



FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL 'THE LONG SILENCE'

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ABSTRACT:

Feminism is essentially a rebellious philosophy challenging the status of male dominated system. It is an Interdisciplinary inquiry. It examines cultural practices and products including literature. For feminism gender is the fundamental organizing category, it is a political analysis of art and literature. Feminism is concerned with the changing power relations between man and woman.

KEYWORDS: *Feminism gender , political analysis , fundamental organizing category.*

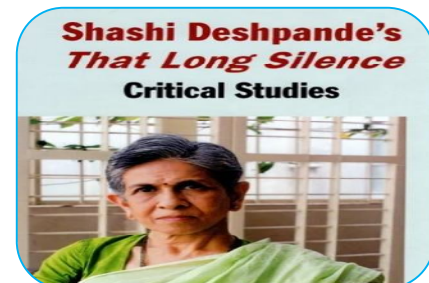
INTRODUCTION

Feminism aims at reexamining, restructuring of the male dominated ideas so that gender equality can be maintained. Feminist theory that is an oppositional practice with beliefs in re-existing to the dominant ideology. Feminism is basically the product of the women's liberation movement of the 1960's and it is shaped by the post-modernist and post-colonial thought.

Feminism dismisses the psycho analytic philosophy of Sigmund Freud. It dismisses the idea that man is the one and woman is the other. Feminism denies male dominated structure of the universal thought. It explores various myths about women. It challenges the sexual and textual politics. It refuses to accept that woman is a category of absence and invisibility. Feminism challenges various modes of women's representation in science literature, linguistics and films. It wants to replace the context language and the theory in the field of literature. It aims at re-reading and re-theorizing the text. Thus it became double practice in the sense that it is a deconstructive and reconstructive at one and the same time. It focuses on biology, the unconscious, the social and economic condition. (J.A.Cuddon, p. 274-276)

Indian English literature flourished in all types of genre whether it is drama novel non-fiction writings biographies and auto biographies. Many writers contributed in all of above literary devices but novel gained much popularity compared to others. Indian English fiction made its journey through different perspectives. It also gave much space to different social issues. As such feminism and literature of female became subject of concern. Chitra Banarjee, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Naintara Sehgal are some of the major contributors for feministic literature.

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as an icon for the younger writers through myth and modernity in the context of contemporary Indian writing in English. Her work reflects Indian cultural issues. The



working out of relationships within families and marriages, define insight into human character, her boldness in the treatment of sex and class barriers. Her novel *That Long Silence* reveals an intriguing picture of an ordinary middle class woman. The novel centers on the inner perception of a woman who is subtly drawn from inside a woman who finds her normal routine so disputed that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is? In the stifling and suffocating domestic ambiance and patriarchal setup she finds her female identity effected. (Bai K.Meera, p. 138).

Shashi Deshpande is the most influential contemporary woman novelist in English. She deals with the inner world of Indian woman. In her novels she has portrayed heroines in the realistic pictures of society. Through her novellas she represents middle class suffering of women. She writes about the place of women and their failure in the rapidly growing changing socio-economic milieu of India. Her heroines belonged to the middle class society and they are all modern educated conscious and urban. They find marriage painful. Her heroines do not break away from their marriage bonds, rather they try balance between tradition and modernity and family and career. They see that their profession will not affect their married life.

That Long Silence is an excellent work of art. The great specialty of this novel is that the authoress has tried very successfully to separate the two distinct strands. Her experience and her awareness of that experience. She has written of herself and her family and of all those persons and places connected with the family. The account she has given is so life like and interesting that one does not get bored in reading it again and again. (Chandra, Subhash, P. 147)

The title of the novel depicts the intention of the novelist in order to reveal the female psyche. Jaya, is the protagonist of 'The Long Silence' who is an intelligent woman with graduation in English, a writer and columnist who had a bright career. Unfortunately, none of these attributes would provide her a respectable position in the eyes of her husband Mohan, who is socialized in a typical tradition and environment. He perceives his wife on par with Seeta, Savitri and Draupadi. His mother and sister are very much submissive to father. The decisions relating to familial and financial matters are taken by the male members of the family. So he wants his wife to be submissive like them as a homemaker.

In a male-dominated society, a woman has no space to be independent. She is dependent on men either on father, husband or son. They are hardly given freedom and independence. Slavery to man makes them suffer from dual roles of child bearing and domestic chores. She has no freedom regarding the selection of her life partners and marriage. Marriage becomes their destiny and Jaya thinks; as we grew into young women, we realize it was not love, but marriage that was the destiny waiting for her.

The novelist vividly depicts the image of marriage institution and familial relations in India. Husband and wife hardly openly talk about their sexual life. It is treated as sinful and immoral. Jaya had dream about her marital life that she would love her husband first and then sex. A mechanical relationship and artificial lover were the consequences of her marriage. It was a total failure. She had lost interest and tried off with the acts of sex. Unfortunately, with Mohan she had only sex but not love either before or after marriage. In other words, she hardly enjoyed marital relationship with her husband. She had no freedom to express or share her desire with Mohan. So her feelings of love and sex are suppressed. And O' God, why couldn't I speak? Why couldn't I say something. I felt foolishly inadequate, having nothing to offer him in exchange for all the charges, he was pouring on me. (*That Long Silence*, P. 119) pathetic condition of Indian woman. It is a reflection of suffering of an Indian woman in the dogmatic social milieu that is family. It also reflects how woman suffers deeply and end up life silently bearing dominations of male. The sacrifice made by women counterpart is hardly noticed by the male dominated society. The writer wants such women who suffers to break their silence in the waken of feminist movement. The novel illustrates the image of women in the middle-class family and the way she is sandwiched between the tradition and modernity.

The novel comes relatively close to real life experiences. It achieves greater credibility from the fact that Jaya the protagonist is a highly read English speaking lady with a literary taste. The novel portrays the conflict in the mind of the narrator between the writer and the housewife. For seventeen long years Jaya manages to suppress her feelings thinking that it is more important to be Good Wife

than good writer. Being a cultured and educated lady she was trying to prove herself a good housewife. Woman's position in a family is a much inferior to that of her husband. She is to obey, service and suffer at least. This starts early in her childhood. Ever since Jaya got married, she had done nothing but waiting. Waiting Mohan to come, waiting for children to be born, waiting for them to start school, waiting for them to come home, waiting for servants etc. And besides all those sorts of waiting she being sensitive by nature, had been waiting for disaster, for catastrophe. She always had a feeling that if she escapes one she would get another soon. She suffered from locked door and empty house. Wait until you get married, wait until your husband comes, wait until you, you go to your in-laws home wait until you have kids. Yes, even since I got married, I had done nothing but wait. (That Long Silence, P.30). Disaster is off Mohan's involvement in a case of corruption, his suspension from service, and his uneasy life. Instead of accepting his crime Mohan tries to prove how he is true that affects the conscience of Jaya. It creates a pressure on Jaya to remain silent. But her silence irritated Mohan again and again.

Jaya's character is born as educated and cultured middle class woman. Her growth as middle class woman makes her so the marriage can survive. She always followed the traditional code of conduct and her inner voice remained unexpressed. She feels herself totally lost as she is taken for granted by Mohan as if her own feeling and emotions don't mean anything to her husband. She got so shocked when name of her mother, her aunts and even Aajji were not found in family list. Here the writer wants to suggest that Jaya plays the role of a caring wife as long as the economics and social conditions are fine.

Jaya's writing and her association with Kamat is an example to find her own identity. Jaya is a representative of urban middle class woman exposed liberal western ideas but she's unable to free herself entirely from the clutches of male dominated society. Jaya is not a revolutionary character but wants to be different from the regular housewife lifestyle.

Jaya's attitude towards her husband and family life made us think that her married life is a loveless. Thought Jaya is portrayed as the educated, determined, courageous but she seems to be caught in a difficult situation. Being educated she remains silent and unexpressed and that becomes the cause for her suffering always. Her excessive goodness also becomes the cause of her suffering. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only the weapon 'silence and surrender' 36 that long silence. Through her character the novelist tries to portray woman's plight and a real picture of society in order to focus how men treat women as interior second citizen. Feministic writers are concerned with recognition of women having their own identity.

In this way, Shashi Deshpande has successfully presented a female character who suffers a lot as she remains silent. Her attitude to be silent made her suffer a lot. The novel is an perfect example of female and feministic writing. Through the portrayal of Jaya, novelist has managed to highlight woman suffering in a traditional Indian society and circumstances she undergoes. The protagonist has the Freudian traits where she is troubled by her inner feelings and outer challenges. At last she manages to come out of it as inner feelings started dominating. Novelist has skillfully depicted a perfect picture of woman who becomes victim of her attitude to be silent.

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