

MARRIAGE AND INDIVIDUATION: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *SHADOW PLAY*

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Abstract

*With regard to the institution of marriage most of the deep psychologists gives significance to the role of unconscious part of mind. Whether an individual engages in a marriage with his/her conscious decision, the working of certain patterns embedded in unconscious part of mind remains unquestionable. Unconscious part of the mind remains the precursor with regard to the institution of marriage across the world. In this paper, therefore, an attempt has been made to view the process of individuation specifically by looking at the transformation and evolution of the couple Aru and Rohit in the novel in point. The concepts of 'Love and Marriage' from Joseph Campbell's book *The Power of Myth*, Carl G. Jung's concept of marriage as a 'Psychological Relationship', M. L. Von Franz's theory of 'Individuation' and Rashna Imshaly Gandhi's ideas about individuation through marriage have been applied for unraveling the working of human mind especially the unconscious part of it with regard to the matrimonial affairs.*

Key Words: *Marriage, Unconscious, Transformation, Evolution, Individuation.*

Shashi Deshpande's *Shadow Play* (2014) is a fine commentary on love, and the institution of marriage and family in the contemporary India. The novel is divided into four parts: 'The Wedding', 'The Home', 'The World' and 'The Crystal Ball'. It primarily tells us the story of central protagonist, Aru and also involves many sub plots running parallel to each other. The main plot which involves Aru and Rohit, occupies most of their childless marriage with oblique references to Charu's married life and an account of Seema's rape. There are examples of both kinds of marriages in the novel, the failed ones as well as seemingly successful ones. The novel also emphasises the developing love affairs among various couples irrespective of their religion, age, and marital status. For example, Gopal's love for Kasturi, Seema's love for Leo, Swati's love affair with Nikhil and Kalyani's husband's love affair with another woman. Thus, the novel is a masterly contemplation on love, kinship and marriage,

Deshpande's concerns about the issues and problems related to love and marital relationships are so deep that she attempts to find out basic causes responsible for the unhappy and failed marriages in modern times. The writer delves deep into the psychology and other ungraspable fine details that operate in marriage and make it what it is. On being asked what is marriage? Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Power of Myth*, replies:

It's the reunion of the separated duad. Originally you are one. You are now two in the world, but the recognition of the spiritual identity is what marriage is. It's different from a love affair. It has nothing to do with that. It's another mythological plane of experience. When people get married because they think it's a long-time love affair, they'll be divorced very soon, because all love affairs end in disappointment. But marriage is recognition of the spiritual identity. If we live a proper life, if our minds are on the right qualities in regulating the person of the opposite sex, we will find our proper male or female counterpart. But if we are distracted by certain sensuous interests, we will marry the wrong person. By marrying the right person, we reconstruct the image of the incarnate God, and that's what marriage is.
(5-6)

In the light of the above quote it is suggestive that our mind needs to be on the right qualities in choosing the right person of the opposite sex, but a young person of marriageable age is not able, at this stage of life, to choose his/her own way, and unconsciously follow psycho-social patterns. With this one is also reminded of the concept of 'anima/animus' as propounded by C.G Jung. This 'inner woman' in the male psyche and the 'inner man' in the female psyche plays vital role in the marital affairs.

Shashi Deshpande, in the very beginning of the novel refers to marriage. She emphasises that the real life begins after marriage, something which is an amalgamation of love, trust, care, sorrow, mutual respect and sometimes pain and disaster as well. The opening lines of the first paragraph are:

Traditionally, a wedding comes at the end of story, a story with a happy ending, that is; in fact, the wedding is the happy ending. However, it is not the end but the beginning: the beginning of a new life for the couple, the creation of a new family- in fact, the beginning of life itself. (3)

The marriage, author refers to is that of Arundhati and Rohit, a love-cum-arranged marriage. Though Aru and Rohit have acquaintance with each other from the very early age as Rohit has been a regular visitor at Aru's place and has been secretly in love with her still Aru takes a long time to decide about her marriage with Rohit. She accepts the mature mutual bond between them but categorically denies any emotional attachment with him. On being asked by Kalyani, about her delay in deciding to marry Rohit 'Is there anyone else, Aru?' (249) she replies;

No, there was not. But she had often thought of the man who had suddenly materialized out of the rain like a phantom when she was lost and had led her to an area she was familiar with. The young man had become a figure of romance for the girl she was then. Time now, she thinks, to put away that phantom lover, time to think of what Rohit means to me. (249)

This phantom man 'out of the rain' signifies Aru's animus, the image of whom she carries in her mind since long. It was this figure of 'phantom lover' who has been putting Aru's decision of marrying Rohit off. M.L. Von Franz has very aptly called this image of a man in the unconscious of a woman as 'animus' which is further explained by Jung as follows:

Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman. This image is fundamentally unconscious, a hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of man, an imprint or "archetype" of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by women. Even if no woman existed, it would still be possible at any given time to deduce from this unconscious image exactly how a woman would have to be constituted. (*The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung* 540)

Aru's animus was "the man who had suddenly materialized out of the rain like a phantom when she was lost and had led her to an area she was familiar with. The young man had become a figure of romance for the girl she was then." (249) Even while accepting Rohit's marriage proposal Aru does not betray any desire to marry him for romantic reasons. Eventually Aru projects her animus on Rohit and accepts him as her husband. She declares her acceptance as follows:

'Rohit,' she said, 'I want to marry you. I want to be your wife,' I want to live the rest of my life with you. I know our marriage will make Amma happy, but that's a by-the-way. I would never marry just for that, I could not be dishonest, I would never cheat any man, least of all you. Believe me, Rohit.'

He did, he told her he did. (90)

Although it seems that both Aru and Rohit make a conscious decision of marrying each other, but little do they know that they are governed by their unconscious mind, something that carries the 'animus' and 'anima', the image of 'inner man' and 'inner woman' respectively. Since it is only an image, there is no possibility that such a man or woman existed. An individual strives to seek the partner that corresponds to

the image which he carries in his unconscious mind. He/she projects the primordial image called animus/anima on any woman/man and feels elated when the target is achieved. As per deep psychologist who studies the collective unconscious as a store house of archetypal patterns, Rashna Gandhi postulates that:

A young person of marriageable age is just emerging from this mist of original unconscious, and has only partial understanding of him/her self and others. The greater this area of unconsciousness, the less a relationship is one of free choice, although the young person may think he/she is exercising an option. This is most easily seen in the metaphor of “blind” love; an expression of the compulsive nature of falling in love. (77)

The critic terms this operation of the unconscious as the 'blind love' where the choice of the life partner is more of a compulsion than a conscious option. The compulsion of such a choice, in most of the cases, is triggered and controlled by the 'primordial' image of animus/anima engraved in the unconscious part of an individual mind. The duo, in this case as in the case of any other marriage, projects one's unconscious 'image' on to the other and feels the sense of oneness with each other in the early stage of marriage. Rashna Gandhi views the early stage of a marriage, whether love or arranged as:

the “in love” stage, in love with ourselves, namely with that part of us which brings our best qualities to the fore: we are open, loving, and vulnerable. We get a glimpse of our own true nature, and this makes us feel complete. Every one of us knows these moments when we are in love. It seems like an eternal, sacred moment, because we touch into our depths and feel this oneness. All boundaries fall away and we transcend time and space. (78)

The 'oneness' which Aru and Rohit feels at the early stage of their marriage is not because of the presence of one another but because of the projection of their inner self. In other words, the 'other' becomes a screen on which one's best qualities can be projected and cherished. In yet other words, the presence of the other helps an individual to split into two half's and thereafter the subsequent union provides the momentary sense of completeness. Under such circumstances of union of lovers both the partners feel that they have transcend the boundaries of space and time and considers such moments as eternal and sacred.

Now in case of Rohit, Aru acts as his 'anima' and as such becomes his pursuit. The characteristics of one's anima as described by M. L. Von Franz,

can be projected so that they appear to the man to be the qualities of some particular women. It is presence of the anima that causes a man to fall suddenly in love when he sees a woman for the first time and knows at once that this is “she”. In this situation, the man feels as if he has known this woman intimately for all time; he falls for her so helplessly that it looks to outsiders like complete madness. (191)

Without being intimate at all Rohit harbours a feeling that Aru is someone whom he knows as an intimate companion. The innocence as well as the reclusive attitude of Aru makes her appear as 'fascinatingly vague' to Rohit, something that boosts his desire to possess her. The text reads, “Rohit had seen Aru then fallen in love with her in an instant.” (90-91) Rohit like any other young man, exert under the influence of anima falls for Aru and recovers only when the romantic phase of their marriage is over. Since both the partners are the projections of an image, and an image being nothing but the product of imagination, the relationship is bound to get sour with the passage of time. In case of Aru and Rohit this 'image' also shatters with the passage of time as is its nature is and leads to disillusionment. It is, in this context, that marriage is seen as an important step towards one's individuation, especially with Aru. Critic opines that:

The fatal mistake we make at this stage, is that we do not acknowledge this wholeness within ourselves, but project it on to the partner whom we hold responsible for providing the “other” (or “better”) half that makes us “whole.” What is actually happening, we think mistakenly, is that the two halves of each partner merge to become a whole-hence this

feeling of oneness, of "paradise". All our energies at this point are absorbed by the significant other. This projection of an internal state of bliss on to the other carries the seeds of disillusionment, because that other is not what he/ she appears to be. (Gandhy-78)

Even if Aru and Rohit remains committed couple, but the need to have a child brings bitterness between them. This can be attributed to the natural instinct of a woman and the purpose of marriage, i.e., procreation. The institution of marriage is seen as a natural arrangement for the procreation and continuation of human progeny; therefore, the inability to give birth to a child fails its vital purpose. The absence of child, in many cases, leads to the breakdown of marriage leading to separation. It needs a conscious and strong effort on the part of both the partners to understand each other's need so that the reasons of estrangement between them get weeded out. Rashna Gandhi further states: "Before the partners understand what is happening, they have made, on an unconscious level, the transition from the state of wholeness to the feeling of separateness"(79) Though an otherwise healthy companionship, the marriage of Aru and Rohit reaches a point of breakdown because of two reasons, one is the lack of child and the other being Aru's extra indulgence with her mother, sisters and aunts.

As stated earlier, the animus/anima projected upon the opposite partner loses its sheen and the couple, in most of the cases, regret of having made a wrong choice in marriage. Since, they do not know that their choice, at the first place, was not a conscious option exercised by them but something decided by the unconscious image inside them, they keep on blaming the 'other' or circumstances for whatever wrong happens between them. Under such circumstances a woman, in most of the cases, turns away from husband and focuses her energies and attentions on the expected child and the related issues. Aru and Rohit also pass through this phase of relationship that one day Rohit leaves her alone, though temporarily. The situation between Aru and Rohit is depicted the as follows:

The next morning Rohit leaves home early, even before she wakes up. There's a stab of fear in her when she sees his bed so neatly made, as if he hasn't slept in it at all, as if he has been away all night. It reminds her of her parents' bed the day Gopal left them, of her sudden panic when she went into their room and found both of them not there, the bed clearly not slept in. Rohit will call me; she comforts herself, knowing that he never lets the day end without talking to her. But there's no call. She tries to get involved in her work, though part of her keeps waiting for his call. (248)

After Rohit's temporary departure Aru begins to realize that how she has kept her husband at the periphery, the centre being her need of a child and her maternal family. It is for the first time that Aru becomes nostalgic about an apparently failed marriage of her parents since her father had also walked out upon his family unannounced. Even if Rohit left her temporarily but for Aru this separation has a deep impact on her psyche as it refreshed the memory of her parents' separation. The separation of Aru's parents without any apparent reasons has had an indelible imprint on her mind. The manner in which parents conduct has a deep impact on their children. Rashna Gandhi has also postulated that the animus of females is influenced as well as structured by their fathers because father is the first male that she encounters in her life. The momentary absence of Rohit jolts Aru to the realization that her married life is in danger. The fact that the absence of the child has weighed too much upon their relationship that Rohit finds it unbearable to live in Aru's company. Even when Rohit comes back and declares his love for Aru, the latter experiences a sense of loss as expressed by the author thus: "Is he reiterating his love for her? Why, then is his tone so puzzled, as if he is asking himself why things are the way they are, why he has to love her". (253) A fresh sense dawn upon Aru with regard to Rohit only when she nearly loses and gets him back. Rohit too, on the other hand, realizes the gravity of the hurt he has caused to Aru by deserting her though temporarily. Rashna Gandhi postulates, "The couple may also experience a financial loss, or the loss of a child or an illness, which may change their lives. As each individual changes and evolves in this process, we may wake up one morning

and realise that the partner is not the same person as the one we married” (79).

In the case of Aru and Rohit the absence of child triggers the separation between them and steers their marriage into a new phase, the phase of differences, estrangement and lack of mutual trust. The child has become the central focus for Aru which has relegated Rohit to the position of secondary importance. The temporary separation when Rohit leaves Aru and comes back brings about a sea change in a attitude towards each other, a change which both of them recognize immediately and induces a sense of loss or fear in both of them. Both Aru and Rohit analyze the reason behind this transformation and quickly decide to find a solution to the problem. Rohit understands the absence of child as the primary cause of the estrangement between them and readily agrees to the proposal of Aru with regard to the adoption of a child.

The couple, at the eightieth year of their marriage, decides to adopt a child, something that becomes a gesture of mutual needs, love and understanding. The couple begins to live the life of a renewed love and feelings for each other because the new child acts as an adhesive between them. Before this, Aru feels that the absence of child, the two of them, i.e., Aru and Rohit were not sufficient to form a unit. After the projection of the animus/anima falls, the child becomes the uniting force that brings certainty and stability in the life of the couple followed by mutual love and respect. Rohit and Aru have to pass through many phases of their lives for them to complete the process of maturation; something Rashna Gandhi calls the process of individuation. Wilfred L. Guerin, in his book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, explains the term as follows:

Individuation is a psychological growing up, the process of discovering those aspects of one's self that make one an individual different from other members of his species. It is essentially a process of recognition that is, as he matures, the individual must consciously recognize the various aspects, unfavorable as well as favorable of his total self. This self recognition requires extraordinary courage and honesty, but is absolutely essential if one is to become a well-balanced individual. (204-205)

Almost smitten by each other Aru and Rohit decide to marry without acknowledging the fact that they are behaving under the influence of the unconscious animus/anima. This maturity gets depicted in what Aru says towards the end, “It's futile telling anyone not to love, as futile as it is to ask someone to love; Aru has learnt that both these are impossible. Why we love and why we can't love are both mysteries we will never be able to fathom” (255). The choice of a lover as well as the aversion to people as a possible choice for a lover is not in the control of an individual. This choice of a partner is an unconscious one and does not involve free will. It is only through the conscious awareness of their unconscious pre-dispositions that they reach a stage where respecting each other's needs and individuality remains the only way to remain glued to each other as a married couple. This process of individuation is explained by Rashna Gandhi as follows:

This process can take place whether the couple remains together or not. If it does, within a marriage, the co-dependent relationship falls away; projections fall away, and a truly mature relationship can develop. It has been one of the joyful experiences in my practice to accompany partners through this process, when both are ready for transformation. (81)

Once the process of individuation is complete, the life of the couple becomes joyful as their relationship becomes mature. As a result of this transformation the partners in marriage can grow independent of each other without becoming oblivious of each other's needs and individuality. In some cases where the partner evolves parallel to each other, marriage can become a spiritual experience.

The study undertaken reveals that even if the matrimony proves to be a disastrous experience it can pave way for self-actualization or what M. L. Von Franz calls individuation. However, it needs acute consciousness, honesty and responsibility for an individual to identify his/her anima/animus so that the marriage can be lived on the basis of each other's needs rather than a relationship based on pure romance and expectations. It further reveals that marriage is a significant part in the life of an individual and can

becomes a learning experience of deep consequences. For a conscious couple or an individual in a marriage the matrimonial experiences can be a spiritual experience if lived sensibly.

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