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SELF-RECOGNITION FOR WOMEN IN THE INDIAN SOCIETY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THAT LONG SILENCE

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Abstract

Indian women writers like Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, and Shobha De wrote about the exploitation and injustice faced by the women. They throw light on women's frustration and their struggle in Indian society in their writings. Shashi Deshpande achieved an important place among the list of Indian women writers who talk about the condition of women of every class of Indian society with their different social problems in her novels. She also paints her stories with a tinge of feminism that glorifies female identity. In her novel *That Long Silence*, she tries to present the image of an educated Indian woman through the character of Jaya who is entangled between the conventional roles that society expected her to do and the other that her own heart craves for something else. She lost her identity and self-confidence by suppressing her desires unconsciously over time. This study aims at making an in-depth study of Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence* and revolves around Jaya's battle between tradition and modernity and then her triumph after self-recognition and self-realization of her powers and potential. It focuses on the fact that the women should not be a victim, but bold enough to accept the challenges of life and fight with them courageously.

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is a prolific writer who has written many successful novels on women and their struggles. She inherited strong willpower and dedication from her father, Adhya Rangacharya, a renowned Sanskrit scholar and dramatist of Kannada theatre. The novel *That Long Silence* was published in 1989 and received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 and the Padma Shri award in 2009. She began her career by writing for magazines like *On Looker*, *Eve's Weekly*, and *Femina*.

Shashi Deshpande tries to show the condition of middle-class educated Indian women who struggle to liberate themselves from the strict rules of patriarchy. Jaya protests by breaking that long silence that she has suppressed for seventeen years. Jaya devoted her life to the care of her husband and her two children Rahul and Rati. She considered Mohan like "a sheltering tree". But when Mohan was caught in forgery they both shifted to their Dadar flat. Here Jaya got some time to think for herself and recollects her past events about her father, mother, brother, and relatives before her married life. Her relationships with her husband were not of love and affection. Mohan changed her name from Jaya to Suhasini after their marriage. The name Jaya is given by her father means victory and the name Suhasini symbolizes a soft, smiling

submissive woman. Jaya gave up writing fiction as it offends Mohan when he says, "They will think I am this man. How can I look anyone in the face again?" Jaya didn't want to hurt Mohan and his male ego so she quit writing fiction and starts writing about a submissive woman named 'Sita' in the newspapers because this theme didn't annoy anyone. Kamat was the best critic of Jaya's stories when he says to Jaya "why didn't you use that anger in your story? There's none of it here. There isn't even a personal vision. I will tell you what really wrong with your story". For this Jaya replied, "a woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated." Kamat treats her equally; he behaves to her like a friend. He is the person to whom she can show her writings without fear which she wanted to show to Mohan earlier.

Shashi Deshpande here portrays the monotonous life of housewife when Jaya explains to Kamat that she can't give time to writing because "There's only order and routine-today, I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after, clean the fridge..." (147-148). Mohan wants comforting and caring words from Jaya in such a crucial time but she couldn't share his grief and pains. When Mohan charged her with allegations she couldn't speak anything. Meanwhile, Mohan left the home. By the end of the novel, when Mukta said ' people don't change', Shashi Deshpande through the character of Jaya said: "It is true. We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible". (193)

Women are aware of the injustices heaped on them but they unwillingly force themselves to live the life of suppression that was endured by their predecessors. In many ways, modern women's condition is even more pitiable than that of earlier generations who unquestioningly accepted their secondary position in the society because they are educated women who are more aware of themselves compared to their earlier generation.

Apart from this, she tries to build up a healthy relationship in the family where there should not be any discrimination or differentiation based on sex and gender, femininity, and masculinity. There should be no question of domination or subjugation between a man and a woman. Both men and women get equal opportunities to develop their personalities. Shashi Deshpande here stresses the importance of communication and trust in the relationship, instead of becoming silent both can talk with each other and resolve their differences. After then they will be no more 'two bullocks yoked together' in marriage but the two main pillars on which the roof of the family rests. Jaya raised her voice against the role models of wife, daughter, sister, and mother and rebelled against the biased behavior of the age-old patriarchal setup. Another thing is that this study is concerned with a woman's quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the potential of Indian women and their handling of the relationship with mutual understanding and harmony.

The objectives of the study are to explore the conflict between tradition and modernity in *That long silence*. It highlighted the situation and methods through which women can establish their identity and lead a successful life, utilizing their inner strength to face life with all its ups and downs. A meaningful co-existence can establish only through mutual understanding, respect, and compassion and not through domination or subjugation.

THE IDENTITY OF A WOMAN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

In a society, the works and responsibilities of a man and a woman are structured in such a way that they are performing these works conventionally without any objection. Men and women formulate their identities by their repeated performances. The novel portrays the role and identity of the women in a traditional society in a very realistic manner. For Mohan, anger makes a woman 'unwomanly'. He even quotes his mother's silent suffering, despite her husband's harassment, as strength,

"My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her".

Mohan's father is a perfect example of typical male domination. Mohan's sister Vimala is also a victim of silence. She suffered an ovarian tumor with metastases in the lungs, but she did not inform anyone and preferred to be silent instead. Jaya tried to do everything that she could do to keep her husband pleased by keeping in mind the advice of Ramukaka, "Remember, Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you",

When Kamat suggests Jaya to express her real anguish in her writings, she replies, "because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman? Although Jaya tries to be the best housewife for seventeen years, she never questions Mohan's ways rather she offers subtle resistance through silence but it is of no use. The irony is that women adapt themselves to the given roles and works and willfully submit to the patriarchal control without any second thought or refusal. Deep inside they reject these mythic images but outwardly they accept all unjust and unfair happenings to them because they fear to protest.

However, Shashi Deshpande does not ignore the importance of a male person nor does she claim to be a feminist like the western feminist. But surely, it is a credible achievement on her part that despite her declaring: I am not a feminist" she is the champion of the cause of emancipation of women from the tyrannous clutches of tradition.

EMANCIPATING TRANSFORMATION

"I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified because we were taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't." (Audre Lorde).

Shashi Deshpande is conscious of such Indian women's problems that have a major concern in her writing. Through this novel, she presents the inner struggle of females to get an honorable position within the framework of the marriage system. She says that her feminism has come to her very slowly; very gradually and mainly out of her own thinking and experiences and feelings. More than being labeled as a feminist she expresses her desire to be a humanist. Deshpande like to convey the message to the Indian women through her novels that women can learn to live in the modern society with self-dignity and self-realization. She writes,

"My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing very clearly women's writing"

To probe into the psyche of her characters she employs interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness technique. In her article "Why I am a Feminist" she says, "I believe that woman is neither inferior nor subordinate human beings, but one half of the human race". Here Jaya recognizes that Silence hovered in her relation with Mohan and within herself. She promises herself that she would never let Silence enter her life again as well as in her relations. At the end of the novel, Jaya transforms into a new woman after going through a period of struggle, self-assertion, and self-recognition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel unfolds the inner struggle and fragmented feelings of Jaya who was constantly suppressed by the male power. She recollects her memories and realizes that it's of no use if you restrict yourself from expressing your ideas, views, and wishes. Through the character of Vimala, Kusum, Jeeja, and Mukta, she presents the problem faced by them in the patriarchal society. Behind their exploitation, it's not only men but women who contribute also a lot. At the end of the novel, Jaya transforms into a new strong free woman fearless and confident. Her fears and insecurities are replaced by confidence and her self-esteem motivates her to speak through writing fiction. The novel ends with Jaya's determination to break the

silence and she learns to make her own way towards self-liberation without changing the culture and tradition of the society.

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