

Sociological Approach In Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence

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Shashi Deshpande's literary inventions are about the post- modern Indian society. It is a vision of humanity and the value based life. The novel, *That Long Silence* is an exploration of culture and social construction of female identity and behavioral pattern of women in the society. It projects multitude of women's problems, dilemmas, disputes and frustrations. The protagonist Jaya, a convent educated, middle class woman married to Mohan who is a materialist at heart. She tries to locate the cause of their marital incompatibility and finds that it is the 'long silence' that they dwell in which has destroyed their happiness. Jaya breaks the silence at one level by writing for the magazine 'Seeta' but even this annoys Mohan who believes that to be angry is to be unwomanly and Jaya sets her mind not to be angry even in writing. She confines her thoughts and defines her role according to the expectations of her husband.

Naturally she loses her 'true self'. The internalized anger turns her nervous and incompetent. She says 'Why? Because no woman can be angry'. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?' (TLS 147) "A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated" (TLS 147). Jaya is not a feminist but a woman caught in a tussle between submission and assertion. However, the repeated allegations and accusations by her husband finally force her to react sharply and she realizes that it is not only Mohan who is responsible for her plight but her own being also, because she allowed herself to be victimized and this realization dawns upon her, she decides to come out of her cloistered self and be the real Jaya.

Identity of woman is defined by others, in terms of her relationship with men, (i.e. as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, and so on) her name

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changes according to the wishes of others. In *That Long Silence*, the writer has presented the phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means a “soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman.” (TLS 15-16) Both the names symbolize the behavior of her personality.

The former symbolizes victory and the latter submission. Jaya tries to adapt herself to the main current. She longs to be called an ideal wife and she revolts in silence. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husband’s words and he calls it strength. He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, which only meant for preparing food. Struggle is so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Jaya, a representative of the typical Indian woman, then wants to mould herself as her husband wills. Her father made her think that she was different from others and hence, she could not cope with her hostel mates and kept herself aloof from other girls.

In her childhood, she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility but after her marriage, she changes automatically. As a child she used to get angry very soon. After her marriage she controlled her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’. When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she at all times, tries her best to follow his advice.

Deshpande has presented the theme of lack of communication. As she herself declares as the themes of lack of communication may be over-familiar in western fiction, but in extrovert India it is not much analyzed. She presents the meanings of silence in this novel. Jaya is very particular about molding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied. In the very beginning of the novel, one can see that she tries to reason out with her father as to why she should not listen to the songs broadcast on the radio, but ultimately she keeps silent, suppressing her desire. As she herself puts it you learn a lot

of tricks to get by in a relationship.

To make the story authentic and appealing, she 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 basically a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband, Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs. The difference between them is so great that they fail, time and again, to understand each other.

In her stream of conscious Jaya looks at her marital relations where there is no conversation with her husband. This unhappiness is reflected not only in her conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion. Her writings are rejected by the publishers. Finally, when Mohan angrily walks out of the house, she feels that she has failed in her duty as a wife. Generally speaking, to have a well-balanced marital life, they must know each other well physically as well as emotionally. It is this harsh reality that Deshpande tries to project through the female protagonist Jaya. The novel ends with chooses to break her long silence of the past. It is not only Jaya's silence that Deshpande is highlighting but the silence of each and every character in the novel from different section of society. The novel is not only about Jaya's efforts to obliterate the silence that is suffocating her but also about the despair and resignation of women like Mohan's mother; Jaya's servant; Jaya's mentally disturbed cousin Kusum. It also deals with Mohan's silence which is the silence of a man who speaks but can find no one to listen to him.

Mohan was captivated of Jaya's modernity and her modern education. With a new feminist frankness Jaya presents inter-dependence of love and sex:

“First there's love then there's sex that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I had realized that it could so easily be the other way round.” (TLS 95)

Woman's realization between her solitude in the act of sex and the possibility of love without bodily union in the case of the affinity between Jaya and Kamat are delineated clearly. Jaya's self is torn

between her identity as a wife and her autonomy as a creative writer. One remarkable factor about Deshpande's women characters is the silent co-operation. Jaya remains silent and it is considered by her husband to be her protest. It is actually her silent protest. Jaya gets support from Kamat, a man living in the apartment near Jaya. Kamat encourages her to write good piece of literature. Here Kamat's role is sounder than the role of Jaya. Deshpande always leaves an open ended way for her heroines – if she cannot adjust with her husband she could think of another man. It cannot be considered as a sin in case of a woman. Her women are subject to sexual liberation, but that also cannot make them wholly detached from her husband.

Deshpande's women characters think of returning to their husbands. Although this is their silent submission to patriarchy but the novelist never ignores the value of marriage. Coming back to the husband does not mean defeat of a woman, but it should be remembered first that women must not forget their "self". One of the goals of post-colonial feminism is to clear space for multiple voices. Jaya raises her voice when Mohan wants to change her name from Jaya to Suhasini. This can also be considered as a mode of resistance.

Deshpande's women characters, in most cases, come to the level of consciousness after some crisis. The moment Jaya finds out that her identity is getting blurred for the mental complexities of her husband, she becomes a rebel, but this is not rebellion in the physical sense; rather it is a mental rebellion. Jaya could only recover herself after her long silence – here silence plays the role of a weapon. It signifies that everything cannot be altered only through active protest. Sometimes the unspoken words bear much strength than the spoken ones. Jaya's silence is expressive and 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" (TLS 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 her by the analyzing the past events of Kusums, Nayana, Mukta, Jeja, Asha, Ajii and Ai. She has to acknowledge to that her role as Mohan's wife has been a passive one. She decides to come out of her comfortable corner that she had so long preferred to social reality. Ultimately, she finds solace and complete meaning of her life as an individual in her writing. Jaya thinks about the life of her relations who came across in her life, their life becomes a lesson to the change of her present mind.

“If there was nothing else to reassure me, there was my knowledge of Mohan, of the utter strength of his convictions: a husband and wife care for each other, live with each other until they are dead; parents care for their children, and children in turn look after their parents when they are needed; marriages never end, they cannot- they are state of being.”(TLS 127)

In Deshpande's writings one can see about human beings and incidents which happen to be woman. The characters are true to life and their problems which encourage the readers and expect to be an excellent art of courage, culture, and socialistic to the world and also to raise the voice to breaks the silence on injustice.

It is difficult for women to do away with the stereotypes and traditions especially for those who belong to the lower strata of the society. Annihilating the existing order, being anti-men or anti- marriage does not lead one anywhere. On the contrary, extreme depression can light the superior self and grant an impetus to look forward for new ways for living. Women need to rise from the bog of their troubles and tribulations as victorious and should not give up the hope. Women cannot afford to be the ones who run away but they should become the ones to return with more firm resolutions. Woman came out of man's rib, not from his feet to be walked on. Not from his head to be superior, but from his side to be protected, to treat equally and next to the heart to be loved.

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.

Jaya's self-examination of her married life has brought to light that she is partly responsible for the loss of her real self. The seventeen years of their married life brings boredom, dullness and monotony instead of intimacy and friendliness. In her effort to be an ideal wife she loses her life in the name of sacrifice. Her failure to be an ideal wife and mother is revealed by her:

"I've failed him (Mohan). He expected something from me, from his wife, and I've failed him" (TLS185)

This kind of self-realization helps her to find the reason for the unhappy married life. She understands the consequences of suppressed anger, but "self-revelation is a cruel process."

(TLS 1) Her silence is nothing but suppressed anger. Silence or lack of communication is the cause of marital incompatibility. She decides to break her long silence to restore peace and happiness. She decides "to plug that hole in the heart. I will have to speak, to listen; I will have to ease that long silence between us." (TLS 192)

The tragic predicament of the Deshpande protagonists is the outcome of male-domination in a patriarchal culture. Their silent suffering is socio-psychic in nature. In her quest for identity, the Deshpande protagonist moves from despair to hope, from self-negation to self-assertion. Her struggle throughout is to attain wholeness, completeness and an authentic selfhood. She bids good bye to her silence, anger and resentment. She realizes her self-worth and decides to give up the prefixed norms of the society. Jaya's decision to exercise her rights is a welcome one. She wants to liberate herself by respecting her feelings and desires. Dinesh finds Jaya moving out of the cloistered self as she seeks to escape from the struggles of everyday life and is forced to find

inner resources that will allow her to return and engage more fully in her life and marriage. Jaya's optimistic view of life that changes are possible exposes of the transformation she has undergone.

Jaya submits herself to the roles assigned by the society. Living to those roles loses her identity. She is every woman who devotes her life to the family and in turn gets nothing more than emptiness and Jaya is every woman who has the potential to rise and establish herself in whatever way she can but is restricted by the dogma engulfing the society. Deshpande conveys a strong message to women through Jaya's portrayal women should accept their responsibility of the family and they have to contribute their own victimization. She advocates that women should sing of their true selves and transcend the oppressions. *That Long Silence* is the preparation of a woman towards the articulation which would break the silence and offer new solutions. People may not change overnight but it is possible to make over long periods. Jaya express her view with positive thought. "But we can always hope .without that life would be impossible and if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible" (TLS 193).

Reader observers that protagonist Jaya, revolts openly in the beginning and later on reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, ultimately does not. Her inner turmoil's are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not to be frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her actions by the society. She is unable to unfold the truth. Her image becomes like that of a bird that has got wings and knows that it can fly but unfortunately it is caged in the name of protection. In the same way, Jaya is aware of her abilities and she knows that she can expose them openly, but somehow she does not. She always remains silent which indicates that the traditional roles of women still have primacy over all the newly-acquired professional roles. Jaya can no longer be a passive, submissive and silent partner to Mohan. The novel ends with her determination to speak, to break her long silence. Breaking the Silence will make a space for equality. The novelist presents some elements of new-woman in the novel *That Long Silence*. The pre-matrimonial love of Jaya and Mohan is a good paradigm of new-woman.

To conclude, in the study of sociological approach this novel creates an awareness to the society that both man and woman has their own likes and dislikes, respecting and sharing one's feeling to others will give space of equality which is a right for both. Most of the Indian women have the curtain of the paternal hearth. They rose in such a blind alley and behind cultural bars, such traditionally and culturally conditioned. Souls cannot dream of going against the social norms, values and ways of life. Especially breaking the silence of women would provide the path for men to understand the feeling of women. Thus, women expects a man who protects her like a daughter, love her like a wife and respect her like mother which means women expects to understand her feelings. Breaking the silence provides the space to fulfill the expectations of women and There is no chance of welfare to the world unless the condition of women is improved.

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