

## **Marginalisation of Women in Shashi Deshpande's, "That Long Silence" and "The Dark Holds No Terror"**

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### **Abstract**

Marginalization is the powerlessness and exclusion experienced by a group, resulting from an inequality of control of 'resources and power structures' within society. Feminism argues that woman is marginalized due to the patriarchal structure of society. Marginalization happens when a person is cornered, alienated and driven to the wall in the society. It is a systematic process, so to say, a type of conspiracy woven like a web with the underlying characteristic features of domination and subordination forcing the woman into submission always. But the feminist theory advocates equality - politically, economically and socially. Even after harping on these equal rights alone, many feminists of late, have come to realize that these cannot free women from sexual and social subordination. So, it is in the fitness of things that marginalization of women, their predicament, and their struggle for identity in finding their own space are taken up and adequately exposed which are the core elements of this trend.

**KEYWORDS:** - Identity, Imagination, Marginalization, Oppression, Reality.

Shashi Deshpande daughter of an eminent Kannada dramatist and Sanskrit scholar was born in Dharwad (in Northern India) in 1938. She began her literary career in 1970 with the publication of a collection of short stories. Besides four books for children, she has written novels such as *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *If I Die Today*, *Come up and Be Dead* and *Roots and Shadows* before the publication of her Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, *That Long Silence*. Her later novels *The Binding Wine*, *A Matter of Time*, *Small Remedies* and *Moving on* drew immediate critical attention. Deshpande is now considered as a representative of Indian women writers. Her works have been translated to different languages.

Deshpande has a hold on psychology, particularly female psychology and a deep knowledge of the Indian tradition. Contemporary women writers make a voice of protest against the marginalised condition of women. Deshpande's approach to women's problems as depicted in her novels is quite distinct. It is easy to distinguish her approach from contemporaries who either protest against the existing norms or remain indifferent to the social system. She did not choose that way of protest, rather she believed in the individuality of woman and her right for freedom. Her protagonists are educated women and most of them are financially independent.

The women portrayed in Indian fiction may be categorized into three. First, there are rural women who are poor, hardworking and sincere as portrayed by Kamala Markandeya. The most representative of these is Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*. In the second category, there are middle class women who are married and working like Saru in

The Dark Holds No Terrors and *Jaya in That Long Silence*. In the third category, there are women of the upper class society from the urban milieu. Most of them have easy morals and do not mind extra marital relations like Paro in Namita Gokhale's novel *Paro* and the female protagonists of Nayantara Sahgal and Shobha De. Deshpande, in her novels has depicted different aspects of middle class women.

*That Long Silence* was published in 1988. This novel displays her skill in narrative art; it combines retrospective narration along with direct description of present events. Theme of the novel is self-realisation of its protagonist *Jaya*, who won fame as a writer and contributor to a women's magazine, but later decides to change her point of view. The protagonist seeks to express her experiences not chronologically, but they flash during the moments of intensity according to her free choice. Like Virginia Woolf, Deshpande believes that the novelist must be detached from life while exposing the character.

The novel *That Long Silence* opens with *Jaya* and her husband *Mohan* moving back into the old *Dadar* flat in *Bombay* from their cosy and palatial house. *Mohan* is involved in a financial malpractice and an inquiry against him is set up. He is consoled to find that their children *Rahul* and *Rati* are away on a long tour with their family friends, and expects *Jaya* to go into hiding with him. It is in this old flat she becomes an introvert and goes into deep contemplation of her past and childhood. For the first time she makes an attempt to analyse who she really is. She started thinking about herself and about her individuality.

During her brief stay in the small flat, *Jaya* has to encounter both her past that comes in the form of memory, and her present in the form of rude shock received from *Mohan's* accusation that his malpractice was for the sake of *Jaya* and children's comfort. *Mohan's* accusation makes her realise the hard reality of life. She has to acknowledge that her role as *Mohan's* wife has been a passive one and that she has chosen to remain silent on *Mohan's* activities including his moral laxity, only to keep her detached from real life.

The novel displays the process of *Jaya's* self analysis and self recognition that help her to emerge from her cosy corner that she preferred so long to reality. *Jaya* wants to be a writer, not just one meant for a woman's journal. She knows that to be a successful writer, she has to detach her experience from her awareness of that experience, only then one can give the real picture of life. To emerge from her dumb existence to make her own free choices becomes the preoccupation in the *Dadar* flat. She decides to do so after she is rudely shocked by *Mohan's* accusation that she too is indirectly involved in the scam. For *Jaya* the only way out was writing. Whatever she wrote so far was not the expression of her real self but her poses.

The code of *Manu* was so rigorously observed that the role of women was confined to the family and they were denied most of the rights enjoyed by men. Though her role got modified and got enhanced over the ages, it invariably remained an inferior one. Freedom and self assertion remain a faraway dream for a large section of women in the Indian society. Despite her marriage to *Mohan* and subsequently becoming mother of two children, *Jaya* was lonely. Her husband could not understand her feelings as result of

which she was torn from within. Deshpande uses a beautiful image to describe Jaya's married life.

This image reflects their condition. It means that the bullocks so yoked shared the burden between themselves but no one knows whether they love each other or not. The protagonist not only suffers from a loss of personality, but faces a dichotomy between the body and soul. Woman is socialised to believe that without her husband, she has no value in life. She broods over her life and decides to assert her voice through creative writing. She takes this step at the end of the novel. Earlier, when Jaya wrote a story, got published it in amagazine and won a prize, her husband reacted in an unexpected manner.

Instead of appreciating Jaya, Mohan discourages her by saying what would people think about them. Jaya resents the role assigned to a wife in our country, who is called upon to stay at home, look after kids and do household works. She could not continue her writing as Mohan did not encourage her. She was deeply distressed to know that she could not come to light as a writer because of her husband. She did not dare to annoy Mohan or to break marriage. The values and ethos of society mould the female in a way that she is thought to feel guilty if she expressed resentment openly. Jaya's words reveal her helplessness. Jaya has every reason to be bitter withhim. She recalls their relationships as wife and husband.

The differences in their outlook make them fail to understand each other and the lack of communication damages their relationship. Jaya suffers silently. She would not express her feeling lest it should spoil her relationship with her husband. She had been brought up with love and care, but marriage gave her only frustration. All that she could do was to suppress her anger. Mohan had told her how his mother had never raised her voice against his father. He was not ready to accept her as an individual and wanted her to live like a 'typical woman.' The disgust of living with a man who does not love her the way she expected him to do, is an issue that educated women have to face in the contemporary society. The girl child is made to understand that she is a temporary resident in her natal home and she is a burden or liability and it is the responsibility of her parents to get her married.

When she asks why she is not included in the family tree, she receives a shocking explanation that she is no more a member of her family since she has been married off. Jaya is shocked to find no mention of her mother, or aunts who kept the family running. She is full of anger and desperation over such gender discrimination. Jaya feels suffocated to fit herself into the pre-ordained rules that a woman has to follow. Mohan's expectation is that a woman should not be rebellious or angry, she has to be meek and passive to him. Expression of anger in silence is best evident in an incident when Mohan accuses her for no fault of hers. She wants to burst out in anger. But she fails to break her silence. She compares her helpless state to that of a huge spear. She cannot react to the pain, but only suffers in silence.

As the story progresses, the meek, docile Jaya of the early days, finally emerges as a bold, challenging and rebellious woman. She comes to grip with the problems and discovers the meaning of life. Jaya understands that by suppressing her emotions she had

landed herself in a whirlpool of emotional turmoil. The mistake was that she had tried to be Mohan's wife and in the process lost her identity.

In contemporary Indian English writing we can see women writers like Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Anitha Nair, Shoba De etc writing about, and for women. These women writers aimed at communicating their experiences as women as well as conveying their views on social reforms. They tried to reveal the obstacles women faced, and the disadvantages they suffered in orthodox Indian society. They have analysed the socio-cultural modes, and values that have given Indian woman their image and role in society and also concentrated upon what they owe to themselves as women striving for equality in a gender based world.

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The characters they portray show very often as being torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition, and modernity. Problem of marital adjustment, and the quest for an assertion of identity make the predicament of working woman still worse. In the Indian context, the emancipation of woman has certainly brought woman far along the road of self-expression. But it has not gone to the extreme as in the case of the women's Liberation Movement in the West. There is no militant feminism in India. In India there is a genuine, sacred feeling for the family.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande have portrayed the evolution of this new Indian woman, especially during the last decades of twentieth century. The weight of the long silence imposed on women folk has, it would see, made the learned heroines of Deshpande's novels uneasy, and they try to cast off the shackles of restrictions habitually clamped on woman. The educated earning wife, and her adjustment, and sometimes maladjustment within the family has been a recent phenomenon in India. In the context of contemporary Indian society Deshpande has her own independent views on woman, her position, predicament, her trials and tribulations. Her major concern has been woman's struggle to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and most important of all, as human being. Shashi Deshpande's fiction is woman-centred. In the novels of all the women novelists there have been the authentic, poignant tale of the middle class educated woman, and her exploitation in a conventional male-dominated society.

In all human relationships, that between a mother and central stage has been occupied by the woman. Deshpande's heroine can be only a daughter, sister, wife, mother, woman, or professional, but never the real "she". Deshpande's heroines are modern, educated, married women. Years of slavery, suffering, suppression and protected life have made them timid and diffident. But after fifteen, seventeen or ten years of married life they want to be self-reliant and free from the socio-cultural shackles, without disrupting the bonds of marriage. Deshpande suggests a balance between the traditional

respect for family and the western idea of self-identity and self-expression breaking the habit of silence. In *The Dark Holds No Terror* the heroine Saru (Saritha) attempts to break her silence in order to attain self-identity.

Through the tender trap, their married life is filled with silences and barriers. The attitude of the middle class Indian man is to deprivilege the woman against the man, the moment she becomes a wife. The Indian male comes out as the villain and burdens the Indian woman. To him a wife is only an object, possession, not an individual, or a human being. Deshpande depicts the condition of woman before and after marriage. On the surface, everything goes on well with the Indian middle class woman. Saritha is no exception. In *The Dark Holds No Terror* Deshpande clearly defines middle class, educated, employed, married, Indian woman's fundamental issues. Indian woman is sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

Saru is a "two-in-one woman" who in daytime is a doctor and at night a trapped animal" (215) in the hands of her husband Manohar (Manu), who is an English teacher in a third-rate college. Saru is searching for balance between her traditional role as daughter, wife and mother and her new role as doctor. Saru is sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant and creative and longs for peace, freedom and success. There is professional jealousy between Manu and Saru. She is ready to resign her job when his "affected indifference" (36) towards her increases. But then he wants to enjoy life with her money and status. She has been only a prized possession to show off to his friends. Manu's simmering inferiority complex explodes when a girl interviews Saru for a magazine "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?" (182) changes him into a sadist from that day onwards.

Since then Manu teases Saru in bed and behaves normally during daytime. She has to suffer the rape mutely. At first she thinks that it is only a nightmare. But the bruises reveal the reality. She is not sure whether it was a 'blackout'. Anyway in order to have a peaceful sleep (life) she has to abandon her husband and her children Renuka and Abijith. She leaves everything, her profession and family. She reaches her home in the pretext, of looking after a daughter, between a father and a daughter, a brother and a sister, a husband and a wife and her lonely father.

There analyses her life and realizes, with definite clarity, that there is nothing to be afraid of. She decides to have a reunion with Manu and determine to continue her job. She does not want to run away from life, on the other hand, dares to face life courageously. In Indian society marriage and motherhood remain the main goal of a girl's life however liberated she may be. But a woman like Saru does not like this marginalization of woman. Another aspect of this novel is the demolition of the ideal wife, ideal mother image of woman.

From time immemorial the role of sacrificing, loving mother and wife is assigned to woman. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru's mother curses her own daughter. Saru herself is unable to look after her kids and Manu. Even the modern woman who treats her own son and daughter equally is not a successful mother. Like other heroines of Deshpande Jaya, Indu, Sumi etc Saru also at first subdues her independence to the pleasure of her husband Manu. Saru is a doctor of financially more independent. But

when she was unable to escape from her sadist husband, she feels that” a wife must be a few feet behind her husband” in every field. That is why she decides to warn her audience of girls that “If he is an M.A, you should only be a B.A” and so on (137).

Deshpande is not a militant feminist. She does not find the male as the cause of all trouble. The female, who surrenders to the males’ sense of superiority also contributes to trouble. Deshpande reminds us that in a patriarchal society, like the Indian society, women have to try hard to find their identities. Saru, is a representative of modern Indian women, who is working hard towards the goal. Her quest for identity lead her from self-abnegation to self-realization. Saru herself find out her own inner world. The turmoil inthe mind of her leads to the discovery of her own identity. She do not wish to blame or judge anybody. She brokeed her ugly silence.

Today’s women are totally different from conventional women who accept everything as their fate or destiny. Now they realize their individual destiny and equality with men .They had tried to unveil the potential of women in India. They discard the idea of their secondary position to men. They undergo a metamorphosis. They began to hope for the best. They become emancipated and mature. They gather strength to turn round and face the barriers .They give us a new image of the Indian woman, who can stand on her own.

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