

Homogeneity of Bilateral Relationship between Theodore Dreiser and Shashi Deshpande's Women

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Abstract

The paper sheds light on how Dreiser and Deshpande's women characters build up various relationships. Man is considered to be a social being; every individual is related to one another in which the closest relationships are most often found with family and society. Human relationships are an integral process through which the individual's attitudes and works are combined or assimilated. Virtuous relationships are given much importance ever since human beings began to live together in groups. Each of the relationships requires diligences to nurture and maintain that gives ecstasy and satisfaction. Healthy relationships of the individuals rejuvenate the human spirits into a greater ecstasy.

Keywords: Relationship, Human Spirit, Feminity, Culture, Similarity, Trauma

Introduction

Family is the basic unit of every social organization and is the focal point of all discipline and moral education. Maintaining good affinity in the family becomes possible only because of individual autonomy and belongingness. Hillis Miller's classic formulation, "a novel is a structure of interpenetrating minds" and "interpersonal relations are the fundamental theme of fiction," (qtd in Philip 28) aptly suits this present research as every woman character in the select novels of Dreiser and Deshpande are being identified for the search for their space through associations. Their relationships have been annexed to formulations of age, gender, the private sphere-family and the association of the society and its values. Both the writers are more concerned with the exploration of various human relationships within the family and the society.

Interjection of Dreiser and Deshpande

Interpersonal relationships are formed and may vary as per the context of family, friendship, kinship and on the basis of social groups and culture. The values of the family set its basic tone. Family cultures vary greatly in their tolerance of differences. It has identifiable culture and is in a constant state of transition as each member moves through the cycles of life and the family itself moves from one stage of development to the next. This difference is evidently proved through the comparative study of Dreiser and Deshpande, who set backgrounds of their novels in America and in India respectively.

The American and Indian's way of maintaining relationships have immense diverseness. Maintaining family relations have dissimilitude that is traced between American and Indian culture. In Indian culture, the family values and relationships are given more prominence than Americans. Indians are more committed to their family whereas the Americans are more resolute to be themselves only. The Americans believe in dominating nature and controlling the environment around them. On the contrary, Indians believe in the harmony with nature.

The concept of marriage marks the greatest difference. In America, both men and women can choose their life partner and even break the proposal when they wish. Contrarily in India, the elders in the family choose the mate for their children. Each one of these aspects plays different roles in finding differences in relationship from one country to another. In the Indian context, once a girl gets married, husband takes complete control over her life. Even then she expects man to understand her. In the prevailing atmosphere not only men but also women look for better understanding of each other. Thus, the image of women throughout centuries got grounded in society and culture. John Gray is of the view:

. . . it emerges that men continue to expect women to think and react like men, and women expect men to feel and behave like women. Without a clear awareness of our differences, we do not take the time to understand and respect each other. We become demanding, resentful, judgmental and intolerant. (14)

People have been programmed by parents, by the culture they have grown up in and by their painful past experiences. Life of every being becomes more mechanical than being caring and affectionate recently. They are fettered with time coerce. Not much polarity exists between the life mode of rural and urban residents. This viable atmosphere of giving more importance to material comforts easily creates barrier in any relationship. Thus, integrating the new wisdom of having loving relationships is a new challenge task in this goal-oriented materialistic world.

Considering the relationships of the individuals, man – woman relationship is exceptional. Every

human being is born to experience the cosmos and tries to achieve some greatness. In the present day life, both men and women are of same status in their intelligence, views, approaches and responsibilities in social life. As Simone De Beauvoir rightly points out, “. . . man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; . . . she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her. He is the subject, he is the Absolute-She is the other” (23); the relationship of men and women seems to be a mysterious one.

Relationship for Betterment

Relationships seldom travel ambiguously. Humans depend on relationships every day to make lives better. Honest or immoral, everything comes into one's life through the chariot of relationship. When there is a lack of indulgence among people, misconception arises. Among family relationships, sibling relationship is considered to be distinctive which provide a constructive socialization throughout existence. The compassionate relationships children form with family members are essential for their prime development. Children's development is chiefly based on the parent – child relationship which is considered to be the major socializing influence on them. Gudykunst and Lee have posited: “The interaction between parents and children and interaction among the siblings is an important part of the study of family communication” (81). The sibling relationship is exclusive because it is the one family relationship that recurrently lasts forever. Siblings have penetrating as well as intricate relationship that perseveres over the life time.

Most children grow up in families with at least one brother or sister and there is an establishment of secure ties and personal adjustments with one another, though the relationship is conflictive. “Siblings are defined as those people who share parents, and therefore, on average, 50 percent of their genetic material” (Maynard 232). Moreover, the growing children feel that “the sibling relationship provides a positive socialization . . . throughout childhood and adolescence” (Volling 205). Literature plays a vital part in portraying siblings as teachers, caregivers, playmates and supporting figures. In fact, in South Asia, the great epics and legends exalt the

relationships among mythic siblings. The literary, mythological and scriptural texts of South Asia that depict sibling relationships include the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Mitakshara. People frequently refer to these models for ideal conduct, to resolve immediate problems and to socialize children.

“Sibship” plays an important role in the chosen works of Dreiser and Deshpande. They have portrayed the sibling context in a very sensible manner. It is mainly because Indians and Americans have created a strong bond for one another. Even blood relationship shatters through the powerful influence of money. Money buys comfort, support, and freedom of action, but it does not make people happy. Yet it does have a power to either make or break a relationship. The relationship of Carrie with her sister, Minnie in *Sister Carrie* is totally artificial. Carrie badly expects shelter from her sister until she gets a job and stands better. Dreiser views the situation thus: “Carrie paid her board, four dollars. Minnie had a quaver of conscience as she took it, but did not know how to explain to Hanson if she took less” (SC 57). Being her sister, if Minnie helps Carrie find a good job, she would get settled and pay her a board. There is no love lost among themselves.

The attitude of her sister and sister’s husband makes her think “What would they expect of her? She thinks that she would first need to get work and establish herself on a paying basis before she could think of having company of any sort” (SC 14). What Carrie expects from her sister is love and kindness. But Carrie hardly enjoys them. Hanson’s culture and his timidity prevent Carrie from being free. This may be because of their parents who never hold the responsibility of promoting the relationship between the siblings. It is the role of parents’ to guide them to make their relationship positive. Brenda K. Bryant notices, “Parents manage the sibling relationship, rather than siblings managing their own relationship. The sibling relationship is part of the constellation of family relationships, led by the parents” (233) whereas this sort of parental regulation on sibling relationship is not traced in by Dreiser in *Sister Carrie*.

Intricacies of Dreiser and Deshpande

When Carrie loses her job at the shoe factory she becomes penniless and an unwanted guest at her

sister’s house. Even when all her appeals at totally different places for a job are turned down, she never thinks about going home. She thinks it is wise to accept Drouet’s offer. And his promises of offering her the clothes and luxurious life wake her mind over her survival. Equally in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, through the character of Saru, Deshpande attaches the importance to material prosperity which might be extended by a professional wife like Saru. When jilting her job, she is no longer happy along with her mediocre customary way of living. She begins to miss the tiny things that cash should purchase. She laments her middle-class life in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*:

I had began [begun] to wonder at his acceptance of our shabby way of living. For me things now began to hurt . . . a frayed sari I could not replace, a movie I could not see, an outing I could not join in. I knew now that without money life becomes petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way became unbearable. (92)

Saru dreams of rising high in her professional career, and of earning money to set up a brand new life. It is very natural for a woman to have the desire for an opulent life. Through this point, Dreiser observes the real problems, and feelings of women. Hanson and Minnie are the antitheses of Carrie. They contemplate money to be something precious. It is clear that both Hanson and Carrie admire money however their perspective differs. For Carrie, money is to relish life. She is hardly in need of money to enjoy life and enjoying life is everything for her. To live a comfortable life she needs money and that is a great success for her.

The treatment meted out to Carrie by her sister’s husband becomes unbearable day by day and makes her think that their relationship is totally financial. “She began to be ashamed. The whole situation depressed her” (SC 74). If Carrie’s sister had consoled her she might not have undergone neither mental nor physical trauma. When the situation at her sister’s house is bad the situation at the shoe factory is also worse. At her sister’s house she faces only humiliation but at the factory she undergoes all kinds of mental as well physical tortures:

[There were] much more of similar familiar badinage among the men and girls, she (Carrie)

instinctively withdrew into herself. She was not used to this type, and felt that there was something hard and low about it all. . . . This illusion ended when another young man passed along the aisle and poked her indifferently in the ribs with his thumb. She turned about, indignation leaping to her eyes, but he had gone on and only once turned to grin. She found it difficult to conquer an inclination to cry. . . . She felt as though she could hardly endure such a life. (SC 44-45)

Not bearing the humiliation, Carrie decides to leave her sister's home at the earliest. Hanson's conventional behavior reflects through their treatment of Carrie in a selfish and merciless way.

The protagonist, Jennie possesses natural innocence which drives her towards persecution by men community. Denial of executing his role and responsibilities as a father permits Jennie to involve with men like Senator Brander and Lester Archibald. Careless life of her father throws her into the pitfall where she is drenched in sexual harassment. Particularly, when her brother Bass is jailed for collecting coals from railway tracks, their father is least concerned to release him. Being a responsible sister, Jennie mortgaged her virginity with Brander who financially helps to release her brother. The society considers a penniless Jennie as a woman on the game. Even Brander renders financial assistance only for her physic and as an invoice for his pleasure. He constructs provision to enslave young American woman like Jennie drives out for victimization. Like Jennie, Carrie is also victimized due to her passion towards thriving life. Uncongenial atmosphere at the residence of Minnie, Carrie's sister, gives chance to Drouet to take advantage on Carrie's life. Without any sort of help from her sister, Carrie is mentally tormented and finds it difficult to handle the situation. Lustful Drouet utilizes this circumstance to quench his sexual desire by appeasing Carrie's yearning for money-making. Worldly pleasures that act as stimulus work more in exploding relationship rather than exploring it. Minds of human beings are recurrently entangled with it. They try to accomplish it through any means.

The greatness of *Sister Carrie* lies primarily in its portrayal of the actual American life and their relationship. Dreiser reflects most of his personal

experiences including his sister's real life story in his novels. Dreiser brings out the autobiographical element in most of his novels which helps the readers to understand the bond between women and the society. The author's own experiences connect women protagonists into a realistic picture. In *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser brings out the adulthood memories of his response to Chicago with the knowledge of what has happened to one of his sisters, Emma. Though he is a male, most of his novels are packed with the life and problems of women in his society, thus he concerns more for women. Marguerite Tjader notices:

. . . women' characters and experiences interested Dreiser endlessly. He loved to question them about themselves, their impressions, their reaction to this and that. He was never tired of studying the likes and dislikes that made up what was to him the mystery of feminine behavior. (12)

Dreiser has more concern for the lives of women. He has identified and narrates the fortune of women. Most of his fiction derives much of its energy from the histories of women found in his letters. Like Dreiser's novels, Deshpande's novels have the autobiographical impact reflecting her thoughts on women's problems which affect her feelings. Deshpande concentrates on Indian women and their life in the patriarchal society. In an interview with Vanamala Vishwanath, Deshpande confesses that ". . . only a woman could read my books – they are written from the inside, as it were," (9). Thus these writers prove themselves that their writings are born out of their personal experiences they had in their respective society and remind the readers of the saying, "as the society so the writer".

The relationship between women and the society differs from culture to culture. Different cultures espouse widely variant ideas on the distinct role and place of women within a society. Women in America decide needs of her education, career and lifestyle to flourish her. American women have the same kind of broad concern that men have around the world. In American culture, women live or earn by any means whereas in Indian culture, women have to abide by the conventions of society. Though they are educated and career-oriented, Indian women are tradition-

bound. They are expected to remain under the shelter of family. Women attain considerable genial recognition and power but still Indian women are facing male domination and exempted from certain roles and responsibilities. The fact behind is a social factor rather than a biological one.

In western civilizations, mostly American society, gender outlook takes on polarities. For example, if men were strong, women were weak; if men were intellectual, women were emotional; if men were warriors, women were nurturers. These assumptions effect power relationships in which most women are regarded as inferior, in need of male protection and with no civil rights, that is not being regarded as individuals, but as subjects. Dreiser mirrors contemporary American society and exhibits that women are the victims of circumstantial forces beyond their control. Dreiser's friend, a social critic, a journalist and another early influent on Bellow, H.L.Mencken, has rightly observed that " Jennie Gerhardt is the best American novel I have ever read, with the lonesome but Himalayan exception of Huckleberry Finn" (12). H.L.Mencken validates the author to himself, strengthening him for his writing. He has championed Dreiser in the early days and showed his ideas into the novel. He explicates Dreiser's the most visible, persuasive and the most eloquent writing.

Culture characterizes people's ways of life and ethnicities. American society recognizes and approves of only some cultural category. Gender is one such contested category in America even today. Gender refers to the different ways that men and women are culturally defined and evaluated. As a cultural, dynamic and variable construction, gender is distinguished from sex. Similarly, Jennie's delicate nature allows men to pursue conventional life while she herself lives unrecognized with her daughter, Vesta, with the depth of her understanding, sympathy and her truthfulness. Yet she is not sentimental but has a natural sort of honor. This novel lies in the conflict of Jennie's natural innocence and the moral confusions of men community.

Conclusion

Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* too holds the related issue like Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt. It deals

with the sobbing of three generations of women and how their men deviated from the responsibility by enjoying life even without minding children. As a result of such approach and attitude of those men, women are made to lead a deserted life. However, the women in Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* bear such treatment throughout life for survival like Jennie. Hence women's suffering because of men becomes inevitable through these writers' work. Thus Women were left behind, refused individualism and forced into a sphere from which, in order to get out, they had to organize them within that restrictive sphere. Women are experiencing far-reaching changes and tradition breaks by their role and status, only the state of affairs of women makes them adapt a new life style.

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