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A STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL 'THAT LONG SILENCE'

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is an award winning Indian novelist. Shashi Deshpande's chief thematic concern is with a women's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, her effort to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother and most of all as a human being. Deshpande generally has the heroine as the narrator and employs a kind a stream of consciousness technique. In 'That Long Silence' Deshpande presents the story of Jaya and Manohar, who live together as husband and wife inspite of their desperate attitude towards some of the fundamental issues of life. It is the view of the novelist that women generally bear the tyranny of men silently in Indian middle class families and if any of them come to suffer from some ailment, they are callously neglected and left to die unsung. 'Jaya' in the novel 'That Long Silence' is an example for it. Shashi Deshpande becomes successful in the novel to transform Jaya's mute suffering into revolting thinking to gain her identity.

Key Words: dominance, feminine, obligatory, protagonist, suffering

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Early life: Shashi Deshpande is an award winning Indian novelist. She was born in 1938 in Dharwad Karnataka. Her father was Sriranga, a well-known Sanskrit scholar. She pursued her education in Dharwad, Bombay and Bangalore. She worked for a magazine 'On Looker'. While working in the magazine, she began writing and the first short story that she wrote got published in 1970. Her collection of short stories was published under the title "Legacy" in the year 1978.

Her Works: Her first novel, "The Dark Holds No Terror" was published in 1980. Her another novel "That Long Silence" brought her lot of praise and appreciation. For this she received the Sahitya Akademi Award and Nanjangud Tirumalamba award. Her other novels include Come Up and Be Dead, If I Die Today, Roots and Shadows, The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Small Remedies. Short stories include The Legacy and other stories; It was Dark, The Miracle and other stories. It was the Nightingale, The Intrusion and other stories. She has also written a play Drishte. Other works for children includes A Summer Adventure, The Hidden Treasure, The Only Witness, and the Narayanpura Incident.

As a writer: Deshpande is gifted with an inborn literary bent of mind which matured with her experiences in life. Shashi Deshpande is at her best, writing with subtlety and a rare sensitivity about men and women trapped in relationship and situations often not of their making. Her stories are about a women; her travails

and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common run of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, the middle class women themselves are enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, love and hate, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, marital discord and male chauvinism. Shashi Deshpande's chief thematic concern is with a woman's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, her effort to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother and most of all as a human being. Shashi Deshpande is known for creating women characters that are contemporary. Deshpande's women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gender discrimination, first as daughter and later as wives. Her works have drawn great critical attention for her sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle class women.

Her sincere concern for women their oppressive lot is reflected strongly in all her novels and stories. Each of Shashi Deshpande's novels is special and offers food for thought on human relationship and emotions. Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears and feelings experienced by human, by women. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind. Deshpande generally has the heroine as the narrator and employs a kind of stream of consciousness technique.

That Long Silence: That Long Silence of Shashi Deshpande presents the story of Jaya and Manohar, Who live together as husband and wife inspite of their disperate attitude towards some of the fundamental issues of life. It is the view of the novelist that women generally bear the tyranny of men silently in Indian middle class families and if any of them come to suffer from some ailment, they are callously neglected and left to die unsung. Jaya is an example of the women who have no choice but to submit to be led by their husbands like Sita and Draupadi of yesteryears to the forests and jungles, and in the mire infamy and deserted finally. "But for me, now that I had abandoned 'Seeta', there was nothing; or, if there was, I had to search for it." (69)

After all she yoked with her husband inextricably. The novelist has used a very apt metaphor of being yoked like bullocks to convey the idea that marriage is irrevocable and wife is bound by a covenant to follow her husband. She is blindfold herself like Gandhari if the husband is blind, no matter if she has to suffer the loss of her hundred sons in consequence thereof. "I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I....."(11) "Two bullocks yoked together.....it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?"(12)

Jaya's father named his daughter Jaya, meaning victory. He instilled the sense of superiority in his daughter. He once pulled out, his daughter from the circle of her friends, saying that those girls "asked for nothing more than the destiny of being wives and mother". "..... 'You're going to be different from the others, Jaya,' Appa had assured me."(136) Jaya moaned, "I had known then that it was all Appa's fault. What had he made me feel I was someone special? Why had he made me feel different from others?"(136)

Jaya's life comes apart at the seams where her husband is asked to leave his job while allegations of business malpractice against him are investigated. Her families existence disrupted, her husband's reputation in question and their future as a family in jeopardy, Jaya, a failed writer, is haunted by memories of the past.

Differences with her husband, frustrations in their seventeen-year-old marriage, disappointment in her two teenage children, the claustrophobia of her childhood-all begin to surface. In her small suburban Bombay flat, Jaya grapples with these and other truths about herself among them her failure at writing and her fear of anger. Shashi Deshpande gives us an exceptionally accomplished portrayal of a woman trying to erase a 'long silence' begun in childhood and rooted in herself and in the constraints of her life.

That Long Silence of Shashi Deshpande shows that women have been keeping silence since long inspite of being under the dominance of man. Jaya had imagined for herself a life of an independent girl but it was not to be because woman in India have been under the pressure of circumstances, custom and traditions, all of which put restraints on women. "I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts, only silence"(143). These lines reveal the oppressive, debilitating life situation of a housewife, who journeys from ignorance to

knowledge, through suffering. Jaya, the protagonist in *That Long Silence*, is exactly the opposite of the enlightened creature with discretion.

Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence* has woven a story to present the truth that woman is assigned a secondary role and relegated to secondary position. She believes that women very often suffer due to male chauvinism and their own defeatism. The title of this novel *That Long Silence* itself implies that women do not raise their voice against suppression. The woman sinks her personality for the sake of her husband and children, yet she remains subordinate to them.

Centuries old sheltering has made women too weak to lead an independent life. This is what we call a feminist dilemma that makes Jaya observe such a long silence despite being a writer. Actually there is a clash between the writer and the housewife in her. The writer in her expects her to express her views and experiences before the society; but the housewife demands silence on her part. In this internal tug of war the housewife wins and she remains silently probing into her past and struggling with her present. As a result she gets a setback in her writing career. Publishers refuse her manuscripts because she does not bring the fire of her experience into play in her writings. She is discouraged by her husband "I have given up my writing because of you". She further says: I had known then that it hadn't mattered to Mohan that I had written a good story, a story about a couple, a man who could not search out to his wife except through her body. For Mohan it had mattered that people might think the couple was us, that the man him". (144)

Being caught in this dilemma, she is withered. She neither becomes an ideal wife which she tries to be, though complainingly nor revolts against the patriarchal yoke to liberate herself.

Jaya is deeply distressed as Mohan discouraged her to write blaming that she "only an exhibitionist"(144) "I gave up my writing because of you,"(119) she told Mohan. But she did not take the risk of annoying him though he had crushed both the woman and the writer in her. She confesses that she had relinquished ".....all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared-scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had i.e, being Mohan's wife"(144) The mere thought of annoying her husband and consequently desertion by the husband, unnerves Jaya, for she could not cast off the role of a traditional Indian woman. "Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into. I had mine-as Mohan's wife, as Rahul's and Rati's mother."(148)

Through Jaya's character, Shashi Deshpande has expressed the confused state of contemporary educated Indian woman who can neither reconcile herself in a loveless marriage nor cast off her husband from her life as she still considers him like "a sheltering tree"(32) she cannot afford to life without.

When Jaya gets married to Mohan, Jaya got a new name 'Suhasini' and surprisingly her personality also changed from 'Jaya' which means 'Victorious' to 'Suhasini' which means "a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman'(15-16) when Kamat suggests her to express the real anguish in her writings, she replies, "because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?"(147)

It shows how a husband's will and social conformity become most obligatory for a woman. Jaya also strives to be the best house wife. She never questions Mohan's ways rather she offer subtle resistance through silence.

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande is undoubtedly a writer who looked into problems of women. She charts women's emotions starting from the pangs of a growing up girl to the void created because of the non-fulfilment of a woman's yearnings. Jaya comes to the conclusion that marriage subjugates and enslaves women. She has been forced to follow her husband's wills and desires. That she is not entitled to have her own autonomous existence. Shashi Deshpande becomes successful in the novel to transform Jaya's mute suffering into revolting thinking to gain her own identity. It symbolises Jaya's endeavour for self-revelation and self-assertion. By the end of the novel, the protagonist within the power matrix of the family also undergoes a radical change: her fears and insecurities are replaced by confidence which is a vital ingredient of happiness in the life of a human being. Now she wishes to exercise her choice; her self-esteem motivates her to break the silence while her

capabilities, make her speak through her writing. So, the narrative records Jaya's movement from the feminine phase as she subverts the patriarchal system, while remaining a part of it.

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