

SILENCES & SURVIVAL OF INDIAN WOMAN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THAT LONG SILENCE

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Received: 2019-09-08

Accepted: 2019-10-16

Published online: 2019-10-21

Abstract

Feminism is a belief that women and men should have equal rights and opportunities. Although women have gained a lot in the past century, there is still inequality in many areas. Feminism emerged as a worldwide movement to secure women's rights on one hand and love, sympathy, respect, and understanding from the males. Shashi Deshpande is a prominent name in Indian Literature to be known for working radically in terms of feminism in most of her works. Depicting the actual and existing state of women in Indian society, she writes about the conflicts between tradition and modernity in relation to women in the middle class society. In her Novels, woman is the central character in search of her individuality and existence.

Keywords: feminism, identity, self-revelation, tradition, autonomy.

Introduction

Feminism is a belief that women should have the same and equal rights like men. Feminism emerged as a worldwide movement to secure women's rights and provide them legal protection and complete equality. Women were always kept behind men. Their existence, value, individuality were unknown to society. As if women were made to suffer in helplessness. And all these sufferings of women leads to many writers to raise their voices against the patriarchy and male dominance and this leads to emergence of feminism, a great movement in western world in 1960.

As feminism started to be emerged across the world, women started to excel themselves in their interests and fields. The new generation of Indian feminists who lighted the issue with their works taking the readers deep in

the lives of their characters sometimes fictional and sometimes based on real phenomenon happening around and showing them the crucial details of the slow emotional breakdown and drastic change in mentalities of the victim women. They raised voices against violence, gender discrimination, patriarchy, objectification, stereotypes and started fighting the slow war for rights, equality, individuality, education, reproductive rights. In literature, feminism was actually concerned with the portrayal of women in society.

As of the particularity of Indian literature, feminism has been used to arouse some of the major concerns of Indian society, in which women are the sufferers. Right from the past, woman has faced male dominance, being exploited by men, being treated as one of the means of satisfaction of men in different ways. A woman has always been shown weak and considered as an object for men and society whether in terms of sex or household chores. Women have always been forced to accept what were provided. As a women is deprived of own identity and she is always defined only in relation to man.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous novelists in the literary sky of India. She has made a profound psychological journey on the minds of women. Basically she writes about the condition and situation of the women in Indian society. Her main concerns of the novel are desire, failure, identity and efforts in traditional Indian society. Her character depiction is realistic and credible. Deshpande has shown how a Indian woman's life has always been confined to four walls suppressing her own desires, forgetting her own identity and settling herself with what she has been given.

In the novel *The Long Silence*, Deshpande's gives us an exceptionally accomplished portrayal of a woman trying to erase a long silence, begun in her childhood rooted in herself and in the constraints of her life. In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande shows the aspect of marriage about which society never opens about. Jaya, the Protagonist is a creative writer. She is encouraged by her husband to pursue her dreams in writing but later on the encouragement turned into mental complexity. Jaya wants to take creative writing as her carrier but her interests and content of writing was decided by Mohan. Then the encouragement turned into complexities and longing for her own individuality in her life.

This novel opens the layers of marriage that the society always covers. This is based on Jaya's life who is the protagonist of the novel, who has always been curious, clever and sprightly. She has always been advised by her grandmother to behave like a civilised girl i.e, skilled, domestic, chores, etc. Jaya gets married to Mohan who is placed really well in a comfortable job. Soon they get blessed with a daughter and son who they name as Ritu and Rahul.

The novel is about the self analysis and self revelation of the protagonist in with her emotional self in different circumstances and with different relationships. Jaya's relationship with her husband has always been restricted. Jaya always feels herself under his husband, resulting into her lost self. For being an ideal wife she lost her creative self and her abilities. Mohan, her husband is materialistic, who cares for money and comforts always and who never bothers to think about her wife's will and desires. When her husband gets accused of corruption, he thinks that his wife will be with him no matter he being right or wrong, Jaya will definitely help him out from this.

Among all these situations, Deshpande takes the reader to the psyche of women who is in constant dilemma of her existence and self revelation. As Deshpande has tried to show that individuality is often neglected in women's life and throughout her life seems.

Jaya thinks:

Self revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real you, never emerge. Looking for it as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.

When Mohan gets in trouble, they move to their Dadar flat for a short period of time and during this time, Jaya finds herself in an intense self analysis of her life and of herself during her married life, 17 years of relationship gave her many roles like a loyal wife and a tireless mother. Here she feels alone and in a constant void, in which she is always haunted by her own bitter past about her own bitter experiences of her married life. She realises that she has been lost all these years, balancing herself among

responsibilities that come after marriage. She has always been told by the ladies of her family and relatives:

A husband is like a sheltering tree, and as a wife, a woman has to keep the tree alive and flourishing even if she has water it with deceit and lies.

Jaya is a kind of person who believes in modernity and has liberal western ideas but she knows that tradition and culture also are the parts of her life, as she belongs to that class.

She always felt the suppression by a male dominant society, though she never wants to be like Mohan's mother and sister who neglected their own existence and dreams to get fit into the frame of perfect wife and women but still Jaya has to Mohan's likes and dislikes as she has been told to obey her husband. Though, she wants to live a satisfactory life, as she wants herself to be with her own identity, as in reality she has suppressed many aspects of her personality that were not fit for her role as an ideal wife and mother.

Jaya has a creative mind when it comes to writing, and she always wished to be creative writer. Initially she is supported by Mohan for writing for various magazine and papers. On Mohan's advice, she starts her writing career "Light humorous pieces about the travails of a middle class housewife" (148-149), but she is not satisfied with that kind of writing. However, she continued her work to make her husband happy. As Jaya is real thinker and observant she wants to write her own experiences and the real picture, she gets prized for her stories but Mohan's sentiments get hurt because of those stories. He who always praised her writings is now insecure and intolerant for a story written by Jaya. The story that caused problems between Jaya and Mohan is about a couple, a man who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body, Mohan assumes that the story is about himself and that is the real picture of their married life. These apprehensions are enough to threaten Jaya's writing career but she knows the truth what her husband thinks so she doesn't argue with him, she says:

"Looking at his stricken face had been convinced. I had done him wrong and I had stopped writing that perhaps if Mohan had been angry if he

had shouted and raged at me, if he had forbidden me to write, perhaps would have fought him and gone on. But he had only shown me his heart, and I had not been able to conquer that. I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking scared- scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had my marriage" (144)

These words of Jaya painfully depict the dominance of man in a marriage when it comes to choices, the women have always to suppress her desires to make her man happy or not hurt him in anyway. As Jaya has no right to express her real self even in fiction. Deshpande here seems to convey the condition of women writers, as they are not allowed to express themselves on their works, giving more importance to their marriage and relationships over their career.

Jaya's life lacks love, respect and freedom, freedom to be herself as she has always been trying to prove herself to be an ideal wife and mother. When Jaya doesn't get what she wants, she gets inclined towards Kamat who is her neighbour as well as a widower. Jaya finds herself free in his company and she realizes that she can express herself much more real in front of Kamat which her life was lacking of as Kamat's treats her as an equal. Kamat's attention, respect, criticism towards her writing, altogether proves to be a great companion for Jaya, which she misses in her husband. She feels that she is so much of herself in front of him. She says:

It had been a revelation to me that two people, a man, and woman could talk this way with this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself, Jaya. (153)

Kamat is a person who makes her what she is. With time their relationship develops into physical attraction. With Mohan, she feels subjugated, overpowered and restricted to be herself. But with Kamat, she is much more that and she can as she wants herself. Sometimes she behaves like a kid, sometimes like a woman, sometimes like a lover.

Though her relationship with Kamat is of equality. Deshpande has not presented any ideal character of women, as she wants to portray the real

picture of a woman and her psyche. Because of Kamat, Jaya realizes what kind of person she is actually and how she wants a relationship to be when it comes to a man woman relationship.

Although, Jaya is always aware of this fact that her companionship with Kamat has always been a threat to her married life, as even if she was comfortable with Kamat, she would not be able to face the society, because of her marital status. With all these examples, Deshpande has presented the place of woman and her desires in a patriarchal society. Just to get fit in the frame of ideal wife and mother, her real self has been neglected in the background. As, In India marriages are always has to presented and given preferences. On marriage Jaya says "Marriage never ends. They cannot. They are cases in traditional modern society. Women have to try hard to make perfectly balanced relationship. Jaya further says about her own marriage. "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much that we have even shipped off bets of ourselves to keep the seals on an even kneel."

Conclusion

Deshpande through *That Long Silence* has depicted the dilemma of Indian woman caught between tradition and modernity. In her quest for identity, Jaya tries to carve a niche for herself in a society which is men-centric and totally against her wish. She resists being relegated to someone else's identity and fight for her own individuality. Though many reformers and women organizations have worked for the upliftment of Indian women but still there is a long way to go and not all women have achieved complete autonomy on themselves. Deshpande is one of those Indian novelists who have worked on many issues relating survival of women in Indian society. She has tried to portray the silences inhibited by women and how they are trying to overcome it in patriarchal society. In this way, she has raised her voice as a protest against all stereotypes rules and regulations imposed on women in the name of tradition.

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