

A Comparative Study of Feminism and Feminist Approach of Shashi Deshpande with reference to the novel *That Long Silence*

Poonam Rani^{1*} Dr. Chhote Lal²

¹Research Scholar of OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

²Associate Professor, OPJS University Churu, Rajasthan

Abstract – *That Long Silence* is a novel written by Shashi Deshpande in which she urges society to break all the norms which it has decided for women. It is not a violent attack on society but a request in silence to break silence to break silence which is a boundary or a mirror or a trend, a sigh or a mark which has been shown by male dominating society to the secondary sex (females). This is a kind of false consciousness in which females are living and thinking themselves unnecessary and unrequired. This is also a type of self negation which can be analyzed through the character, Jaya, the name given by her father which means victory but her name has been changed by her husband as Suhasini, a domestic ordinary woman whose all the wishes are related her family not for herself. So the theme of my paper is actually about the journey of Jaya from self negation to self assertion. This story is not actually the story of Jaya but the ninety percent of Indian woman are living of the same standard of Jaya. Urbanization and Education are the two factors which cannot work basically for women liberation. Self assertion can be acquired by doing a lot of efforts in the field of awareness. Shashi Deshpande is also doing the same efforts by writing novels on Female issues. This research paper is the comparative study of Shashideshpande's inquisitiveness of Feminism and her Feminist approach used in *That Long Silence*.

Key Words: Self Negation, Self Assertion, Urbanization, Education

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INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande has been awarded for the Sahitya Academy Award and Padam Shree. The novel is set in urban high middle class society. The book is divided into four parts. The Protagonist Jaya and her husband is a happy married couple with two children. But Jaya's secure life is threatened when Mohan is accused of malpractices at his workplace and is asked to leave his church gate home as long as the investigation is on. They shift to the Dadar flat and Jaya is forced to live alone for a few days. This time spent alone makes her analyzed her life from the childhood. The novel is written in first person with flashes back and forth in time. The Title of the novel is an apt phrase that highlights the very thematic concern for women, using epigraph-

"If I were a man and cared to know the world I live in... the weight of that silence is one of the world."

THEME OF SILENCE

Silence is a recurring theme in post colonial literature. Women use silence as a weapon,

metaphor and patriarchal symbol to show their protests and to muddle through their problems. The protagonist Jaya, also tries to resolve her problem by a process of temporary withdrawal and achieves it only after breaking her long silence. Her first quarrel with her husband forces her to compromise with all desires for marital harmony, thus bear everything in silence. She remembered the advice given by Vanitamami that 'a husband is like a sheltering tree even if you have to water it deceit and lies' and Ramu Kaka's words, "Remember, Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you."

FAMILY TIES- UNSUPPORTIVE TO WOMEN

This unfriendly atmosphere of her seventeen years of married life and this long silence drives her towards extra-marital relationship with Kamat. Jaya feels to be individualistic only in the presence of Kamat as she says, "with this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself- Jaya. These had been an ease in our relationship." But unfortunately Kamat died and Jaya leaves him deliberately in silence for the fear of her married life. When one of her stories won prize, Mohan was not happy with it because he considers that the story was a disclosure of their

personal relationships and criticizes Jaya. Jaya did not protest but retreats in to silence. This considers herself a unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and a failed writer. When Mohan got accused in malpractice and decided to move to Dadar flat, She followed him silently like, "If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too."

During their stay at Dadar flat, their silence intensifies. It destroys their physical intimacy too. It engulfs them that they stop their conversation as a customary husband and wife: "I knew he was aware too but there was nothing I could say, so I lay in silence."

Jaya never discloses her problems with her mother. There was a silence of estrangement between Jaya and her mother after her father's death. She condemns her mother as, "It was all her fault.... she has prepared me for none of the duties of a woman's life. When Mohan blames Jaya for his malpractice: "I have done it for you and children." Jaya blames him in exchange: "I have sacrificed my life for you and the children and bursts out into laugh." Mohan was shocked at her behaviour. There was utter silence. Her loud laugh symbolizes her frustration and disappointment in her life as a whole. Mohan's departure gives her ample space to self interrogate her inner life. In her introspection she decides to put an end to the Gurrilla warfare. Which she has waged with her husband for long years. Happiness in her married life is only an illusion. Like mythical character- Sita, following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging to death to retain her husband, Draupadi sharing her husband- Jaya follows Mohan to Dadar flat.

She is named Jaya' by her father which means 'Victory'. Her father brought up her as an individual. Later Mohan has given her name 'Suhasini' which means a soft smiling, placid, motherly woman. Like Bharti Mukerjee's protagonist Jasmine in the novel Jasmine, she also loses her identity by being called with several names. Jaya's maid servant jeeja has the opinion, "Don't forget, she keeps the kumkum on her forehead. What is a woman without that?"

Mohan ideas about woman hood are based on the women of his family where they are trained to perform their well defined ideas ordained to them by society. After their first quarrel, Jaya learns that women should never be angry for Mohan, "anger makes a woman unwomanly". He even quotes his mother's silent sufferings as, "My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her."

HISTOY AND MYTHS- ENEMY TO WOMEN

Her mother 'Ai' does not support to her in any way which makes her more utter able. Her mother always prefers her sons that she even gifts the Dadar flat, their ancestral property to her son rather than to daughter. Another instance of gender discrimination can be viewed in the case of Jaya's neighbor Mukta's daughter Nilima. When Nilima was born she thought she would give birth to son but unfortunately Nilima got born. Through this, Shashideshpande also put question against female feticide in the novel. When kumkum got insane and jumped into well in order to kill herself. She involuntarily kills her unborn child with herself. She never voice her opinions and has internalized all her anger and maintain silence.

She willingly follows Mohan's likes and expectations and loses her selfhood.

"...the real picture, the real you never emerges." She calls herself a failure on mother parts as she could not understand the complexities of her son, Rahul. In the end she finally understands, "two bullock blocked together...to go in different direction would cause pain and what animal would voluntarily choose pain".

Shashi Deshpande is a well-known writer who has her own distinct style and who has focused on the theme of family life, especially the life of women in Indian society. She confesses that only a women writer can tell the complete story of a woman. She makes Jaya saying: "I am a woman and I can understand her better. He is a man and he can't."

The culture that has created Sita and Gandhari has denied the existence of woman and accept her only as a daughter, sister, wife and mother of a male. Society characterizes woman as an ideally warm, gently, dependent, submissive and helpless woman. According to Manu Smriti: "Day and night woman might be kept in the subordination to the male of the society".

Deshpande in her novels does not talk about the rustic women. Her heroines are educated and very much in contact with the society. She does not talk about man as the main cause of all the suffering of woman. She talks about the subordinate condition of woman. She is not in favour of those women who lead an insignificant life. Many critics have observed that her fiction presents her view point on behalf of every woman.

DESHPANDE' FEMINISM

Deshpande writes about feminism against the background of contemporary Indian society. Shashi in her novel 'that long silence' presents the condition of woman in Indian society- her role model and how the different type of women cut out their

roles with their silence. The title of the novel emphasize the 'silence' that the protagonist Jaya wishes to break the order to search her own self, her wife role and her real individual self.

The novel 'That Long Silence' begins with gender discrimination. The most important example of this is provided by the family tree that is sketched by Ramukaka:

"Look, jaya this is our branch. This our grandfather-your great grandfather and here's father and then us-Luxman, Vasu and me. And here all the boys". Jaya exclaims, "I am not here! Ramukaka looks up at her with irritation and impatience at her stupidity. How can you be here! You do not belong to this family. You are married, you are now part of Mohan's family. You have no place here". But she would not find even herself in Mohan's family. Jaya wanted to ask Ramukaka if I do not belong to this family what about kakis and Ai. They married into this family but they have no place in the branch. And what about Ajji, who single-handedly kept the family together. But she asks no question and adopts, only silence." It means that women have no place either in the house of parents or husband.

Generally, a woman's identity is defined by other in term of her relationship with man as a daughter as a wife and as a mother etc. The question: "What a woman does?" is never asked but "Whom she belongs to?" is always considered important. She does not have an identity of her own. Even her names keep on changing according to the wishes of others. In 'That Long Silence' the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of jaya, who is known by two names- jaya and suhasini. Jaya which means 'Victory' is the name given to her by her father and suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means soft, smiling and motherly woman. Both these names symbolize the trait of her personality. The former symbolize revolt and the latter submission. It means that after marriage a woman has to become submissive.

In the India context, once a girl married to a man, whether it be a love marriage or an arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her, whether the husband follows the right path or the wrong one, she has to blindly follow his footsteps. When Mohan is caught in an act of malpractice and is supposed to be unavailable for certain period, he assumes Jaya would accompany him. Though she does not want to be "Sita following her husband's travails". She is compelled by the situation and circumstances to follow the principle that "both are yoked together, so better to go to the same direction, as to go to different direction will be painful."

JUSTIFY FEMINISM- BEING A FEMINIST

Deshpande arouses in her novel that the next issue that is in Indian context and females are treated as if they were breeding machines- whether they want to have a child or not it does not matter. Vimla dies because she cannot bear child and her mother dies because of regular pregnancy. Jaya says:

"Yes I see something common between them, something that links the destinies of the two, the silence in which they die." Kusum, Jaya's cousin also suffer because of male diplomacy and indifference of parents. This makes kusum insane and she commits suicide.

Thus in 'That Long Silence' women characters suffer at the hands of men folk. They do not suffer because it gives them abnormal pleasure. They would only like to be treated as individuals at par with men. They would not like to be men themselves. Further, they should know each other physically as well as emotionally. The novel ends with the lines, "And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible". In this novel, the novelist illustrate very well aspects of feminist theory. In this way, we can say that Shashi Deshpande is a great feminist writer.

The tragic predicament of Jaya is the outcome of male domination in a patriarchal culture. In her quest for self she moves out from self negation to self assertion. Jaya who perform initially as a dutiful bound wife finally understands and accepts that she too has contributed to her own oppression. Towards the end of novel, she emerges as a bold and mature woman. Who refuses to be merely a shadow? She wants to break the silence but compromises with the situation and moves from the sphere of silence to the phase of balance of powers of sexes. She hopes for a change in her life. As she said 'life has always to be made possible'. Shashi Deshpande through this novel wants women to plight for their rights. The subjugation of women can be rooted out only if women start breaking the silences, oppression and moves towards Jaya's self realization.

India is a gender constructed society paves the way for Indian Women novelist to deal with their psychoanalytical broadness when to see the society. Male is like a king who gives permission to his servant (female) to write to something in praise of her king. Female (servant) who is very creative and emotional forgets her boundaries and limitations and starts writing on her own wishes and desires and demands by assuming it's her right to write and makes the world (male and female) aware about her importance and status with equal rights. As a writer she now get this opportunity to see the world and understand with her own perception.

Shashi Deshpande does not want to be recognized as a woman writer. She writes as human being, neither as a man nor as a woman. She explains her viewpoint in her article, "The Dilemma of the Woman writer", that there must not any category or group on the basis of gender discrimination. She holds that literature has to be valued in social context and male and female writers are those which are assessing the problem of society and try to find out the solution along with readers while making them attach with the writings. There is not the matter of man and female and their individual problems. Society is run by two wheels, one is male and other is female. No man and woman can run it individually she points out in her article:

"All this kind of writing- feminists, humors and pornographic has its place in women writings as it has in the writing of men".

Shashi Deshpande has started her carrier in 1970's, She has so far published 21 books, which include nine novels, eight volumes of short stories, four books for children, and one collection of essays. In recognition of her major contribution to Indian English Fiction she was rightly honored with the Sahitya Akadami (National Academy of Letters) award in the year 1990. It was a time when Salman Rusdie gained popularity after writing his famous novel 'Midnight children'. But Shashi Deshpande was not affected with that popularity and form of writing. She remains constant on her journey of social change through her writing.

She asserts that it is individual capacity and no one can fight with the inner self. There is a natural which bind a writer particular taste with his writing. Voice in every writer when he shares his ideas with the society, she has shown clearly this in *That Long Silence* when Mohan blames her of sharing of their privacy to the society. But Mohan could not understand her psychoanalytical study of man-woman relationships. *That Long Silence* is her best and is more meaningful than any of her works, as deals with a much larger issue- the long silence of women'.

Shashi Deshpande is a reputed novelist of considerable worth both in Indian and Abroad. Her works have been published by the small literary publishers like writer's workshop Calcutta to major publishing have such as women press, London and penguin international. Her writing has a distinct quality. Her prose is poetic and thought provoking. But a corner of dissatisfaction or incompleteness she has within her which fosters her to find out the deep rooted barrier in Indian feminism and she writes accordingly to find out best possible solution. So, her writing are actually try to create a social balance and give a theme to society to a positive change.

The social and cultural change in the post-independence India has made. The women conscious of the need to define themselves and their place in society. Her novels represent the women's struggle to define and attain an autonomous selfhood. Her earnest aim is to analyze the image of woman in her novels and in her short stories. Her female character is tossing between tradition and modernity.

Education removes many hurdles is a myth for the character of Shashi Deshpande because her female characters are urban and educated and are basically from middle class. Actually education develops in them logical thinking and half they have realized their problems that it is to harm to the other woman who sometimes creates hurdles in progress of other women. Here are the examples of Ajji and Ai from *That Long Silence*. Her novels generally centre on family relationship- particularly the relationship between husband and wife and the later dilemmas and conflicts of marriage Deshpande told in an interview:

Human relationship is what a writer involved. Person to person and person to society relationship... these are two primary concerns of a creative writer, and to one, the former is of immense importance. My preoccupation is with interpersonal relationships and human emotions. These relationships are responsible for human bond ages. There is no other way, "it is necessary for women to live in relationship. It is need".

Quest for identity is the most important theme of many women writers. Deshpande has been called a 'Feminist'. Asked whether she would like to call herself a feminist, she replied to GeetaGangadharan:

Yes I would, I'm a feminist, in the sense that, I think we need to know a world which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior, we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone De Beauvoir that "that fact that we are human; is much more important than our being men and women". I think that's my idea of feminism.17

Beyond the shadow of doubt, identity is a integrating force that brings closer the various aspects of the individual, Unites individuals in community and establish harmony between communities, but where does woman search her identity? No any religious book, institute and preacher has given importance to woman she is just supportive of man and a secondary to man. Even woman is found submissive and threatened in social and religious taboos.

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the new Indian women and her dilemmas, her efforts to understand

herself and to save her identity as wife, mother and above all, as a human being in the tradition- bound, male- dominated society. Her novels can be regarded as staple material of feminist thought, women's sexuality, the gender roles, self discovery, dreams and disillusionment and soon. She can be called a feminist in a specific sense. Her interview with

Lakshmi Holmstrom throws significant light on her stance:

I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lines, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminist without realizing it. The Hindu society denied woman of being a person capable of achieving individualization. She is a non- person and as described in Raja Rao's the serpent and the Rope' women should not be."

ACCORDING TO KATE MILLET:

Through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament and status the prudence of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female... aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the female, passivity, ignorance, docility, "virtue", and ineffectuality in the female... sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest and ambition to the male.

The prominent point about Deshpande novels is her delineation of woman's character, her inner world. Her protagonist are women struggling to find their own voice and space and are continuously in search to define them. But they "become fluid, with no shape, no form of... (their) own". Jaya, in that Long Silence, under take a futile search for herself. The Real Picture, the real you never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces" (30)

In this way we can say that Shashi Deshpande is one of the most significant feminist writers in English. Gifted with a rare literary make up of mind, she has matured with the experiences in life and literary world. Through her art and fiction, she has made niche for herself among Indian English novelists. The transparency of her language, her sport aneity and literary device make her novels highly redable. Her real contribution lies in the portrayal of plights and problems, trials and tribulaticens of the middle- class Indian Women- especially those who are educated and chosen a carrier for them. Deshpande knows this segment of the Indian society very well. She is very near to the story of every character. She uses and realizes their conditions with her own

experiences; her concern is nothing than a feminist. As a clincher of her presentation of thickly women, human relationships, she is superb.

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Corresponding Author

Poonam Rani^{1*} Dr. Chhote Lal²

Research Scholar of OPJS University, Churu, Rajasthan

E-Mail –