

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
EXPLORING MODERNITY – CONTESTING IDEAS

Modernity symbolises a world made out of active and purposive intervention of human beings along with the realisation and responsibility brought in with such an intervention. The modern society is the creation of human beings, the experience of which heralds a sense of freedom and endless possibilities of a brighter future. This new idea of freedom brought in with modernity involves time consciousness. Time here means a duration which is ever changing and looks towards the future than the past. The individual of this modern society considers himself/herself not only as a creator of this society but also as a person with a vision for the future. Modernity is characterized as being flexible and open as opposed to the traditional society bound by rigidity and static structures.

Max Weber, thinker of the modern era identified modernity with the growth of objective knowledge and scientific thinking. Weber's modern society is symbolized by individual interaction of its members instead of a conservative form of social organization. Thus, modernity brings with it a scope for various forms of human expressions through social interaction. For him modernity meant "new possibilities for the expression of human subjectivity."

“Weber sums up the particular problematic character of contemporary reality under the title ‘rationality’.” (Rundell 2013: 15)

Max Weber believes that modern societies are an array of contesting ideas, notions and powers. Weber seems to have two related aspects in mind. The first being the fall of the pre – modern world characterized by moral, cognitive and interpretative unity. This phenomenon has resulted in the retreat of ultimate and sublime values from human life. Secondly, Weber’s idea of modernity looks at every thing as capable of explaining with reference to logic and scientific belief. Therefore, religious understanding of the world becomes somewhat backward and superstitious from the modernist perspective. For Weber, modernity is characterized by rational actions, rules and science rather than rules and orders governed by traditionality. The modern society in the words of Weber is characterized by

“bureaucratization, rationalization, intellectualization, and the disenchantment of the world.” [Weber 1946: 155]

Weber’s position on modernity has often been termed ‘cultural pessimism’. He is considered to be representative of the pessimistic face of modernity.

“The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the

World'. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations." (Weber 1946:155)

Weber's cultural pessimism is arguably counterbalanced, however, by his focus on other aspects of modern society, such as individual independence, increasing subjectivity, and freedom, all of which might be valued rather than repented, and all of which are made possible under the umbrella of modern pluralistic society.

The present day lifestyle with its endless demands leaves modern man entangled in an anxious state of mind. A never ending choice is always at his fingertip leading him towards an alienated position. The lack of something definite at the centre of the soul forces us to search for immediate gratification in ever new stimulations, sensations and external activities. Thus, man entangles himself in the instability and helplessness that manifests itself as the mania for wild pursuit of competition and as the typically modern disloyalty with regard to taste, style, options and personal relationships.

"We should strive for freedom and dignity, even at the expense of our happiness." [Weber, M. 1975:306]

"Dignity is the structuring of existence by a moral obligation and the readiness to renounce on its behalf." [Weber, M. 1975:364]

The novels of Shashi Deshpande depict a psychological journey into the minds of urban middle – class educated Indian women standing at the cross roads of tradition. The women protagonists of the novels of Shashi Deshpande clamor for change but within the accepted social structure. They do not want to tread into the path of reinterpreting their roles. Their only desire is to lead a life of dignity and self respect within their anchorage in married lives. Like, Jaya in *That Long Silence* is symbolic of sacrifice motivated by her desire to establish her dignity and identity approved by a patriarchal social set up. In spite of her efforts to portray herself as a perfect woman and mother she finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya is representative of Weber's 'modern man' who is perennially alone with all options in hand but becomes tired with so many choices.

Weber's idea of social action, as found in *Economy and Society* (1978) links the question of passing into modernity with tradition. For Weber human action is social in so far as "the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it." (ES 77) Social action may be influenced by the action of past, present and future. Therefore, it is a result or a modification of some action of other person or persons. Social action presupposes the existence of other individual and some action by him. This means there can be no social action in isolation. Therefore social action is possible if there is another human being whose action or behaviour is prompting the individual to act in a particular manner.

Mere behaviour becomes action when it involves interaction with others and when it assumes meaning; that is 'oriented in its course'. The basic requirement is the awareness of the actor regarding his action which can be interpreted in terms of their intentions, implications, motives and feelings as they are experienced.

Actions are termed traditional when their ends and means are fixed by customs and social norms. Being habitual it is taken for granted. In his four fold classification of social action, the last one is traditional action which is fixed by customs and traditions. Such action is habitual in nature. The typical problem of Deshpande's protagonists remains the inner conflict between surrendering attitude to tradition and rebellion against social set up. What pre modern man considered destiny or fate, is for the modern man a probability or a matter of choice. Destiny, hence, gets transformed into decision.

Such traditional action leads Indu, the heroine of *Roots and Shadows* (1992) to lament,

“This is my real sorrow, that I can never be complete in myself.”

(RS 47)

Indu left her home at the age of eighteen to get married according to her choice. This action represented her as a harbinger of new generation who reviews everything with reason and new vision. She explains the ideals of

detachment and liberation and tries to achieve them. However, unfortunately enough she fails. In spite of Jayant, her husband, failing to live up to her expectation and betraying her hopes for harmony, peace and happiness she fails in her attempts of liberation. Inability to enfranchise the traditional background in which she is reared forces Indu to believe that she cannot be complete without Jayant.

“Now I dress the way I want. As I please.’ As I please? No, that’s not true. When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him? And I can’t blame him.... It’s the way I want it to be.” (RS 49)

Weber talks about various stages of social action and emotional stage is one of its components. It seems to be the emotional response to actions, done by others. We express our joy, happiness, love, sympathy, hatred etc in response to some specific occasions. Likewise, the traditional stage is known for the likings of long nurtured norms, customs and set pattern of the society. In the words of Raymond Aron, Weber’s view is the paradigm of a sociology which is both historical and systematic.

Weber’s problem with modernity takes us to the fact that it needed a historically unique galaxy of social norms and cultural notions.

“Cultural values can reject an ethic, just as an ethic can reject cultural values.” [Weber 1949c: 15]

In a Weberian sense, significant social change will occur if and when there is perceived correlation among class, status, and power. Individuals practice, as Weber put it, a "specific style of life [that] ... is not subservient to economic ... purposes." Weber notes that self-imposed class rules "may confine normal marriages within the status circle..." (cited in Bendix, 1977, p. 86).

In other words, people's perception regarding hierarchy of groups in a stratified society is bound to question the legitimacy of the whole system rather than just one part. The increasing or decreasing need for 'routinization' will be affected as a result of the degree of social change. This 'routinization', Weber argues, will in the long run lead to a kind of stratification that again sets up the conditions for conflict and change. For Weber, social systems are nothing but a cyclical process moving incessantly through routinization and charismatic change.

The religion of India, especially the ethos of Hinduism was criticized by Weber mainly because he found that the ideas of 'Dharma', 'Karma' and 'punarjanma' made Indians defeatists and fatalists. Ancient India made valuable contributions to science and trade links, however, the caste system held them back. Weber believes that caste system works as an unavoidable part in the lives of Hindus and they become entangled in it. Efforts to overcome the

caste barrier become almost impossible in their lives. Traditional Hindu belief in 'samsara' – the transmigration of soul brings the idea that nothing can be changed until the next life. Individual effort that can make people hard worker is also neglected because of the belief in the inevitability of fate. The typical Hindu belief that our present condition is the result of our past action demotivated the Hindus left them with no intention to strive to improve their economic condition. The material world which is thought to be temporary and illusory is hardly given any importance. The welfare of the 'atma' is given prime as it is considered imperishable. Weber strongly held the belief that such over emphasis on religion hardly fosters attitudes that promote change. Weber in *The Religion of India* (1958) concludes that 'rationally formed missionary prophecy' – i.e. the fully worked out and systematized versions of South Asian religions – had no consequences for the "ethic of everyday life" of ordinary people.

In the clash of religion with the intellectual sphere, we find Weber's view in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (2009):

"The tension between religion and intellectual knowledge definitely comes to the fore wherever rational, empirical knowledge has consistently worked through to the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism. For then science encounters claims of the ethical postulate that the world is a God – ordained, and hence somehow meaningfully and ethically oriented,

cosmos. In principle, the empirical as well as the mathematically oriented view of the world develops refutations of every intellectual approach which in any case asks for a 'meaning' of inner – worldly occurrences. Every increase of rationalism in empirical science increasingly pushes religion from the rational into the irrational realm; but only today does religion become the irrational or anti – rational supra – human power.” (ES 351)

Weber's primary notion of modernity contains the core belief that human efforts—scientific, political, and economic—can lead to the regeneration of the human condition. It involves negation of the fatalistic approach that all occurrences in this world are predetermined, inherent and inevitable. Weber is of the opinion that it is not impossible to bring about change but it is a bit complex and very slow in nature. For the betterment of the society things should be borrowed from outside also.

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* (1992) alludes to reservations and the reactions to them by the higher castes. *A Matter of Time* (1996) shows the extent to which polarization along caste lines has made itself apparent at least in some states of India. Gopal, a liberal college teacher who has never cared for caste, is attacked by his own non – Brahmin students for an article, abused as a 'bastard of a Brahmin' and compelled to withdraw the article. It shows how irrational, intolerant and inhuman the caste feelings can make the

native young people. And the responsibility for it rests with the politicians of different shades and colours who serve capitalism. Indian bourgeoisie, which is neither willing to nor capable of providing food, shelter, education, medical care and jobs to all, has also sought to distract people with cheap tricks. Reservations on caste basis and installation of the status of the 'higher caste' are but two examples of the same which have divided people along caste lines, causing a lot of bitterness and led to the conflicts about non – issues. The process of modernization through industrialization tends to overlook the role of culture which is behind the individuality that is modern in nature. The modernist programme has witnessed partial failure because of its own success in one sense. As a result the need of individual freedom has been sidelined.

Deshpande shows her concern for caste and region in the pages of *The Binding Vine* where a particular character wants to get “the statue of our warrior queen” installed but laments: “It has to be in the central square, but it’s so crowded, there’s no place left, not an inch. They already have Gandhiji, Nehru, Ambedkar and there was Indira Gandhi last year”. (BV 151) Needless to add that choice of statues of late is often based on caste or regional considerations.

Shashi Deshpande and her novels can be well interpreted by applying the idea of Max Weber in terms of social relations and Friedric Jameson’s idea of modernity. Deshpande’s characters are often victimized for their stepping out of the accepted boundaries and challenging the set values. Friedric Jameson, on

the other hand, locates modernity in the inevitable cultural stage of history. Like all historical tales, it also brings out some repressed truth. Modern authors are a part of the historical situation; they express their individual opinion or paint the characters influenced by any particular historical event or incident.

In the words of Jameson

“...when applied exclusively to the past, ‘modernity’ is a useful trope for generating alternate historical narratives, despite the charge of ideology it necessarily continues to bear. As for the ontology of the present, however, it is best to accustom oneself to thinking of ‘the modern’ as a one – dimensional concept (pseudo – concept) which has nothing of historicity or futurity about it. This means that ‘post modern’ does not designate a future either (but when properly used, our own present) while ‘non – modern’ is unavoidably drawn back into a force field in which it tends to connote the ‘pre – modern’ exclusively (and to designate it in our own global present as well). Radical alternatives, systematic transformations, cannot be theorized or even imagined within the conceptual field, governed by the word ‘modern’.” (Jameson 2002: 214 – 215)

The advent of modernity enunciates some fundamental changes in the traditional thought process of humanity. It also promulgates social relationship

in a new way. It has an impact on all sectors – social, economic and political spheres of life. Modernity redefines our life in general – it becomes the post traditional meaning of human existence.

Jameson says

“Modernity is not a concept, philosophical or otherwise, but a narrative category..... Modernism is necessarily a periodizing category and whether it turns out to be affirmed or denied on some ultimate reading, it necessarily accompanies the individual modernist text as a ghostly allegorical dimension, in which each text comes before us as itself and as an allegory of the modern as such.” (Jameson 2002: 35)

In a certain sense, Shashi Deshpande in her novels shows that she is caught within the broader historical situation. In *That Long Silence* (1989) she has been influenced by Gandhism. Like Jaya, a protagonist of her novel, *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande was born on the 3rd of September, 1939 her birth almost coincided with the beginning of the World War II. Mahatma Gandhi dominated the political scene during her childhood and it is but natural that older generation in her novels like Jaya’s father in the *That Long Silence* and Badri Narayan’s father in *Moving On* (2004) is influenced by Gandhism. Mahatma Gandhi’s role in the freedom struggle and his move to eradicate untouchability stirred the young minds of the times with the effect that even

young men like Badri Narayan's father born in conservative and loyalist families joined the freedom struggle and went to jail and dared to marry a Harijan girl. Leela in the *Small Remedies* (2000) was a participant of the 'Quit India Movement', a memorable event of the 1940s.

There are passing references in the novels to the Post – Independence and Post – Gandhi events too frequently. Thus, in *That Long Silence* we find references to Indo – China War, to army wives squatting with children as their husbands were arrested for spying and held in communicado, to Jaya Prakash Narayan's 'Total Revolution' and an Industrial strike. In *Small Remedies*, there a reference to the lot that befell small princely states after independence. Their rulers were shorn of all pomp and power and reduced to ordinary citizens. The 'Emergency' declared by Indira Gandhi to remain in power was a rude shock to the entire nation and Leela was imprisoned during the period and Madhu dared pass a letter to her there. In *The Binding Vine* (1993), murders of Indira Gandhi and Robert Kennedy are alluded, while *Small Remedies* records the loss of Madhu's son Adit and her childhood friend Munni alias Shailaja Joshi in the Bombay Riots of 1993, which followed the demolition of Babari Mosque in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992.

In *A Matter of Time*, Shashi Deshpande shows her appreciation for Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable as well as Satyajit Roy's 'Charulata'. Culturally, Deshpande can be considered cosmopolitan. *A Matter of Time*,

presents inter mingled stories to give the effect of an impact in the interweaving of intertextuality. New stories are produced in the novel by the way of mixing one story with another. Stories from *Jataka* coincide with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Satyajit Ray's *Charulata* is referred to while mentioning the legend of *Kisa Gautami*. Cinderella's fairy tale opens a gate way to understand and interpret daughters of Sumi. However, the Cinderella fairy tale ultimately gets rejected as a possible lens through which Sumi's daughters could be viewed (MT 32 – 33).

The disaster in marriage of Sumi and Gopal is viewed through the romantic tales of *Shakuntala and Dushyantha* as well as *Romeo and Juliet*. The most pronounced in Deshpande's novels are the references to the Geeta and the Upanishads.

She draws references from Brhad – aranyaka Upanishad which presents the scene of the sage Yajnavalkya informing Maitreyi: 'Maitreyi,' said Yajnavalkya, 'verily I am about to go forth from this state (of householder).' The epigraph indicates the central action of the novel. Like the sage Yajnavalkya, the character Gopal decides to renounce his family. But the contrast is obviously marked as in the case of sage Yajnavalkya it is 'sanyasa' as was the practice in those days to seek it after relishing life of a 'Grahsta' – house holder ship but in Gopal's case it is a withdrawal from his duties due to fear and pain of worldly ties. (II.4.1)

Gopal's abandonment of his family is not the outcome of saturation in the earthly life. His action can perhaps be interpreted more moving away as a result of pain rather than a renunciation due to contentment. Moreover, Gopal's life has nothing to offer in lines corresponding to the older Vedic stages of a man's life.

Deshpande has portrayed the misery of a family when the husband abandons it in lurch and how a woman has to cope with her circumstances along with fending not only for herself but for her children too. When let alone with her with her three daughters: Aru, Charu and Seema, Sumi does not break down in sorrow and grief. Instead she takes the step of moving on with her life.

She knows to the best of her knowledge the state of all affairs and has no confusion, "Her mind is crystal clear, she knows what has happened." (MT 9)

She has a clear idea that there is no concrete reason behind his desertion and "the reason lies inside him, the reason is him." (MT 24)

Her show of strength, courage and fortitude gathered with her sense of heroism leaves everybody surprised. She works hard in her life and carves a niche for herself in the professional front besides accomplishing other tasks like paying for her daughters' fee and fulfilling their demands. She accepts the finality bravely.

She never asks for an explanation from Gopal either on the fateful day of desertion or at any other day later on. She wants to ask him one question few days after his decision but the question remains unasked.

“..... If I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one, the question none has thought of what is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out of his family and all that he owns?

Because..... it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life?

Will you be able to give me answer to this?” (MT 27)

Religion and state help sustain the status quo and Deshpande pays tribute to these in a subtle way especially in her novel *A Matter of Time*. Besides all the allusions to the Geeta, the Upanishads, Meerabai, Tukaram, etc. her protagonist Gopal takes his wife Sumitra’s ashes for immersion in the Alaknanda. This, coming from a husband who had deserted his wife for no apparent reason, is highly symbolic. Does it not amount to a clarion call to submit to one’s religious duty ultimately?

Shashi Deshpande disapproves of the Emergency, which retorted to certain provisions of the constitution of India to make it inoperative for a period of time. Leela, a heroic figure of *Small Remedies* was imprisoned during the

time. But in the aftermath of the murder of two Prime Ministers and the terrorist activities like the Bombay Riots, liberalism is seriously threatened and hardliners are getting the upper hand in Indian politics with their demands of stern measures against the culprits. With the prevalent mood of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth', civil liberties are likely to be affected even without a formal declaration of emergency. For one thing, none of the major political parties in India has agitated consistently and persistently for the abolition of the repressive laws enacted during the British rule. Instead, they have all permitted new repressive laws to be enacted by the central and state legislatures on some pretext or other.

Akka, one of the traditionalists expected all the younger to adhere to the age old norms of society. No free mixing with the young ones of the opposite sex constituted one of them. She also held that both boys and girls must get married at a certain age and the marriage must take place in one's own caste and in a family of high status. That is why she was willing to spend a lot for the marriage of Mini regardless of the merits of the groom. Her faith in caste was so deep-rooted that she refused to go to a hospital as she could not be sure of the caste of the doctors and nurses and accept food or drink. She preferred to die at home instead Sarita's mother in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Sripati in *A Matter of Time* have their own obsessions about male child. As a result of long nurtured patriarchal values, preference for male children is deep – rooted

in Sarita and Sripati. Both lose their male child and ruin their family life with their irrational behaviour for the rest of their lives. Sarita's mother holds her daughter responsible for Dhruva's death and makes life a hell for herself and her daughter. Sripati holds her wife responsible for disappearance of his mentally retarded son and stops speaking to her and lives secluded from others in a room. That is the impact of the usual patriarchal thinking that gives preference to the male child who inherits the property and assures continuity to his line besides performing certain rituals after the death of his father. Vanita, Kusum's mother and Mohan's mother are the passive women who suffer in silence as they have been taught to submit to the authority of the husband. Childless and neglected by her husband, Vanita nevertheless tells Jaya: 'a husband is like a sheltering tree.' Kusum's mother and Mohan's mother too are victims of an ideology that deprives women control of their bodies. As a result the former has such a large number of children that she cannot care for them properly while the latter died a tragic death in a desperate attempt to terminate pregnancy.

As for the rebels of Shashi Deshpande's novels, Indu in the *Roots and Shadows* honours the will of Akka by making best use of the money. She spends the money for Mini's marriage as Akka wanted and also provides for Vithal and shelters Atya but leaves the rest to make best use of the proceeds of the sale of the old house. Thus she does not wash her hands of her obligations

to the natal family. Despite her extra marital relation with Naren which ends abruptly by latter's death, she saves relations with her husband Jayant and tries to improve the same. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita does not flee or shut the door in the face of her husband but resolves to face her boldly. Jaya in *That Long Silence* is an educated and a writer too but she too cannot escape effect of the indoctrination that goes on in a woman's life since early life. He has been taught to please her husband and her family and deem it as the supreme goal of her life. She has also learnt what is womanly and what is not womanly. So she tries to imitate the woman of her husband's who do not question about or argue with what men do. But she realizes her mistake when her husband lands in trouble due to some of his questionable deeds. After a long reflection on her married life she resolves to remain no longer a silent partner of her husband. Thus we find that all the women characters of Shashi Deshpande are concerned about the institution of family. They like to reform it, to make it a success despite differences in their education, status and temperament. This is because they have been taught to believe that family is an eternal institution and also irreplaceable one. The epigraph of the *Moving On* consists of a quote from Erica Gong: "All the stories that have been told are the stories of the families....from Adam and Eve on ward". If the institution of family is as old as Adam and Eve, if it is going to remain ever, why not make adjustments within it?

Shashi Deshpande's novels record strivings for adjustments for three or four generations. Change is inevitable in any society. New rulers with new set of rules and regulations have come. More and more educational institutions have come into being. Increasing rate of literacy and education are enlightening women too. Industrialization has caused concentration of a lot of people into urban centres while the pressure of rising population as well as the land reforms (even if limited ones) are stirring to rural life. Unemployment has appeared as a big problem and the competition for jobs. People living under these conditions are trying somehow to make life possible for themselves.

Modern Indian women of the new era felt the need of changing the patriarchal structure at last and as a result they refused to be within the sheltered cage any more. They attempt to redefine their relationship with tradition while reevaluating their roles within the family gradually realizing that "new bonds replace old, that's all." (RS 14) This interrogating the traditional social set up has given a new dimension to modernity. The problem of being a female has always been highlighted by Shashi Deshpande in her novels. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* brings out the pain of being a 'female':

"As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything,

even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive.” (RS 158)

All of Deshpande’s characters are rebel in this sense. They are born to fight – both with the society at large and within the family in particular. Also they redefine their own roles in the society. The long nurtured role of daughter, wife or mother is not accepted at its face value by them; rather they add new meaning to the lives of new women.

Through this research work, it is intended to look into modernity from the historical, social and realistic point of view. A study is made to analyze the impediments to social change in India along with identifying the forces favouring or conducive to change. Shashi Deshpande’s novels deal with some social problems that are related to modernity. The response of Indian society to them and Deshpande’s own answer to the problems is also be discussed at length.

The question related to women’s liberty and their power of assertion is examined critically in the work. The difficulties still faced by Indian women in the society are not less in number. Naturally the study deals with the social attitude towards women especially from the male viewpoint. The consequence of such an attitude is explained in detail with adequate precision.

The advent of modernity in the recent past has witnessed a complete change in the traditional pattern of parent child relationship. Indian society has some specific problems in this sphere and naturally some unwanted incidents occur due to generation gap. The novels of Shashi Deshpande accord due importance to this aspect. The study intends to discuss this phenomenon keeping the traditional pattern of Indian family on the one hand and modern attitude towards children on the other. The study aims to provide a deeper insight into the marked shift in the parent child relationship and the changes that modernity has brought into the attitude of the society.

Shashi Deshpande's women challenge their victimization and look for a new balance of power between the two sexes; however their concept of liberty is not borrowed from the West. They prefer to conform to their filial demands to ensure domestic harmony. They advocate compromise over revolt to avoid discord in their family relationship. Modernity, in terms of their new position in the society has been highlighted by Shashi Deshpande.

“Shashi Deshpande was so fascinated by her women characters that she laid more emphasis on women. Shashi Deshpande says that she knows how the women feel and she knows the mood of India. It has been observed that the predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place

from conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught in a transitional world.” (Singh 1991: 50)

However, the onus is still on women to prove their assertive individuality. It is upto them to assume their role as indispensable members of the family while retaining their right to take their own decisions without getting restricted by social norms and customs.