

A Desire for An Eventful Life of Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's "That Long Silence"

M. Kavitha¹, Dr. Padmini Bernard Fenn²

¹Assistant Professor in English, Sree Sakthi Engineering College, Karamadai, Tamil Nadu, India

²Associate Professor in English, G.R.D. College of Science Commerce, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract:-Love and marriage are interrelated concepts of human relations. Love has many forms and one of its forms is seen in the relations of husband and wife. This relation has been the major concern of feminists all over the world. The most stable, pious and natural form of love, and its expression in daily life changes with time and space, from a permanent fountain to occasional drops. Even in this expression, a woman has no equal share and these results in dissatisfaction, subjugation and suffocation, which is well brought to the fore by Shashi Deshpande in That Long Silence. A male partner not only changes a female's identity from a girl to a woman, but dominates her whole life to such an extent that she accepts herself as a part of his identity. She accepts everything silently, not because she is afraid of changing the society, but she fears changing herself, her relation, and her forced identity. She becomes so suppressed from within, that hardly she feels the need to change her pre-decided roles and assume her new identity. The roles, she imbibed with the help of her darling mother. Many times she feels herself tied with invisible chains, invisible chains but harder and stronger than visible

Shashi Deshpande's novel That Long Silence is the understanding of woman's desire, silence and its suffocation. Jaya internalizes silence as the heritage of her culture. But it continuously sickens her soul. Throughout the novel she tries to calculate the gain and loss of being silent and eventually finds that she always hides her faults behind her relations and responsibilities. Her growing dissatisfaction comes to an end with the sermon of Lord Krishna who gives freedom to every individual to do as they desire. It is the tale of every woman living in a patriarchal setup. This paper tries to illuminate the impact of silence in Indian women's life and Jaya's overcoming of it. The study tries to understand what makes a woman to stay silent and what eventually forces her speak up.

I. INTRODUCTION

That Long Silence of Shashi Deshpande presents the story of Jaya and Manohar, who live together as husband and wife in spite of their desperate attitude towards some of the fundamental issues of life. It implies that women do not raise their voice against suppression. Jaya was named by her father because it meant victory, but victory never came to her life. She was married to a man who had no qualms in adopting unfair means for money, while she was straight and upright in everything. Shashi Deshpande wants the women to be aware of the subordinate position they have placed themselves in for the sake of their husband and children. Just they have become wives and mothers, and ceased to be individual women. Jaya,

for instance felt at one stage the woman sinks her personality for the sake of her husband and the children. But yet she remains subordinate to them.

Shashi Deshpande further says that the story of gender discrimination is not a new development. It began since the beginning of civilization. She has given the example of Shankuntala who was exhorted by the saints to live in the haven of the king, no matter if the king had refused to recognize her as his wedded wife. Jaya, the heroine of the novel, felt that Prakrit sounded like a baby lisp.

That Long Silence is a woman -centric novel. Naturally, kusum , Jaya, Mukta, Vanitha Mami, Jaya's mother , grand-mothers, Jeeja, Nayana, Manda, Nilima, etc. occupy the centre-stage . None of these women has any defect of character and every one of them is the victim of male malevolence. Jaya realized “ All those happy women with husband's in good jobs, men who didn't drink and beat their wives, those fortunate women whose kitchen shelves gleamed with brass and stainless steel vessels. They were of no use to me. It was Jeeja and her like I needed.

On the other hand , Male characters are presented as devoid of feelings and sense of responsibility .Mohan the most important of them, had no qualms of conscience mother male character was Rajarama, husband of Nayana . He was a drunkard, earned nothing but threatened to know out his wife if she gave birth to a girl baby again. He would beat his wife if she refused to give him money. Jaya's Dada was a very selfish person who makes himself free from the responsibility of an unmarried younger sister; he pleaded Mohan's case very strongly.

Shashi Deshpande always chooses to present the action, the events of the novel in retrospect. In this novel present, Jaya begins her story from the time Mohan came to the Dadar flat to escape ignominy of being involved in a scam to give a slip to the official action. Through this novel the author emerged the technique of reviewing the incidents is that able to discover the connections existing between the incidents? Thus the whole novel was replayed and the novelist had the opportunity to watch the whole novel from critics' point of view.

As Jaya and her husband Mohan arrived at the Dadar flat , Jaya was full of shame for what her husband had done.

She was reminded of Nair family , all the four members of which went , tied together into the sea., never to return due to remorse on being involved in a similar scam. Use of the technique of presenting the incidents in retrospect is to an intimate conversation with his uncle Vasant had made her feel that Rahul was never so intimate with her.

Shashi Deshpande has used a very powerful language, full of catch words and phrases which get imprinted on the mind and difficult to forget. For example Jaya told that husband is like a sheltering tree, this remark that dawned upon Jaya when she met the doctor for treatment of Rajaram. When the novel opens with the assertion that Jaya and Mohan were the two bullocks yoked together. Being the wife of Mohan didn't have the right to decide the direction while Mohan had option to go anywhere. Jaya was to go in the same direction. In order to make her clear point Shashi Deshpande offers makes use of figures of speech and images. She is a crusader against suppression of women. She wants companionship between man and woman .Since she never deviates from hard realities of life by convincing for equality.

Jaya's life comes apart at the seams when her husband is asked to leave his job while allegations of business malpractice against him are investigated. Her familiar existence disrupted her husband's reputation in question and their future as a family in jeopardy: Jaya , a failed writer , is haunted by memories of the past. Differences with her husband, frustrations in their seventeen- year-old marriage, disappointment in her two teenage children, the claustrophobia of her childhood – all begin to surface. In her small suburban Bombay flat, Jaya grapples with these and other truths about herself – among them her failure at writing and her fear of anger. Shashi Deshpande gives us an exceptionally accomplished portrayal of a woman trying to erase a long silence begun in childhood and rooted in her and in the constraints of her life.

Shashi Deshpande presents the meanings of silence. As she herself puts it: "You learn a lot of tricks to get by in a relationship. Silence is one of them. . . . You never find a woman criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage the relationship." The novel is not an autobiography, except for certain parts dealing with the frustrations of an unsuccessful writer. Shashi Deshpande has presented an Indian woman as she is in India of the eighties and not as she should be. Veena Sheshadri says in her review; Why has the author chosen a "heroine" who only succeeds in evoking waves of irritation in the reader? Perhaps it is because a competent writer like her is never satisfied unless she is tackling new challenges. Also, she believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be; and there must be thousands of self-centered women like Jaya, perennially griping about their fate, but unwilling to do anything that could result in their being tossed out of their comfortable ruts and into the big, bad world of reality, to fend for themselves. To make the story authentic and appealing, Deshpande has used the device of first-person narrative to ensure its credibility by making the

protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman.

Jaya is a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband, Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs. The difference between their outlooks is so great that they fail, repeatedly, to understand each other. To Mohan, woman sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot food is the real "strength" of a woman, but Jaya interprets it as nothing more than despair. The difference in their attitude is the main cause of their failure to understand each other. Due to differences in attitude, their marital life grows shaky and gloomy. It becomes more of a compromise than love, based on social fear rather than on mutual need of each other. The cause 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. He made up his mind to get married to Jaya when he saw her speaking fluently, sounding so much like a girl whom he had seen speaking English fluently. He tells Jaya:

You know, Jaya, the first day I met you at your Kamakku's house, you were talking to your brother, Dinkar, and somehow you sounded so much like that girl. I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you. (90)

In her stream of thoughts, Jaya, too, looks at her marital relations where there is no conversation left between them. This unhappiness is reflected not only in her conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion. The publishers reject her writings. In addition, when, finally, Mohan angrily walks out of the house, she feels that she has failed in her duty as a wife. She recalls the tradition of act and retribution and compares herself with Kusum: "An act and retribution—they followed each other naturally and inevitably." (128) When Mohan leaves the house without informing her; she feels that her husband is neglecting her in the same manner as she had done with Kusum. There grows a silence between the husband and the wife. It creates a gap between them. Mohan keeps on asking questions, but she does not find a word to answer them: "I racked my brains trying to think of an answer." (31) But her silence on such issues, like her own writings, puts one into doubt. As Veena Sheshadri writes: "One ends up by wondering whether Jaya has imposed the long silence on herself not out of a sense of duty or to emulate the Ideal Hindu woman of the ages gone by, but in enter to camouflage the streaks of ugliness within her."

Her negative approach coupled with her habit of discerning and analyzing every situation causes havoc in her personal life. She does not like to submit to the male-chauvinistic ideas, for her prudence does not allow her to submit before ignorance. Thus, there ensues a struggle between ignorance and prudence.

Further, her covert superiority complex makes her think not only of herself but also of others which causes a type of irritability in her marital conduct. Thus, all the troubles

emerge from their unequal cognitive status. In order to have a well-balanced sexual life, it is important that husband and wife be at same wavelength. They should supplement and not supplant each other. Further, they should know each other well physically as well as emotionally. It is this harsh reality that Deshpande tries to project through the female protagonist who, at the end, chooses to break her long silence of the past.

In human life reality, fancy and imagination work side by side. Reality is hard surface, harder than stones. As stones have sometimes pores to let water pass through it, same is the case of reality, it gives a chance to the flow of imagination for the best survival of human beings. Human being is destined to experience the changing states of consciousness and varying levels of awareness of his own self each day. Jaya, always in search of her identity, feels disturbed to such an extent that she introspects herself, for the real root of the problem. When Rahul returns in Dadar for his ailing mother, she feels a little comfort. Mohan's telegram with the message 'All well', fills a sense of joy in her lonely heart. She expected normal behavior in abnormal situations, and abnormal in the normal ones. She realizes a drastic change in her attitude, when she found herself swinging between what she desired, and what she achieved. Now onwards, she will not allow the silence to cripple her life. She decides: "But it is no longer possible for me. If I have to plug that 'hole in the heart' I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us" (Deshpande 192). Man is a product of his environment and all his dreams and desires, reflect the shades of this, time and again. Generally a woman is expected to be the silent bearer of all the natural and man-made sufferings. She is laden with all responsibilities and duties, and finds herself in invisible fences of familial and social codes. Mohan's accusations made Jaya realize the hard reality about he self. She has to acknowledge to that her role as Mohan's wife has been a passive one. She decides to come out of her cozy corner that she had so long preferred to reality. Ultimately she finds solace and complete meaning of her life as an individual in her writing.

Shashi Deshpande's approach to man-woman relationship, displays well her strong sense of reality. Instead of portraying the attractive love story of married life, she shows the hard realities of life, in the life of a well educated girl with literary sensibilities, and the effect of difference in her ideals and reality. But no one can degrade us, until we allow others to do so. Once we realize the power within us, then the whole world appears powerless. Jaya, by self introspection, decides to give voice to her different roles in her life. She becomes the real Jaya, the winner when she conquers her own fears and fences, to bring the hidden self to

the front. The present paper is an attempt to reveal the hidden gaps of married life, which not only suppress one of the partners, but many times lead to total failure of relationships. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, is a manifesto of such predicament of its main protagonist, Jaya.

That Long Silence is that Jaya is heroic in her ideas and perceptions only so long as she stays on the subjective grounds of Church gate. All her heroism sags when she shifts to the upper-floor flat at Dadar. Now, she reflects upon the ground-realities from some height. She is not involved in them because life has come to a stand still for her. The upper-floor existence signifies the, objective state as against the subjective mode at the Church gate. No hopes are offered: if Mohan is reinstated, life will start flowing again for Jaya; if not, then she shows no sign of recovery from the shock of realization. There is no vision offered: Jaya can be happy only as a devoted but complacent wife.

Shashi Deshpande has made the revelation of Jaya's real nature the very core of the novel. Java is in conscious pursuit of self-knowledge. Thus, various discordant notes meet and unite her complex nature. She is a model of patience, endurance-, devotion, integrity, rebellion, defiance and disobedience at the same tune. She is all along pursuing the idea of a separate female identity. She finds it difficult to put together the different discordant acts of her personality. Thus, the young bride Suhasini is at loggerheads with the mature and seasoned Jaya who is both restrictive and destructive. The tradition-bound docile woman in Jaya is irreconcilable with the modernist individuality seeking Jaya. The loyal, loving Java — the devoted wife of Mohan — is irreconcilable with the epicurean Jaya relishing a momentary embrace with Kamat. So, the novelist is able to impart a complex identity to Jaya, focusing at the same time on the egoistic and the altruistic aspects of womanhood-

WORKSCITED

- [1]. Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M.Parsley. Plarmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1975. Print.2.
- [2]. Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*. Noida: Penguin Books India, 1989. Print.
- [3]. Haldar,Santwana. *Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence, A Critical Study*.New Delhi: Asia Book Club, 2005. Print.
- [4]. Mundra, S. C., J. N. Mundra. *A History of English Literature*. Volume III. Meerut: Aastha Printers, 2009. Print.
- [5]. Nair, Pramod K. "Feminism". *Literary Theory Today*. New Delhi: Asia Book Club, 2006.Print
- [6]. <http://www.languageinindia.com/sep2013/kavitabreakingsilencefinal>.
- [7]. <https://penguin.co.in/book/fiction/that-long-silence/>
- [8]. <http://albertsliterature.blogspot.in/2012/02/problem-of-identity-in-sashi-deshpandes.html>