

Reconstructing the World through Feminism: A New Approach towards Feminist Slants in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande has her own way of describing the situations and characters in her novels. The theme of her novels is the inferior situation of women and the superiority of patriarchal society. She believes that women suffer due to male chauvinism and their own defeatism. The novelist delineates some hard facts to instigate women to action. The title of this novel, *That Long Silence* itself implies that women do not protest against suppression. Jaya was so named by her father because it meant victory, but victory does not come in her conscious existence. She was married to a man who had no qualms in accepting wrong means for wealth, while she was simple and elevated in everything. Jaya had to admit silently what he was performing- she was yoked with him- yet she was held accountable for all his wrong actions; a scapegoat as she was made by Mohan. She said nothing to disprove the allegations created against her by her own spouse, though she realized well that the allegations were unfounded and worthless.

Key Words: Patriarchal Society, Female Suppression, Consciousness, Adjustment, Silent Revolt.

Shashi Deshpande needs women to be conscious to the subordinate condition they have placed themselves in for the sake of their husbands and children. They are wives and mothers, and ceased to be individual woman. Jaya, for instance, realized it at one stage. When she flipped the pages of her old diaries, she found that there was wife of Mohan and mother of Rahul and Rati all over, but Jaya herself was nowhere. The female sinks her personality for the sake of her husband and children, yet she remains lower to them. In her other novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, the heroine, Sarita, said simply that the woman must be in a subordinate status than her husband if she required a happy family life for herself. She said to the girls in her lecture that if they want to be happily married, if the husband is an M.A., they should be a B.A. If he is 5'4 tall, they should not be 5'3 tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, they should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That is the only rule to follow, if they wish a happy marriage. Do not ever attempt to reverse doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. She assures them that it is not worth it. He suffers, they will suffer and so will all the children. Women's magazines will tell them that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That is nonsense and rubbish. Thus, Deshpande attempts to bring a consciousness among female characters so that they may fight for equal partnership with men:

All existence is merely contingent, without any necessity to exist, without any rationality, any essence simply in the way, superfluous, de trop, and so it is absurd.

(Lavine, T.Z. 1984-346)

She further informs that the story of gender disparity is not a recent development- it started since the beginning of civilization. She has provided instance of Shakuntala who was exhorted by the saint to live in the harem of the king, no matter if the king had refused to identify her as his wedded wife. Again, Draupadi had to go to jungle with her husband's though they had put her at stake and lost her in the game of dice. She realizes observes that in Sanskrit drama, female characters had to talk in Prakrit, while male characters spoke Sanskrit, because Sanskrit was

considered the language of advanced and learned men. Jaya, the main female protagonist of the novel, felt that Prakrit sounded like 'a baby' lisp'. She understood that she had been speaking Prakrit all her conscious existence. Jaya was taught by her Aiji not to debate with her husband. And Mohan's mother informed Jaya not to protest against her husband however badly he treated to her. On one occasion, Jaya spoke Mohan to cook food during the first months of her pregnancy since the smell of oil and spices made her sick. When he presented his inability, Jaya said that she was sure he would cook well as his mother cooked. This answer enraged Mohan. He did not talk to her for days on end. Jaya had to create the first conciliatory motion, because she had felt that Mohan was shattered. He did not expect such a forthright remark from his spouse. On another occasion Jaya was surprised when she observed marks of distaste on Mohan's face when she had got into temper, signifying that a female had no right to be angry. He thought that wrath made a female unwomanly. By all these examples, the novelist has expressed that woman is not supposed to revolt against inhumanity, whatever happens to her.

With these objectives in mind, the writer describes her characters. The novelist narrates that she is not only writing a tale of a callous, insensitive husband Mohan and a sensitive and suffering wife Jaya but also writing for women's real condition in society. She obviously wants to say that Mohan and Jaya are not only typical characters but also representing the two classes of husbands and wives. She has drawn particular characters with their own peculiarities. Mohan is not a general case but he had a bad childhood. His father did not have enough money to pay his school fee. His mother was a poor and pitiable lady, who went to cook in other person's homes. Mohan had tasted the rigours of hunger and indignation. He became in a way a psychological character and obsessed with wealth, and rooted in present-day mores. When he engaged himself caught in a financial scam, he talked like a modern scammer that he had just accepted a few favours from men he felt. Things are not too bad, he is not that involved Agarwal he does not know how Agarwal slipped he was always very alert. He had no compunction since he was to create fast bucks:

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 where they are needed, marriages never end, they cannot they are a state of being.

(Deshpande, Shashi, 1980-127)

The writer has implied the technique of placing foils to show the characteristics of her characters. Mohan, a man of day-today world was married to Jaya, who was rooted in traditional ethical values. When she came to realize that Mohan was engaged in a financial scam, she thought of Nair family who had committed crimes. Mohan had tendency to shift his blame to others. He first told that Agarwal was to blame but soon altered his stance and informed that his spouse was to blame. Jaya, on the contrary, could not utter anything in defence though she understood that allegations against her were false. Next, Mohan never cared for Jaya's emotions, while Jaya was always careful not to hurt the feelings of her husband. Jaya recollected that she had a brain to laugh when men who came to Mohan's party appeared to her like the animals in Noah's Ark as all of them she watched, had the same smiles and created the same remarks, but she controlled her smile, because she would not laugh at anything that matter to Mohan. She felt that if she did so, it would diminish him, and who needed a dwarfed husband? Surely, she did not. Mohan on the contrary, went on applying false allegations and eventually walked out on her.

Women are in the main pivot of novel *That Long Silence*. Naturally, Kusum, Jaya, Mukta, Vanitamami, Jaya's mother, and grand-mothers, Jeeja, Nayana, Manda, Nilima, etc. occupy the centre-stage. None of these female characters has any defect of character and everyone of them is the victim of patriarchal society. Jeeja, Nayana, Manda are the domestic slaves, discharging essential services. Jaya felt that all those happy women with husbands are in good services who did not drink and beat their wives, those lucky women whose kitchen shelves glittered with brass

and stainless steel vessels- they were of no use to her. It was Jeeja and her likings that she needed; it was these female characters who protected her from the hell of drudgery. Any little emancipation she had depended on them. And jaya would not wish them any different life. All of them are created miserable by their men-folk. Jeeja did not have child, so she let her irresponsible husband have a second wife, who ceased leaving her children to be brought up by Jeeja; her step-son, Rajaram was a drunkard, yet he was married to Nayana. He had warned his wife that he would throw her out if she did not give birth to a son. Nayana, being conscious that she was the sole earning member and did not care for the threat Rajaram got injured in a broil and had to be admitted in the hospital. In spite of his being an irresponsible man, jeeja, his wife Nayana and daughter Manda took care of him, Jaya went to the hospital to request the doctor for better treatment and attention to him. They also sold *Batatawade* near the mill for extra income. Thus this group of female characters highlights the qualities of endurance, honesty, sincerity and diligence, but it was shame for the society that they are not behaved with sympathy.

Among Jaya's Kakis and Mamis, Vanitamami deserves a special attention. She was very meek and submissive. She did not protest against the excesses of her mother-in-law, who did not even permit her to purchase saries of her choice. But when she decided to fetch kusum in her family, she opposed the opposition in the family. Her own husband did not like the presence of Kusum, but she did not care. Then, she attempted her best to achieve the Dadar flat for Kusum, requested Jaya to get a good service for Kusum's husband, assist the girl in her own way. Jaya helped Kusum. Jaya's sole consideration was that she was Vanitamami's Kusum. When Kusum ceased, it was Vanitamami who lamented and consoled Jaya who had assisted her in spite of opposition of everybody around her. Vanitamai was only person who had empathy for a suppressed girl. Shailja attempted to get favour of Vanitamami but she failed because she lacked innocence ad feelings of Kusum. Honour goes to her for her affection for the neglected and the innocent.

Mukta and her daughter Manda were the neighbours of Jaya at Dadar. Mukta was a young widow but she was very cooperative and helpful. When Mohan walked out on Jaya, she provided full support to Jaya, who was heavily worried and restless. She went to her Churchgate home to know if Mohan was there. She did not meet Mohan instead she saw that Rahul had also disappeared and Rati her daughter talked indifferently to her. She therefore returned to Dadar in worry with high fever, could not sustain herself. Mukta obtained the keys of flat from her bag, opened the door for her found her to alter and got her into bed. Jaya was so much upset that she had been talking hysterically about Rati. Mukta realized that she had temperature of nearly 104. Jaya could recollect nothing except that she had got into the train and a female sitting there was embroidering something. When Jaya woke up in the morning, she saw Mukta sitting beside her seat. Nilima and Manda prepared tea for Jaya. Hearing the two girls' conversation and laughing in the kitchen was soothing. Jaya knew that this was actual pampering. She smiled at her as Mukta covered her with blanket. So much of care reminded Jaya of her Appa (father) who felt her fever with the back of her hand and advised her to come out of the bed as she was quite well. Mukta had the great quality of emotion grateful to anyone that ever did a good response to her. After she had lost her husband, Kamat encouraged her to do B.Ed. In return, she was always sincere and respectful to him and snubbed Jaya for leaving him alone to cease.

The women characters do not have any defect. They possess spirits of affection and forgiveness. Male characters, on the other hand, are highlighted as devoid of feelings and sense of accountability. Mohan, the most significant of them, had no qualms of conscience. He knowingly came into unholy alliance with the contractors, engineers and bureaucrats, and unashamedly informed that he had worked except that he got some favours from the public and supported the substandard material, and aspired that Agarwal would get enquiry put off. When he knew that his matters had become public, he shamelessly told that he had to perform all that for the sake of his spouse and children and walked out on them. Without thinking how lonely and miserable his wife would be.

Another male character was Rajaram, husband of Nayana. He was a drunkard, earned nothing, threatened to throw out his spouse if she gave birth to a girl again. He would beat his wife if she refused to give him money. He got engaged in quarrel with some rascals and got beaten them so much that had to be admitted in the hospital. The whole family was in distress. Nayana was fed up with him. She said that so many drunkards die, but this one won't. He will dominate them all to death instead.

Jaya's Dada was a very selfish person. To create himself free from the accountability of an unmarried younger sister, he pleaded Mohan's case very effectively. Jaya recollected that Dada had wanted her off his hands; he wanted to be free of accountability for an unmarried younger sister, so that he could go ahead with his plans. He often informed that he wanted to come back from America to his own people, but Jaya knew her own people but Jaya also knows that he would never return.

The boy, Satish wanted to go abroad, without caring for his mother. Her one son had died, and the other was going away. Nilima informed Jaya that one son of Mai was dead, the other was running away. Mai did not have even a grandson Naturally, her tension was who would cremate her after her demise. Nilima had assured Mai that she would cremate her but Satish could not provide her even this much of assurance, an ungrateful son as he was. Kamat had some graces, but he attempted to take freedom with Jaya. The author wondered why people have craving for a male child. She had heard Nayana cursing her father and brothers, all of whom were wasters.

Deshpande always chooses to describe the action and the events, in retrospect. In the present novel, *That Long Silence* Jaya begins her story from the time Mohan arrived to the Dadar flat to escape ignominy of being involved in a scam and to provide a slip to the official performance. It is the vantage point from where she could well see the whole drama of her life, comprising of her childhood when her father cherished her Jaya. He gave her the impression that she was different from all other children, pulled her out of the circle of her companions exhorting her not to mingle with them since they could not understand beyond being housewives, while his daughter was to go to Oxford, win prizes and honours; her convent education against the opinion of her uncle and grandmother; her marriage with Mohan, her empathy with Kusum, demise of Kusum and reaction of their mother, Mohan's involvement in a scam, and his allegations against her:

Antony Flew states that: Each self-aware individual understands his own existence in terms of his experience of himself and of his own situation.

(Flew, Antony, 1979-108)

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