

Self- agony of Women Characters in *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande

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Abstract

This Research Paper is an attempt to study self- agony of women characters in *That Long Silence*. Shashi Deshpande has presented a lucid presentation of reality, problems and the inner trauma of women's life. Self- agony of all class women of society such as Jaya from middle class and Jeeja from lower class has been represented by Shashi Deshpande. She has tried to describe the reason for women's secondary position in the society. Shashi Deshpande has presented the capacity of women how they tackle the problems in real life. She has given nook and corner of women's life means their hidden problems and feelings. Shashi Deshpande has used the technique of stream of consciousness to project the minds of characters. 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. *That Long Silence* is multi-layered novel. Like the other novels of Deshpande it tells the story of Jaya who searches for her self-identity. During her journey of self-identity she comes across many bitter experiences which reveals her self-agony. Other women characters are also representing the position of women in traditional contemporary Indian society.

KEYWORDS: self agony, trauma, struggle, self-realization

Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande is the renowned novelist of the twenty-first century. She was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka. Her father was the distinguished writer and Sanskrit scholar Adya Rangachar, better known as Sriranga. She took a degree in economics and she also acquired degree in law and English and a diploma in journalism. She has been awarded by Padamshree award. *That Long Silence* has brought a Sahitaya Akadami award to her credit. She has written many short stories and novels also. Deshpande has written a whole novel on the question of silence enveloping an Indian woman's life. *That Long Silence* is a pathetic story of Jaya. In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande has presented self agony of Jaya who is a writer with graduation in English. She is a middle class lady who lives with her husband Mohan and her two children. Being a writer She is supposed to present her views and ideas before the society, but she remains silent because of social and husband's pressure on her. She finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men.

In beginning of the novel, Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their well-settled, comfortable house to their old flat in Dardar, Bombay. They shift into their old house because Mohan has been caught in some business malpractice and an inquiry is in progress. In this old flat Jaya finds time to think about herself. Her journey of self-realization starts from here.

In her childhood, she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility. Jaya is very close to her father. Even when her mother scolds to her or questions her going out and returning home late, she complains against her mother to her father.

Jaya is an ideal wife. She thinks that an ideal wife should follow the path of her husband's footprints. She has been living a life of her an ideal wife for seventeen years. She is a dutiful wife and caring mother. She is so much busy in her routine life that she never gets time to think about herself. She becomes submissive after her marriage as she realized that to Mohan anger made woman 'unwomanly'.

"A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There is no room for anger in my life, no room for despair, either. There's only order and routine – today I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after, clean the fridge . . ." (Deshpande, 147-148)

Jaya becomes submissive after her marriage. She never goes against her husband's will and wishes. As Simone de Beauvoir states,

"Marriage subjugates and enslaves women and it leads her to aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose" (Beauvoir, 500)

In Indian society after marriage, the husband gets control over his wife. She has to follow the path of her husband whether he is right or wrong. When Mohan is caught in male practices in his office. She takes her as granted that she will support her in her ill-legal activities and goes with him to live in Dardar flat. Though Jaya is a modern and educated, she compares herself with the image of Sita and Draupadi and other mythological characters.

"I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails . . ." (Deshpande, 11)

Jaya's husband Mohan interprets things in relation to the effect it may on the society. He likes to follow the social norms. She warns Jaya does not write a story about them, which will endanger their married life. She wants Jaya to follow her so Jaya does as her husband tells her. These all male –chauvinistic ideas are thrown upon her by her husband and society.

Vimala is the sister of Mohan. She is suffering from an ovarian tumor with metastases in the lungs. She is suffering from heavy bleeding all time. She never dicusses this thing with her family members as she knows it is of no use. Once Mohan and Jaya visited her – normal routine visitit. Her mother-in-law shrugged heavily and said,

"God knows what's wrong with her. She has been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her away if you want to. I never heard of women going to hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don't have heavy periods! What a fuss! But these women who've never had children are like that." (Deshpande 39)

At the end of her life she sank into coma and died a week later, her silence intact. She even told this thing to her brother also.

Mohan's mother is also victim of domestic violence. Her husband is drunkard. Her mother cooks for wedding feast. Her husband always eat hot rice and fresh chutney. Mohan tells Jaya that her mother used to wait for her father at night and always prepare fresh food for him. Once his father thrown the plate of rice when chutney was not served to him. Her mother sent Mohan at neighbour's home at mid-night for collecting ingredients for chutney. Jaya comments on a situation when her husband talks about this incident. He calls it "strength". Jaya says,

"He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender." (Deshpane 36)

Vimala says about her mother,

"almost all my childhood I remember her as being pregnant. She didn't want her last child, she'd lost four or five by then, and she was desperate." (Deshpande 37)

As Simone De Beauvoir States,

"She is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her." (Beauvoir 1949 41)

Vanitamami is maternal aunt of Jaya. She is suffering from ovarian cancer. She still hope for a child. She used to do pooja and fasts to get a child. She has advised Jaya that "husband is like a sheltering tree" she thinks that we can not live alone without husband.

Jeeja is maid- servant of Jaya. She is unable to give birth to child so her husband married to another woman. Her husband is drunkard and he used to bit her. She tolerates this all. After some time her husband and his second one wife died. So responsibility of children comes of Jeeja's shoulder. She takes care of the children. Her son is also like her father. He used to drink and bit her wife Tara.

Nayana is also maid-servant of Jaya. In a very small age she becomes pregnant again and again. She is pregnant and she hopes this time she will have male child. She has four children out of them two girls survived and two boys died. Her husband forces her for male child she says,

"he'll throw me out if I have another daughter"

In Indian Society, Though People of today are so much educated and learned but they always have a wish of atleast one male child must be in the family. In the wish of having a male child they sometimes give birth to girl child and sometimes go for abortion also. This is our misfortune that still this thinking is prevailing in contemporary Indian society whether they belongs to rich or poor family background.

Kusum is cousin of Jaya. She is mentally retired. She lives at Jaya's home for sometime. Even though Jaya's husband Mohan is not ready to keep Kusum with them. She keeps her with them. After sometime her brother brings her back to her home. At her home she committed a suicide by jumping into the well just before one day when her husband has to come to take her. Jaya shocked by her mother's words when she says,

it was a good thing in a way. She was of no use to anyone after she went crazy, nobody needed her" (Deshpande, 22).

Jaya says,

"As if a woman has no life of her own? Is she only a thing usable for others and when her usability diminishes or expires, she is a waste thing which can be disposed of?"

In Indian society it is believed that if a woman dies before her husband is lucky. If she is widow she has to follow some restrictions and rules created by society. Jaya's grandmother is widow. She has been allotted her room. But she can not sleep on the bed she has to sleep on the ground. She lives a miserable life after death of her husband.

Manda is daughter of Tara who helps her mother for earning livelihood and works at home also even though she helps her mother she is neglected by her as she is girl child.

Conclusion:

Shashi Deshpande has presented a touching part of women's life. Jaya has realized at last silence is not the solution of any problem. She has broken the silence and published her story. Women should raise their voice against the gender discrimination, marital problems, sexual harassment etc.. Shashi Deshpande has presented every problem of women's life very minutely from every start of the society. She has presented the journey of woman's life from girlhood to womanhood.

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