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Grammar and Literary Style in Shashi Deshpande's Novels

M. Sakthi Radha and Dr. S. Parvin Banu

Importance of Style

In fiction, style occupies a prominent position in expressing the views of author in an attractive way. Among plot, character, theme and setting, style is taken to be one of the inherent constituents of fiction. Each writer has his/her own unique style of writing which shows the verbal identity of the writer. Literary style consists of elements like sentence structure, pace, expansive diction, vocabulary, figure of speech, use of dialogue, point of view, character development, tone, use of words (word sound), paragraph/ chapter structure, time sequencing/ chronology, allusion, experimentation in language and meta-fictional techniques.

Shashi Deshpande and Her Feminist Views

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Grammar and Literary Style in Shashi Deshpande's Novels

Shashi Deshpande, a spirited Indian woman writer, utters her feministic views in an excellent way with her distinguished literary style. Her novels are of simple and clear language showing her pleasant literary style that induces the readers to read her novels. She has portrayed women's issues realistically in her novels. Her success lies in her representation of real life experience in a simple and pragmatic way. This paper deals with the use of Grammar and Literary style in the novels of Shashi Deshpande.

Place of Grammar in Writing

Grammar is the backbone of every part of writing. Literary style in literature is an intellectual element that depicts the ways the author uses words. It really means the way of the author writes her pieces. Literary style contains elements such as sentence structure, pace, expansive diction, vocabulary, figure of speech, use of dialogue, point of view, character development, tone, use of words, paragraph/chapter structure, time sequencing/chronology, allusion, experimentation in language and metafictional techniques. Every author has a unique style of writing.

Shashi Deshpande's Style

Shashi Deshpande utters her feministic views in an excellent way with her distinguished literary style. Her unique literary style can be seen in her works like "That Long Silence", "Small Remedies", "A Matter of Time", "The Dark Holds No Terror", "Roots and Shadows" and so on. Her simple style can be noticed in her words which recounts the influences in her life. She says:

"There are three things in my early life that have shaped me as a writer. These are that my father was a writer that I was educated exclusively in English and I was born a female."(1996:107)

Selected Perennial Themes

Deshpande's novels deal with certain perennial themes such as quest for self-identity, man-woman relationship, experience of educated and rural family woman and the image of woman. Her narrative structure is embodied in several strands, using memory, experience and so on. Her stories are about women's struggle in their day-to-day life.

Sentence Structure

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In Shashi Deshpande's novels, the sentence structure consists of long and also short sentences. Sometimes, instead of full and long sentences, Deshpande uses elliptical and minimal words. This type of sentence structure is shown in her novel "Small Remedies" and such words are uttered by one of her characters Munni.

"You don't know anything. He's different outside the house. When there are people around he pretends. But at home....." (Small Remedies: 65)

Though it is incomplete, the sentence can be understood by Madhu, the protagonist of the novel who is listening to her. The order of words which Deshpande uses in her novels is straightforward and is easy to understand; she uses simple words in a pragmatic way. Her view towards a child's birth is shown through her character Madhu who gives a realistic way of expression of straight forward word order in the novel.

"A child's birth is a rebirth for a woman; it's like becoming part of the world once again". (Small Remedies: 88)

Different Generations, Different Styles

Shashi Deshpande's novels focus on the atmosphere of her women characters in which they are living. Most of her women characters belong to male-dominated society and are searching for their own identity in their society. Her novels focus on the plot movement by telling the story of women belonging to different generations through the protagonist of her novels. The plot moves from one story to another by expressing the sufferings of different generation of women in their own way and finds remedy to overcome their struggle in the male-dominated society. In this way Madhu in "Small Remedies" explains the story of Savitribai, Leela and Munni.

Spontaneity in Style and Creativity

Shashi Deshpande is an efficient writer and presents her views in a prolific literary style. She is well-known for her spontaneity in creative writing. She has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemmas, her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being in the traditional-bound, male-dominated society. The expression of strong point about her novel is her delineation of the woman's inner world. Deshpande's protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice and are

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continuously in search of them; ‘But they become fluid, with no shape, no form of their own. (Roots and Shadows: 15)

Jaya in *That Long Silence*

Jaya, in “That Long Silence”, undertakes an unavailing search for her ‘self’. The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. “Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.”(That long silence: 1)

These words show her use of metaphors and similes in her fictions and each character plays significant role in different aspects. Jaya, who is the protagonist of this novel, offers us a glimpse into the lives of apparently content housewives who are nevertheless suppressed under the weight of male dominance. Her major concern as a woman writer is about women’s struggle to find and preserve their identity as wife, mother and apart from that as human being in the contemporary Indian society. Deshpande has expressed all these views in simple and colloquial way.

Simple and Realistic Way

Deshpande is accomplished with a remarkable literary mind. She has exclusively matured exposures in life and readings. She has experienced her thought by expressing her views on writing in a simple and realistic way as follows:

“I realize that I write what I write because I have to, because it is within me. It’s one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing.” (Ibid: 761)

Dialogue as Substitutes for Narration

Deshpande’s dialogue acts as substitutes for narration. She is honestly concerned with expressing herself in English with proper grammatical structure as clearly and effectively as possible. Once in an interview entitle ‘Everyone Has a Right to Choose a Language’, Deshpande tells Stanley Carvalho that:

“When I write narrative, I think in English; when I write dialogue I think in Kannada or Marathi, which are my languages”. (Ibid).

Modelling after Mother Tongue

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Shashi mostly thinks of dialogue in her mother tongue with which she is more familiar. Sometimes, the dialogues in her novels look like translation from Kannada, Marathi or Hindi, but her narrative is generally free from Indian coinage. Analysing this words, she has incorporated:

“In our middle-class families, most of us converse in English but automatically switch over to our mother tongue when we speak to our elders, relatives and so on. I do not use Indianisms to make my writing look Indian” she said. “I never try to make India look exotic either. “(Eve’s weekly, 18-24 June 1988: 28)

Style and Development of Character

Development of character is a prominent one among the elements in literary style. Shashi Deshpande, a leading women writer in English, has tried to bring out a naturalistic picture of the middle-class educated women who are financially independent and represent a large part of the contemporary Indian society. Her novels deal with the problems of the adjustments and conflicts in the mind of female protagonists, who belong to the traditional rules. The characters in her novels are free from their fear and guilt. In addition, they feel free from the restrictions imposed on them by their society, culture and nature.

Deshpande’s first full-length novel “Roots and Shadows” highlights the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Hindu, a middle-class young girl brought up in an Orthodox Brahmin family, in a male-dominated society. Saru in “The Dark Holds No Terrors” has childhood scars. Denied of parental love and a victim of her husband’s frustration, Saru undergoes a rigorous journey into her and liberates herself from guilt, shame and frustration to get full control over her life. Jaya in “That Long Silence” represents the modern young women educated and they are unable to break free from the strange hold of tradition.

“Small Remedies” revolves around the four women characters, Madhu, Savitribai, Leela and Hasina, who learn to know themselves and in the company of female folks, they achieve their social as well as spiritual identities. This novel is about the ‘making’ of writer, singer and a social worker.

Deshpande’s novel “A Matter of Time” deals with the theme of the quest for a female identity. It explains the complexities of man-woman relationship especially in the context of

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marriage. Sumi is the central figure of this novel who dies just as she is about to begin a new life.

Shashi Deshpande's heroines decline rituals that are traces of the past. All her women characters revolve around the same concept of search for their self-identity. They, in order to achieve their freedom, seek marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. Deshpande brings out the struggle of these women to give shape and content to their individual survival in a sexist society which ends in compromise. All the characters, finally, accept that there is selfhood in being a wife, a sister, a mother and a career woman. Consequently, one can be true to oneself.

Stereotypes

Deshpande's characters are stereotypes. They aim to induce the readers into leading a peaceful life for themselves in a sophisticated manner. They motivate the younger generation to have a self-identity for their own in the society in which they are living. Deshpande's main motive is to make women realize their position and responsibilities as a wife, a daughter, a sister and a mother.

Use of Tone

Tone is another important element in the literary style in which the author's attitude and the mood of the story are known. Shashi Deshpande's main perspective is to achieve the self-discovery of women of different generations (traditions). The author seems wistful throughout her novels. The women characters in her novels are longing for the self-identity in the male-dominated society showing their quest for space and selfhood.

Deshpande's novels are not only wishful but also it gives hope for the women who are suppressed by the male domination in their family. Though they are lovable towards their family and family members, situation leads them to a mournful atmosphere. This tone can be much seen in Deshpande's novel "Small Remedies" in which Madhu, the protagonist of the novel mourns for the death of his only son Aditya. Madha herself says:

"We need to mourn him together; we need to face the fact of his death and our continuing life together. Only in this is healing possible" (Small Remedies: 323)

Inner Conflict and Style

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Even though there is an inner conflict between her and her husband Som, Madhu wants to mourn for her son's death along with her husband. This shows her love for her family, but later she came out of her family and began her career as a writer to get out of her grief.

Impact of Native Education on Style

Deshpande's is totally different from the other Indian Writers because she has not been educated abroad and strongly believes in the Indian culture. She is fully aware of the problems that Indian writers in English face and is of the opinion that they should evolve a language of their own. She has always aimed at the Indian readers and not the western. She is quite famous for her creative use of language.

Narrative Technique and Style

Every author uses different methods of story-telling, but the narrative technique used by an author is of great importance. Shashi Deshpande has used a combination of first person and third person narrative with flashback tools to bestow reliability and believability to the novels. She has expressed her views and her narrative techniques in a chronological way. She has explained every incident in a coherent way and it consists of logical ordering of things happened.

Style of Paragraphs and Chapters

Structure of chapters and paragraphs are considered to be an uncomplicated thing. The paragraphs are conventionally framed; hence it would be easy for the readers to get her concept comprehensively. She has divided her novels into simple units which helps the reader not to feel weary by reading a long or lengthy unit. Deshpande pays much attention to her own way of narrative process. Her thoughts reach the mind of the reader because of her simple and realistic way of expression. Her style of narration, role and her thoughts are mentioned explicitly in all her novels. Thus, the meta-fictional techniques serve as the base for the elements of literary style which makes her work effective.

To Conclude

Deshpande utters her feministic views in an excellent way with her eminent literary style. Thus Shashi Deshpande's novels are of simple and clear language which shows her

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pleasant literary style that induces the readers into reading her novels. She has portrayed women's issues realistically in her novels with effective literary style. Her success lies in her representation of real life experience in a simple and pragmatic way.

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