

SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN IN THAT LONG SILENCE

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Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, India. She is the second daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Shiranga. At the age of fifteen, she went to Mumbai where she graduated in Economics. She then moved to Bangalore, where she gained a degree in Law. The early years of her marriage were largely given over to the care of her two young sons, but she took a course in journalism and for a time worked on a magazine. Her writing career only began in earnest in 1970. Deshpande began her writing with short stories which later developed into writing novels. Her first collection of short stories *The Legacy* published in 1972 had been prescribed for graduate students in Columbia University. She is regarded as one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English.

Women in most part of the world are exploited and oppressed. The social structure rigorously scrutinizes the women folk. The society lays a psychological pressure on women and forces her to accept the traditional principles in the patriarchal society. Shashi Deshpande showcases her artistic talent in bringing out the complex human relationship and struggle of women folk in the society. She has also come with a remedy to solve the problems and lead a happy life.

Shashi Deshpande is a winner of the Shahitya Akademi award for 'That Long Silence' (1989). Her novels reveal the role of women in a patriarchal society with a deep insight of female psyche. Real life incidents are the main reason for her successful novels. Gender biased society and identity crisis became the main theme in her works. Through her novels Shashi Deshpande unfolds the problems of women and uproots the bawdiness in the male dominated society.

Jaya is the protagonist of the novel 'That Long Silence'. She is the symbol of most of the women in Indian society, who are unable to express their inner agony and feelings. Jaya's father, a Gandhian wanted to raise her as an independent woman showered with victory throughout her life, so he named her 'Jaya'. On her wedding day her husband Mohan, a traditionalist renames her 'Suhashini', wanting her to be always soft and placid. After the death of her father Jaya becomes dependent on her brothers. Her mother's preferential treatment depressed and suppressed Jaya, which in later developed as an inner Silence after her marriage. Deshpande exposes the silence in Jaya as socio psychic in the novel.

Shashi Deshpande portrays marriage to be the destiny for Indian women where a woman has no space of individuality. Mohan wants his wife Jaya to be like the mythological characters: Seeta, Savitri and Draupadi. His mother and sister Vimala always obeyed the words of their husband. He also wants his wife to be a Submissive homemaker. Jaya's mother and Vanita mami go on hammering onto her that 'husband is like a sheltering tree', which means she should live in his shade. Jaya finds her routine life to be monotonous and toilsome. That even makes her long for a catastrophe that would provide her relief from her physical and mental agony. Deshpande portrays the reality and exact mindset of women, that make her character strong.

Jaya and Mohan moves to Dadar flat because of the malpractice done by Mohan in his work space. Now Jaya is relieved from her melancholic life. The greeny memories of her childhood bring her back the promising writer inside her. The loveless seventeen years of marriage life drives her towards extra-marital relationship with Kamat. Deshpande clearly depicts the marital life and family relation. It is considered sinful to talk about sex and women to express her feel for her husband. Jaya share only sex with Mohan not love.

Kamat though not handsome as Mohan, made Jaya feel individualistic and help her to regain her self confidence. Rather than Mohan's wife and Rahul and Rati's mother Jaya emerged as an artful writer. One of her novel won prize but Mohan condemned and criticized for the autobiographical content in the story. The death of Kamat and continuous torment of Mohan slowly diminished the writer in her. Here Deshpande subtly indicates the constraints of a women writer and also how a budding writer in Jaya is doomed to dwindle into a stereotyped society.

Deshpande signifies the battle of widowhood through Aiji and Mukta. Aiji, a shaven widow portrayed as a symbol of negativity, prohibited from auspicious rituals. She is made to sacrifice her luxurious life and spend rest of her life in memory of her dead husband. Mukta a skilled dancer and singer made to mute her talents after the death of her husband Arun who jumped from a running train. Mukta was made to fast for seven days of the week. Jaya pity her as she was rarely seen taking her normal meal. Nilima, her daughter is the only heal for Muktas worthless confinements. She is very bold and outspoken girl. She trashes those who criticize her as black. Through Nilima Deshpande discusses about the cumbersome issues of menstruation.

Women like Vanitha mami, Jeeja, Nayana and Kasam plays the role of a domestic wife and a childbearing machine. Vanitha mami and Jeeja could not give birth to a child, which is considered to be a conjugal duty of woman in an Indian society. Those childless women are considered to be a curse to the family. Deshpande rightly points out the superstitious practices in the society like fasting and painful offerings to God, which were considered to make a women bear a child. Sometimes a girl child is also not accepted in the society. Deshpande talks about the preference given to the male child that even makes men victimize women for not having male child.

This gives the privilege for the husband to marry another woman. It's always a tormenting life for Nayana, a drunkard's wife who was rarely seen without baby bump. Kusum is another victim who committed suicide because of being alienated by her family. Kusum suffered an unidentified disease, so her family isolated her, which led to her suicide. Jaya was also forbidden by Mohan to visit Kusum. Deshpande epitomizes these characters with the cruelties prevailing in the society against women. She also clobbers the concept of dutiful and silent wife.

Deshpande portrays 'Silence' as one of the most important weapon used by Jaya to kill her agony against the cruelties of the society. She finds silence as her means of communication. Stream of consciousness is used by Deshpande when Jaya interrogates with herself in hard and confused situations. From the beginning of the novel Jaya maintain her silence, she never protests for her righteous reasons. In the final scene of the novel her silence break downs and condemns Mohan for all the mistakes committed.

Mohan's separation makes Jaya self examine herself. Her interrogation made her realize that she was also responsible for the crisis created. Jaya should have opened up from her silence when needed. She felt sorry for accusing Mohan as a scape goat for her failure in writing. She joins in hands with Mohan and her children. Now Jaya and Mohan sees the world surrounding them in a new prospective.

Shashi Deshpande thus suggests women to protest to identify their true self. She says women in no doubt being victimized by the society, still they can find their own ways to break the barriers and cross

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the perils with their strength and self confidence. Deshpande finally ends the novel with a theme that one person cannot be subjugated without their consent. She too wants her fellow girls to be brave and fight for their rights. And this is possible only by breaking the silence.

References

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