



‘FEMININE PSYCHE OF JAYA IN SHASHI DESHPANDE’S ‘THAT LONG SILENCE’

Batshala Kumari

**Research scholar in the Department of English
S. K. M. University, Dumka**

Abstract-- Shashi Deshpande, one of the most prolific women writers in English in a contemporary India, has eleven novels, six collections of short stories, four books written for children, and a screenplay to her credit. Her novel, *That Long Silence*, published in the U. K. in 1988 and in India in 1989, won her the Sahitya Academy Award and Tanjanganad Thirumlamaba Award. She has been known for her sincere and realistic projection of Indian feminine sensibility and her portrayal of middle-class, urban and educated Indian women with their suppressed dreams and aspirations, unavoidable silence, patience, tolerance and tolerance, sorrows and sufferings, suppression and oppression, pain and agony, issues and problems, trials and tribulations, plight and predicament, and with their strengths and weaknesses. Her novels are a sincere attempt to explore the hidden psyche and consciousness of Indian women who have been victimized from time immemorial. Her sincere concerns for women are reflected strongly in all her novels and stories. The present paper “FEMININE PSYCHE OF JAYA IN SHASHI DESHPANDE’S THAT LONG SILENCE” shows how Jaya, the protagonist of the novel ‘That Long Silence’ undergoes the trauma of a middle class working woman. The paper shows how she becomes a trap in the male dominated society.

KEYWORDS: Jaya, Mohan, gender discrimination, protagonist, society, culture, patriarchy, menstruation, feminism, depict, novel, tender, etc.

INTRODUCTION: Feminist movement advocates the equal rights and equal opportunities for women. The true spirit of feminism is look into at men and women as human beings. There should not be a gender discrimination in familial and social life. Establishing gender equality is the key aspects of feminist

movement. In India, women writers have come forward to voice their feminist approach to life and the patriarch family set up. They believe that the very concept of gender is not merely biological phenomenon but it has a social construction.

Feminist movement has a great deal in this regard. The feminist writing of Indian literature probe into the pathetic situation of women in the male-dominated society in general and in the institution of family in particular. In order to establish social harmony, the harmony in the family needs to be established. There has to be an end to discrimination on women based on the gender. No gender is superior in this world. Gender equality has a bearing on attaining gender development in order to have peace, harmony and love in the family relationship.

Indian women find herself as a victim of oppression at all such levels. They do not have any control over their body. Their subordination is total 'at almost all stages of their life'. As daughters, they are the victim of gender bias. They are taught from early childhood to suppress their wills and aspirations. Their ideals are Sita and Savitri, and they are taught to emulate them to become an ideal' wife. As wife and mother, they have no identity. Their existence is geared towards pleasing their husband and bearing their children. In Alison M. Jaggar's words,

“with the partial exception of mothers, the male culture defines women as sexual objects for male pleasure.” (Feminist Politics and Human Nature, p. 260)¹.

They depict women with both the positive and the negative attributes. Women are no longer objects because they become the subject in their novels. The major aspects of their novels are:

“Power women, the deviousness of women, helplessness of women, and courage of women.” (Indian women novelists, p. 34)²

These novelists depict women:

“who aspire attempt and strive to be there true selves.” (Feminism as an Extension of Existentialism, Woman in Indian English fiction. p. 138)³

Shashi Deshpande is renowned novelist of Indian writing in English. She has credited of writing well known novels, namely; 'The Dark Holds No Terrors'; 'Roots and Shadows'; and 'That Long Silence'. Her first novel 'The Dark Holds and No Terrors' was translated into German and Russian languages. 'That Long Silence' (1998) was her fifth novel which was recognized with 'SahityaAkademi Award' in 1990. Her works primarily deals with the problem of women in the present social context. Deshpande's quest for identity and freedom has become dominate themes in literature. She unfolds the problems very positive way. According to her, woman has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decisions, to be independent and to take charge of her destiny. The present paper "FEMININE PSYCHE OF JAYA IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THAT LONG SILENCE" is an attempt to examine the feminist perspective in 'That Long Silence' of Shashi Deshpande. Women's quest for self exploration is the principal theme of this novel. In an interview, the novelist reveals that all her characters are concerned with their 'selves' and they learn to be honest to themselves. 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.

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

In the Contemporary times Indian Writing in English has acquired a wide dimension. Multiple and diverse themes are being incorporated thereby enriching the writing of Indian English writers. Man-woman relationship, alienation, loss of identity etc. are some of their favourite themes. Meenakshi Mukherjee says:

“Alienation is a very common theme” (The Twice Born Fiction. p. 83)⁴

Further renowned critic, Pritish Nandy also finds in them :

“the specimens of a rootless literature, totally alienated from the people, unconcerned with Indian realities (Aspects of Indian Literature. p. 89)⁵

The male superiority signifies the patriarchal culture in the family relationship between Jaya and her spouse Mohan. The result of marriage yields into frustration, discard and disharmony as there is absence of love with only sex. Jaya is compelled to keep silence and surrender and adopt socio-psychic nature. The traditional, institution of Indian family is dwindling as the familial relationship does not have gender equality. Male member of the family is entitled to all sorts of comforts and excuse whereas female member has to sacrifice her life keeping silence, suppressing emotions and desires. The mechanical and artificial love is significant where gender discriminate exists in family environment. Jaya could break her silence after the support of Kamat but decides to keep silence and surrender. Violence is not the solution for the problems, to bring a change one has to wait and to be optimistic.

The title of the novel depicts the intention of the novelist in order to reveal the female psyche during the quest of Jaya, the protagonist, for self. She is the protagonist of 'That Long Silence' who is an intelligent woman with graduation in English, a writer and columnist who had a bright career. Unfortunately, none of these attributes would provide her a respectable positive in the eyes of her husband Mohan, who has socialization in a typical tradition environment. He perceives his wife on par with Seeta, Savitri and Draupadi. His mother and sister Vimala are very much submissive to father. The decisions relating to familial and financial matters are taken by the male members of the family. So he wants his wife to be submissive like them as a homemaker.

In a male-dominated society, a woman has no space to be independent. She is dependent on men either on father, husband or son. They are hardly given freedom and independence. Slavery to man makes them suffer from dual roles of child bearing and domestic chores. She has no freedom regarding the selection of her life partner and marriage. Marriage becomes their destiny and Jaya thinks; as we grew into young women, we realize it was not love, but marriage that was the destiny waiting for us. It had been our parents who had taken vague desires of our sand translated them into hard facts. It was like the game we had played as children on our buttons tinker, tailor, soldiers, and sailor.

Jaya's parents and VanithaMami go on hammering onto to her that 'husband is like a sheltering tree'. Women should be dependent on the male member of the family in order to be safe and protected. In other words, a woman is undermined ignoring the fact that she is equal to men in all the spheres of life.

Her abilities and strengths are undermined. However, she is inferior to men in patriarchal society. This is rightly pointed out by Deshpande as;

A sheltering tree.
 Without the tree you are dangerously
 Unprotected and vulnerable. This
 Followed logically;
 And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing
 Even if you have to water it with deceit and lies (TLS, p. 32)⁶

The novelist vividly depicts the image of marriage institution and familial relations in India. Husband and wife hardly openly about their sexual life it is treated as sinful and immoral. Jaya had dream about her marital life that she would love her husband first and then sex. A mechanical relationship and artificial lover were the consequence of her marriage. It was a total failure. She had lost interest and tried off with the acts of sex. Unfortunately, with Mohan she had only sex but not love either before or after marriage. Other sex words, she hardly enjoyed marital relationship with her husband. She had no freedom to express or share her desire with Mohan. Her feelings of love and sex are suppressed as she says :

In any case, whatever my
 Feelings had been then, I had
 Never spoken of them to him. In fact, we
 Had never
 Spoken of sex at all. It had been as if
 The experience was
 Erased each time after it happened, it
 Never existed in words.
 The only words between us had been in question,
 'Did I hurt you?' and my answer
 'No' (TLS, p. 95)⁷

Jaya was introduced to her neighbour Kamat who motivated her to think and act independently about her writing by appreciating and admiring. He inspires and cheers her to get serious, to be real and true to herself. This made her regain her self-confidence which had been lost. He further makes her to speak frankly about sex. What she could not speak with Mohan, was able to speak to Kamat. It makes her realize her 'self'. In this way, Kamat enables her to break 'long silence'. Jaya now resolves to assert her individuality by breaking 'that long silence', putting down on paper that in her entire seventeen years of silence she had suppressed her desires.

The companionship of kamat makes Jaya to get her identity. However, she is not strong enough to challenge the traditional value system of the society. Though she has list faith in her husband, she wants to adjust with her present setup. She is of the opinion that no change comes suddenly, it takes a long time. Human happiness consists in harmonizing the opposites of life. The husband-wife relationship needs to be built on the values of democracy and socialism. In other words, rebelliousness is not the solution of the problems of life.

Through the protagonist conscious-raising voice, struggling to assert her femininity, Shashe Deshapnde gets to the root as existence and given vent to a kind of female subjectively which refuses to reconcile and identify herself with a patriarchal and male- dominated society. Throughout her female protagonist she seems to convey the message that marital polarization curtails human potential and individual happiness.

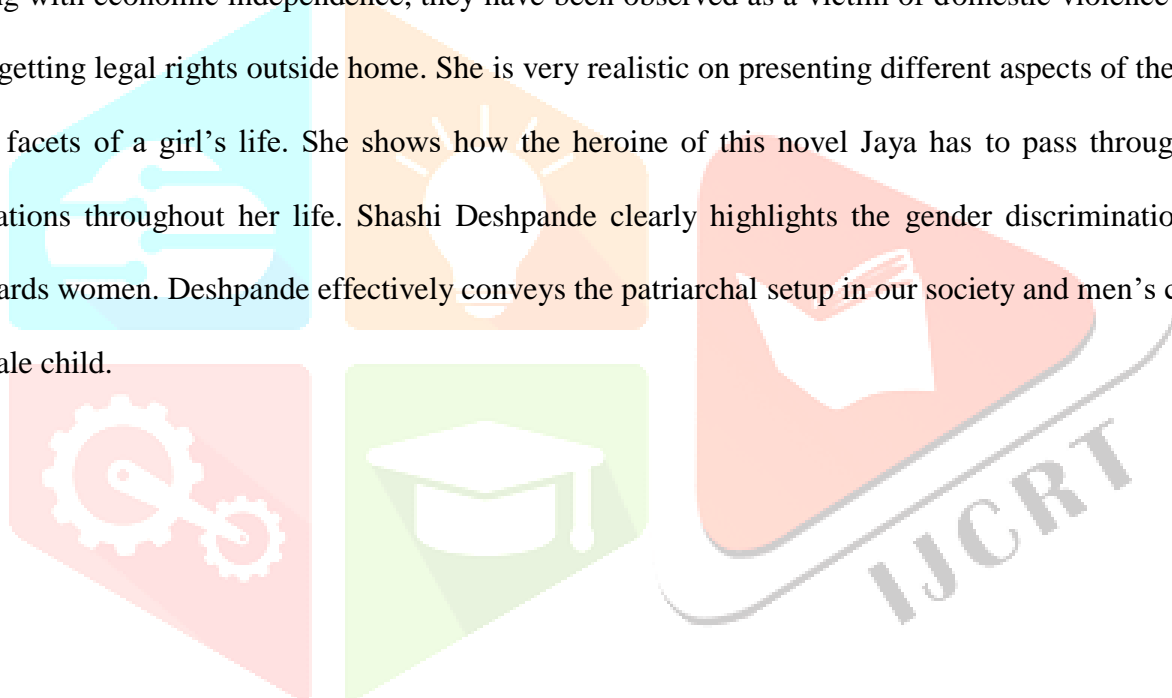
It is suffice to state that courage and not escapism is what woman of today requires. She should have the courage to uphold what is right for her and adhere to it with firm determination. A headlong plunge into the social milieu with pertinacity can alone bring harmony and fulfilment in her life.

At the end of a novel Jaya's husband loses his confidence, his position as an engineer. In the urban and global society, her husband comes the victim of corruption. During the seventh year of their marriage Mohan never asks her opinion on any matter but when an inquiry has been set up against him, he holds Jaya's hand asks her to support the family through her career as a writer. But Jaya remains silent kind of protest against her long silence, which makes her strong at the end of the novel.

Shashi Deshpande's 'That long Silence' is one of the unique works of Sashi Deshpande which signifies the pathetic condition of Indian woman. It is a reflection of suffering of an Indian woman in the dogmatic social milieu that is family. It also reflects how woman suffers deeply and end up life silently baring molestations of male. The sacrifice made by women counterpart is hardly noticed by the male dominated society. The writer wants such women who suffers to break their silence in the waken of feminist movement. The novel illustrates the image of women in the middle-class family and the way she is sandwiched between the tradition and modernity.

The novel narrates the story of a marriage on the rocks. We find that in the novels of Shashi Deshpande men give up easily and go on to fresh fields but women fight on and do emerge victorious after most battles who want to achieve individuation and authentic self-identity without changing the culture and tradition of the society. They may be weak and even be oppressed but they have the will power to rise up like a phoenix out of its own ashes.

CONCLUSION—Shashi Deshpande presents the state of women in India very beautifully in this male dominated society. She shows that women suffer due to men and marriage. The novelist is at her best in creating a central character which not only describes her own experiences as a woman but also makes a full study of women in the society. She shows although women have acquired education and knowledge along with economic independence, they have been observed as a victim of domestic violence as well as not getting legal rights outside home. She is very realistic on presenting different aspects of the problems and facets of a girl's life. She shows how the heroine of this novel Jaya has to pass through difficult situations throughout her life. Shashi Deshpande clearly highlights the gender discrimination by men towards women. Deshpande effectively conveys the patriarchal setup in our society and men's craving for a male child.



REFERENCES :

1. Jagger, Alison. M. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld Publishers, 1983, p. 260
2. *On the Writing of a Novel*. Indian women Novelists. Vol- 5(ed) R.K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige, 1991. p. 34
3. Bai, K. Meera. *Feminism as an Extension of Existentialism, Woman in Indian English fiction*. The commonwealth Review, 6-1, 1994-1995. p. 138

4. Mukharjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Bom Fiction*. New Delhi: Heinemann educational Books, 1971. p. 83
5. Nandy, Pritish. *Literature of Protest*, In Suresh Kholi. (ed), *Aspects of Indian Literature*. Delhi: Vikas, 1975.p. 89
6. Deshpande, Sashi. *That Long Silence*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1969. p.32
7. *Ibid*, p. 95

