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BREAKING SUBMISSIVENESS IN THAT LONG SILENCE BY SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Abstract

The novel THAT LONG SILENCE written by Shashi Deshpande was published in 1988. Shashi Deshpande has won the most prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 and Padma Shri Award in 2009. Her writings are mostly based on feminism. This novel revolves around the woman protagonist Jaya, who is educated and lives as a typical Indian middle class housewife. She maintains silence for her husband and her children. The characters involved in the novel are connected with our realistic environment. In this novel she searches for her self-identity which she has lost by throwing herself in the family background. Later Jaya understands her identity and realizes her role in the family. The novel ends up with the breaking of submissiveness and subdued entities and silence. Shashi Deshpande deals with the genuine problems of contemporary Indian women. Her works are mainly based on the theme of gender discrimination, inequality, and male chauvinism.

INTRODUCTION

Women writers of Indian English fiction have contributed to enrich the contemporary status of women in the society. Magnificent feminist writers like Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Virginia Woolf, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, Taslima Nasr in etc. have made remarkable contribution for the growth of the literature of feminism. Shashi Deshpande is a remarkable figure in Indian literature. She does not write as a feminist, but writes from a woman's perspective. The connotation of the term 'feminism' has changed over the years, which has earlier been regarded as the 'state of being feminine'. Now it has been defined as "a social theory or political movement arguing for female rights." Shashi Deshpande deals with the genuine problems of contemporary Indian women and conveys the depths of female psyche. A woman

who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her and roused her strong feelings. In this respect, Deshpande's novels reflect the highly critical sense of woman's identity in order to reveal the essentiality of her existence.

Her novels show the 'feminine mystique' which considers woman only as a respectable wife and good mother and no more distinctions than this identity. This novel also examines the dichotomy between the modernity and tradition. Simone de Beauvoir conveys that a man is a subject, he is an absolute and she is the other [non-subject, non-agent, only a soul]. This is not an imaginary story. This novel opens with Jaya, a modern girl being brought up by her father with 'individualism'. She is educated and after her father's death she gets married to a middle class gentleman named Mohan at the age of fifteen. At the age of twenty she gives birth to

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two children, Rahul and Rati. In this era where there is more awareness about rights, freedom, equality, and a tendency to stand on one's own legs, she still continues to maintain silence. Even though she is brought up as an individual and knows about the rights after the stage of marriage, her role changes to a dutiful wife, affectionate mother and respectable relative to her in-laws. She is a failed writer and has been forced to change her name as "Suhasini" to get submissiveness in marriage. In our culture, individualism is protested and it is considered as the mark of alien culture. The marital bliss and woman's role at home is considered as the expression typical of Indian culture. Jaya, the young educated woman, is crushed under the burden of male domination and tradition-conscious society. The portrayal of Jaya's frustrations, sufferings and disappointments makes the novel truly a feminist text. The author has chosen the characters from real life by which we can compare ourselves with those characters and find our respective positions. A typical Indian husband does not treat her as an equal better half, but just uses her for pleasure and considers her as a machine to do his household works and to bear children. In this novel Mohan, Jaya's husband is also of that kind. He marries her solely for his social betterment. Jaya's distant cousin, Kusum never voices her opinions regarding this kind of situation.

Since she has internalised all her anger in order to maintain silence, she takes refuge in the insane world. 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 an idea about her stories. Shashi Deshpande does not prefer female chauvinism as a solution. She makes reference to a 'pair of bullocks' because if two bullocks go in the same path it can reach its goal correctly. But in that two, if one is pulled down, it cannot reach the goal at the expected time. So here both husband and wife are the two bullocks which should travel at the same speed. If the wife is pulled down by the husband without understanding her feelings and emotions, the complete burden falls on the husband who rules the family as a king without a queen in the palace. While Shashi Deshpande lays the blame

on man, she creates awareness in women's mind also. While studying the novel, we understand that Jaya is deeply distressed that Mohan has been dismissed from his job. Mohan discourages her to write, blaming her in the process that she is "only an exhibitionist". Jaya tells Mohan that "I gave up my writing because of you." But she did not take the risk of annoying him though he had crushed both the woman and the writer in her. He tells her that his mother never raised her voice against his father however badly he behaved to her. The author throws light on the issues of gender injustice and power structure of patriarchy reflected in several characters in *That Long Silence*.

Silence becomes an important motif in the novel to express the gender bias of the society. Mohan and Jaya hardly speak about in the mood of love-making. We only see the contradictory attitude between them and this creates a gap in them. As a result, Mohan leaves the house. Jaya thinks herself that she has failed to be closer to her husband mentally and emotionally and also act as a dutiful wife. Even now she continues her silence in order to follow the Indian tradition. In the days when she was a child, she used to get angry very soon. But after her marriage she has learnt to tolerate everything, thus not excluding her anger. She implies that to Mohan whose anger makes a woman 'unwomanly'. According to the author, the Indian husbands take for granted their wives' emotions, likes and dislikes being the same as theirs and here the author reciprocates the emotions in detail. The silence is still prevailing in her instead of anger but for a change this silence has brought a great impact in the mind of Jaya. She starts to express her compression of silence in writing. She already has a certain aim to become a writer, but after marriage she is unable to attain the goal.

The seventeen years of silence, emotional turmoil and frustration get released while putting them on paper. Further she doesn't accept Mohan as "a sheltering tree" of her life any more. She tells that she is not afraid of anything and she wants to cut off her name from her husband's name and that she now has only Jaya to her name and not anything more to signify as Mohan's wife. In this point she not only breaks the name of Mohan, but also the silence, submissiveness, blind tradition, etc. This symbolises Jaya's endeavour for self-revelation and self-assertion. Her fears and insecurities are replaced by confidence which is a vital ingredient of happiness in the life of a human being. Her

self-esteem motivates her to break the silence while her capabilities make her speak through her writing. Shashi Deshpande's novel ends with the breakage of silence of an Indian modern housewife from her entities.

CONCLUSION

Jaya's self-examination of her married life has brought to light the fact that she is partly responsible for the loss of her real self. Shashi Deshpande in all her novels raises her strong voice of protest against the male-dominated Indian society and against man-made rules and conventions. Thus 'silence' is seen as an image of subjugation, alienation and absurdity of Jaya's existence. Erasing that long silence, she evolves herself as a confident and independent being. While reading this novel, we may intend to question our own identity. Shashi Deshpande recommends to the readers with endemic imbalance in a marriage to relate it to their own expression of frustration. But nowadays this kind

of discrimination is not seen anymore because men have started appreciating and giving them freedom in all sorts of work. More than this woman has also developed greater awareness about their role and capabilities.

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