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SHASHI DESHPANDE'S PORTRAYAL OF VICTIMIZED WOMAN IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with feminine consciousness. While Shashi Deshpande has been very particular about selecting female protagonists, there is no attempt at selecting or focusing on male protagonists. But as many critics of Shashi Deshpande have revealed, her women narrators transcend their gender in order to explore the male psyche. Whether Shashi Deshpande is feminist or not is a contentious issue because she herself labeled as feminist fiction. A novel is by and large an author's private vision and purely subjective. Similarly, *That Long Silence* presents Shashi Deshpande's personal views on marital disharmony. It is true that in *Jaya's silence* any Indian woman may find her own silence. But this can be a partial view to say that Shashi Deshpande is a feminist writer and she dehumanizes male characters.

Key words: feminine, consciousness, transcend, male psyche, subjective, dehumanize

The silence can be found in both her female and male characters with different connotations. To understand this, we need to identify and analyze both male and female psyche portrayed in her novel. Her male protagonist lives in his own personal world. To him career is more important thing than his family. But for her woman the family gets prominence than the self. Women often engage themselves in household work to keep them mentally sound if they are house wives. In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande depicts two different pictures of Indian women the lower strata of women engaged in domestic chores to earn their living and educated middle class women. Though from different social backgrounds, they have one thing in common they believe that a woman's success lies in the success of marriage. Women in this novel, no matter to which class they belong, they prefer to get married and maintain their marriage, for failure in marriage is considered to be a woman's greatest failure.

Shashi Deshpande gives minute details development of girl child in her novels. She has displayed a series of girl- children, where each girl faces a different problem within the family. Violence against women, whether physical, mental or emotional, is an issue that crosses all borders and all classes of women. Generally, the Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferer. While she has played different roles as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her own individuality. The reason for this suffering is the lack of perfect understanding emotions between husband and wife which causes failure in their life. There should be a blend of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity and above all revolt if the occasion demands and compromise for peaceful life.

Jaya in *That Long Silence* like Indu of *Roots* and Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* makes a journey of life from ignorance to knowledge through silent suffering. When Jaya was born, her father felt very glad and he wanted her to be victorious in every attempt she would make. That was why she was christened as Jaya. As a loving daughter, she is very much attached to her father. Her father is a pragmatist and radical in outlook, and he wants all his

children, two boy's one daughter, to be very modern.

When all the people are sending their children to Kannad schools, her father alone has sent his three children to convent school in spite of the opposition of his wife. Her father has made Jaya to be different and extraordinary. Hence, from her childhood itself her father has made Jaya to be realizing that she has not been an ordinary girl. She has not been allowed to play with other girls because like them, she is not going to be just a wife or a mother. Her father used to say that she should win many prestigious prizes and go to Oxford for her higher studies. The sense of superiority has thus been instilled in her by her father. But such sense of superiority has become a curse for her because she is not able to make friend and mix with others. She has started blaming her father having made her become unsocial. She could express her moaning by saying to herself:

Why had I made feel I was someone special? Why had he made me feel ...with them, not walking past, invisible, ignored (TLS.136).

Hence, she has been silently suffering inside her for the loss of happiness which she could have enjoyed her childhood. She could not be outspoken by opposing her father's rules. As she loves and feels confident with her father very much, she silently obeys her father's words. Jaya has been going to convent school as per her father's words. The convent education makes Jaya conscious of women's position in the society. She realizes that women have been suffering silently and die silently. There is no one to rescue or take notice of their sufferings. She feels pity for them. But she has not realized that the fate will include her also in that category of women. The fate occurs in the form of the death of her father. Her father has died when she has been doing SSC course itself. So, she could not win any laurels or go to Oxford for her higher studies as per the dream of her father. She has silently shed tears for her father's death because she could not fulfill her father's dream and it has been shattered into pieces.

After her father's death, her ~~bro~~ holds responsibilities of the family. So he has been

under pressure from his uncles to discharge responsibilities of her sister. Her brother also wants to leave for U.S. So, he has settled the marriage of Jaya with Mohan without the consent of Jaya. She says:

Dada wanted me off his hands he wanted to be free of his responsibility for an unmarried younger sister so that he could go ahead with his plans. After Appa's death, the kakas never let Dada forget his role as the man of the house. And so Dada had cleverly maneuvered me into a position from which not marrying would have been childish, irresponsible and unfavourable to dada" (TLS.160).

She silently suffers and feels agony for her marriage because she wishes to do her higher studies. She has refused her marriage and expresses her desire of going to college to her brother. But her brother is a clever arguer. He argues that Mohan is fairer than Jaya, knowing well that women give sufficient weightage to the complexion. He also explains about the poor situation of their family.

Jaya's brother also has convinced her by saying that, Mohan is an Engineer and is quite good-looking, no squint, and is hard working, ambitious. His family is orthodox and he is also a decent chap having a good job with him. So, Jaya is unable to say reason or deny her marrying Mohan. She says "And, if there had been no reason not to marry him either" (93). So, she has to accept silently Mohan as her husband by sacrificing her own thoughts and views about her husband for the sake of her family. She silently suffers and thinks that if her father had been alive, she would have done her higher studies. But, now she has been forced to accept her marriage with Mohan.

As a girl Jaya is not very practical and she romanticizes love. But when she grows up into a young woman, circumstances make her look at marriage practically because of her family situation. In our practical life also, many girls are seen like Jaya, looking their marriage

practically by sacrificing their own feelings, ideas about their husband due to their family circumstances. They need to accept it silently because of the family situation. So, silence seems golden for them. But some girls break their silence to fulfill their thoughts and protest to have the desired life partner and their life would not be happy. They get good life partner since they would not be outspoken.

Jaya's silence acceptance of marriage on the other hand, became advantage for her to get a good family. It is true that people in middle class families want to have a good and comfortable life which providence has denied to them, and they find it difficult to realize their dreams. Now, Jaya belonging to the middle-class family is happy to see that life has become more comfortable for her as it never was. After her father's death, her mother sold off the house to repay the loan. Even her marriage with Mohan was held because dowry was not demanded. So, she suffered a lot with her mother her father's death. When compared to the past life her married life was a welcome change to Jaya.

Jaya enters into her family life with a lot of dreams without knowing that she has to suppress her own thoughts and desires. Outwardly she is a satisfied housewife married to an apparently caring man, with a comfortable home, with no dearth of material comfort. But on scrutiny, it is revealed that to achieve the stage of fulfillment as a wife, Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refuses to fit in with her image as a wife and mother. Generally, in the Indian context, marriage is absolutely a sacrosanct contract and the image of the devoted wife and husband conforming to the concept of Ardhanarishwara. This concept has been held up now-a-days. The male dominism arises. The husband wants his wife should be inferior to him. Normally the relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and enduring. This is so because there was no love between them. Generally, the disgust of living with a man who does not love the woman the way she expects the way she expects him to, is a burning problem the educated woman has to face in

the contemporary society. When discussing about the gender and the imminent reality of the relation between the sexes, Catherine Stimpson says:

Cultural laws of gender demand that feminine and masculine must play off against each other in the great drama of binary opposition. They must struggle against each other, or complement each other or collapse into each other in the momentary, illusory relief of the androgynous embrace (1).

As a result, marriage seldom corresponds to the personal experience or aspirations of the individuals. It happens in Jaya's marriage also. But they perform their duties mechanically. If they live mechanically without true love, it ends up in mutual hatred and distrust. Jaya and Mohan are also like a pair of bullocks who leads a mechanical life without true love between them. She slowly transforms herself to the ideal of womanhood, after marriage. She learns to suppress her anger, feelings and attitudes silently. She always works up to please her husband. She does not evince interest in anything which is essential for day-to-day life. She remains silent for all the decisions of Mohan. She has no right to take her own decisions.

Jaya was so depressed that she stopped writing. Mohan did not bother about that. He did not any care convince Jaya. But Kamat, her neighbor on the floor comes to her rescue. He analyses her stories objectively and tells her how she could make them more forceful and hitting. Kamat also tells her that she has been feeding on wrong sentimental notion, "women are the victims..." (148). He rebuilds her morale and suggests her to send writings to women's magazines. Kamat who is a hard critic knows well that Jaya is capable of giving greater credence to the roles as wives, mothers and aunts and says:

You know something – I never can imagine you writing this. This you, I mean. I can see the woman who writes this ...' he'd narrowed his eyes as if focusing on some vision, she's plump, good humoured, pea brained but shrewd, devious, skimming over life... (TLS 149)

So, he encouraged Jaya to write her stories under the pen name. Hence, she started to write under the pen name Seetha. She writes the kind of stuff which pleased the publisher and made her husband feel proud of her as a writer, but she herself has fallen like an imposter. Therefore, Jaya suppressed her feelings at every stage of her life, compromises to conform to the role of an ideal Indian woman. In order to become an ideal wife, she has to snip off the bits of her that had refused to be Mohan's wife. As a result, she has been masquerading not only as the writer of Seetha but also as Suhasini. So, silence has become virtue to Jaya to have a good relationship with her husband. If she is outspoken and burst out her feelings, it would spoil her relationship with Mohan.

Though Mohan gets good salary as a junior engineer in a steel plant in Lohanagar, he was not satisfied with the salary he was getting. There was also workers' strike against him since he has taken action against worker. So, he decided to resign that idea of leaving the jobs was already in his mind. Hence, he resigned his job and tried to get a new lucrative job at Bombay. His greed for money was not satisfied, though at times he boasted of his achievements. He would tell Jaya that one of his old colleagues was only a junior engineer, another was on a low position, struggling to make both ends meet, while he was well off and happy. His greed for money resorted to unfair means as a result of which he was caught and a legal action was to be taken against him. His co-worker, Agarwal advised him to disappear from the scene for some time to save him from ignominy and legal action.

Therefore he shifted from Church gate to Dadar. Jaya who was yoked with him had no choice but to follow him silently like Sita and Draupadi of yore. They shifted from church gate to Dadar, where Jaya was not as she was in church gate home. There was nothing to be cleaned, arranged, or re-arranged, since it was not so well furnished. They had come here in a way to pass the period of exile, in anonymity. The truth is that it was Mohan who had a clear idea of what he wanted to lead, the kind of home he would live in. Jaya has to accept and

simply follow his ways silently. She chose to remain silent for his activities whether she likes or dislikes. She is not an independent woman living according to her choice. Since she was Mohan's wife, she lives according to Mohan's choice only.

It is factual that women of the middle and lower sections of the society are still imprisoned in age-old superstitions. The women in the epics like Sita, Draupadi, Gandhari, etc., had followed their husbands blindly as if they had no existence of their own. Jaya also follows her husband ways blindly like that of the epics, even though she is an intelligent woman. She did not try to know why her husband came to the new lucrative job, how the money is coming for new comforts. There is no particular Mohan and Jaya being referred to, but there are Mohan's in India who have been amassing wealth by unlawful means and thousands of Jaya's are enjoying the riches, with their eyes closed to the moral lapses of their husbands. She bandaged her eyes tightly without questioning Mohan anything Mohan anything about his job. It was enough for her to move to Bombay and she could send Rahul and Rati to good schools and she could have things she needed and travelling first class.

So, she maintains silence. But, silence is not fair here to Jaya. If she was outspoken here, she could have avoided the malpractice of Mohan in his company. It is fact that women are the creator or destroyed of the family. If the husband goes to a wrong way it is the duty of the wife to make him correct. It is the duty of Jaya to lead her husband in a correct path. So, woman plays an important role in the family and she need not be silent all the time.

When woman asserts her to take a different path and cease to be the silent sufferer, there is hostility. It is not accepted in the family. If the woman is silent, she will be expected always to be silent. Hence, she should not be silent always. She should act according to the situation.

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