly at a transitional phase, she begins to realise the victimisation of her true self that shattered her individuality. Accordingly, she decides that she will live afterwards without sacrificing her real self.

If Indu, Saru and Jaya are involved in fighting their own battles, Urmila of 'The Binding Vine' is ahead of them by her endeavours to help other women. She is an independent individual from the beginning with an identity of her own. Urmila passes through the lives of many poor and downtrodden women and draws society's attention to her protest. She represents the protagonist who transforms herself into a non-victim before the society victimises her. She has already found the pleasure of her true self and enables other suffered woman to cross the transition between false and true self.

Sumi of *A Matter of Time* gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from the utter desolation and trauma of being a deserted wife. Unlike any other in her place, she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion, instead of making her an emotional wreck, has surprisingly brought out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent and thereby, revives her creativity at the most comfortable transitional area of herself.

The concepts of the true and false self are used to explain the subjective experience of the loss and discovery of the self in the protagonists of selected novels. Winnicott argued that the core self must be protected at all costs. Otherwise, the self's psychic reality gets fragmented and the individual experiences difficulty feeling grounded in his or her body. From examples of mentioned protagonists, it is clear that true self is not exposed to the outside world but remains sacred and hidden. The false self is considered to be a part of true self created to protect to the true self. It is otherwise an illusion of personal existence. All the five women of Shashi Despande passes across the illusionary false self before they develops their own transitional realm. Winnicott called this space the transitional space, potential space or the third area of living. It is a hypothetical area, because it does not exist in reality. It is not part of the person's internal world nor is it part of the external, observable, measurable reality. It is an "intermediate area of experiencing, a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate but inter-related" (Winnicott, 1992).

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