

SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE* AND ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy have raised the issues like gender discrimination, the oppression and exploitation of woman in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society, conflict between tradition and modernity, woman's search for identity and human relationships in their novels. In That Long Silence, Deshpande suggests that woman should not succumb to the roles cast upon them. Woman should get rid of the fear on her part that allows the oppression to continue. It is not only man who subjugates woman. She is also responsible for her own predicament and should struggle to achieve her own identity. Adjustment should be made but not a servile one. On the other hand, The God of Small Things unveils a vast plethora of details concerning the problems plaguing woman in a male-dominated society. It vividly portrays the plight of woman in society and her endless struggle for carving an identity in this male-chauvinistic world. The novelist narrates the agony and affliction of a single, helpless mother (Ammu) in an apathetic world – a world where the age-old subjugation of woman still persists.

Paper Identification



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Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy are the prominent and upcoming Indo-Anglian novelists of the recent times who take up the issues and problems of middle class Indian woman in their novels. Deshpande was

born in 1938 in Karnataka as the daughter of the renowned Kanada dramatist as well as a great Sanskrit scholar, Sriranga. She received degrees in Economics and Law at Bangalore University. While working as a journalist in the magazine "Onlooker", she began writing and her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* got published in 1980. Her novel *That Long Silence* brought her lot of praise and appreciation and she received Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel. Arundhati Roy was born in 1961 in Shillong in Meghalaya and spent her childhood in Kerala. She left for Delhi at the age of 16 and embarked on a homeless lifestyle. She has concentrated her writing on political issues like Narmada Dam Project, India's Nuclear weapons, corrupt power company **Enron**'s activities in India.

Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy have raised the issues like gender discrimination, the oppression and exploitation of woman in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society, conflict between tradition and modernity, woman's search for identity and human relationships in their novels. But marriage is the focal point in Deshpande's fiction. She brings out the boiling issue of marriage as a social practice, that is, a history of woman's suppression right from the beginning to the end. This theme of marriage has also been dealt by Arundhati Roy in her novel *The God of Small Things*. The novel unveils a vast plethora of details concerning the problems plaguing woman in the frame work of marriage. It vividly portrays the plight of woman in society and her endless struggle for carving an identity in this male chauvinistic world.

In her earlier novels like *The Dark Holds No Terror* and *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande exposes the absurdity of rituals and customs which only perpetuate the myth of male superiority. In these novels, Deshpande shows her protagonists growing from self-abnegation to self-assertion within the framework of marriage. In her later novels like *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on man for the subjugation of woman. Analyzing husband-wife relationship, she shows that both husband and wife find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles given to them by the society.

The novel is the story of an educated middle class girl, Jaya, who finds herself restricted in her married life. The silence between Jaya and her husband further deteriorates the situation. Towards the end of the novel, she realizes that she should break the silence and try to achieve her identity as an individual through self-realization and self-assertion. Middle class girls get good education and caring atmosphere in family, but they are also conditioned to mould themselves to suit the requirements of their future life partner. In childhood, Jaya used to be of witty and inquisitive nature. At the time of Jaya's marriage, Ramukaka tells her that the happiness of her husband and home depends on her. Dada advised her to be good to Mohan. And Vanitamami tells her about the importance of being with a husband: "Remember, Jaya ... a husband is like a sheltering tree Without the tree, you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable" (p. 32). These words keep on echoing in the ears of Jaya and she realizes that since a husband is like "a sheltering tree," he must be nourished and nurtured adequately even if the wife has to suffer to give it nourishment.

After her marriage, Jaya, who used to consider herself independent and intelligent, shapes herself to suit her husband's model of a wife. As a result of this, her individuality gets annihilated. But Jaya resents the role assigned to a wife in our country. To Jaya, married life becomes unbearable and monotonous. She gets frustrated. Moreover, Jaya has to stifle her creative urges to save her career as a wife. Mohan objects to her creative writing because he finds that her themes reflected the autobiographical details. In order to avoid conflict in her marriage, Jaya gives up creative writing. A husband denies his wife the right of her individuality. He wants her to see the world around her

only in the way he would like her to see. He expects complete devotion, complete allegiance to his vision of life from his wife. This is what Mohan wants from Jaya when he is charged with corrupt activities. He seeks emotional support from Jaya. Having failed to get any sympathy from Jaya, Mohan leaves the house. This proves to be a traumatic experience for Jaya. Like any other traditional Indian wife, Jaya can not bear Mohan's absence. Even the thought of his death horrifies her. Under these frustrating circumstances, Jaya gets terribly disturbed and starts questioning herself. She rethinks over her marital relationship. She realizes that she is not only Mohan's wife, rather she is an individual having her own distinct identity. She hopes to be on equal terms with Mohan, and at the same time, accepts the established norms and values.

The God of Small Things is the only novel written by Roy. It is a story about the childhood experiences of a pair of fraternal twins who become victims of circumstances. Roy here gives the reader a deeper understanding of all of the different dimensions of marriage. Without sufficient dowry for a marriage proposal, Ammu becomes desperate to leave her parents and marries Velutha whom she later discovers addicted to alcohol and leaves him. Ammu, after the birth of the twins Estha and Rahel, leaves him and returns to Ayemenem. Baby Kochamma loves Father Mulligan, a young Irish Priest, but could not marry him because of opposition from the family. Chacko marries an English woman named Margaret but later gets a divorce. Ammu develops love for Velutha, an untouchable. The police arrests Velutha and beats him for crossing the caste boundaries. Velutha dies from his injuries. He dies in the police station due to the brutal treatment. Ammu holds herself responsible for the death of her lover Velutha. Ammu has to go out on her own. Estha is sent to stay with his father Baba. Rahel stays with Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. The last time Rahel sees Ammu is when she is 11 and Ammu is 31. Ammu is suffering from a lung disorder. When she dies, Rahel and Chacko go to have her body incinerated. Estha has returned to Ayemenem. Now she is 31. Rahel when grown up, leaves for the US, gets married, divorced and finally returns to India.

Deshpande and Roy have not only described the predicament of woman in marriage, but also have suggested the possible way-out. They seem to suggest that a woman can get out of the entrapment of marriage by asserting her femininity through self-realization and the discovery of self but there are lot of differences in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy. Shashi Deshpande's vision regarding women self-analysis and self-understanding is more broad. But Arundhati Roy mainly writes protest writings. Through the theme of marriage, she deals with several other issues like caste system, patriarchal social set up, social discrimination etc. *The God of Small Things* deals with class antagonism and class exploitation, the tyranny and injustice that the untouchables have to suffer, the oppression and exploitation of woman in a male-dominated society. In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande suggests that woman should not succumb to the roles cast upon them. Woman should get rid of the fear on her part that allows the oppression to continue. It is not only man who subjugates woman. She is also responsible for her own predicament and should struggle to achieve her own identity. No doubt, a woman should inculcate in herself the qualities like love, kindness, faithfulness and tolerance, but self-assertion is not to be regarded as contrary to these values. So, Deshpande seems to give the message that Changes do not happen overnight but we should not lose hope and keep the gates of choice open. In order words, Jaya puts it more simply: "We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything to know now it is this: life has always to be made possible" (p. 193).

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