

Awakening of Spiritual Intelligence in the Women Protagonists of Shashi Deshpande and its Significance in Life

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Spiritual Intelligence and how it is awakened in the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande through self-discovery is discussed in the paper. Self-awareness, the inner and outer quiet as a way of opening themselves to receive creative insights, non-conformity, acceptance of misfortunes with fortitude, and living with equanimity are some of the principles of Spiritual Intelligence found among the women of Shashi Deshpande. In the modern world when a lot of cultural anomalies are present in the society, the culturally rooted wholistic Awakened Feminism opposed to the militant western feminism proposed by Shashi Deshpande is very relevant. Towards the end, all women with an enlightened awakening reconcile with families and events. They also resolve to work in the situation not out of ignorance but out of greater understanding.

KEYWORDS

Shashi Deshpande; Spiritual Intelligence; Culture, Feminism; Self-discovery; Awaken.

In recent years, spiritual intelligence has emerged as a controversial subject and a popular buzzword. How this concept of spiritual intelligence is awakened in the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande and its relevance in today's context is our point of discussion here. First of all, the term spiritual intelligence and how it is vital to life and crucial to finding meaning and satisfaction in life is to be clarified. The history of the term spiritual intelligence begins with the theory of Multiple Intelligence (MI) put forth by Howard Gardener¹, Professor of cognition and education at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

Robert A. Emmons another psychologist applied Gardener's criteria of identifying intelligence and promoted SI as a distinct intelligence². For Emmons, thinking of spirituality as intelligence helps refute those who view religion as inherently irrational and emphasizes the relevance of spirituality and its importance for mental health and subjective well-being.

Dr. Cynthia Devis defines spiritual intelligence thus:

Spiritual Intelligence is the ultimate way of knowing. We use it to envision unrealized possibilities and to transcend the methodical plod of life. We use it also to

understand pain, answer the basic philosophical questions about life, and find meaning both temporally and existentially (3)

According to Dr. Valdghan, a clinical psychologist:

Spiritual Intelligence goes beyond psychological development. In addition to self-awareness, it implies awareness of our relationship to the transcendent, to each other, to the earth, and to all beings. Working as a psychotherapist, my impression is that Spiritual Intelligence opens the heart, illuminates the mind, and inspires the soul, connecting the individual human psyche to the underlying ground of being. Spiritual Intelligence can be developed with practice and can help a person distinguish reality from illusion. It may be expressed in any culture as love, wisdom, and service... Spiritual Intelligence can also help a person discover a hidden wellspring of love and joy beneath the stress and turmoil of everyday life... (4)

From the above-said definitions, psychologists arrive at some of the following practical applications of Spiritual Intelligence:

- Acceptance of adversity rather than raging against it. Not resorting to blame, rationalizing, anger, denial, and other typical defense mechanisms.
- Using materials preciously and avoiding waste, recycling, reusing things wherever possible, reducing waste, and repairing things instead of replacing them.
- Being grateful for everything including adversity.
- Having the capacity to go with the ego's habitual tendency or do something different.

- Apologizing for one's mistake and making amends wherever possible.
- Seeing the inherent beauty of everything and everyone.
- Having a positive attitude.
- Treating everyone and everything with compassion and gratitude including tools and machines.
- Leaving every place, you go better than you found it.
- Respect for the environment and bio-diversity as having inherent as well as practical value (5)

It is very clear from the above-discussed facts that a peaceful human life is possible with the help of high SQ. Based on these concepts, we can consider Shashi Deshpande's novels.

In all the novels of Shashi Deshpande, the Spiritual elements are interwoven and towards the end in a very subtle way the novels are brought to a happy ending. Though on the surface level it looks as if Shashi Deshpande's novels are categorized as women's quest for identity and ultimate self-discovery, a careful study of the novels would lead us to something more. The author does not stop with mere identity crises or women's self-discovery. She brings to light the women's understanding of the culture in which she lives and analyzes the problem to make a positive decision to live in harmony with family, neighborhood, and society at large. This decision comes out of mature introspection, willpower, and inner stamina. This inner strength is a by-product of an awakened self-consciousness that springs from a sound mental and spiritual well-being that we call Spiritual Intelligence.

Shashi Deshpande's women gradually transcend from self-discovery to spiritual awareness and slowly become women endowed with a higher level of SQ. In *Roots and shadows (RS)*, Indu, the heroine of the novel seeks complete freedom. Her baffled longing to achieve complete personhood is explicitly

suggested: "This is the real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself" (RS34).

The earnestness for freedom comes from a mature soul. Only real freedom liberates human beings from pain and suffering.

According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one's conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as in action. This awareness of her conscience dawns on her when she is in her ancestral house. The responsibilities, fears, and frustrations do not touch her. The turmoil and distaste that had filled her slowly begins to seep out of her. She is viewed as an assertive woman with an emerging new self. Through Narren's preaching of detachment, she is able to rebuild her lost vision. She suddenly realizes what she lacks. "I knew in that instant what it was that my life had lacked. It was the quality of courage" (RS 150)

A new awareness dissented on her and with an enlightened awakening, she reconciles with her family and life.

Awareness of one's own mistakes is a noble trait of Spiritual Intelligence. Indu realizes her shortcomings. She also apologizes for her mistakes. Making amends wherever possible, Indu critically contemplated the nature of existence, reality, and love relationships and achieves transcendental awareness. Hence, she goes beyond the discovery of self to blossom as a spiritually intelligent person.

In the novel *The Matter of Time*, we find two characters Aru and Kalyani. We find special bondage between them. Aru exclaims over her grandmother's swollen feet and asks her to show them to a doctor. She gets a basin of water to immerse her feet in and gets herself a cup of coffee. Life is made pleasant by these little acts of love. When the news of Sumi's death comes, it is Aru who rushes to Kalyani and kneeling by her huddled body says: "Anna, I'm here, I'm your daughter, Amma, I'm your son. I'm here with you." (MT 233)

Shashi Deshpande makes her character Aru attain a transcendence process. Aru goes beyond her separate egoist self into an inter-connected whole view, including a holistic relationship. Through empathy, compassion, and loving-kindness she is oriented toward holistic personhood of high spiritual Nature.

It is because of Aru and Kalyani and the partnership that they have forged, and the strength with which they face suffering that the novel ends on a note of hope. The last image on which the novelist closes her story is not of Sumi's death but of Aru and Kalyani standing together at the door and the 'Smile of encouragement' that they have for Gopal.

What is most striking at the very beginning of the novel is how Sumi reacts to Gopal's desertion. There is none of the typical ranting and raving. Sumi is proud and defiant. She does not want anyone's pity. The fact that she realizes, that life must go on and she must be strong for the sake of her daughters, is reiterated throughout the novel.

Even in the face of extreme calamity, Sumi faces life with courage and hope. This amounts to her high level of spiritual Intelligence. Gopal walks out on her for reasons which he cannot understand. Sumi returns with her three daughters Aru, Charu, and Seema to the shelter of the Big House where her parents Kalyani and Sripathi live in a strangely oppressive silence. They have not spoken to each other for thirty-five years. There is a distinct parallel between Sripathi's desertion of Kalyani and Gopal's desertion of Sumi. But what is significant is that without the men the women come to terms with their own and show the potential to shed the dependency syndrome. But Gopal's desertion is not just a tragedy. For Sumi and her daughters, it is also a shame and a disgrace. There is a social stigma that they now have to bear. Even though others think that she takes Gopal's desertion Sumi undergoes her kind of suffering and she

learns to cope with fortitude. "It takes time to get used to sharing your life with another person, now I have got used to being alone." (MT23)

Sumi tries even to persuade Aru to ignore what her father Gopal has done. "Do you want to punish him, Aru? I don't; I'm not interested. I just want to get on with my life. Let him go Aru, just let him go. This is not good for you." (MT61)

This is a mature way of treating a problem. Sumi does not want to take revenge or put Gopal in an embarrassing situation. Instead, she encourages her daughter Aru to make a mature decision. This is only possible for a woman having high Spiritual Intelligence.

Shashi Deshpande not only forthrightly articulates a thematic and technical maturity but also effectively communicates an intensely apprehended Feminine Sensibility. She has injected a new consciousness, offered a varied interpretation of imperishable Indian values as well as highlighted our cultural heritage. She added a new depth, a new dimension to Indian English fiction. This new dimension we call Spiritual Intelligence.

The woman protagonists in her novels achieve, "Personhood" yet do not negate the family or the society. They 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."

They no doubt discover themselves but the quest does not end there. It could be observed that they are not feminists in the first stage but the second. The second stage cannot be viewed in terms of the family, new terms with love and work. It is a kind of enlightened reintegration into the society where they find their voices; no longer being "other-directed" (9). Hence, she advocates a culturally-rooted holistic and Awakened Feminism as opposed to the militant western Feminism.

Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, about not being married or not having children, etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, and our experiences. And I feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it. (10)

Yes; This is Shashi Deshpande's concept of Feminism.

Deshpande feels that women have tremendous inner strength, but so much of that strength is used up in merely enduring. Her idea of feminism is best summed up in her words: "For me, feminism is translating what is used up in endurance into something positive: a real strength" (11). This strength is Spiritual Intelligence.

Shashi Deshpande in one of her interviews talks about the basic goodness of human beings. Perhaps her faith in the basic goodness of all human beings makes her create her protagonist endowed with a high Quota of Spiritual Intelligence. Shashi Deshpande talks about dealing with new landscapes of love and goodness in her novel *In the Country of Deceit*, She says:

Sometime during the writing of the novel, I realized that I have been exploring the idea of love in all my novels. Different kinds of love; the different faces of love. I also find myself increasingly interested in the idea of goodness in human beings. The emphasis today, perhaps because of the times, is on violence, on evil. Goodness, when it is written about, is made to seem like weakness. We shy away from

the very word. We speak of values instead. Nevertheless, goodness is real. It exists - not only in people like Bapu or Mother Teresa but in ordinary people. It is these people who make life worth living. So, whether it is Joe in *Small Remedies*, Kalyani in *A Matter of Time*, Akka in *The Binding Vine*, or Gayatri in *Moving On*, they make life possible for others. (12)

Hence it is her belief in the basic goodness of all human beings that make her carve her characters with such delicacy that makes them appear as human beings with a higher level of consciousness and we call it Spiritual Intelligence.

In the modern world, lots of cultural anomalies are present in society. This has led to divorce, misunderstanding, nuclear family, broken relationships, and individualism. Our basic goodness and rich cultural values are pushed to the background in the name of woman's liberation. This is one of the illusions and dangers of our modern society. Unless we are deeply rooted in our culture our lives will slowly disintegrate and lose meaning. By saying this I don't want to highlight once again the mythological figures like Sita and Savitri. We only want our women to be enlightened and awakened women with a high Quota of Spiritual Intelligence like Indu, Sumi, Jeya, and Aru who despite their limitations were able to transcend to a higher level of understanding, finding more meaning for life and relationships. This helps them to live in equanimity with the universe. Though our traditional women possessed a tremendous amount of inner strength to bear any amount of pain, suffering, and silent tortures. That strength was born out of ignorance, fear, and a fatalistic attitude. But Shashi Deshpande's women are Enlightened, culturally rooted, awakened to the realities of life, and make

decisions on their own. Their decisions are not out of their ignorance, inability, or submissiveness. They decide to analyze the situation, crossing all barriers of identity crisis and subordination.

Like all human beings, they also see themselves in the context in which they live and make the mature and best decisions possible. This is viable only when women are endowed with a high quota of Spiritual Intelligence. That is why we call Shashi Deshpande's Feminism as Enlightened Awakened Feminism.

Shashi Deshpande's women discover their real selves and transcend towards the expansion of self. They live a set of values and design a vision for their life. The amount of courage and fortitude they exhibit in times of misfortune brings out the higher self in them. They integrate seemingly conflicting trends or contradictory views and strive for the integration and wholeness of all things. They always derive meaning from pain, suffering, turmoil, and trauma. They express sincere love and compassion to all human beings and sympathize with the less fortunate.

Conclusion

Most of the woman protagonists of Shashi Deshpande towards the end find satisfaction in creative writing. Through self-reflection and introspection, they rejuvenate their inner self and emerge as New being. Though they are unable to find meaning in their roles as women, wives, mothers, and daughters, towards the end they find joy and meaning in their different roles. It is Spiritual Intelligence that makes Shashi Deshpande's women act more maturely and harmoniously. Some of the traits of Spiritual Intelligence like the spirit of equanimity, peaceful co-existence, understanding, and acceptance make the novels end on a positive note.

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