

FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*

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Abstract

That Long Silence is an acclaimed novel by Sashi Deshpande. In this story the author reveals an intriguing picture of ordinary middle class educated women. The name of the protagonist is Jaya who lives with her husband Mohan and two children Rahu and Rati. The story entirely revolves around Jaya, her married life and her role as dutiful wife. She plays the role of an affectionate mother, dutiful to her in-laws and her relatives. It gives a simple enchanting scenes solely expressed by the author. According to the author husbands do not give attention to wives emotions, likes and dislikes. The author expresses the emotion with vivid details like that of lovemaking relationship with children, and she depicts her lifestyle clearly she lives for herself or for others. Throughout the story she is engaged in searching her identity as an individual.

In this story one situation arises when husband and wife's relation was given an offbeat. Two individual though very intimate but couldn't relate each other in terms of feelings or understanding. Many married women might find some instances similar in their everyday lives after reading the story. The author has done a good job in expressing intimacy. Sexual feelings are expressed in its natural tone. This story begins with quotation from *That Long Silence*, "I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts, only silence" (TLS 143). These lines reveal the oppressive, debilitating life situation of a housewife, who journeys from ignorance to knowledge, through suffering.

This paper is an attempt to explore the extreme silence of Indian woman as a gendered subject is the focus of the narrative. This characterization of the silence in the novel critiques the deafness of the patriarchal social order towards women. It is suggested that the 'long silence' is a result of patriarchy's refusal to comprehend woman's 'language' in so far as woman's work, speech, acts and aspiration are concerned. The burden of breaking the silence is finally placed on the women in the novel by the novelist and it seems to imply that silence can be only if women 'learn' men's language.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English. She has created ripples in the society of male domination by taking women seriously in her novels. She takes us inside the consciousness of her women characters to present their plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions. Jaya realize how her voice is muted with respect to articulating her experiences. In her retrospection, she is alive to the restrictions on herself expression. Her

narrative, which forms the novel *That Long Silence*, written in secrecy, is a breaking of the silence imposed on her because it is a violation of the gendered modes of self expression.

The novel reveals the limits on the women's ability to participate in a free circulation of idea and employ 'fiction' as a mode of self-expression. Mohan takes strong exception to Jaya's story published in a magazine where it had won a prize because he feels the story will be constructed as real (by their acquaintances), and they would see him in a poor light. He says, "They will all know, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these persons are us..... How could you Wright these things?" (TLS 12) Interestingly, Mohan offers a paradoxical reading of the story here. In feeling hurt, he seems to find the story realistic and hence feel reviled in public; yet, he insist that he is not the man in the story through others would mistake it to be so. This acts as a force containing Jaya's free expression and she turns to writing 'womanly' pieces in women's magazines, gaining popularity. This regulated and conformist mode of writing is appreciated by Mohan. In this entire episode, the determining factor is not Mohan's individual preferences or attitudes. It is the patriarchal 'role' that drives Mohan into such a position. In the novel, this is indicative of how the patriarchal order silences the modes of self expression of women and interferes in women's cultural self-representation.

Shashi Deshpode's novels, however, reveals her acute sensitivity to the issues involving women and her tremendous sympathy for women. She presents both the weakness and the strengths of the women. In her own words, she is portraying in her writings, "[the]

Vulnerability of women. The power of women. The deviousness of women. The helplessness of women. The courage of women" (Dhawan 34). She seeks to expose the ideology by which a woman is trained to play a subservient role in society. Her novels, featuring female protagonists, reconstruct aspects of women's experience and attempt to give voice to 'muted' ideologies, registering resistance. Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists are truly in search of inner strength and her attempt to give an honest portrayal of their frustration, hopes and disappointments makes her novels susceptible to treatment from the feminist angle.

Novels of Sashi Deshpande are about in female quest for identity. Her novels are usually narrated by female protagonists who strive to find out their own selves throughout the novels. Her heroines try to find out their own selves through writing and they ultimately reach a resolution in their lives. No doubt, they are haunted by the memories of past and feel a kind of worthlessness, but towards the end they realize their selves. This is one of the important needs and messages in today's world where women are facing a void, a vacuum in their lives. Though, they appear to be successful, but they seem to lack direction and feel a sense of futility.

Deshpande's novels fit into such a scenario and help females realize their potential in a positive manner. The quest for female identity has its roots in the patriarchal set up, where man is given every kind of freedom. He has the right to choose his aim. His emotions are taken care of. Blunders committed by him are ignored and are perceived as his pastime, whereas women cannot afford a little digression from the set rules. She has to conform to social norms. Otherwise, she is perceived as a woman of loose morals. She has projected objectively a new female face with subjective experience with a geocentric vision. She reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings are rooted in the culture in which she lives. Her remarks are sensitive to the common everyday events and experience and give an artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. Her feminism is particularly Indian in the sense that it is borne out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities. The women characters are with traditional approaches trying to tie family and profession to maintain the virtues of Indian culture.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (TLS) is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian housewife. Although many women writers tried their hand at

expressing this long silence that had turned woman into non-entities, they could only provide psychological depths to their characters. They either created unreal sentimental romances or finally succumbed to the temptation of mouthing feminist ideology. But Shashi Deshpande's success lies in her representation of real life experience.

She realistically depicts their inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for the self identity. Although Jaya as a child was born into an above average household, she had developed the fear of ridicule from males beginning with her father, who had snobbishly criticized her poor taste in music, saying "What poor taste you have Jaya" (TLS 3). Jaya not able to erase his father criticizing her 'poor taste' lapses into silence even later so that she avoids confessing to Mohan that she actually enjoys the ads in the movies more than the movies. The inability to find words leads Jaya to embark upon a long silent journey.

That Long Silence deals with the various shades of the life of Jaya who journey from ignorance to knowledge through her untold sufferings. It is a novel of self-analysis, self-realization and self-introspection. She realizes at the end of her life that her very compromise shatters her individuality. The present study aims to explore the struggle and survivals and the quest for self identity and self liberation of the women who belong to the patriarchal society.

References

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