

**REFRAMING GREAT DISCOVERIES : READING WOMEN'S DILEMMA
THROUGH AMULYA MALLADI'S *A BREATH OF FRESH AIR* AND
SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *A MATTER OF TIME***

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Abstract

Indian writing in English refers to the works written in the English language by the Indians. The themes are many and varied. Majority of the works focus on the contemporary issues. The works taken for analysis are Amulya Malladi's *A Breath of Fresh Air* and Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*. Amulya Malladi was born in 1974 and *A Breath of Fresh Air* was published in 2002. It talks of the aftermath of the Bhopal gas tragedy portraying how the protagonist encounters confusions when she is faced with certain unexpected calamities caused by human beings. Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 and *A Matter of Time* was published in 1996. The novel projects the sufferings of the female protagonist named Sumi and explains her stand during her period of dilemma with her three daughters after the head of the family, Gopal walks out of them. Both the novels portray that women's stand in the familial affairs has the power to alternate situations, if only they have the capacity to reframe their ideas. It also provides a clear-cut picture that when women are unable to take matters in their own hands, they lead a tearful future for the rest of their life.

Keywords

Unexpected Calamities, Familial Affairs, Reframed Ideas

Full Paper

Indian English fiction from the beginning to the present day is dealing with the problems related to the effect of changes in women's life and the problems faced by them in various areas. The writer's picture the reality of the present scenario that suppression and marginalization are very common in the present day independent India. The main issue arises when men and women were expected to share the available opportunities with responsibility and when this responsibility is trampled off by the other.

Amulya Malladi was born in 1974 in Sager, Madhya Pradesh, India. She has a M.A in Journalism and has lived all over the country from the Himalayan foothills to the Southern city of Madras. Some of her famous novels are *A Breath of Fresh Air* , *The Mango Season*, *Song of the Cuckoo Bird* and *The Sound of Language*.

A Breath of Fresh Air was published in 2002. The novel talks of a real incident named Bhopal gas tragedy and the sufferings faced by the local public after inhaling the terrific gas. The heroine of the novel, Anjali alias Anju suffers due to the effect of the gas. Here, the plight of her affected son, Amar, her discovery of various realities and her technique of reframing incidents at a huge cost leading to the death of her only son, Amar are the themes of the novel.

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, Karnataka. Her novels reflect an on-going process of problematic life's conflicts, triumphs and tragedies. She is regarded as a feminist writer by the present day society. She concentrates on themes like man-woman relationship, human desire, body and gender issues, rebellion and protest. Some of her famous novels are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, *That Long Silence*, *Small Remedies* and *A Matter of Time*.

A Matter of Time was published in 1996. It pictures the pitiable plight of a woman who is matured in matters related to marriage than her contemporaries. When she was deserted at a very young age by her husband, she has three daughters. Yet she gathers herself, becomes self-independent and takes matters in her own hands, thereby reframing her life through her discoveries from her experiences. The story revolves around a character named Sumi who though deserted by her husband, pressured due

to patriarchal pressure and family responsibilities, discovers the necessities and comes out victoriously from her dilemma with mere courage and independent spirit.

In Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*, the protagonist Sumi struggles hard to come up in pace with the expectations of the society. When the novel opens, Gopal has deserted his wife, Sumi along with their three daughters. Sumi tries to find out the reason for his desertion but couldn't recognize any of her faults and she understands that she was deserted for no particular reason. She is left in a dilemma to contemplate of the past days when they are in love with one another, and brings to memory his words of desertion. He was senior to her and in the past even when they are in love with the other, Gopal has instructed Sumi that, after their marriage if any one of the partners feel dissatisfied even for no reason, the other should not question the decision of breaking off the relationship. Moreover, the disturbed Sumi is of the opinion that the mistake is in the attitude of Gopal, and he too indirectly asserts her idea.

A wife is very much dependent on her husband and his absence makes her to feel miserable. Even in the present days, her fate is the same. A woman's fate is casually measured through her marital status. Normally, in all societies, a woman is respected only if she has a husband, despite the innumerable wives he has, his cruel treatment or his dead silence with his wife. The society is of the opinion that it is more than enough if the couples live together under one roof just for name sake. According to them, there is nothing in a woman if she does not have a husband. Even the women living nearby question her about the life of a woman in the absence of her husband. When Sumi thinks of her plight in relation to the ideals of the society, she is able to remember the words of an old woman saying:

What is a woman without a husband? It is enough to have a husband, and never mind the fact that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifehood makes up for everything, for the deprivation of a man's love? (167)

Hearing these words, she finds out that her life situations are controversial with the demands of the society. She tries to reframe herself and hence she faces the anguish of a deserted wife and the trauma of an isolated partner. Even at the age of forty, she feels alone, helpless and in a dilemma. Moreover, she discovers that her daughter, Aru was blaming her of taking the relationship with her father so casually that lead to her father's desertion and tries to alter it. At this juncture, she discovers that the society expects women to depend upon a male from her birth till death. Her situation can be compared with the opinion of Clarissa Bader about the society's expectation on a woman through *Women in Ancient India* where she says:

During childhood, a female must be dependent upon her father, during
Youth upon her husband; husband being dead, upon her sons; if she
Has no sons, upon the near kinsmen of her husband; in default, upon
The sovereign supreme; as an authority, woman must never govern
Herself as she like. Everyone can question a female, irrespective of
Their relationships. (123)

Eventhough she, in a dilemma, stands helpless, reacts in a normal manner. She doesn't scream out her agony openly. This behavior portrays that she doesn't need other's pity and is in a stable mindset that her life will move further, atleast for the sake of her three teenaged daughters. Thus, as a mother she reframes her self - discovery. Moreover, she reframes herself when she reminiscences the past days of her husband's tone when he announces his decision to abandon her forever and concludes that he was clear, calm and very serious. Keerthi Ramachandra in her book, *Of Fate and Eternity* comments that:

Sumi's marriage was a failure and had mentally affected her in an unexpected condition. No doubt that Gopal's act of desertion and absence leaves her in a state of frustration and vast emptiness. From the depth of her despair, she struggles hard to transform her emptiness

into a peculiar meaning in order to refine her identity. She does not become a passive person but an active agent. As a wife, Sumi does not question the man, her oppressor – Gopal. (21)

After Gopal's desertion, she reframes herself and indulges in new habits. She hides her dilemma when she holds her two older daughters when they come together thereby gaining and giving off mutual comfort to each other. She also smoothens their hair with her hands but she doesn't show any sign of distress openly. She discovers and tries to understand her husband's reason for desertion that he had to face the fear of family responsibilities. She often remembers that she was eighteen years old and Gopal was twenty six years old when they were in love only after his desertion. She says that she is conscious of his strange habit developments and as she knew the exact time from which he started to move away from her, she was unable to stop him as she was in a dilemma. Finally she develops her interest only in getting on with her life and finding a meaningful existence on her own.

After his desertion, one day she meets him accidentally at the house of one of his students, but she has no feelings for him. Her dilemma sublimates and she feels that she cannot live with her husband again as their lives had already moved apart into two different spheres. She puts forth her feelings towards the end that:

All these lives . . . spell out the actuality of their separation. We can never be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged, they now move separately, two different streams. (85).

Later, discovering her dilemma, reframing her mindset, she takes up her job as a school teacher to support her family and when she had acquired the capacity to set things alright, she dies in an accident. But, in Amulya Malladi's *A Breath of Fresh*

Air, the protagonist Anjali finds out the happenings within the family and tries to replace them alone. When the novel opens, Anjali was waiting at the railway station for her husband in vain and this leads to a catastrophe. She doesn't understand things, but when similar crisis repeats, she strives to face the reality. After being discharged from the hospital, she understands her husband's illegitimate affair with Bela Chaudhary and considers the outcome of the happenings. The result is that she alters the peaceful life of all the characters. After discovering certain incidents, she is in a dilemma, yet comes out of them in anger. Her anger especially towards her first husband and her parents who refuse to accept her second marriage forces her unconsciously to lash out hardy at the people who abuse her, be it her own parents and thereby expresses her entrapment openly.

Anjali, unlike Sumi expresses more amount of dilemma even for smaller issues. This is evident even in the opening point of the novel. When a Sardarji driving a taxi offers her a lift without her demand, her mind discovers that something was wrong and she refuses to accept his offer outrightly. But, she reframes her decision within a fraction of a second when she senses that something is wrong with the air as she felt a sharp pain, similar to the breathing of chilli powder in her lungs. Hence, she accepts his offer of travelling in his taxi without a definite second thought. When she is struck up in a traffic jam, she encounters dilemma once again and tries to reframe it. But, when she feels sure that she could not escape from her present situation, she ponders of her husband's mistake once again. She says:

As I struggled to stay alive, a new fear gripped me. Was my husband caught in this? I shuddered at the thought and prayed he had indeed forgotten to pick me up. But if he had come and picked me up when my train arrived two hours ago, we would have been safe. I would have been safe. (5)

At her home too, she encounters dilemma, when she was forced to answer Komal, her husband's sister. She was brought inside the house without Anjali's permission and this creates a sense of discomfort within her but she couldn't express

it openly. Her dilemma increases when she was questioned by Komal regarding her relationship with her former husband and she desires to throw a knife at her, but she reframed her idea as her husband approached. Similarly, she was struck up with various sorts of confusions when she is forced to meet her ex-husband at school without prior permission. In her tensed state of mind, she is unable to behave as per her expectations. Her behavior towards her former husband is described as:

I was shaking with anger and relief. He had apologized, and if i had not been caught so off guard, I would have demanded what he was voluntarily apologizing for. I was sorry, too . Sorry that it was such a miserable excuse for a man. Sorry that I had loved him once and really sorry that I had ever been married to him. (35)

In *Social Problems in Major Indian Works : An Introduction* R.K.Dhawan opines that traumatic effect of accidents happening in one's life, could create severe effects like violent mood swings, amnesias and even partial paralysis of the body. According to him:

In traumatic neurosis . . . the operative cause of the illness is not the trifling physical injury but the effect of fright – the physical trauma Any experience which calls up distressing effects – such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain may operate as a trauma of this kind. (498)

When the novel ends, Anjali was unable to reframe her discoveries and hence she develops symptoms related to psychological disorder and as a result when she is left to take care of her only son, Amar she removes the tubes connecting her son to the life-saving machine and kills him intentionally. Both the novels thus portray that discoveries of certain incidents are essential in life and reframing them accordingly with care may alter women's dilemma to a greater extent.

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