ABSTRACT

The present study seeks to rectify the gaps, imbalances and misconceptions characterising a large body of critical works on Shashi Deshpande by examining in depth and detail her treatment of the theme of determinism and free will and how it finds an aesthetic expression in her novels. It also tends to arrive at a more comprehensive and incisive understanding of her view and vision of human life.

Almost all of her novels deal with this theme and dramatise an evergoing battle between the will of an individual, on the one hand, seeking its expression and realisation in one form or the other and various forces of determinism, setting a stage for them and thus trying to control and decide the course of their life in different ways and forms on the other. If she underlines the power of libidinous desire of human body and the physiological functions like menstruation in women she also brings out with equal force the assertion of will by her men and women to free themselves from their constricting hold. She also provides deep insights into psychological conflict between one’s rational and irrational, conscious and unconscious selves, highlighting, at the same time, the intricate relation between one’s past and present.

Her novels present a realistic and gripping picture of the struggle between an individual’s authentically personal intentions, aims and aspirations on one hand, and the dominant norms and structures of their social, cultural and economic milieu on the other. The drama of human will contending against the designs of invisible and mysterious forces, appearing in such forms as untimely deaths and other inexplicable incidents, add new dimensions to the scope and range of her thematic canvas.

The way she portrays some of her characters, especially the protagonists, and endows them with abilities and capacities of intelligence, understanding and courage in varying degrees to withstand, resist and even overcome the pressures of determining forces in their lives evinces her faith in human potentials, thus imparting on element of realistic optimism to her vision.

This conflict between human will and different deterministic forces is perfectly and powerfully dramatised by her art of characterisation, plot construction and the skilful use and organisation of such devices as myths, imagery, symbolism and irony.