European Journal of Business & Social Sciences
Available at https://ejbss.org/
ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 6
June 2019

Shashi Deshpande views for women

REENA DEVI
MA (ENGLISH)
VPO DHIGANA
PH-9416675030

Abstract:- Woman's struggle to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and the most important of all as the human being forms the major concern of Shashi Deshpande's novels. Deshpande doesn't want her writing to be called feminist writing because she feels her novels are not a man versus woman issue at all. She portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemma in the tradition-bound, male-dominated Indian society. Being a woman herself, she sympathizes with women and her main apprehension is for human relationships. **That Long Silence** depicts the women world in an authentic, realistic and credible manner. This article highlights the fact that it is not the circumstances that contribute to the negation of women's rights; but the fact is that it is their women folk who polarize their dig at the emancipation of women.

"No act is to be done according to (her) own will by a young girl,
a young woman, or even by an old woman, though in (their own)
houses." (The laws of Manu 5.148)

"In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her sons, she should not have independence…" The position and status of woman is thus stated by the ancient Indian sage Manu. From the beginning of the Indian civilization, Indian male psyche has such an opinion on woman. They have had every advantage in telling us their own stories. They had education, a much higher degree, to articulate and voice their

ISSN: 2235-767X
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dominance. But, women had no education, nor were they strong to voice. Phenomenal progress has been registered in economic, political, technological and industrial fields; but the social structure of the contemporary Indian remains tattooed with certain taboos when it comes to the woman-question (Subash Chandra, p.147). This article contemplates on the protagonist's dilemma in this typical Indian milieu, which binds her like an octopus and at the same time, expects her to "perform" effectively and competitively in her allotted orbits.

Shashi Deshpande has presented in her novels modern Indian women's search for the definition about the self and the society; and the relationship that are central to women. Her novels highlight the image of middle class women squeezed in between tradition and modernity. She portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. She deals with a woman's psyche which is made to feel inferior and a burden on the family. Her heroines are courageous enough to revolt against the marginalization of women by men and society as revealed in *That Long Silence and The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

In *That Long Silence*, the protagonist Jaya journeys towards self-actualization. The novel embarks on with the receptive appearance of the solitude of a woman and the poignant question of the eventual purpose of her life in the milieu of her familial bond. The novel *is* an individual's journey in search of one's true self who confronts the gender oriented tradition. It depicts the plight of a wife who suffers silently in the name of family. Marriage is still a social necessity, where women seek security and men respectability. In her early married life, Jaya had yielded her decisions to her husband. The forced isolated stay in Dadar flat facilitates her to reconsider her life built around the needs of a husband only. Jaya's creativity provides her an outlet for her dissatisfaction. The novel ends with a renewal of faith. Jaya's decision to wipe out the silence and have a balanced contented

ISSN: 2235-767X
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life is a decision in the right direction. Self-actualization is possible if a woman decides to be herself, to reveal the genuine value of her free and inborn individuality in its entirety.

As Eva Figes (1986) says: Dominance is …the keynote in an analysis of the man-woman relationship where the male attributes are associated with mental thought and positive activity, whilst the woman is regarded as essentially passive, her role to be the respectable of male sexual drive for the subsequent reproduction of the species. The complexities of human relationships fascinated Shashi Deshpande and she has confessed it in an interview with Geetha Gangadharan: "We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and the Universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it. And still it is tremendously intriguing, fascinating." (Indian communicator, 20 November 1994 P-11). Deshpande's major apprehension in *That Long Silence* is to search deeply into the psyche of a woman who is made to face all kinds of mental tortures. The question what a woman does is never asked, but "who she belongs to" is always considered important. She never has an identity of her own. Her name changes as per the wishes of others. In *That Long Silence*, the writer has presented this fact through the character Jaya, who is recognized by two names: Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya is the name given by her father when she was born which has the meaning "victory"; and Suhasini is the name given after her marriage which means a "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman". Both the names stand for the persona of her individuality. The earlier one symbolizes revolt whereas the final one symbolizes submission.

To make the story a reliable one, Deshpande has made use of first person narrative to represent the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman. To appeal to the readers, she uses flashback technique. The first chapter deals with the present, but the remaining chapters are more in

ISSN: 2235-767X
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reminiscence with the final chapter ending in the present. The narrator in this novel is Jaya, the protagonist herself. While narrating her heartbreaking experiences, her mind wavers and she unfurls her whole life – from her childhood days to her father's death. She is a typical modern woman who has her roots in tradition, while her husband Mohan, a traditionalist has his roots in customs. Their outlook is different and they fail to understand each other. Due to differences in their attitude, their marital life grows shaky and gloomy. It becomes more of a compromise than love based on social fear rather than mutual need of each other. The choice may be rooted in their choice of a partner. For example, from the very beginning, Mohan wanted a wife who was well-educated and cultured and never a loving one.

To Mohan, a woman sitting before fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat her food is the real strength of a woman, but to Jaya it is nothing more than despair. "He wanted his rice fresh and hot, from a vessel that was untouched. She had just finished cooking this second cooking and was waiting, hoping, perhaps that he would not be too late, for it wouldn't do to allow and as for lighting the fire again, that was unthinkable" (P.15-16). "Her Ajji along with silence had taught her to "wait" the waiting game"(30). For a man waiting brings in restlessness but for woman the game of waiting starts quite early in her childhood "wait until you get married, wait until your husband comes, wait until you go to your in law's home, wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I got married I had done nothing but wait" (30) Women are blamed unfeminine and unnatural if they break the social system and so they are enforced to adhere to be termed feminine.

Deshpande reveals the consciousness of Jaya through an account of her mind in the process of thinking, feeling and reacting to the stimuli of the moment and situation. In doing so, she goes on to assert the feminine psyche of the protagonist, to break away from the strong hold of a social framework rooted in patriarchy which repels as it attracts. Jaya is a modern predicament and the flood

ISSN: 2235-767X
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of consciousness that ensure out of it is a silent stream of thoughts and feelings. She knows pretty well that in order to get by in a relationship one has to learn a lot of tricks and silence is one of them. Jaya surrenders Mohan without revolting. She never refuses or complains about anything. Her identity, personality is totally crushed which leads her to total confusion along with loss of self identity. We get a glimpse of Hinduism in the numerous fasts observed by women for the well being of husbands, sons or brothers. “Generally, a woman’s identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother It means virtually a woman doesn’t have an identity of her own” says Indira Kulkshreshtha (3).

The narrator Jaya, an upper-middle-class housewife with two teenage children, is forced to take care of her life when her husband is suspected of fraud. They shift to a small flat in a poorer locality of Bombay, leaving their luxurious house. The narrative reveals the futility of modern Indian life, where success is considered only with the upwardly mobile husband along with their children studying in "good" schools. The daily chores of normal life of a woman with material comforts is significantly represented in the following lines, "the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curious that had to be kept spotless and dust-free, and those clothes, God, all those never-ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again" (57). Jaya's creativity is muted by strong social and family pressures and holds all creative activities in submission to her role as a homemaker.

Though she is a writer, Jaya has not achieved true self expression. There is something almost overpowering about the restriction of the narrator's life. The story is unfolded by Jaya, ironically again symbolizing victory, while in the actual life situation, she is supposed to lead a traditional,

ISSN: 2235-767X
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passive life like; "Sita following her husband into exile, Savithri, dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails….." (11). She turns down these role models because in modern life these characters are simply citation of the past with no application to the present. These legendary women followed their husbands willingly but Jaya is accompanying Mohan everywhere because of compulsion. There is a frank, even brutal, realization of this evil necessity in her marital life. "Two bullocks yoked together.....it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful: and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?" (12).

That Long Silence is very close to real life experience and achieves its consistency from the actuality that the protagonist Jaya is a well educated person with a literary sensitivity equivalent with her fictional role. Silence for her is a kind of Defense Mechanism, which helps her to express herself more comprehensively. But the repeated allegations and accusations of her husband compel her to react sharply. She (Jaya) once tells kamat (her neighbour) ".....no women 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 " (147). Mohan wonders how Jaya, a woman could be so rebellious and angry. To him, it is unwomanly to be angry. A woman can never be angry. There is no room for misery, either. There is only order and routine. Woman pays for their happiness at the loss of their freedom. Marriage suppresses women and it leads her to "aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose" (30). The role restricts women's self-development. She feels that in life of a woman, there are many cross roads and many choices but a married woman has a few or practically no choice left to her except what her husband wills and desires. She unburdens herself to trigger out the creative impulses in her artistic self. The novel deals with feminism at its core. In the beginning, the imitation of role models has been crossed by Jaya.

ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 6
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Then it is followed by anger and protest. Whenever she looks back on her life, she has no nostalgia or yearning for the past;but it is exhibited as a feeling of suppressed anger which can burst out any time. Finally, articulation and assertion of the protagonist are only hinted as one of the future potentials for Jaya.

Shashi Deshpande told Joel Kuortti in an interview: *That Long Silence* is a hysterical novel in the sense that inside of me I was kind of screaming, but when it came out - as you said, one steps back from that screaming self – and one says, look Jaya is very analytical. There is no point at which she gives way to her emotions or self pity or anything. Throughout she is analyzing herself, her life, her relationships, and I think that is how it has been for me. I think it was really the culmination of the anger and all the repression; everything came out in That Long Silence (Sharma 55). She lays down a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. To her, tradition symbolizes the Indian way of life with the values of harmony and co-existence, and modernity is the affirmation of the self-regulating identity of an individual. The Sahitya Academy Award winning novel is about Jaya's hopes, fears, aspirations, frustrations and later triumph in life. Critic Y.S. Sunita Reddy observes: " The narrative with its slow unknotting of memories and unravelling of the soul is like an interior monologue quite similar to the stream of consciousness technique employed by Virginia Woolf " (Sharma 81).

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya undergoes an ordeal because she has refused to go into hiding with her husband as an enquiry against his financial irregularities is on. She kept her eyes shut to her husband's illegal earning at office like the mythological character Gandhari. Even her journalistic writings are hemmed in by her husband's likes and dislikes. Eventually she is able to evaluate her prospects of life. After having cast off traditional role models, Deshpande's protagonists exhibit great strength and courage in evolving, as their own role models as per the prerequisite of their social

ISSN: 2235-767X
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mileau. Her characters go through a progression of self - examination before they attain self actualization as stated by *Indira Gandhi* (*Eternal India),* "Woman must be a bridge and a synthesizer. She shouldn't allow herself to be swept off her feet by superficial trends nor yet be chained to the familiar. She must ensure the continuity which strengthens roots and simultaneously engineer change and growth to keep society dynamic, abreast of knowledge, sensitive to fast-moving events. The solution lies neither in fighting for equal position nor denying it, neither in retreat into home nor escape from it". Thus, Jaya is one among Shashi Deshpande's victorious strong women protagonists who repudiates to get trampled under the influence of her personal tragedy, and faces life with great courage and strength.

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