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A STUDY OF FEMINISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a diverse collection of social, cultural and political movement motivated by or concerning the experiences of women. Feminist differ over the sources of inequality, how to attain equality. This present paper is an attempt to reveal the hidden gaps of married life. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is a predicament of women, through the female protagonist Jaya.

Key Words: Feminism, feminist, equality, predicament of women.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most important Indian English writers who continue to write about issues of women. *That Long Silence*, *Root and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* are her famous novels. Shashi Deshpande's themes dealing with struggle of women in the tradition – bound, male – dominated, middle – class urban contemporary society in India to overcome their self – imposed inhibitions and to establish their respectable status.

The novel *That Long Silence* is about a married couple – Jaya and Mohan who get separated in course of time and about Jaya who observes silence all through her married life only to break it in the end, where she took to write about herself her own plight, and her husband Mohan. But the novel ends on a note of optimism as her son, Rahul returns and Mohan promises to return on Friday morning, Jaya also learns the truth that "Life has always to be made possible".

That long Silence is a realistic view of true feminist on the condition of middle class women. It is very expressed and won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1990. *That Long Silence* is not an imaginary story but the story of every middle class educated woman in India. The Indian Woman is born in an era, where there is much awareness about her rights, her liberty to express ideas, freedom to enjoy finance and the chance to stand for a cause. But the silence still continues. Jaya, the protagonist, an educated middleclass woman lives with her husband, Mohan and two children, Rahul and Rati. Her character is confined between her realizations and restrictions. Her father brought up Jaya as an "individual" who has the rights as well as the other gender in society. But it is the same society that hesitates to accept the woman as an individual. After graduation she is married and steps into a dutiful wife, affectionate mother, perfect woman to her in – laws and relatives. Like the mythological character Gandhari, she kept her eyes shut to her husband's illegal earning at office. Even her journalistic writings are circumscribed by her husband's likes and dislikes; finally she is able to evaluate her expectations of life. The novel is about Jaya's hopes, fears, aspirations, frustrations and later triumph in life. The novel reveals the hollowness of modern Indian life, where success is seen as a convenient arranged marriage to upwardly mobile husbands with children.

Jaya is married to Mohan, an engineer, not because he is the most suitable groom of her, and also not because, she wants to relieve his responsibility. It is a matter of pride that a wife should be liked by her husband, rejecting a good offer from her side, is considered an act of foolishness in our Indian society.

Shashi Deshpande deliberately weakens the character of Mohan and projects him as a callous, insensitive and intellectually weak husband dishonest to his profession and his family life and glorifies the image of Jaya as intellectually superior, prudent, compromising and adaptable to the situation. She further compares herself with Gandhari, the wife of Dhritrashtra who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband to prove herself as an ideal Hindu wife as Gandhari was

“If Gandhari could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I did not want to know anything.” (61)

Both Jaya and Mohan are responsible for the failure. They failed to understand each other. They both failed to convince each other. She conveys the message that seeds of rebellion are sown in the modern Indian women who want to revolt but somehow take their steps back for they are yet to be prepared for open revolt. The image of Jaya indicates that the long silence is threatened to be broken. The novel also shows that the newly acquired professional roles are still subservient to the traditional roles of women.

The actual desire takes a hidden corner, when other concerns dominate. Jaya, lost in the tussle of Suhasini and Seeta finds herself tangled in a web of social and family codes, set for a woman by the dictates of the patriarchal society. She feels herself helpless, before the heap of expectations of her husband and his family.

Self is one of the central concepts which haunt human existence in this temporal world. The notion of self develops in a cultural context which has the element of continuity, keeps changing with the interaction of people and places, and when the gap between ideas and reality persists, the person may feel alienated, isolated and betrayed.

It is generally prevalent thinking in our society that whether man is happy or sad in marital relations, all credit goes to his wife. It does not occur to anyone to find out whether she is happy or not, she has to feel satisfied at every cost in every situation, as Mohan has left Jaya is under the grab of suspicion.

The author clearly depicts the image of marriage institution and familial relations in India. A mechanical relationship and artificial love were the consequence of her marriages. It was a total failure. In other words, she hardly enjoyed marital relationship with her husband. She had no freedom to express or share her desire or feelings with her husband Mohan. Jaya was introduced to her neighbour Kamat who motivate her to act independently and also made her regain her self – confidence which had been lost. His appreciation and admitting her makes her realize her ‘self’. In this way Kamat enables her to break “long silence”. The novel also shows that the newly acquired professional roles are still subservient to the traditional roles of women.

Shashi Deshpande is primarily concerned with the feminine consciousness and the women occupy the central stage in these novels, she desires to come to attain the stage. Her approach to man – woman relationships, displays well her strong sense of reality.

That Long Silence is a realistic novel dealing with the dilemma in which a part of middle class Indian women under the influence of the feminist movement of the West find themselves caught up over the question of which role to opt for the traditional role or the feminist role in a simple and expressive Indian English.

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