



# Breaking the Cycle of Stagnation: Grief of Single Motherhood and Emotional Healing in Shashi Deshpande's *My Beloved Charioteer*

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**Abstract**— This study examines *My Beloved Charioteer* by Shashi Deshpande from the perspective of emotional stagnation and how it affects single parenthood. The article explores the connection between widowed mother Aarti and her daughter Priti, highlighting how unresolved grief may lead to a never-ending cycle of emotional paralysis. The significance of familial support in attaining emotional emancipation is demonstrated by the grandmother Ajji's pivotal role in interrupting this cycle through intervention and instruction. The article highlights how loss affects generations and how self-realization and familial ties can lead to healing and fresh starts.



**Keywords**— Emotional Stagnation, Single Motherhood, Intergenerational Relationships, Grief and Loss, Emotional Liberation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande was born on 19 august, 1938 in Dhawarka, Karnataka. She was born into an intellectual and literary family. Her father, Adya Rangacharya, was a renowned Kannada writer and dramatist, and her mother, Sharada Adya. Her exposure to literature at a young age had a profound influence on her and sparked her passion for writing. She received her education in Bangalore and has the degree with law and economics and in Mumbai, she studied journalism at the Vidya Bhavan and worked for a few months as a journalist for the magazine 'Onlooker'. Shashi Deshpande married D.H. Deshpande. Together, they have two children. Deshpande's experiences as a wife and mother greatly influenced her writing, particularly in how women navigate personal roles and societal expectations. Shashi Deshpande wrote 13 novels, four children's books, memoir and collected essay. She is the winner of sahitya academy award in 1990 for the novel *That Long Silence* and received Padmashri award in 2009. Her novel *Shadow plays*

was shortlisted for The Hindu Literary prize in 2014. She published her first collection of short stories in 1978 and published her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* in 1980. Shashi Deshpande's published her first collection of short stories in 1978 and *My Beloved Charioteer* is one of her short stories which depicts the life of mother as a single parent, it deals with the relationship between mother and daughter moreover the life of widow and the different perspective on their life.

## II. DISCUSSION

The theme of ending the cycle of stagnation is deftly examined in Shashi Deshpande's *My Beloved Charioteer* through the dynamics of mother as a single parent, especially in the relationship between Aarti, the widowed mother, and her daughter Priti. The story focuses on the effects of unresolved grief on family relationships, especially between mothers and daughters, and the

emotional paralysis that results from it. Deshpande emphasizes the possibility of emotional freedom and development by deftly illustrating Aarti's battle with widowhood and her incapacity to let go of the past. In order to help Aarti escape the cycle of emotional stagnation, the grandmother, Ajji, is crucial, proving that healing is a family process as well as an individual one. This essay's central idea is breaking the emotional stagnation. The story's protagonist, Aarti, is a widow who is following the death of her husband, finds herself emotionally unfulfilled. She clings to memories of her once-happy marriage because her grief has prevented her from moving on. Aarti becomes emotionally paralyzed by her incapacity to accept her new life to become mother as a single parent. Her relationship with her daughter Priti suffers greatly as a result of this stagnation. Given that Aarti's grief shows up as a lack of emotional availability and communication, the emotional distance between mother and daughter is evident. Consumed by her memories and the anguish of loss, Aarti grows more and more alone, erecting an emotional wall that keeps her from interacting with her daughter to the fullest extent possible. The stagnation is reflected in her incapacity to move past her grief. Aarti's relationship with her daughter, Priti, is significantly impacted by the cycle of emotional stagnation, which is especially prevalent in single motherhood. Priti is unavoidably impacted by her mother's emotional state, even though she is not yet experiencing the same grief. Priti's life is emotionally empty as a result of Aarti's retreat and her incapacity to face her loss because the unresolved grief of one generation affects the emotional development and well-being of the next, Deshpande hints subtly that emotional stagnation can be passed down through generations. One of the main conflicts in the narrative is this intergenerational stagnation, which emphasizes how the incapacity to deal with loss can limit emotional development and impede the formation of positive family bonds that is shown in these 'Do you remember your Papa?' Aarti had asked her one day with a sudden harshness.

'Papa?' There had been a moment's hesitation. Then she had replied, 'Yes, I remember.' 'No, you don't. Don't lie to me.'

The child had stared at her with a frightened face feeling she had done something wrong, though she didn't know what it was. When Aarti left us, she burst into sobs, clinging sobs" (p.186)

Ajji, plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of emotional stagnation while Aarti is still deeply entrenched in her grief. Despite going through the agony of loss, Ajji, a widow herself, has been able to move on with her life. Ajji demonstrates emotional intelligence, resilience, and a more

well-rounded view of widowhood in contrast to Aarti's emotional paralysis. In sharp contrast to the tense and emotionally distant relationship between Aarti and herself, she has an open, loving, and understanding relationship with her granddaughter, Priti. The granddaughter, Priti's role as the future is to symbolize the potential for a fresh start. She is the new, unrealized potential to end the cycle of stagnation, even though she is growing up in a home characterized by loss and emotional strife. "I SMILE AS I hear them at last, the sounds I am waiting for. A rush of footsteps, the slam of the bathroom door and then, bare feet running towards me" (p.181) Priti's relationship with Ajji is still open and full of possibilities and unlike her mother, she is not yet burdened by the emotional scars of the past. The tense relationship between Aarti and herself is contrasted with Ajji's relationship with Priti, which is free of unresolved emotional baggage. Priti and her grandmother's relationship turns into a representation of hoping a chance to start over, get better, and move on "Happiness can mean different things to different people. For me, it is this—the beginning of a new day with this child." (p.182). In this way, Priti represents the family's future, one in which the emotional barriers of previous generations are recognized but do not limit her capacity for emotional growth. With the help and direction of sage, emotionally developed family members like Ajji, Deshpande implies through Priti that every new generation has the capacity to overcome the cycles that have held the preceding one back. In order to help Aarti face the unpleasant realities of her past and overcome the emotional stalemate that has characterized her life since her husband's passing, Ajji's viewpoint becomes crucial. Breaking the cycle of stagnation in the family is heavily dependent on Ajji's role as the matriarch and emotional mentor because of her personal experiences with loss and grief, Ajji knows how important it is to let go of the past in order to move on. She gently urges her daughter to cut the emotional bonds to her past because she understands the negative consequences of Aarti's unresolved grief. An important turning point in the story is Ajji's intervention, which initiates both Aarti's emotional awakening and the family's healing process. Aarti can learn from Ajji's emotional clarity and wisdom, which show that even in the face of severe loss, emotional development and healing are achievable. The grandmother Ajji provides a more resilient and introspective perspective on widowhood and motherhood than Aarti, who exhibits emotional stagnation. Even though she has also lost a spouse, Ajji has accepted the role of a guiding matriarch rather than one who is mired in the past by allowing herself to grieve and move on. This insight is revealed when Ajji chooses to step in after realizing her daughter is emotionally paralyzed. Her relationship with her granddaughter Priti turns out to be

crucial in resolving the family's emotional stalemate. The grief that characterizes Aarti's relationship with Priti does not affect Ajji's relationship with her despite her own loss, Ajji fosters and treasures her relationship with her granddaughter, teaching her the value of moving on in spite of the hurt caused by the past. Ajji's function as a link between generations is essential in demonstrating that emotional freedom is achievable and that, with the correct direction, the cycle of stagnation can be broken.

The act of facing grief and letting go is closely linked to the theme of emotional liberation in *My Beloved Charioteer*. Over the course of the narrative, Aarti experiences emotional release and epiphany. As she shares her own traumatic marriage and widowhood experiences, Ajji teaches Aarti the value of realizing how suffocating grief can be and how important it is to let go of the emotional burden of the past. The path to emotional release provided by Ajji's disclosures to Aarti necessitates her accepting the loss and letting go of its grip on her life. The cycle of stagnation that has characterized Aarti's life since her husband's passing is said to be broken by this act of facing grief. Aarti learns from Ajji's intervention that healing calls for more than time; it calls for an active engagement with the past and a readiness to let go of it. Aarti is able to re-engage with life and more significantly, to re-establish a healthier relationship with her daughter, Priti, thanks to this emotional release. One of the most important steps in ending the generational cycle of stagnation is the emotional liberation that Aarti starts to feel, which gives the family an opportunity to move on and heal. Although the main focus of the narrative is Aarti's battle to overcome emotional stagnation, the granddaughter Priti serves as a significant symbol of the possibility of a fresh start. The emotional burdens that impede Aarti's relationship with her mother are absent from Priti's relationship with her grandmother, which is one of respect and love. Future generations may be able to escape the cycles of emotional paralysis that have bound the previous ones, as Priti's emotional development is largely unaffected by the grief and stagnation that characterize her mother's life. Through Priti, Deshpande suggests that new generations can flourish emotionally without the burden of unresolved grief and familial stagnation if they receive the proper direction and emotional support.

### III. ANALYSIS

Aarti's experiences as a widow and a mother as a single parent demonstrate how a family's cycles of stagnation can be sustained by the emotional isolation and grief that accompany losing a spouse. Aarti is unable to move on emotionally because she is a single parent. She is

unable to fully interact with her daughter or let her grow emotionally because she is unable to confront the reality of her marriage and her grief. Her daughter inherits this cycle of emotional stagnation and may later struggle with her own relationships and personal development. 'I always used to think I was very different from you. And look at us now, both of us alike. A pair of widows.' (p.184). Both Aarti and Ajji have experienced widowhood, and a large portion of their lives are shaped by their grief. Aarti's grief over her husband's passing and her incapacity to move on serve as a metaphor for how grief can consume a person and impede personal development. This theme also discusses how loss impacts a person's relationships with others, resulting in emotional conflict and feelings of loneliness. Aarti and Ajji are both impacted by widowhood, which is a major theme in the narrative. Ajji's more resilient approach to widowhood stands in contrast to Aarti's incapacity to deal with her husband's passing. 'Earlier I used to ask, 'Slept well?' And one day, she had put the cup down with a trembling hand and said, 'Slept well? No, I never do that. I haven't slept well since Madhav died. I'll never sleep well again all my life. I have to take something every night so that I can close my eyes for a few hours. Now never ask me again if I slept well.' (p.182) Deshpande examines how a woman's identity, sense of self-worth, and emotional state can be significantly impacted by the experience of losing a spouse through these two characters. The granddaughter of the grandmother (Ajji) is exemplified by Aarti. The emotional stagnation of Aarti depicts through these lines, "Aarti, after neglecting herself for days, suddenly dresses up, makes up her face and does up her hair. But it is her face that has the arid look of a desert; no smile, no happiness ever blooms there. Life has been cruelled to her. It was her father whom she had loved and he died, while I live. It was her husband she had loved even more than the child, and he died, while Priti is left to her" (p.184). She is emotionally stale as a result of her grief as a widow. She is stuck in her memories, unable to adjust to her new reality and unable to move past the loss of her spouse. Her inability to establish a deep emotional connection with her daughter Priti is a result of her tense and aloof relationship with her mother (Ajji). Additionally, this stagnation represents the larger idea that unresolved grief and emotional pain can impede future relationships and personal development. The suppressing effects of unresolved emotional burden is one of the main themes in Aarti's bitterness towards life "There is nowhere I want to go. Everywhere I see couples. I can't bear to see them. I could murder them when I see them talking and laughing" (p.185), which results from her widowhood. Her mother and her past, especially her marriage are the subject of unresolved emotional issues. The narrative emphasizes how unresolved feelings like grief

and rage can keep people stuck in the past and keep them from living fully and moving on. The way that characters like Aarti and Ajji are influenced by their pasts is greatly influenced by memory. While Ajji muses on her personal experiences with loss, love, and motherhood, Aarti is mired in memories of her blissful marriage and her bond with her father. The story illustrates how memories can affect people's current relationships and emotional states in both a comforting and limiting way. The story's central theme is 'letting go'. The grandmother learns the value of letting people move on in their own way from her relationship with Priti as she said in the story, "Happiness can mean different things to different people. For me, it is this—the beginning of a new day with this child" (p.182). The grandmother's actions reflect this theme, particularly as she tries to help Aarti get over her emotional paralysis and stifled marriage by demonstrating to her the importance of letting go of the past. It highlights the emotional necessity of escaping the confining hold of previous relationships and traumas. The story contrasts the loneliness Aarti experiences as a result of her emotional state with the friendship between Ajji and her granddaughter Priti. Grief and unresolved issues can lead to emotional isolation as demonstrated by Aarti's retreat into her memories and the gap between her and her mother. The relationship between Ajji and Priti, on the other hand, demonstrates the happiness and power that come from friendships particularly when it crosses generational boundaries.

The disruption of cyclical emotional patterns is a major theme. The narrative implies that there is always room for improvement and development, even though emotional stagnation can be passed down through families. Her grandmother (Ajji) is not only her grandmother but also her best friend in the house Ajji's intervention in Aarti's and Priti's life represents the potential for overcoming ingrained emotional patterns and achieving serenity and resolution.

In essence, *My Beloved Charioteer* touches on the complexities of family dynamics, grief, memory and the process of emotional healing all while navigating the delicate relationships between the generations. The examination of single motherhood and the theme of ending the cycle of emotional stagnation are intertwined in Shashi Deshpande's *My Beloved Charioteer*. The narrative emphasizes the intricacies of the bonds between a grandmother, her daughter and her granddaughter but it also shows how these generations can be affected by emotional paralysis and unresolved grief, especially when the grandmother is a mother as a single parent. Emotional development is a major theme, especially when the grandmother realizes that Aarti's emotional stasis is caused by her inability to confront the reality of her marriage and her grief. The grandmother's journey, which ends with her

attempt to assist Aarti in moving on, serves as a metaphor for how crucial it is to face difficult realities in order to feel emotionally free and healed.

Ajji's intervention in her daughter Aarti's life is the primary act of breaking the cycle in *My Beloved Charioteer*. Ajji enables Aarti to identify the harmful patterns of grief and loneliness she has been caught in by disclosing the truth about her own stifled marriage and the significance of emotional liberation. As a result of Ajji's guidance, Aarti is able to confront her grief, come to terms with her past, and move on, which ultimately gives her the opportunity to improve as a mother to Priti and start the process of ending the cycle. Aarti's grief and widowhood combine to create a vicious cycle of emotional inactivity that hinders her ability to interact with people, particularly her daughter Priti. She is unable to reconcile her current reality as mother as a single parent with the pleasant memories of her marriage and her time spent with her late husband, so she keeps thinking about them. Since she projects her own unresolved pain on their relationship, Aarti's attachment to the past prevents her from fully interact with her daughter. The mother's emotional trauma may unintentionally become a barrier to developing a healthy, open relationship with her children, which is a common struggle in single motherhood. Aarti is unable to embrace the present and create a future of emotional development for herself and Priti because of her emotional paralysis, which is based on regret and unresolved grief. There is little space for the love or joy that could aid in the healing of both mother and daughter because of the emotional burden of her past. Aarti's incapacity to overcome her own emotional paralysis has a significant impact on her role as Priti's mother as well as her relationship with her mother. Motherhood is portrayed as a delicate balance between emotional well-being and nurturing, and Aarti's unresolved grief keeps her from giving her daughter her whole attention "But, Ajji, if I try to talk to her, she says, "Go to sleep, Priti, don't bother me." And she never sleeps at all; she just reads and smokes. And I don't like that smell." (p.184) By dwelling on the past, Aarti unintentionally inhibits her daughter's emotional growth rather than giving Priti the room she needs to develop emotionally and forge her own identity. The emotional barriers Aarti has put up around herself limit Priti's emotional development, which could have been encouraged in a healthy setting "But Mummy is with you." The child's face had fallen" (p.184). Since Aarti's incapacity to move on burdens her daughter, further entangling her in the same cycle of loss and grief, this dynamic emphasizes the generational impact of emotional stagnation. Unless a deliberate effort is made to break free, the generational effects of emotional paralysis can lead to a pattern where each new generation is burdened by the unresolve.



The Part Ajji Plays in *Breaking the Cycle* holds a value theme, Ajji, the grandmother, acts as a catalyst for the family's transformation and reconciliation. Despite having gone through widowhood and loss herself, Ajji takes a different route than her daughter. Ajji considers her own loss and history, but she refuses to let it completely define who she is. Because she understands the need to escape the emotional cycles of stagnation and grief, she has a more open and encouraging relationship with her granddaughter, Priti. Breaking the cycle of emotional paralysis that has afflicted the family is largely dependent on Ajji's strong bond with Priti and her readiness to step in and help her daughter. Ajji assists her daughter in realizing the necessity of self-liberation and emotional healing by pushing Aarti to face her emotional suffering and the realities of her oppressive marriage. This is essential to ending the cycle of inertia because it forces Aarti to face her unresolved feelings and move on as a person and as a mother. The granddaughter Priti stands for optimism and the potential to overcome the past. The next generation, represented by Priti, has the opportunity to start over and overcome the emotional stagnation that has afflicted her mother and grandmother, even though she has a strong bond with her grandmother. The emotional burden that afflicts Ajji and Aarti's relationship does not affect Priti's relationship with her grandmother. This implies that even though the cycle of stagnation is deeply ingrained, it need not go on forever.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

*My Beloved Charioteer's* healing theme emphasizes that ending the cycle of emotional stagnation requires a family effort as well as individual effort. The narrative demonstrates that although Aarti's path to recovery is extremely personal, she only starts to face and overcome her emotional paralysis with the help and intervention of her mother, Ajji. This family's joint endeavour serves as an example of how healing is only possible when there is love, understanding and a readiness to face up to difficult realities. The textual highlights that achieving emotional freedom necessitates the participation of people we love, who may either support or impede our path to self-realization. Future generations will be able to live more freely and fully as the family starts to heal as a whole as Ajji assists Aarti in overcoming the emotional stagnation of the past, the idea of ending the cycle highlights the need to allow emotional healing to occur as well as the transformative power of facing pain. Healing starts when we acknowledge and let go of our deepest hurts, as demonstrated by Ajji's encouragement of Aarti to confront the unpleasant realities of her marriage and emotional paralysis. Aarti's path is one of emotional development, and

with her mother's support, her readiness to face her past signals the possible end of the family's stagnation. The experience of being mother as a single parent and the generational dynamics within the family are closely linked to the theme of ending the cycle of emotional stagnation in *My Beloved Charioteer*. Ajji's insight and capacity to overcome her own grief provide a counterbalance to Aarti's grief and emotional paralysis, paving the way for Aarti to follow her emotional path. Through the grandmother's intervention and the potential presented by her granddaughter Priti, the story highlights the value of emotional freedom for both individual and family development as well as the potential to overcome the stagnation brought on by prior trauma. In the end, Deshpande's story shows that emotional healing necessitates both personal effort and family love and support, making ending emotional cycles a shared path to emotional freedom.

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