

## **From Stagnation to Empowerment: The Catalyst Effect of Father Figures and Friends on the Protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's Novels.**

**Abstract:** Supporting fathers and trustworthy friends accelerate the growth of the women protagonists in the works of Shashi Deshpande. The novels show that fathers shape self-worth, educate their daughters. But after marriage, patriarchal norms, make these women submissive and lose their worth. It is marked in their journey that their fathers and friends once again, make them realize their self-worth. These protagonists, then, reclaim their identity and cope up with their predicaments. The research paper attempts to explore the catalyst effect bringing transformation in the protagonists and thereby giving social implications about the supporting role of fathers and friends.

**Keywords:** Parenting-gender discrimination-girl child marginalized-supporting father- self-actualization and self-worth in daughter-marital suppression-loss of identity-role friends and fathers-catalyst effect- accelerate transformation.

### **Introduction:**

Viewed through the lens of Indian social parameters, girl's parenting is marked by patriarchal dominance and gender discrimination. Both or either one parent treats the girl child as secondary sex, giving superior treatment to son. Father's relationship with his facilitates in her wellbeing as an individual and in context of society. The real women empowerment begins in a family. Besides father, role of a good friend also can turn supporting during predicaments in life. A trustworthy relationship helps to coordinate in the wellbeing of an individual.

### **Framework:**

The framework of the paper consists of the tracing the journey of the protagonists from meek victims of patriarchal society to strong individuals - a transformation that takes place due to the influence of their fathers and friends. This secondary treatment given by mothers while self-worth inculcated by their fathers will also be studied. But the same women, give up their identities to save their marriage. After sharing their predicaments to fathers and friends, the protagonists are able to re-locate themselves. The paper shall analyze into the pre-marital and post-marital

situations of the protagonists focusing the triggering role of fathers and friends giving it's social implications.

### **Discussion:**

The "catalyst effect" refers to how a person, event, or situation acts as a catalyst in someone's life, meaning they cause or accelerate significant change or transformation. Just like a chemical catalyst speeds up a reaction without being consumed, a person with this effect prompts important developments or shifts in someone's life, often leading to personal growth, change in direction, or new opportunities. In literature, such a character might provoke key decisions or shifts in the protagonist's life, significantly impacting their journey and development. The novels of Shashi Deshpande reflect this catalyzeffect of friends and fathers as agents of growth and propel the protagonists to shift from stagnation to aspire and coordinate with their predicaments.

Saru's father(*Dark Holds No Terror*) empowers her by permitting to have medical education by resisting Saru's mother who reminds of the double financial burden of Saru's dowry as well as her education. She becomes a successful doctor. But her marriage turns into competition rather than companionship making her submissive victim of sadist husband. Boozie supports Saru to climb up the ladder of success. He is a doctor by profession. Saru is impressed by his knowledge and confidence. She decides to role model Boozie and learns from him to be a skilled doctor. He also lends money to build hospital. The reading of the novel shows that she has been carrying the trauma of false accusation by her mother of killing her brother. To escape from Manu's sadism, she returns to her father's home. Father and Saru have an open talk which minimizes her tension. Jasbir Jain marks Saru's outlet as significant. She comments - "This confrontation, this bringing into the open of past fears, hatreds and prejudices, of accusation and defense, is also a cathartic moment for Saru" (Realities 147). She shares about her sadist husband. Her father advises her to face the situation "Give him a chance, Saru. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what's wrong. Tell him all that you told me. Don't turn your back on things again. Turn around and look at them. Meet him" (DHNT 216). Gathering her courage Saru returns to Manu and her family.

In the novel *Roots and Shadows*, Indu's father sends her to a convent school in spite of opposition from the narrow minded society and family rules. Her higher education brings awareness and develops identity. But it is Jayant's (her husband) impositions not to allow her to become creative writer but impose her to write for magazine as it gives money. Staying at her

father's home give her chance to probe into her conflicts and realize her self-worth. Indu shares with Old Uncle that she is afraid of failure of expectations in relationship. Marriage has made her weak and dependent on Jayant. She says that love and attachment bring punishment. She is even afraid to have children. He tells that family gives an anchor and background. One finds meaning of life in this interdependence. He also advises Indu that she must not escape from attachment because attachment is natural. Old uncle do agree that relationships bring limitations and restrictions. But he makes Indu to look at her marital life positively telling that one can always find freedom within rules. She realizes her own need of Jayant.

Another influencing relationship is Naren, Indu's cousin and a childhood friend. Both are artists and sensitive- Indu a writer and Naren a singer. He has always been reading her writing. He admires one of her short stories. Besides her expectations, Jayant had never admired her writing but rather denied her the kind of writing that she wanted to. Naren offers a constructive criticism on Indu's writing. Naren realizes the artificiality in Indu's writing and therefore it lacks quality also. So, he suggests her to write her own 'stuff' (RS -78). By articulating her voice in an artistic manner, she would be able to give an outlet to her repression. It would be a kind of extension of her 'self'. Later on this gives her courage to resign the job of writing for magazine. Finding a good listener in Naren, she shares about her loneliness and sexual suppression to him. The long suppressions suddenly come out with an emotional outburst.

I pummeled him on the chest with my fist and for the second time that night burst into a storm of weeping

But that too passed away. And I felt calmer, quieter, and clearer. As if I had passed through the agony of suffering, of apprehending death and now found the peace of it. (RS 154)

It was the cleansing of emotions that made her mind clear. Their affair gets extended into a physical relationship. For some time she is confused that it is not Naren but Jayant with whom she wanted to be. With Jayant she couldn't have equal participation. But with Naren, Indu finds sexual experience gratified with love. She expresses this experience - "There was a joyous sense of release of passion I could experience and show and participate in. I clung to him convulsing, marveling that I didn't have to hold myself back" (RS 152). He also tells her about her need of Jayant's love. Although being an extra marital affair, it never comes in the way of her marital life but rather brings Indu closer to Jayant. Later, Naren dies of drowning in the swimming tank.

Bhatnagar describes this situation-

It was Naren who made her realise that she did not want, as she had believed earlier, detachment and noninvolvement. Naren's detachment made it possible for him to remain unaffected by anything. He could never be anybody's husband or beloved. Her rejection of him had left him completely untouched, whereas, she knew she could shatter Jayant completely with her rejection which made Jayant so precious to her. Now, she did not want detachment and noninvolvement which are meant for the dead not for the living. (quoted in Reddy 45)

She declares to Jayant about her decision to resign job and start creative writing. Indu looks upon marriage with a hope now, because she has learnt to seek freedom and space for herself within the familial responsibilities. S. P. Swain appropriately sums up Indu's growth

The meek and docile humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defines male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman's masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self-struggle for harmony and sanity...She is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. (Pathak 95)

Jaya (*That Long Silence*) has been brought up in a middle class family where a girl is asked to remain submissive. Like Saru's mother, Jaya's mother too showers her love and care on her son Deelip than Jaya. It is Jaya's father (Appa) who supports and motivates her. He is happy to have a girl child. He sends her to convent school. Since her childhood, Appa has made Jaya to realize that she is unique. He also inculcates confidence in her by telling that he would send her to Oxford University for further studies. He names her 'Jaya' meaning victorious. He used to make 'V' of his fingers and tell her that 'V' stands for victory. But with Appa's sudden death when Jaya is only of fifteen years, she is left alone with no emotional support. In the early years of her marriage, Jaya is going to be a successful creative writer. She wins the first prize for a story that is published in a magazine. He thinks that people will consider him as the kind of husband as depicted by his wife. So, he tells Jaya to stop such writing and continue with her contribution for column 'Seeta'. She writes under an assumed name. But as her writing is now controlled by the impositions of Mohan, Suman Ahuja describes her situation - "Jaya caught in an emotional, eddy, endeavors to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying, albeit in vain, to

rediscover her true self, which is but an ephemera, an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and failed writer" (2). Kamat, a widower is her neighbor. She finds Kamat free of patriarchy. Being an advertiser by profession, he is well read and possess the sensitivity of a writer. Finding an equal companionship with Kamat, she confides her suppressed feelings and anger in him. He advises to Jaya to improve her writing. Jaya shares about her anger that publishers categorize the writing by women separately and consider it suitable only for women's magazine. Kamat analyses her writing objectively. He tells her to express her experience as a woman in society to make them "more forceful and heating" (TLS 148) Kamat makes her to realize that she lacks originality. Instead of writing what pleases her husband and publishers, she must give genuine expressions in her writing. He asks her to spew her anger in writing. He also makes Jaya to realize that the fact that she is afraid of being failure as a writer. She accepts the fact that it is not only Mohan's imposition to tell her to write for 'Seeta' but she is also responsible for her writing. Her father was a failure in creative writing. She too carries the same fear and doubt. Kamat does not indulge in self-pity. But he makes Jaya to confront the reality by telling that the household chores and Mohan's impositions are all the lame excuses given by her. The reality is that she lacks courage to write boldly what she wants to. Thus, the power to break the silence lies within her and not outside. Jaya keeps writing but hides it from Mohan. So, Kamat is ready to receive her mail at his address. She knows that it is impossible for morbid and practical Mohan to understand her sensitivity. But with Kamat she feels considerate and receptive. She describes her relationship with Kamat as – "With this man (Kamat) I had not been a woman. I had been just myself - Jaya. There had been an ease in our relationship I had never known" (TLS 153). She also describes Kamat the day when Appa died. This is the most tragic event in her life. Jaya, even today is not able to overcome the trauma of it. While remembering the memory of her father, she suddenly bursts into tears. After sometime, she realizes that she was crying and Kamat was holding her. She soon takes her self back. She describes these feelings - "It had been warm and comforting, like wearing Appa's coat on a chilly night, like sitting before him on his bike" (TLS 156). She finds sexual relationship accompanied with love and care. Mittapalli describe her relationship with Kamat – "She (Jaya) derives from Kamat "the best of her father's concern for –assurance and comfort –and the best of attention that she would like to have from Mohan" (68-69). She recalls the words read from Appa's diary – "Yethecchasi that kuru" meaning 'Do as you desire' (TLS–192). At the end of the novel, Jaya writes a novel which is but her own story.

In another novel *Binding Vine*, Shashi Deashpande presents Mira highly educated and intellectual. Mira's father protects her self-worth although belongs to a middle class traditional family. He educates her in spite of social oppositions. He has always presented literary books on her birthdays that shaped her literary mind. But her possessive and patriarchal husband suppress the creative writer in Mira. Its after her death during childbirth, later on, her daughter-in-law (Urmi) finds her diaries in the trunk. Urmi, being a professor in English and pursuing Ph.D., is able to realize the writer in Mira after reading her diaries. The scribbling of poems and passages show that submissive Mira was marginalized as an artist. With no support of father or any friend, she never claims her potentials and identity. It is Urmi, who publishes her poems posthumously. The novel shows the lack of catalyst effect in Mira's life.

The singer artist in Bai, (*Small Remedies*) propels her to take a bold action and elope with her Muslim home tutor Ghulam Saahab to create her own space for singing. Both live together forever without marriage. They also have a daughter. This act of Bai is an open challenge to the Hindu Patriarchal society where a Brahmin wife and a daughter-in-law elopes with a Muslim man and lives forever with him without marriage. Although it has been noticed that the patriarchal norms prohibit Bai from developing her art, but it is also seen that Ghulam Saab supports her to fulfill her artistic potentials irrespective of the social restrictions on women. Shashi Deshpande sets an example in Ghulam Saab where mutual understanding and freedom bring individual development as well as healthy relationship. Ghulam Saab gives mutual support to Bai to progress in the art of singing. He arranges shows for Bai. He also gave tuitions in music in order to give financial support while Bai couldn't earn from art. He proved worthy to the trust of Bai that she put in her tabla player lover to support and motivate her in the career of music. Man-woman relationship as presented and reflected is described by the novelist as-“companionable relationship between men and women” instead of “uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed” (WMOE 84). The harmony in the relationship of Bai and Ghulam Saab can be described in the words of the novelist "..... this kind of thing too often not to know that their (Bai and Ghulam Saab's) smiles are not shared feelings of lovers, but a moment of support between singer and accompanist, the ecstasy almost that they attain when they reach their destination, the moment of 'Sam' together" (SR 175). The description does not give an impression of union of two lovers at physical level but symphony between artists. To describe the catalyzing effect of fathers and friends in the words of Thapan, these women draw strength from –“deep reservoirs of self-reliance (105) they resist the “imposed controls and seek to establish their own norms” (142).

**Findings:**The discussion shows that friends and fathers play literary roles in changing the narratives,plots, and bring dynamic changes in character development. Theyplay a crucial role in developing self-worth of theirdaughters; encourage to achieve career goals and face challenges of patriarchy .They reveal the emotional and psychological turbulence of characters who grapple with their personal desires and societal norms.Directed by their fathers and friends, these women walk on new paths and find their vision in life. Achieving their autonomy,they areable to coordinate with their surroundingrelationships also.Like a catalyst, these fathers and friends remain unaffected.The role of friends show the limitations of marriage as an institution to support women,whereas , friends show equal treatment to women These friends set the protagonists on self-quest and trigger the careers and potentials. Like a catalyst,they never come in the marital life, rather they support for better coordination.

**Conclusion:** India, where social and emotional marginalization of a woman takes since her childhood needs to be supported by inspiring role of father,brother or friend who promote gender equity within family structures.Positive father-daughter relationship enhance self-esteem,academic achievement and support social mobility and coordinate women intheir marital situations also.To conclude, supporting father-daughter relationships canserve the foundation to break patriarchal social norms and establish gender equality.

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