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JAYA'S ODYSSEY- EXTENDED SOCIETAL PERSPECTIVE OF SHASHI DESHPANDE
IN THAT LONG SILENCE

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ABSTRACT

Man's realization of self and individual is a significant system to recognise the potential within. Self-centred patriarchal society has concealed the self of women since their creation. Women, who are aware of their existence of innate potential, are in constant search of their self and individual identity; fortunately women acquire this awareness through education. The real self is comprehended through analysis and introspection of actions and events, and enough space makes possible to contemplate on issues. Women naturally undergo self analysis with profound contemplation which ultimately directs them to discover their identity. Contemplation provides ample scope for analysis of the interior cemented self and potential. Hence contemplation is rather an odyssey of the individual from the known to the unknown with an objective to explore reality. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have presented the real vulnerable state of Indian women (educated/uneducated). Among these writers, Shashi Deshpande advocates harmony with assertion. She recommends assertion with harmony to preserve the traditional value as well as the integrity of familial bonds. She stands a class apart for her assertive heroines. Deshpande's award winning and most prominent novel, *That long Silence* portrays this idea most lucidly with the odyssey of the protagonist Jaya. *That Long Silence* alluringly presents the odyssey of women through the character of Jaya trapped between modernity and tradition. Her odyssey unravels awesome facts and realities of life.

Key words: Potential, Contemplation, odyssey, explore reality.

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Man's realization of self and individual is a significant system to recognise the potential within. Self centered patriarchal society has concealed the self of women since their creation. The most startling fact is that women in past centuries had hardly ever known that they possessed a 'self' of their own. If at all they perceived knowledge of their self, they had been denied to realize it in order to restrain them from acquiring identity. Infact the truth remains intact behind the veil of culture and tradition. Women, who are aware of their existence of innate potential, are in constant search of their self and individual identity; fortunately women acquire this awareness through education. Hence the quest for identity of educated women is more intense

than uneducated, nevertheless their search is endless. The real self is comprehended through analysis and introspection of actions and events, and enough space makes possible to contemplate on issues. Women naturally undergo self analysis with profound contemplation which ultimately directs them to discover their identity. Contemplation provides ample scope for analysis of the interior cemented self and potential. Hence contemplation is rather an odyssey of the individual from the known to the unknown with an objective to explore reality. Eventually the gradual push –force of the odyssey ends up with discovery of identity, pragmatic attitude with recognition of responsibility.

India is a country known for its traditional value which sanctifies marriage and family entity. Indian tradition upholds the worth and saneness with its belief in integral entity called family, which nourishes elevated idea of ‘unity in diversity’. The significant factor responsible for upholding the traditional value is the strong will of Indian woman to preserve culture, tradition and responsibility silently or assertively. Deshpande has rightly represented such women in her writings. She, as a law graduate, is aware of the traumas of divorce and family disintegration in Indian social scenario. Her ideas of feminism are balanced and consequence oriented. She believes in Simon de Beauvoir’s idea of woman as fundamentally a human being, which is the humanistic perception for predicament of women. Deshpande, a down to earth humanist, has altogether a different idea of liberation in the Indian context. Her ideal projects the need to evade divorce, a societal trauma which disintegrates the integral unity of the family. When the modern western influenced the society and women rightly comprehend the idea of liberation, the values are preserved with harmony. Deshpande, despite a feminist clearly states what it means to Indian liberated women. She says:

Liberation means you refuse to be oppressed, you refuse to give up your individuality, you refuse to do things which go against your conscience. You realise the potential you have within you, you don’t let other people tell you what to do. You know what you are worth. You know what is your value. You take that into account, and this is liberation. This does not mean doing away with all ties. (IWNIE 91)

Indian women writers, with awareness of feminists’ movement in the west, began to explore issues related to predicament of women. The objective of these writers remains the same while their approach varied due to myriad factors. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have presented the real vulnerable state of Indian women (educated/uneducated). Among these writers, Shashi Deshpande advocates harmony with assertion. She recommends assertion with harmony to preserve the traditional value as well as the integrity of familial bonds. She stands a class apart for her assertive heroines. Deshpande as a feminist is keen on the idea of women’s attainment of identity not by revolt or rebellion but by contemplation and self-analysis. Neeru Tandon says about Deshpande’s belief as, “To Deshpande’s mind, no amount of theorizing will solve women’s problem- specially in the Indian context.” (FPS 17) Her heroines are educated women and her predicament of educated women vividly manifests the internal quench and conflict within educated women. Deshpande’s approach is rather unique from other contemporary writers. Her heroines break through glass ceiling to establish their identity and express their innate potential within. They evolve as strong empowered women, who stand as an epitome to the definition of empowered women by Priyanka Vaidya:

An empowered woman has self-esteem and self-confidence to break the age old shackles. She respects herself and invites others to treat her with dignity and respect. She is capable of being self-sufficient whether she works outside the home or not. Empowered women provide tremendous help and support to men; they do not overpower them. India has been a patriarchy for a long time, but it is time to move forward; it is time to develop into society that is neither male-dominated, but where men and women are equal-socially, politically and economically . (FE 11)

She, as one of the most accomplished novelists has made her heroines assertive through an odyssey, exploration and introspection that happen accidentally in the life of her heroines. She articulates the introspection and journey towards harmony with pragmatic approach. The significant motivation for this pragmatic approach is accomplishment of education of her heroines. Deshpande with an extended societal perspective advocates women to proclaim their identity and space within the constraints of responsibilities

and harmonious integral unit called family. Her heroines are successful in discharging their duties with assertion and accomplish space and identity.

Deshpande's award winning and most prominent novel, *That long Silence* portrays this idea most lucidly with the odyssey of the protagonist Jaya. *That Long Silence* alluringly presents the odyssey of women through the character of Jaya trapped between modernity and tradition. Jaya's odyssey reveals the intense feminine desire of Deshpande. Jaya's interior journey is epitome of women's quest for identity and space. Her odyssey unravels awesome facts and realities of life. It is rather self-introspection of the conscious within. Inward journey of Jaya analyses and reanalyses events, people and society which have widely influenced her personality. In addition she discovers her innate potential within. Integrally, the odyssey of Jaya transforms her life completely.

Jaya is unconscious of her subjugation as a daughter and wife, until she faces catastrophe in her life. Jaya leads a contented life with illusionary image of women in advertisement. She is totally happy with her husband, children and luxurious commodities at home. She destroys her 'self' after her marriage with Mohan. Jaya becomes Suhashini after her wedding. Her father named her Jaya in order to make her a victorious woman but paradoxically things changed after his death and Jaya's wedding. Basically, Jaya is a daring personality who questions all the superstitious dogmas and patriarchal ideologies. She retorts when she does not find her name in the family tree. Contrastingly she remains silent after her marriage and forgets her original self.

The truth is that it was Mohan who had a clear idea of what he wanted, the kind of life he wanted to lead, the kind of life he wanted to lead, the kind of home he would live in, and I went along with him. But I cannot blame Mohan, for even if he had asked me – what do you want? – I would have found it hard to give him a reply. Maitreyee comes to mind now, Maitreyee who so definitely rejected her philosopher husband Yajnavalkya's offer of half his property. 'Will this property give me immortality?' She asked him. 'No,' he said, and she immediately rejected property. To know what you want ...I have been denied that. (TLS 25)

Jaya, after her wedding, becomes a silent woman as to the desire of her husband, Mohan. Her smile, work and even her love transforms into lifeless actions. Her potential of writing undergoes transformation due to her husband's interference. She has nothing of her choice. She changes her appearance to the desire of Mohan. Jaya's glass ceiling by the contented family prevents her from recognising the real identity. Jaya breaks the glass ceiling only when the catastrophe attacks the family, when Mohan blames her for the misfortune. She collapses and becomes hysteric. She realizes the worthlessness of her sacrifice and silence. Her hysteric laugh provokes Mohan to leave the house. She gradually returns to her normal state and undergoes introspection.

As the title of the novel indicates, Jaya for very long in her past life tried to play the role of a traditional woman- the embodiment of tolerance, suffering and courage. However, her courage deserts her and becomes the modern, egotistical, self-assertive, rebellious woman-all these being marks of modern feminist awakening. But the desertion of the traditional submissive role and adoption of the new role do not leave the psyche of Jaya unstinted and intact. She faces great emotional turmoil...But the novelist has chosen as humanistic byline, a psychological solution to Jaya's problem. She is allowed to retrospect her own silence and indulge in her egotistical feelings. The smouldering fire of suppressed feelings, the maintenance of self control, the pursuit of mechanical role of mother and wife, the need to cater to the physical and emotional needs of husband and children must remain suspended for a while, or be forgotten and her real feminine soul, her pent up suffering and feeling must find an outlet. (Thakkar 28-29)

The fundamental identity of man is his name and unfortunately, Jaya's fundamental identity was changed during her wedding. Her husband's family named her Suhashini. Jaya accepts this without any reservation. Mohan boasts of selecting her name. Jaya in her introspection feels annoyed to have accepted the name and determines to give up Suhashini and sustain her name Jaya, which are her fundamental identity as well as her right. She, despite her suppression, remains a modern educated woman, capable of representing her

expression in writing. Self-expressing Jaya is in complete conflict with silent Suhashini. Jaya's potentiality as a writer is short of encouragement; adversely Mohan curbs her talent and restrains her to focus on women's exclusive column. "The need of the hour is to raise the voice and express the desires and demands. Jaya, which means 'victory', is definitely on the side of the character of Jaya, but she blinded herself to her potentialities and sulked away under the name of Suhashini. The most important thing in life for any person is to live an independent life without fear." (Geethamala 107)

Jaya writes for the women's column under the pen name Sita and remains docile Sita or Gandhari, who have followed their husbands blindfolded. Jaya in her nostalgia realizes her subjugation and decides to unknot the fake identity. She hates her docile personality and desires to transcend to an assertive and bold personality. She stops writing for the magazine under the pen name Sita, which has been concealing her identity.

But for me, now that I had abandoned 'Seeta', there was nothing; or, if there was, I had to search for it. Was that the reason why I was sitting here with the diaries, I realised, was like going backward. As I burrowed through the facts, what I found was the woman who had once lived here. Mohan's wife. Rahul's and Rati's mother. Not myself.

But what was that 'myself'? 'Trying to find oneself' – what a cliché that has become. As if such a thing is possible. As if there is such a thing as one self, intact whole, waiting to be discovered. (TLS 69)

Jaya's inward journey brings forth the predicament of uneducated women through the characters like Kasum, Vimala, Mukta and Jeeja. These women bear their agony and accept the traumas as part of life, they tolerate blindly for the sake of superstitious tradition and culture; the pains of these women are far more intense than Jaya's. Hence, Jaya tries to discover the cause of her agony, lost identity and hysteria. The cause of her suffering is her silence for 17 long years. Her muted self fails to recognise her space and allows patriarchal exploitation. Kamat, Jaya's neighbour motivates her to recognise her space, potential and identity. Jaya determines to sustain her lost personality by proclaiming her original self. She neglects the image of Sita and Gandhari and begins to voice out her emotions. When Jaya reveals her emotions openly, frustrated Mohan leaves the house; Mohan's actions make her realize her responsibility and role. She realizes that it is her 'self' and not an external force that is responsible for her agonies.

'With whom shall I be angry?

With myself, of course.' (192)

Jaya discovers justice in Mohan's action. At this juncture Jaya is enlightened on the profound concept of family. So, Jaya ultimately decides to reclaim her 'self' and space assertively, but by embracing the entity called family. 'If I have to plug that 'hole in the heart', I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us'. (192)

The Odyssey of Jaya at last witness positive favourable space. Jaya is full of hope and expects to change things concussively. 'But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible.' (193) The journey /quest of Jaya with multidimensional analysis discloses minute, profound, sensible issues related to women; discovers diminutive, cemented potentials, roles and responsibilities, existential struggles, the cause; and consequently an invariable answer to the predicament of women which impels Jaya to evolve out of subjugated position. *That Long Silence* is a paragon which reflects the possible attainment of empowered self of women with symphony. Deshpande, in *That Long Silence* with an extended societal perspective, delineates the merit of familial cords despite its setbacks which are rectifiable most probably only by Indian women of whom the nation is proud of.

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