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MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL
"THAT LONG SILENCE "

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ABSTRACT

Marginalization is the social process of being relegated to the fringe of society. One such example of marginalization is the marginalization of women. Marginalization is the process of according less importance to something or someone moved away from the inner workings of the group. A social phenomenon of excluding a minority, subgroup, or undesirables by ignoring their needs, desires, and expectations. Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. The predicaments of women continue to be the same or rather worse despite the entire efforts for women empowerment. The literary writers with true concern towards the present predicament of women use their literary medium for the awakening of the human conscience which affects dormancy towards the pitiful condition of women. In modern days, the women writers play a pivotal role to create awareness and empower women through their novels. Shashi Deshpande is one such genuine writer who creates life-like female characters in her works. Her true concern and eagerness to uplift the women make her depict her female characters as a beacon of hope to the oppressed ones because she makes her female characters rise up with their inborn potential and confidence from their helpless situations. The novels of Shashi Deshpande are about women's self-quest and struggle to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by society, culture and nature. The present paper tries to explore the issues like marginalization and empowerment of women. The prime objective of the present study is to focus on marginalization of women in Indian society as portrayed in the Sashi Deshpande's novel That Long Silence.

Key words: Marginalization, discrimination, empowerment, predicament, inequality, relegated.

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MARGINALIZATION DEFINITION

Marginalization is the social process of being relegated to the fringe of society. One such example of marginalization is the marginalization of women. Marginalization has been defined as a complex process of relegating specific groups of people to the lower or outer edge of society. It effectively pushes these groups of people to the margin of society economically, politically, culturally and socially following the policy of exclusion. It denies a section of the society equal access to productive resources and avenues for the realization of their productive human potential and opportunities for their full capacity utilization. This pushes the community to poverty, misery, low wage and discrimination and livelihood insecurity. Their upward social mobility is being limited. Politically this process of relegation denies people equal access to the formal power structure and participation in the decision making processes leading to their subordination to and dependence on the economically and politically dominant groups of society. As a consequence of the economic, political and cultural deprivation a vast chunk of the population has emerged to be socially ignorant, illiterate, uneducated and dependent. Devoid of the basic necessities of life they are relegated to live on the margins of society. Marginalization is the process of according less importance to something or someone moved away from the inner workings of the group. A social phenomenon of excluding a minority, subgroup, or undesirables by ignoring their needs, desires, and expectations.

In general, the term 'marginalization' describes the overt actions or tendencies of human societies, where people who they perceive to undesirable or without useful function, are excluded, i.e., marginalized. These people, who are marginalized, from a GROUP or COMMUNITY for their protection and integration and are known as 'marginalized groups'. This limits their opportunities and means for survival.

Peter Leonard in his book 'Personality and Ideology' defines social marginality as being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity'. People who are marginalized do not have sufficient resources available to them and so they develop low self-confidence, self esteem and negativity ultimately resulting into alienation.

The Encyclopedia of Public Health defines marginalized groups as, 'To be marginalized is to be placed in the margins, and thus excluded from the privilege and power found at the center'.

Latin observes that, "Marginality' is so thoroughly demeaning, for economic well-being, for human dignity, as well as for physical security. Marginal groups can always be identified by members of dominant society, and will face irrevocable discrimination." These definitions are mentioned in different contexts, and show that marginalization is a slippery and multilayered concept.

Most vulnerable marginalized group in almost every society are women . Under different economic conditions, and under the influence of specific historical, cultural, legal and religious factors, marginalization is one of the manifestations of gender inequality. In other words, women may be excluded from certain jobs and occupations, incorporated into certain others, and marginalized in others. In general they are always marginalized relative to men, in every country and culture. Women belonging to lower classes, lower castes, illiterate, and the poorest region have different levels of marginalization than their better off counterparts.

Shashi Deshpande (b. 1938) is one of the prominent authors in Indian Writing in English. Her writing is a clear picture of her rootedness in middle class Indian society. Shashi Deshpande, like many other women novelists centres her novels round the marriages of women protagonists and her place in the family which serves as a reflection of Indian women in the society. A close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals her views on the role of Indian women and their struggle to find their own self, their frustration and their alienation. Deshpande is acknowledged for her remarkable potential as a serious writer. Most of her protagonists are women who are well educated and highly exposed to liberal western ideas, but are unable to free themselves entirely from the clutches of radical male ideas which are a part of her culture, that culture which is created by the patriarchal society.

Shashi Deshpande has projected marginalization of women in her novels such as *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988). Deshpande focuses on various themes in her novels such as patriarchal society, subordination of women, gender discrimination etc. In Indian society a woman is expected to be obedient daughter, submissive wife and sacrificing mother. Women play variety of

significant roles in society from their birth till the end of life. Even after playing all her roles in efficient manner, she is weak because men are still, strongest gender of the society. Women are treated as the 'weaker sex' who needs to be protected entire life-be it by her father, husband or son. It is obvious that women are still subjected to persecution by the male even in the present days. Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality.

As a feminist, Deshpande has a deeper understanding of the condition of the Indian middleclass housewives living in joint families. Despite having enough education, they are bound to adhere to age old customs and conventions. As a novelist Deshpande has been deeply concerned with the evils of male dominance, male oriented ideology, and their impact on the conditions of women. Her awareness of the problems of middleclass women, especially, economic deprivation and the impact of gender discrimination on their psyche find expression in her novels.

That Long Silence which won its author the Kendriya Sahitya Academy Award in 1990, tells the story of the pattern of relationship in a typical Indian middleclass family. The heroine of the novel Jaya stoically maintains silence throughout her life to cope with the desires and expectations of her husband Mohan. The notion that Indian women are basically inferior to men is instilled into the heroines of Deshpande giving them a mindset which they cannot discard. So a woman has to be passive and docile. The protagonist of *That Long Silence* makes all efforts to fit herself into the traditional mould. Her life is a crusade against the defaming silence that has entrapped the likes of her generations.

Jaya, the protagonist of the novel *That Long Silence* is a modern, career oriented woman but is dominated and suppressed woman. She was taught by her family members to be obedient to her husband to save marriage. She has involved in the current of the traditional role of a women- wife and mother. She has suppressed her existential self. Though she has a happy home with her well earning husband and two children Rati and Raghul and material comforts, she feels fed up with the monotony and fixed pattern of her life. In her attempt to rediscover her 'true self', she finds herself as an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and a failed writer.

Jaya's husband Mohan is involved in corruption in the office at the instigation of Agarwal. When they are not able to do favour for minister's relative, they are forced to face an enquiry. Agarwal advises Mohan to move from church gate house to somewhere to avoid unnecessary publicity and shame. Jaya's family move to her uncle's flat at Dader. Fortunately their children are away with the neighbour's family. Mohan who is disturbed because of the final disgrace which the enquiry will bring, takes excuse by saying that he has engaged in malpractices to keep his wife and children comfortable.

Her stay with Mohan in silent resentment paves the way for self-evaluation and self-criticism. In her re-examination of her married life, she discovers that she is not really happy. Happiness in their married life is only an illusion. Jaya does not enjoy her individuality. Like mythical woman-Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draudpadi stoically sharing her husband's travails, Jaya follows Mohan to Dadar flat. She is named Jaya by her father which means 'victory'. Later Mohan has given her name Suhasini which means a soft smiling, placid, motherly woman. It is a manifestation of her resistance to conform to the traditional role of a woman. Both names symbolise the traits of her personality former is closer to her rebellious nature and latter to her submissive nature. The novelist presents a conflict between earlier self of Suhasini who considers marriage as a great fortress of happiness and the disillusioned wife Jaya. Her quest for freedom and completeness turns into disillusionment and frustration. In order to get rid of this frustration Jaya takes writing as her career. But social obstacles prevent her from writing. To her writing is an escape. But that too is killed by Mohan's indifferent attitude.

All the female figures from her own family, Jaya, her mother, her grandmother, Mohan's mother, her maid Jeeja, her cousin Kusum, and her widowed neighbour Mukta present the picture of victims of patriarchal system. These women's silence is a result of the failure of communication between individual men and women. There is no denial of women's secondary status. Her mother-in-law who silently suffers in despair and

died of a botched abortion, her sister-in-law who died of an untreated tumour, Kusum who threw herself into a well; all are victims of this secondary status.

In order to exterminate this marginalization, care should be taken by every individual. People should try to change their orthodox mindset and treat women as equal to men.

Empowerment of this class should be at every level that is personal, familial, social, political, economical, educational etc. People should consider women as the part of the mainstream. It is the responsibility of every human being to treat others equal so in coming future we may not find such marginalization in the society.

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