



A CRITICAL REVIEW OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH IN *THAT LONG SILENCE*: EXPLORING THE UNCONSCIOUS SEGMENT OF ITS PROTAGONIST'S MIND

Dr. BARAKHA BANSAL

Lecturer, Dept. Of English, Govt. Girls Inter College, Devla, Saharanpur (U.P)
barakhabansal411@gmail.com



Dr. BARAKHA BANSAL

ABSTRACT

Viewed in the light of several psychoanalytic theories expounded by Freud and others, Shashi Deshpande's fictional works open up new vistas of the psychic realities of the life of modern Indian women. Her deep insight into the complexities of the human mind has enabled her to dive deep into the hidden instincts, faded memories, suppressed desires, half-forgotten dreams lying submerged under the ocean of the 'unconscious' of her women. Her Sahitya Academy Award winning novel *That Long Silence*, has deep psychoanalytic nuances as it studies the impact of conflicting forces, both internal and external, on the psyche of its protagonist, Jaya. Jaya faces a long- drawn agonized psychic conflict due to her temperamental mismatching with her husband. His strange behaviour and open defiance of her wishes whenever she tries to assert her 'self', gives to her psyche a tremendous shock that subsequently manifests itself into a series of neurotic reactions. The depiction of her frequent neurotic reactions such as experience of divided-self or split personality, falling a prey to delirious fits etc. during the moments of her intense psychic struggle bears deep psychoanalytic undertones. The sense of incompleteness and disorientation that haunts both the conscious and subconscious parts of her mind too often to let her have peace, pushes her psyche a step further to neurosis. However, she achieves a modicum of peace for her agitated mind when the pressure of her beleaguered circumstances provides her an opportunity for objective self-criticism.

The chief objective of this research paper is two-fold: One, to explore the effects of the unconscious motivations and conflicts on Jaya's behaviour; two, to reinterpret some of the major events happening in the subconscious and the unconscious segments of her mind in psychoanalytic terms . An attempt, therefore, has been made in its main body to study, by applying the tools of psychoanalytic technique, the vital and multi-dimensional role performed by the submerged dark invisible forces of her 'unconscious' in the formation of the thoughts and feelings, images and visions, nightmares and obsessions that lie visibly afloat on the surface of her stream of consciousness.

Key Words : psychoanalysis, unconscious motivations, psychic conflict, neurotic reactions, divided self , sense of incompleteness

©KY PUBLICATIONS

With the coming into prominence of the criss-cross of the numerous psychoanalytic theories, the Indian English Women novelists of the 20th century experienced a unique paradigm shift, for their focus apparently shifted from the portrayal of outer actions of their literary characters to that of their inner dynamics. Taking a cue from the basic tenets of psychoanalysis, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the inner and outer actions of her characters in their moments of intense psychic struggle. Gifted with a keen observation and a probing psychological insight coupled with subtle analytical powers, she is perfectly suited to undertake the tough task of illuminating the innermost dark recesses of the unconscious segments of the psyche of her female protagonists. It has been her utmost endeavour in her highly acclaimed novel *That Long Silence*, to bring into light those dark corners of its protagonist, Jaya's mind that lie concealed beneath the vast abyss of her unconscious. Here the novelist has explored the innermost recesses of her (Jaya's) psyche where most of her unfulfilled desires lie suppressed. In this novel, Jaya has been portrayed as a hyper sensitive character who moves too far away from the ordinary course of life and at the end either loses her way into the dark and dismal labyrinths of psychosis or falls a prey to terrible neurosis. Her craving for self-assertion runs counter to the accepted norms of society that force her to repress her feelings and desires. This repression when prolonged causes a deep sense of anguish, frustration and tension which serves as a prelude to her subsequent neurotic reactions. Her various neurotic reactions such as insomnia, hallucination, visions, nightmares, experience of split personality and delirious fits etc. bring forth the acute mental trauma she is forced to undergo in her attempt to carve out her peculiar feminine self.

During the early years of her married life, Jaya confronts a long-drawn psychic conflict between the instinctual demands of her id and the rational realistic demands of her ego. Due to complete temperamental mismatching between herself and her husband, she fails to receive positive response or appreciation for her creative sensibility from her husband. Besides, being a man of conservative ideology, he does not allow her freedom of action,

thought or expression and thereby coerces her into observing complete silence in his presence. Thus, she has to suppress the instinctual demands of her id viz. her urge for creativity and her craving for personal freedom for fear of losing the bliss of her married life. On some occasions, this ruthless repression of her instinctual urge makes her ego experience a traumatic conflict. For instance, when her husband strongly objects to her writing a story which he thinks has a deep autobiographical undertone, she feels profoundly hurt by his misapprehension. Her id momentarily goads her ego to react sharply to it. But the very next moment, the rational force of the ego rejects this irrational instinctual demand of the id and prefers to bear the trauma of suppression and repression for the sake of preserving the happiness of her married life :

I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared – scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardising the only career I had, my marriage. (*That Long* 144)

Jaya comes close to Kamat due to their perfect temperamental matching, a thing she tries to seek in her husband but fails miserably. To interpret it in psychoanalytic terms, in her relationship with Kamat, she seeks satisfaction for one basic demand of her id – its craving for proper communication and emotional harmony with someone in whom she may confide her genuine thoughts and feelings freely. The creative urge of her id that remains rivelled and shrivelled like a withered flower in the suffocating heat of her husband's company blooms into a full fledged flower in the cool, open and fresh air of Kamat's company. In his company her ego remains all through under the control of her id, for though there is nothing platonic in their attachment, her ego does not restrain or repress its demand for physical pleasure. On one occasion when the interplay of the instinctual urges of their id forces them into each other's embrace, Jaya's 'ego' gives a free hand to the working of her id's libidinal forces, though only for the time being :

His eyes had looked steadily, almost dispassionately at me. And my body had responded to that look, that voice, that

touch. I had almost felt his body on mine, becoming a part of mine, I had felt his mouth on mine, I had almost been able to smell and taste his lips. (*That Long* 157)

This is how her powerful id, finding a favourable opportunity, pounces upon her weak ego, takes it under its tight grip and forces it to fulfil its instinctive craving for sexual pleasure, though for a few moments only. But very soon her superego rescues her ego from the poisonous tentacles of the id by using its weapons of fear, guilt and shame; fear of losing the bliss of her married life, guilt of her act of infidelity and adultery and shame of her act of transgressing the social code of morality :

The body's response is so much simpler, so much more direct; is it possible that it is therefore more likely to be right ? Even now I have no answer to that. At that moment, however, I had instantaneously rejected the body's response. I had moved away from him, from that scarcely touching grasp, I had left him without a word. (*That Long* 157)

Thus, while her beastly id pushes her into the embrace of Kamat, her moralistic superego pulls her out of it.

When faced with acute external crisis Jaya's ego loses its capacity for rational thought and so gets subjected to traumatic experiences. Consequently, her mind becomes a battle-ground between the instinctual driving forces of the id, on the one side, and the rational restraining forces of the ego, on the other. The war between these two psychic forces disturbs her mental equilibrium for the time being. The mental balance she had managed to maintain so far by using such defence mechanisms as suppression and repression gets disturbed due to her ego's failure in its role of crisis management. When faced with the sudden onslaughts of the adverse circumstances on her family caused by her husband's involvement in a case of embezzlement, it (Jaya's ego) fails to meet the id's instinctual demand for a peaceful happy domestic life. This causes a lot of tension and anxiety in her mind leading ultimately to the onset of neurosis. The thought of her husband losing his job together with his sudden disappearance and her

son's running away from home breeds in her a sense of insecurity, a feeling of unidentified fear and a lot of anxiety and worry. All these are but early symptoms of neurosis. As her neurotic conflict draws on, she begins to have agonizing experiences of split personality and of detachment from the self. The seeds of split personality or divided self that lay buried in the unconscious of her mind for full 17 years of her married life, suddenly sprout up and crop up to the conscious part of her mind during this critical period of her life. When she casually visits her churchgate house where she had spent a major part of her married life, she becomes fully and clearly conscious of her divided self. Shashi Deshpande describes Jaya's traumatic experience of divided self in a purely psychoanalytic strain :

And now nothing seemed to connect me to this place, nothing bridged the chasm between this prowling woman and the woman who had lived here. I was conscious of a faint chagrin at her disappearance. Wasn't it I who had painfully laboriously created her ? Perhaps, for that very reason, she could not evade me entirely, and she appeared to me, only a faint wraith of herself, standing near this table, hand poised over a vase of flowers. (*That Long* 168)

As her neurotic conflict proceeds to its climax, she detaches herself from everything even from her own 'self' and develops "a feeling of total disorientation" (177).

The neurotic conflict in her mind becomes further manifest in her apparently crazy actions as mumbling, speaking nonsensical things, raving incoherently and in insomnia, recurrent nightmares and thoughts of depression. The hold of neurosis sometimes becomes so strong on her that she even falls a prey to delirious fits. The novelist describes one of her delirious fits with psychoanalytic overtones. After her secret visit to her Churchgate house, Jaya waits for the bus at the bus-station where she sees a young beautiful girl being molested by two men. Her neurotic brain makes her see the image of her own daughter in the person of that girl. This nightmarish day dream imagined by her takes so strong a hold on the conscious of her

mind that she runs out of the bus-shelter into the heavy rain pursued by her imagined fears. She reaches home and deliriously starts ringing the bell and banging on the door alternately unconscious of the fact that the door is locked and the keys are in her purse. Her delirious fit continues till her neighbour Mukta comes to her help, takes the key out of her purse, opens the lock and the door for her. All this time she keeps on raving incoherently and talking irrelevently. She remains in the grip of delirious fit even the next day. In that state of delirium, she identifies her situation with that of her cousin Kusum who had virtually fallen a prey to insanity :

And now the sense of confusion, of turmoil, towards which I had been rushing headlong, met me with brutal force. I could feel myself gasping, drowning in the darkness, the wild, flailing, panic-stricken movements that I was making taking me lower and lower into the vortex

I came floundering out of the depths, thinking – am I going crazy like Kusum ? (*That Long* 125)

The whole description manifests her grave neurotic mental state caused by the failure of her ego to manage the acute crisis created by her hostile circumstances. However, her fast depleting psychic energy reserves suddenly stage a turn-around and start returning to normalcy from the point she receives a telegram from her husband informing her of his well-being. This telegram works like a safety valve that gives an immediate outlet to the extra steam that exerted an unbearably high pressure on her mind. In that relieved state her ego, under the spell and command of her superego, renders her capable of self-criticism and self-observation. This is proper time and occasion for her to ponder over the moral and philosophical aspect of what she has done so far and what she ought to have done but what she did not do. To put it in Freudian language, it is her 'ill-luck', her 'external frustration' that enhances the power of conscience in her superego to the extent that she begins to search her soul and acknowledges to herself her many sinful acts which she has kept concealed from her husband so far. The long process of self-

perception and self-criticism she now passes through enables her to analyse things in proper perspective and with a chastening enlightened outlook on life. She now arrives at several healthy conclusions that treat her of her psychic ailment of neurosis. For instance, her conclusion that things should be interpreted only in their proper context and also that one must not be guided by one's own understanding only but must also give due consideration to that of others as well help her a lot to resolve her psychic crisis and break out her silence :

'*Yathechchasi tatha Kuru*'The final words of Krishana's long sermon to Arjuna 'I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire.'

If I have to plug that 'hole in the heart', I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us. (*That Long* 192)

Thus, anxiety that over powers Jaya during the moment of acute crisis in her life making her a victim of neurosis gets wiped out only after she musters up enough inner strength through objective self-criticism and makes important discoveries about herself and the world around. In this way, her neurosis casts a sobering effect on her psyche as she makes important discoveries about herself during her neurotic sufferings and in the final analysis finds sizable quantum of fulfilment in her relation to the life, to the world and to the universe .

Works Cited

- [1]. Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*. London: Virago Press, 1988. Print.
- [2]. Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Trans. James Strachey. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973. Print.
- [3]. _____. *Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness*. Trans. James Strachey. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. Print.
- [4]. Naik, Chanchala K. Introduction. *Writing Difference: The Novels of Shashi Deshpande*. Ed. Naik. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2005. Print.
- [5]. Rajeshwar, M. *Indian Women Novelists and Psychoanalysis. A Study of the Neurotic*

Characters. New Delhi: Atlantic Pub, 1998.
Print.

Brief Biography of the author: With a brilliant academic record all through, **Dr. Barakha Bansal** has been working as a permanent Lecturer in the Dept. of English in a Govt. Girls' Inter College in Uttar Pradesh for above six years. She obtained her M.A. Degree from C.C.S. University, Meerut in 2005 and M.Phil Degree from Alagappa University, Tamilnadu in 2008. She was awarded Ph.D. Degree by C.C.S. University, Meerut in 2012. She presented Research Papers in two different seminars of national level. A couple of her research papers have also been published in eminent Research Journals.
