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MARGINALIZED VOICES THROUGH MINOR CHARACTERS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence*, highlights the domestic conflict between husband and wife by intervening at the emotional, intellectual, and egoistic levels. The protagonist of the novel brings silence as forbearance tolerance, sufferance, and an aggressive form of inner conflict. Deshpande's imagination in *That long silence* has both an intellectual and a sentimental side of self-identity. She has outlined the benefits and drawbacks of conjugal life. The novel depicts a fragile break between a sensitive woman, Jaya, and a self-centered husband, Mohan. The fundamental issue is a lack of human interaction between them. The current study examines the marginalized voices of minor characters in the novel.

Keywords: Silence, Tolerance, Patriarchal, Conjugal Rights.

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande's works excel at presenting a realistic image of educated women from the middle class. Her works predominantly focus on the struggles and lives of women in the context of India. She explains how Indian women are oppressed in the name of marriage, sex, and love, as well as how they are portrayed as oppressed figures in mythology. Similarly, She brings out Indian women's emotional turmoil, convulsions, frustration, and perseverance, in her notable book *That Long Silence*. The present article adopts the back-and-forth narration similar to what Shashi Deshpande does in *That Long Silence* to explain the supporting characters. It also highlights the issues they confront in the society. Jaya's narration brings all of the supporting characters together and underlines the difficulties they face. The minor characters include Ajji, Mukta, Jeeja, Tara, Kamat, and Vimla. The minor characters in the book play a

direct or indirect role in transforming Jaya from a suffering phase to rebellious thinking.

Jaya in *That Long Silence*

Jaya, the central character was brought up in a sensitive family. Her fond memories of her youth make her joyful. Her real sorrow and agony started with her age of marriage since no one in the family considers asking Jaya's opinion to learn what she likes and dislikes about the choice of her life partner. Jaya's father has given her every opportunity to become modern, educated, and independent. Yet, the choice of life partner was not by Jaya instead everyone was expecting a positive response from her. When her brother finds a well-settled life of Mohan he decides to give Jaya in Mohan's hand without bothering about Jaya's preference. However, Jaya was not happy with Mohan after marriage as Mohan sees Jaya as an object. Her marital life has turned her into a traditional housewife even though she is capable enough to be

a good writer. She feels terrible as she finds her life motiveless. Here Jaya says about the routine of her life, as she says,

"I can't cope, I can't manage, I can't go on....
Is this all the biggest question facing the woman of these diaries had obviously been: What shall I make for breakfast/ Lunch/ dinner? They had been the motif of my life' (TSL, 22).

Out of all those dominations and aimless life, Jaya emerges as a courageous woman. Jaya's writings were breaking the silence. One of her stories won the prize when she has made mentioned a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body. She tried to become a woman whom she would adore. In Alka Rani Purwar's work, *The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of Marital Relationship in Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence* mentions that "via Jaya's story that a balanced and full existence is not only a utopian fantasy for a woman who desires to realize her creative potential and so attempts to liberate herself from mental terror and generations of bondage. Selfhood is attainable if a woman chooses to be herself, demonstrating the actual importance of her free, inherent, and unfettered personality." (Purwar, 33).

Minor Characters and Marginalized Voices

Gary Zukav quoted, "The loving personality seeks not to control, but to nurture, not to dominate, but to empower." As the quote suggests men in the novel did not have control over dominating their women instead they remained dominant and ruined relationships. Men's lack of control resulted in nothing but their women being marginalized emotionally.

The eldest female character in the novel represents the stage of widowhood Ajji, who is Jaya's grandmother. She is often addressed as a shaven widow', here the word "shaven" points to the public humiliation of tonsure which a Hindu widow has to go through in her life. The word "widow" is now the symbol of robbing the slightest happiness she possesses in her life. Ajji now lives in complete seclusion. A widow is compelled to

withdraw all the luxuries and pleasure. She was given only two sarees to wear. Ajji thought that she was responsible for the death of her own son, as he cycled three miles every day to see her. As a sign of mourning, she had given up her single meal and died within six months. The voiceless sufferings of Ajji made Jaya speak up for herself.

Kusum is Jaya's maternal aunt's niece who was a mother of three children. Ever since she has become insane, she was excluded from the family. It was only Vanitha Mami who gave her shelter in spite of the opposition of her husband. When Kusum was hospitalized she wanted to go to her home to see her family. She had a strong mother instinct but her children and relatives have nothing to do with that. They completely excluded Kusum from the family. It is quite evident when Jaya says to Kusum, "They don't need you, they are managing quite well without you" (TSL, 52). To answer Jaya's opinion, Kusum firmly replies that she needs them. Later, she was sent to her in-law's house where she was of no use to anyone. Eventually, she threw herself in a well and dies. Jaya thinks of Kusum every now and then and pities her situation.

Mohan's mother endured a great deal of suffering after his father's incapability to make money and his egoistic attitude. She was forced to live in poverty and shame. Whenever there is a family event, she would go and assist in the kitchen. When Jaya remarked that Mohan would cook well because his mother was a cook. This comment infuriated Mohan, for a while he stopped talking to Jaya and told her to always follow his sister Vimla. Mohan's Mother cooks separate meals for Mohan's father since he won't consume remnants of children's deceptive meals. He prefers hot, fresh rice served in an unopened container. At times, he threw plates at the wall and watches his wife patiently clean the mess he created. This pain and the suffering were indirectly daunting to her mind and Jaya decided not to live like her Mother-in-law.

Vimla is a sister of Mohan. She led a similar life of her mother. There are many commonalities between them, as her mother died unheard, and Vimla also died uncared and unattended. Vimla never told anyone about her illness and she is

diagnosed with an ovarian tumor. Later she sank into a coma and died a week later. She never disclosed her problem to anyone because she knew there is no solution to solve it because, in the view of societal means, it is a curse upon her life and not even to raise her voice towards her husband and toward society. She thought a woman without a child is considered to be a blot. Vimla is the true victim of silence and this leads to the way of her death. Through Vimla, Jaya learns about being silenced under social pressure.

Mukta is Jaya's neighbor at the Dadar flat who is a widow. Jaya describes Mukta as a dancer. She recollects the death of her husband Arun, when she listens to a song. Arun happened to die in a train accident which left Mukta with never-ending grief. She begins to fight the battle of widowhood and loneliness. She is educated yet is never able to set herself free from the orthodox, worthless norms and confinement of solitude because of the fear of society. However, her daughter, Nilima is a rebel who is outspoken and wants to live life to the fullest. Both Mukta and Nilima happened to support Jaya mentally.

Jeeja is Jaya's maid and a widow who is from a lower-class community. She attends to all kinds of odd jobs that come her way. She did not complain against her husband's will for marrying again for children. She did not even complain against the woman either. She accepted it as her fate. When the second wife of her husband dies of Tuberculosis and leaves two children under Jeeja's care. Her son Rajarama is married to a girl called Tara. As Rajarama turned into a drunkard like his father and domestically abuses Tara. Meanwhile, Tara had to work with Jeeja to bring up her children. Through Jeeja and Tara, Jaya finds hope to live through the struggles for the sake of her children.

Manda is the eldest daughter of Tara and goes to school in the morning and in the afternoon she helps Tara and Jeeja. The three characters Jeeja, Tara, and Manda worked all day for their livelihood, partly because their men were drunkards, averse to doing any work. These three minor characters pushed Jaya to overcome financial stability.

Nayana is another maid of Jaya who has already given birth to four children. Her husband is a drunkard and he refuses to take care of his family. Nayana had a desire for a boy baby as she believes that boys will care for her in old age, but also she was frightened that her daughter will also suffer at the hands of drunkards. When Jaya asks Nayana about her child preferences, "Why do you want a boy so much?" Nayana replied that "When giving birth to a girl, Bhenji, who'll only suffer because of men all her life? Look at me! My mother loved me very much; she wanted so much for me A house with electricity and water, shining brass vessels, a silver waist chain, and silver anklets.... And what have I got? No, no behnji, better to have a son" (TLS, 63). This little conversation shows Nayana's aggressiveness toward patriarchal society.

Kamat is a young widower who lives above Jaya's apartment. When Jaya writes articles, Kamat gives comments and encouragement. Jaya enjoys her friendship with Kamat. She admires him for treating her as his equal. Even Kamat points out that her stories lack anger. He suggests, "why didn't you use that anger in your story?" He warned her to give up her view that 'women are the victims', and take women seriously. He finds it odd to hear women's lame excuses like, 'I'm a wife and mother first, my home and children come first to me'. Kamat's encouraging note inspired Jaya's vision and ideologies.

The above-mentioned minor characters are the reflections of a male-dominated society and the selfless life of women in a domestically abused society. They all directly or indirectly affected and slightly inspired Jaya to lead a life.

Conclusion

In the novel, *That Long Silence* Jaya takes on various roles at various points in order to quench her emotional and psychic thirst. As a writer, homemaker, and mother, Jaya represents the rage of people through the voiceless characters. She comes to the conclusion that marriage subjugated and enslaves women. She was like Sita who never questioned her husband and now she had decided to take up the role of Maaitreyee. The novel underlines that every human being is equal at birth

and should have the right to survive on his/her own terms. Whether or not the changing times and the world scenario are acceptable to us, women are definitely taking front-ranking positions in every sphere of life. The present paper attempted to examine the minor character's marginalized voice through the point of view of Jaya.

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