

JAYA: STANDING AT CROSSROADS

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande has depicted the picture of Indian women, who are generally submissive, docile, neglected and suppressed. But the female protagonists of hers are well-educated, self aware and assertive, having a prestigious life of their own. Education is now becoming available to a section of women but it does not change their way of thinking automatically. Despite education, they do not shed their prejudices easily. Only the hard blow of the circumstances can compel them to think anew and behave in a new way. When men and women distort their identities, when they ignore their social obligations and creative impulses in the name of family demands, they get nowhere. Personality of an individual is an integrated whole. It cannot be reduced to pieces, some to be suppressed and some to be played up. Jaya commits a blunder when she tries to suppress her social being, her individuality and to confine herself to the role of Mohan's wife and the mother of their two children. What the novel highlights is that education is now becoming available to a section of women but it does not change their way of thinking automatically. Despite education, they do not shed their prejudices easily. Only Solution, they have to take recourse to self-examination and to become bold enough to resist undesirable pressures.

Paper Identification



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INTRODUCTION

The novels written by Shashi Deshpande depict the picture of Indian women, who are generally submissive, docile, neglected and suppressed. But the female protagonists of hers are well-educated, self aware and assertive having a prestigious life of their own. In the traditional, orthodox patriarchal society, where little scope has been left for their independent identity, they struggle hard to gain it. The present paper is an attempt to trace the tragic flight of the female protagonist, Jaya, of *That Long Silence*. The novel *That Long Silence* if we interpret only each word of the title, expresses the novelist's outbursts of the immense persecution that they have undergone. The title suggests a warning that as it has now been understood, the womenfolk will have voice and not surprising if they wage a war against the atrocities on them. The Silence put up by the one half of population longs for

voice now and to make the patriarchal society understand that the females too, have their value and they can fight for equal attention to be given to them. In Shashi Deshpande's novel's female characters are more bold, defiant and self-conscious. Her first published novel *That Long Silence* presents the story of Jaya a traditional Indian woman who raise voice to the dictates of a patriarchal society where woman is considered a commodity to give advantage to everyone. without giving a little attention to her own self and her own choices. The diversified roles of an Indian woman merges in Jaya, the protagonist. The great expectations of Mohan, her husband, make her falter in fulfilling her own self. Jaya's identity is lost in her various names and various roles. Jaya's silence seals her communion with the outside world where her own desires get nauseated and she desires an outlet. The novel highlights the plight of the so called educated woman still bound firmly by the shackles of tradition and customs. As G. D. Barche observes: Unhesitatingly the modern educated woman's crusade against years of slavery, suffering and oppression is a serious one, however, in the process of this crusade, we see her suffering from certain weaknesses and complexes which have been highlighted by Indian women novelists. The first weakness she suffers from can be summed up in what Pope has said about Addison 'Willing to wound, yet afraid to strike'. (15)

Jaya grows up in an environment of amalgamation of tradition and modernity. Her father wanted her not to be like other girls who dreams for nothing more than being wives and mothers. For this her father had sent her along with her brothers to a convent despite his mother's disapproval. But those dreams did not materialise as her father died when she was just fifteen. However her education gives her command of English but her social background seems to prevail upon her thinking.

As it is customary in some communities Jaya get a new name Suhasini after her marriage. While her

original name Jaya stands for victory, the new name given by her husband means - "a soft, smiling, motherly woman," a woman who lovingly nurtured her family. This new name is indicative of what Mohan expects from her. Jaya who once found her mother and maternal aunt low and wanting in their performance as house wife and mother now tries to learn what is womanly and what is unwomanly for the women of Mohan's family. Contrary to her previous self she learns that it is unwomanly for a woman to be angry, that she has to suffer in silence and has to sacrifice her interest, her hobbies and her cares for the sake of her husband and family. It can aptly said as "Victims of patriarchy and also of their own silence."(TLS 168)

In her endeavour to become as ideal wife, Jaya destroys her own identity. In her pursuit of becoming a perfect wife and a loving and caring mother relegates her identity to the background. She becomes not an independent woman but "stereo _ type of a woman – nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support." (TLS17) Even her creative writing is stifled by her husband. One of her short stories published in a magazine bags the first prize but Mohan feels hurt by it. That is because the story centres around: "a couple, a man who cannot reach his wife except through her body." (TLS 81) He considers it to be a portrayal of his own life. For the sake of her marriage Jaya stops writing stories after that.

When she resumes writing them again under an assumed name, they are rejected and returned to the address of her neighbour Kamat. In her discussion with Kamat on these rejected stories, she realises that they have become impersonal and devoid of strong feelings, But Jaya is unable to take a decision at this time and decides to write light things for the sake of Mohan. He has destroyed the potentiality of Jaya's as a good and meaningful author. But Jaya is also equally responsible for this as she has not cared to resist and assert herself. She gets some solace in the arms of Kamat, but her Hindu faith starts loading her conscience. She makes a

reassessment of herself and decides to be with Mohan and toe the line of a traditional Indian woman. 'Stay at home, look after your babies keep out the rest of the world, and you are safe' (TLS 9)

That is the foolish notion to which she sticks for long seventeen years of her married life. Her illusions are shattered when Mohan becomes involve in a corruption case and they have to be in hiding to the flat at Dadar. When Jaya finds herself alone in the flat, she gets an opportunity to recollect and contain her past. She discovers her strength and weaknesses then and chalks out her future course of action.

Jaya is a representative of the urban, middle class women exposed to liberal Western ideas. But she is unable to free herself from the clutches of male chauvinist ideas, the ideas which are an integral part of her culture and imposed on her by those who are around her. Her aunt, Vanita Mami, for instance, counsels her just before her marriage: "Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies."(TLS 32) In spite of her flippant attitude towards Vanita Mami's advice, however, Jaya proves herself to be no different from her. At the moment of choice between her husband and family, and asserting herself as an individual, she chooses the first one without any reluctance.

But after the sudden catastrophe of the corruption charges against Mohan and their exile of Dadar flat, however, compel Jaya to "excavate her own truths and those of other women in her life and break *That Long Silence*." Here Jaya's carefully built facade cracks and she breaks herself imposed violence. As Indra Bhatt observes, "Shashi Deshpande unmasks both Jaya and Mohan when they faces the crisis in their lives. They have run into a strong weather and their secure sheltered life washes away like a water colour in a rainy storm."(Bhatt, 156) For the two nights before the return of her husband and son that she has to herself in Dadar flat, she pours out her inner most

thoughts, giving vent to her pent up feelings, her feelings, her fears, her doubts and everything she had suppressed in her seventeen years of silence. After her purgation, "Jaya no longer wants to play the role of a passive wife. Perhaps this is the hardness and ruthlessness that Deshpande talks about in the forward. A Man is conditioned to right from the beginning, a woman learns through experience."(1989) Jaya's first reaction to the changed situation is: "I know that safety is always unattainable. You're never safe." (TLS 201)

Mohan's excuse for all his questionable deeds is that he has done everything for his family. Pondering over it, Jaya remembers the folk tale about the sparrow and the crow and concludes that selfish, cynic behaviour even for the family is not excusable. As for her own role, she realises that her own role all along has been passive. Time and again, she has associated marriage with the image of "two bullocks yoked together" and concluded that under the circumstances they must move in the same direction because moving in different directions will be painful. The image is no doubt valid regarding the nature of traditional marriage. But it does not follow that the wife must remain passive. Marriage can better mean partnership with both partners sharing the burden (that is, the responsibilities) equally and consulting the other. Male arrogance may prove an arrogance in the way but it need not become an excuse for unquestioning submission. Silence cannot save women from disaster and they are partly to blame for it as their silence prolongs and deepens their sufferings. That is why Kamat rejects 'the women are the victims' theory. Thus she realises she cannot evade responsibility for the mishap that has befallen her family.

The other thing that her reflections bring to her mind is the personality of an individual in an integrated whole. It cannot be reduced to pieces, some to be suppressed and some to be played up. Jaya commits a blunder when she tries to suppress her social being, her individuality and to confine herself to

the role of Mohan's wife and the mother of their two children. That dispels her misgivings and restores her confidence. So she declares at last: "I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm 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 30,137)

Obviously, her married life is now destined to change as she has resolved to gain her real identity, become more than a wife and mother, namely, a social being, an individual having her own desire and her own choice and a creative writer. She is conscious of the difficulty she will face now in adjusting with her husband but she is not much perturbed about it. As she puts it: "We don't change overnight....But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible." (TLS 130) Subash Chandra Comments, "By permitting her story, she has achieved articulation of her predicament, her constraints, her anguish and has thereby broken her silence."(155)

What the novel highlights is that education is now becoming available to a section of women but it does not change their way of thinking automatically. Despite education, they do not shed their prejudices easily. Mohan, the engineer deems it below the dignity of a man to cook even at the hour of dire necessity. Jaya, the writer leaves no stones unturned to prove herself a good wife as demanded by tradition. Only the hard blow of the circumstances can compel them to think anew and behave in a new way. Secondly, it emphasizes that when men and women distort their identities, when they ignore their social obligations and creative impulses in the name of family demands, they get nowhere. Only Solution, they have to take recourse to self-examination and to become bold enough to resist undesirable pressures.

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