

JAYA'S QUEST FOR SELF IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*

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ABSTRACT

"That Long Silence". It is the story of Jaya, the housewife who is seen always engaged in searching her own identity. Set typically against the Indian backdrop "The Long Silence" raises that eternal question whether woman lives for them or for someone- their husband or children.

Key words: Husband, Woman, Housewife, Children.

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INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande was born in Dharwad, Karnataka in the year of 1938. In the childhood she completed her education in Karnataka after completing the preliminary stage she shifted to Mumbai for further study and then again move back to Bengaluru to do the law. She currently lives in Bangalore with her husband who is pathologist. She holds degrees in economics, law and English literature.

She is the daughter of Sriranga, a famous Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar. According to Shashi Deshpande herself, she did not make a conscious decision to be a writer but stumbled into being one out of boredom. Shashi wanted to express her feelings about the society and its various aspects and this was the perfect platform to make the reader aware of any burning issues.

Her novels are deeply rooted in India and this is the specialty of her writing. The characters, settings, and the conflicts, are inherently Indian. Above all, she is a storyteller. Her short stories have been widely anthologized throughout the country. Shashi Deshpande also won the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel 'That Long Silence

'That Long Silence' is an acclaimed novel by Shashi Deshpande. In this story the author reveals an intriguing picture of an ordinary middle class educated woman. The name of the protagonist is Jaya who lives with her husband Mohan and two children Rahul and Rati. The story entirely revolves around jaya her married life and her role as a 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 don't give attention to wives emotions, likes and dislikes. The author expresses the emotion with vivid details like that of lovemaking, relationship with children, etc. She reflects her lifestyle, her role clarity, is she living for her or for someone else, etc. 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 individuals 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. Author has done a good job in expressing intimacy. Sexual feelings are expressed in its natural tone.

'That Long Silence' by Shashi Deshpande is based in the context of contemporary Indian writing in English, Deshpande is one of the most understated yet confident voices, who explores individual and universal predicaments through the female psyche.

The traditional role of woman – a dedicated wife and a dutiful mother. Not able to bear his allegation that she fails in her duty to support him at the time of crisis, she begins to laugh without control. Insulted and irritated Mohan leaves the house that leads her to engage in self-introspection. She wants to shout at Mohan, " I didn't mean to laugh, I wasn't laughing at you, I was laughing at everything – marriage, us, this whole absurd exercise, we call life"

The silence of woman symbolises helplessness. But men take it as a symbol of woman's contentment. Rashmi Gaur observes:

"Jaya's journey towards a well-defined self-hood is mired in the labyrinthine mazes of societal pressures, feminine conditioning to fashion oneself according to the accepted norms of behaviour, suppressive and egotistic male chauvinism and the continued dilemma of attaching a purpose to her life, culminating in a ling silence. Her silence is symptomatic of alienation and apprehension rioted in every woman's soul in different forms – a silence which is often misunderstood by men as a symbol of woman's contentment".

Jaya's distant cousin Kusum never voices her opinions. Since she has internalised all her anger and maintain silence, she takes rescue in insane world. In her madness, she can be ' gloriously' herself (p.127).Entry into insane world is a kind of escapism. When this sane world is too much for her, she jumps into the well and kills herself. Like Kusum there are so many women in the society who silently swallow their pain and sufferings.

Kamat, a lonely young widower lives above Jaya's apartment. Jaya's writings receive comments, criticism and encouragement from Kamat. Jaya enjoys her intimate friendship with Kamat by sharing her opinions and ideas about her stories which she could not do with Mohan. She admires him for treating her as his equal and only in his presence, she can be in her own self. It had been a revelation to me that two people, a man and a woman, could talk this way: with this man, I had not been a woman. I had been Just myself. No doubt Mohan encourages her to write but the way he expects. Her writing is also a kind of breaking the silence. Rajeswarisunder Rajan argues,

Deshpande's protagonist breaks her silence at one level through the act of writing itself ,at another level through renegotiating interpersonal relations within the family". One of her stories has won the prize where she has made a mention that a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body. This hurts Mohan because he is afraid that people would think that the man is Mohan and the woman is Jaya. Jaya doesn't want to jeopardize her marriage and thereby she changes her style of writing. As a result, all her stories have been rejected and she stops writing. Even Kamat points out that her stories lack anger. He suggests her to give her personal view and spew out her anger, "why didn't you use that anger in your story? There is none of it here. There isn't even a personal view, a personal vision. I'll tell you what's really wrong with your story. It's too restrained. Spew put your anger in your writing, women spew it out. Why are you holding it in?".

This is the problem not only with Jaya but also with all women writers. They tuned their mind and ways of life according to the need and expectation of men. Since Mohan thinks, for a woman, to be angry is to be unwomanly, Jaya set her mind not to be angry even in writing. She confines her thoughts and defines her role according to the expectation of her husband. Naturally she has lost her 'true self'. Anger which has been internalized has turned her to be nervous and incompetent. She says:

"...no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman? ... A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated".

Jaya married Mohan as he had decided to marry the convent educated, cultured Jaya. After the marriage also Jaya found him a stranger. Intimacy with him had seemed a grotesque indecency. In their physical union he would ask, 'Did I hurt you?' and her answer is 'No'. It is sex that bring both of them together

not love. She realises love is a myth, without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unendurable.

Jaya has shaped her life according to the desire of Mohan and loses her own self and identity. She admits:

It hadn't been Mohan's fault at all. And it had been just a coincidence, though it had helped, that just then Mohan had propelled me into that other kind of writing. 'I encouraged you', he had said to me. He was right. But, I went on with my chest-beating out of penitence, Mohan had not forced me to do that kind of writing. I'd gone into it myself with my eyes wide open.

Jaya willingly patterns her life to keep pace with Mohan's likes and expectations. In a mood of frustration she feels for the loss of her selfhood. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces. Jaya's looking at herself as Mohan's wife, and his children's mother but not as an individual is pathetic. The sense of loss of her identity and self makes her say: 'I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife'.

CONCLUSION

Jaya's self-examination of her married life has brought to light that she is partly responsible for the loss of her real self. The seventeen years of their married life brings boredom, dullness and monotony instead of intimacy and friendliness. In her effort to be an ideal wife she loses her life in the name of sacrifice. Her failure to be an ideal wife and mother is revealed by her: "I've failed him(Mohan). He expected something from me, from his wife, and I've failed him." Her incapability to deal with her son Rahul's complexities make her say: "A mother?... I had been unfit to be trusted with the entire responsibility of another human being".

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