



Patriarchy and Crisis in Marriage: A Critical Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988) reflects on the inner feelings of frustration and alienation of Jaya, the protagonist and how it clashes with the traditional patriarchal societal expectations placed upon women for centuries. This age-old societal pattern of patriarchy brings crisis in the married life of man and woman. Even in this 21st century, girls are not entitled freedom to choose their life partner. Girls are married off without their consent. It is not considered whether the girl is happy or not in marrying a person. Parents and brothers feel that a girl in the family is a burden. And to get relief from the burden it is their duty to get them married with a person who can provide the basic amenities required for being physically alive. Jaya is a victim of this. The age-old societal pattern of patriarchy brings crisis in Jaya's marriage. Jaya's brother has a responsibility of marrying off her sister. He would be free from his responsibilities only after her marriage. Therefore, Dada has been forced to bring in proposals for Jaya's marriage. Jaya did not like the proposal of Mohan. But she also doesn't find any reason of discarding the proposal. Besides she painfully realizes that accepting the proposal of Mohan would make her brother free from his responsibilities. So ultimately, she is bound to decide to marry Mohan. This paper exposes how the patriarchal attitude towards women bring crisis in the married life of women through a critical analysis of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*.

Keywords: Silence, Patriarchy, Society, Identity, Women, Dilemma, Gender

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande, the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Padma Shri Award in 1990 and 2009 respectively, is an

Indian novelist. *That Long Silence* (1988) is the fifth work of fiction for which Shashi Deshpande won the Sahitya Academy award way back in 1990. The title of the novel refers to

the century's long pattern of women enduring, suffering and suppressing their true desires to conform to societal pressures, the struggle between tradition and modernity. The novel discusses the themes of the limitations of marriage and the quest for identity, women's oppression and empowerment within a patriarchal society and the power of silence and its oppressive nature.

Objectives

The objective of the paper is to expose how the patriarchal society pattern bring crisis in the married life of women through a critical analysis of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*.

Methodology

A critical and qualitative analysis of the impact of patriarchal society structure on women has been made in the study on *That Long Silence*, a novel authored by Shashi Deshpande. The researchers collected the evidence from both the primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from the characters, dialogues, philosophy, and experiences that unveil the crisis in marriage as reflected in the novel. The secondary evidences were collected from the various research papers and articles etc.

Discussion

The story of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988) begins with Jaya, a very talented and hardworking girl from middle class family. Jaya is characterized as super intelligent, talented and mature girl who possesses all qualities which a true girl should possess but still her old grandmother doesn't like her. Jaya's grandmother is an old thinking woman who does not believe in the freedom of girls. Jaya's grandmother believes that women should always be quiet, shy and their duties should be confined only to the kitchen. She believes that girl should never argue with other, and girls should never raise their voice no matter what. Jaya suffers a lot due to this narrow

mindedness of the people of the society like her grandmother. Though she is educated, intelligent and have writing skills, nobody cares. She suffers from inferiority complex in her family and in the society. Therefore, she gradually develops a habit of being silent. Because of society pressure she starts dominating her emotions, likes and dislikes. Jaya knows that people only want to see her as a silent and shy girl. Therefore, She started living a silent life. Here Jaya's grandmother represents the people who want to dominate the women in the society for centuries. Jaya was fond of writing and wanted to be successful writer. She used to do writing in her free time but people had problem with her writing skills too. There is only one person who supported Jaya and that is her loving father.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988) illustrates how Jaya has to choose for an arranged marriage just to satisfy her family. Mohan, an engineer wants to marry an educated and cultured girl instead of bothering about dowry, money and others. Jaya's brother Dada says, "I believe what he wants is an educated, cultured wife. He says he isn't bothered about dowry, money and all that." (Deshpande *That Long Silence* 90) Mohan is right in his decision. He wants to marry an educated and cultured girl not because an educated girl would join a job and bring money to the family. Rather he believes that an educated wife would understand the familial responsibilities better and she would be able to handle every situation. He also believes that an educated wife would be able to guide her husband, to correct his mistakes. An educated and cultured wife would be able to behave with educated and uneducated people equally. Mohan is not bothered about money and dowry.

Even in this 21st century, girls are not entitled freedom to choose their life partner. Girls are married off without their consent. It is not considered whether the girl is happy or not in marrying a person. Parents and brothers feel that a girl in the family is a burden. And to get

relief from the burden it is their duty to get them married with a person who can provide the basic amenities required for being physically alive. Jaya is a victim of this. The age old societal pattern of patriarchy brings crisis in Jaya's marriage. Jaya's brother has a responsibility of marrying off her sister. He would be free from his responsibilities only after her marriage. Therefore, Dada has been forced to bring in proposals for Jaya's marriage. Jaya did not like the proposal of Mohan. But she also doesn't find any reason of discarding the proposal. Besides she painfully realizes that accepting the proposal of Mohan would make her brother free from his responsibilities. So ultimately, she is bound to decide to marry Mohan.

"Dada has wanted me off his hands, he had wanted to be free of his responsibility for an unmarried younger sister, so that he could go ahead with his own plans. After Appa's death, the *Kakas* had never let Dada forget his role as the man of the house. And so Dada had cleverly maneuvered me into a position from which not marrying Mohan would have been childish, irresponsible and unfair to Dada. ("I know I'm only your brother, I know I have no real right to tell you what to do, if only Appa had been here.....") And, if there had been no reason why I should have married Mohan, there had been no reason not to marry him either." (Deshpande *That Long Silence* 93)

A prolonged discussion goes on in the house of Jaya as to whether Mohan ought to be Jaya's husband. Jaya is irritated with the long discussion and therefore she makes up her mind that she would marry Mohan. Being a girl Jaya was always neglected by her mother. She was looked down upon by her mother because she was a girl. Jaya's mother discriminated in treating her son Dada and daughter Jaya on the basis of their gender. All these makes Jaya to decide to marry Mohan. She thinks that

marriage is a way to get escape from the parental home where she is ignored and hatred. "Jaya married Mohan to defy her mother. Curiously Deshpande's women not only rebel against male domination but ferociously satirize their mothers and grandmothers who had not taught them to articulate their desires and needs. Jaya represents a naive young girl who sees marriage as a passport to freedom from the oppressive control of the parental home." (Manohar, 115)

Jaya has no role in her marriage. She has no saying regarding her likes and dislikes, happiness or unhappiness. It is Mohan who has made the proposal on the basis that Mohan likes Jaya's educated and cultured background. She has no option as it is the custom of her family. Therefore, she feels that trying to find out reason for discarding the proposal as well as reason for deciding to marry Mohan is futile. She is a girl and she has to accept the family's decision to satisfy the family in all ways.

"By the time they had finished wrangling and Dada had restored Ai's good humour, as I had known he would, I had made up my mind. I would marry Mohan. The decision would be mine, not Ramukaka's, not Dada's, not Ai's. [...] But all this is actually a futile exercise, trying to figure out why I married Maohan; the truth is that he had decided to marry me, I had only to acquiesce." (Deshpande *The Long Silence* 94)

Owing to family pressure, Jaya marries Mohan. But Jaya and Mohan are completely different from each other. Their thoughts and ideas are different. Their attitude towards life are also different. There is no understanding between them. Jaya wasn't allowed to have her own point of view and that why she wasn't happy with her marriage life. Mohan believes that whatever he thinks is right and her wife, Jaya should always be quiet and should do housework. Mohan was completely indifferent

towards Jaya's feelings. He wanted Jaya to live like a machine having no feelings. This attitude of Mohan brought rift in their relationship as husband and wife. Jaya and Mohan were totally unhappy in their married life.

In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande shows the shrewd attitude of males in arguing according to their needs and conveniences. After Jaya's marriage She chose a career of creative writing. But Mohan discouraged Jaya when she wrote a story in a story-writing contest, about a couple having published and winning a prize for it. Jaya did point out that she was not happy when Mohan tried to identify only himself with the male characters and not Jaya because Mohan had thought that people would think that the story was about Jaya and Mohan. This was like a storm in her life. She had no other obstacles in her career except this one. Since then she did not get any fondness for writing stories. But now it is Mohan who is himself encouraging Jaya to start writing. Actually, Mohan is apprehensive about losing his job in a corruption case. So, he is worried about his family. He knows that writing for a magazine would not bring sufficient money, but he believes that something is better than nothing. Now Mohan and his friend Kamat encourage Jaya to use her writing skill.

"Why don't you take up a job?"

"A job? Me?"

"Yes, I thought [.....]"

"But you never wanted me to. That time when I wanted to try my hand at teaching [.....]"

"Oh, that was different. Circumstances were different then. But now, may be you should try." (Deshpande *The Long Silence* 98)

Jaya is surprised when Mohan is insisting on joining a job by Jaya. Jaya reminds him that he was not in favour of Jaya when she wanted to join a teaching profession in a school. She says that she has no experiences to get a job.

But Mohan repeatedly encourages her. Even Kamat also request and encourages her for joining the writing profession.

"But you have been writing [.....]"

"It's not the same."

"You can try. You don't lose anything by trying. Suppose, by some chance, I lose my job."

"Thank God you have your column. And your "Seetha" fortnightly. And your stories. That's something. Not much money in it, but [.....]" (Deshpande *The Long Silence* 99)

In Indian situation, when a wife has economic dependency on her husband, the husband is powerful and the wife is powerless. But when the wife is gainfully employed, the wife also gets power in the family and the husband loses power. It is the money which decides the role of wife and husband in the family. While Jaya starts earning, she is getting power and Mohan is losing his power. She is going to be independent. Mohan is making her independent and powerful. Jaya is changing her role in the family by getting economic independency.

The Long Silence is also a sarcastic criticism on the social institutions like marriage and family. These institutions place individuals into slots such as wife, husband, brother, sister, daughter, son, etc., and create obstacles in the human relationship. This is what happens in Jaya's relationship with Kamat who was Jaya's neighbour upstairs in Dadar. Kamat was a widower and his only son settled abroad. He was a lonely man and showed much understanding and sympathy for Jaya. It was Kamat, who inspired Jaya for taking up her writing career. In fact, Jaya was freer and more uninhibited with him than she was with her husband. But in our society this kind of friendship between a married woman and another man is always criticized. Perhaps that's why when Jaya found Kamat dead on the floor

of his apartment during one of her visits to his place, she was frightened and left the place silently. This shows how marriage often puts people in impossible and uncomfortable situations. Jaya couldn't even stay and pay tribute to her best friend in his death for fear of ruining her marriage. She may be great at her role as a wife, but she fails as a person. This is a situation that institutions like marriage, family and society create for human beings.

Conclusion

That Long Silence by Shashi Deshpande is about Jaya, an Indian woman who, after her husband's professional disgrace, is compelled to confront the disgusting 'long silence' that has defined her life and marriage. The novel critiques patriarchal norms by exposing the suppression of women's freedom and the importance of expression for a healthy relationship. The patriarchal structure spoils Jaya's life, her ideologies, her writing career, etc. But finally, it is Jaya's writing through which she exposes her inner sufferings and marital discontentment and break down her long silence. This breaking down of her silence through her writings bestows upon her a life full of freedom and it also gives her an identity in the society.

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