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A Character Delineation of Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

The paper attempts to examine the character delineation of Jaya, who is the protagonist in Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*, which won her the Sahitya Akademi Award. Through this paper, the effort is made to apply psychoanalysis for the interpretation of women protagonist's internal and external conflict, faced by her in the search for identity and self-assertion. Shashi Deshpande's primary concern is to depict the conflict and anguish of the modern educated Indian woman caught between patriarchy and tradition on one end, self-expression, individuality, and independence for the women on the other. Her fiction explores the women's search to fulfil herself as a human being, independent of her traditional role as a daughter, wife, and mother. She has scrutinized a variety of common domestic disasters, which trigger off the search. Through the character delineation of Jaya, this paper will focus on that women should not victimize themselves; they should try to erase the silence, and they should try to give voice to their inner conflicts. Jaya, the central character in *That Long Silence*, having got in the current of a woman's traditional role – wife and mother have

repressed her existential self. Though she has a happy life with her well-earning life partner and two children Rati and Raghu and material comforts, she feels fed up with her life's monotony and fixed pattern.

Keywords: Self-identity, Patriarchal Society, Inner Conflict, Suffering of Modern Woman.

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is one of the principal novelists in Indian English literature. She seeks attention by publishing her novel *That Long Silence* (1988) which won her prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1991. As a novelist, Shashi Deshpande's area of expertise lies in her realistic presentation of women's lives in general and the educated, modern, middle-class women in particular. She explores the inner 'psyche' of the modern woman at the cross lines between tradition and modernity. Their problem lies in their inability to discard the traditional values at once and follow their newly acquired values. Most of her novels reflect the predicaments and struggles of this type of woman. Jaya starts to maintain silence since she knows the fact that to Mohan "anger made a woman 'unwomanly'. He tells her that his mother never raised her voice against my father; however, he misbehaved. The author throws light on the issues of gender injustice and the power structure of patriarchy reflected in several characters in *That Long Silence*. Silence becomes an essential motif in the novel to express the gender bias of society.

This novel presents a realistic image of educated middle-class women. The novel advances validity from the fact that Jaya, the protagonist, is a well-read woman, blessed with literary awareness though nurtured in silence which resembles her fictional role. Jaya is a modern, educated, English-speaking woman and a creative writer who represents the emerging new woman aware of her position in society. After seventeen years of disturbing life in silence, Jaya writes her story revealing her feelings, peaks, and valleys that caused her misery and disappointment, and threatened her life. She begins the novel by saying that she is not writing "a story of a callous, insensitive husband and a sensitive, suffering wife. I'm writing to you."

Jaya's Search for Identity

Jaya, an ambitious girl, tries to find her life's real sense and identity in various roles assigned to her by family and society. She starts the journey of her life with her father's

favorite name Jaya and passes through different life phases with other Sita and Suhasini identifications. She finds her role fit, only in Jaya, "Jaya, the Winner as papa wanted to make her". She belonged to a family, in which modern thoughts dominated traditions and pierced social restrictions. Her father gave a setback to his family's expectations by having a love affair with her mother, denying comprising and adjusting ways of society. This helps Jaya to think differently. Like all the girls in society, she does not want to shadow her mother and typical domestic girls, who visit temples and smears sandal paste, hoping that their prince charming and to prove themselves devoted and complete homemakers. Her father has made her different, indifferent to social restrictions and rituals, as he often said-

"You are not like others, Jaya,'Appa had said to me, pulling me out of the safe circle in which the other girls had stood...You are going to be different from others, 'Appa had assured me" (TLS 136).

The novel begins with Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting back into the old Dadar flat in Bombay from their cozy and lavish house. Mohan is involved in financial malpractice and an investigation against him is set up. He is consoled to find that their children Rahul and Rati are away on an extended tour with their family friends and expects Jaya to go into hiding with him. In this old flat, she becomes an introvert and goes into deep contemplation of her past and childhood. For the first time, she attempts to analyze who she really is. She started thinking about herself and her individuality. During her brief stay in the small flat, Jaya has to encounter both her past which comes in the form of memory, and her presence 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 realize 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 the cozy 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 and 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.

Despite her marriage to Mohan and then becoming a mother of two children, Jaya lived in solitary. Her husband could not understand her and as a result of which she was torn from within. Deshpande uses a lovely image to describe Jaya's married life:

“A pair of bullocks yoked together... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals, I so loved. But we are two persons. A man. A woman.” (TLS 8)

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 suffers from a loss of personality and faces a dichotomy between the body and soul. A woman is socialized 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 in a magazine, and won a prize, her husband reacted unexpectedly. Instead of appreciating Jaya, Mohan discourages her by saying what people would think about them.

Jaya feels aggrieved about the role assigned to a wife in our country, which 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. Jaya did not dare to aggravate Mohan or to break the marriage. The values and ethos of society mold the female in a way that she is thought to feel guilty if she expressed resentment openly. Jaya's words reveal her vulnerability. Jaya has a valid reason to be bitter with her 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 feelings in case 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 fury. 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 doesn't love her the way she expected him to do is an issue that educated women have to face in contemporary society.

As the story advances, the timid, quiet 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.

"I am Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible" (TLS 191).

Jaya realizes that women have to find their freedom within limits imposed by society. In order to attain self-hood, a woman has to exceed silence, negation, and self-alienation. The novel exhibits the opinion that women should have an assertive individuality which includes the capability to make decisions about her life and carry them out with a sense of responsibility. Her decision to cease to be a passive partner and overcome the turbulence in her relationship with Mohan leads her to uninhibited self-identification.

The novel ends with a resurrection of faith. Jaya's decision to remove the silence that had defined and distorted her husband's communication should be interpreted as the harbinger of new hope. A woman's desire to succeed as an individual is not incompatible with the desire for love and the small pleasure of domesticity. Jaya's story proves that a balanced fulfilled life is not merely a utopian fantasy for a woman if she decides to realize her creative energy capacity to erase her conditioning and free herself from her psychic fears and the bondage of centuries. Self-actualization is possible if a woman decides to be 'Herself,' to exhibit the genuine significance of her free, and uninhibited personality in its totality.

The transition from Tradition to Modernity

The female protagonist, Jaya, conforms to the rules and constraints of society. She is unable to find out whether she lives for herself or her family only. She is taken for granted by everyone in the family. She is a typical wife with love and affection for children, respect, and a sense of duty for her husband and her in-laws. Being husband and wife, she shares intimate relations with Mohan, yet she cannot relate herself to him in terms of feelings. Her silence is

symbolic of most of the world's women who are unable to express themselves as an individual.

Jaya's self-examination and memories are a part of every woman's life. Like every other woman, she is not motivated to take up the profession. Though she tries her hands at writing, her husband does not appreciate her. Not only her husband but her children also disappointed her. She is not satisfied with her life and lacks the courage to revolt. She feels a kind of stagnation when she recalls that her life seemed so busy was nothing, but a worthless pursuit.

Jaya confessed, "Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monitor." She also compared herself to Gandhari, who blindfolded herself to share the blindness of her husband. She realized that she had totally altered and lost herself during the process of pleasing Mohan. She changed her name, personality, and profession. Mohan expected her to change because he did not need Jaya, but a woman who could serve him supports him and acts as dictated by him. Jaya admitted that she spent her days just waiting as she said,

"waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school, and waiting for them to come home---" (TLS 2)

Now left by Mohan, Jaya was broken and helpless. However, she emerged as a round character that developed in due course of time. The same Jaya initially longed for disaster but awakened herself so much that she decided to be hopeful and start a new life during a crisis. Shashi Deshpande reveals how female protagonists long for identity and self-dependence because she suffers from silence and lack of communication with her husband. The novel teaches women to fight the silence and express themselves and message the man folk to understand a woman better.

Jaya reorganizes herself in new kinship patterns, with every change, and within these changing patterns, she revolts against the tradition. In this way, it is found that Shashi Deshpande's novel explores the patriarchal social set-up of India, and her protagonist, located within this social reality, reaches out to define the self in an attempt to free herself from tradition. The writer's voice explores predicaments through the female psyche. Her novel reveals the woman's inability to speak and the positive movement is always the movement towards the breaking of That Long Silence.

Focusing on the marital relation Shashi Deshpande seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservience role in the family. She also reveals that the man-made patriarchal tradition and uneasiness of modern Indian women in being a part of them.

Conclusion

Deshpande's protagonists display a perceptible expansion during the course of the novel. They go through a process of self-analysis before they reach self-actualization. Thus, Shashi Deshpande has successfully created strong woman protagonists who refuse to crumble under the weight of their personal tragedies and face life with bravery. Her protagonists are courageous enough to revolt against the attempts of men to marginalize them. Reasonably, they appear to be more life-like and more akin to today's educated, middle-class, urban woman. Deshpande's greatness lies in the fact that protagonists seek harmony within the traditional social setup.

Deshpande's work is not only about finding the reasons behind female subjugation, and she throws light to a resolution in practical life. Her greatness lies in the fact that instead of blaming men or society, her protagonists seek harmony within the social setup. Her protagonists represent a new generation of women, who review everything with reason and intellect. The novel aesthetically communicates the essence of the creed of feminism along with contemporary realities.

The present paper also analyses the transition from tradition to modernity. In the role of Jaya, the writer portrays the image of a modern woman who faces void and feels a vacuum in her life. Shashi Deshpande wants to crave a female space by challenging the age-old order of the countless bondage of tradition imposed on women by a male-dominated society. The writer seems to believe that society compels a woman to assume the "other" status. No doubt, the Indian women in this era are born when there is much awareness about her rights, liberty to express her ideas, freedom to enjoy freedom, and the opportunity to stand for a cause but the Silence Continues!

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