



Marriage and Patriarchy: Feminine Perspective in Shashi Deshpande's, *That Long Silence*

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ABSTRACT

In our society marriage is the privileged locus of the interaction of male and female which reflects and regulates the attitudes. Women are always expected to adjust and behave only in a certain way after marriage in the name of respect and change as decided by the in laws. Marriage is considered to be one such aspect which assures the future of the society. It is a continuous strife and struggle between the individual asserting their differences. Jaya the main protagonist in Shashi Deshpande's novel, "That Long Silence" represents the orthodox virtues of Indian womanhood where love for her husband is steeped in deep spiritual bondage. The present paper examines her plight to be married and be responsible of all the consequences that affect the family. But she cannot endure it all the time, there has to find a way to get out with it, that too with dignity, and she has to rediscover herself respect which she has lost in course of time.

Key words- marriage, adjustment, identity crisis, rediscovering self.

Since time immemorial and since ages, man woman relationship has inspired humanity. Love and marriage has intrigued mankind from the very beginning. The concept of marriage in Indian families is always considered sacred. One may see love both as human instinct to seek fulfillment, as a creative urge that manifests itself in biological attraction towards the opposite sex and as desire or lack of it that needs to be complimented. In our society marriage is the privileged locus of the interaction of male and female which reflects and regulates the attitudes. Marriage is considered to be one such aspect which assures the future of the society. Whether one views marriage as the blissful coming together of equal voices speaking in unison or as the sites of continuous strife and struggle between the individual asserting their differences.

Women cannot sustain or escapes the structure marriage prescribes the patriarchal interest it serves and survives. Marriages are not contracted from one or two simple motives; there is large number of considerations behind them.

The novelists in the Indian scenario reveal a variety of assumptions about love that vary according to their mental makeup, cultural moorings and personal circumstances. Different novelists at different times portray women differently as Shashi Deshpande's characters reflect greater sensitivity, depth of understanding and awareness of orthodox virtues in marriage while Anita Desai's protagonist are more rebellious in nature, Kamala Markandya's heroine are more vulnerable docile and submissive.

The title of the novel *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande suggests the association of darkness with mystery. Jaya's experiences in the novel depict a series of compromises that goes straight with most Indian situations. She is trapped in a marriage that saddles her with more responsibilities than she can handle. She represents the orthodox virtues of Indian womanhood and her love for her husband is steeped in deep spiritual bondage.

The other characters of the novel also have arranged marriages, where the parents' wishes are more primary in nature. Unlike the West, Indian families resort much in arranged marriages and fall prey to family pressures. In India the brides are expected to be least protesting and have to follow the orders of the father, the head of the family. The husband is not of their own choice. They to bow to this life as like many other Indian brides and don't have the courage to defy the wishes of the parents. They fall prey to the wishes and find it difficult to marry against the wishes of their parents.

That Long Silence a novel by Shashi Deshpande, recalls Virginia Woolf's remark that women are trained in silence. Jaya in 'That Long Silence' is a failed writer whose creative potentials are suppressed in the kind of relationship that she finds herself in. She is married to Mohan and has two children out of the wedlock. She is an ideal couple for the society, 'pair of bullocks yoked together', as the Indian phrase goes. They have no sense of being one but only give an appearance of it to others. Mohan like other male tells her that whatever he does is for her and holds her responsible. He says:

"It is for you and the children that I did this. I wanted you to have a great life, I wanted the children to have all those things that I never had."
(9)

The family disrupts when Mohan is caught in a malpractice. Jaya follows him like the traditional Indian woman. Jaya had to change her name to Suhasini after marriage as is the culture in India. This would give her a new cultural identity which confirms her initiation into a new patriarchal

order ascertaining her submission and repression. The change of name brings a drastic change in her personality. The name itself represents the docile submission very different from Jaya who is an embodiment of deity Durga who conquers over adversaries. Since her marriage, her life only revolves around the needs of Mohan. When he was charged of malpractice Jaya thinks, "There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing for me to do"(24).

She discovers the truth that it was Mohan who had a clear idea of what he wanted; she simply followed him. Jaya's life becomes miserable when her husband Mohan is asked to leave the job while the allegations of malpractice are being investigated. They are forced to move to a new place where Mohan has to wait for the results of the investigation. Jaya broods on her life with Mohan's:

"He had not known what waiting was. He had always moved steadily from one moment to the next. But for the woman the waiting game starts from the early childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in laws house. Wait until you have your kids. (30)

Jaya grapples in a tough situation where it is difficult to get out of it. She feels trapped and suffocating in the stifling atmosphere. She has to try her patience to keep the marriage intact. Her own mother in law had to suffer calmly and revealed the same social injunction. She had to wait until he got back and he wanted his rice hot and fresh. If there was no chutney he would get furious and throw the plate and walked out of the house, leaving her to gather the splattered food and wipe it off from the floor and the wall. The situation explores the male dominated society which puts the woman in a painful situation and the household chores are their own responsibility. Their self respect gets tattered and they can do nothing about it.

Jaya's maid Nayana also is an embodiment of patriarchal discomfort and she advises Jaya not to give her pay to her husband. Her life is hard:

"There had been days when she had come to work bruised and hurt, rare days when she had not come at all" (51). Still she is never angry with him, "With whom shall I be angry...God didn't give us any children- that was his misfortune as well as mine. How could I blame him for marrying her when I couldn't give him any children? How could I blame that woman for marrying him? (52).

Jaya sees her own plight as variation of the lives of Nayana. A woman is destined to take care of her husband and the belongings, to be there always when he needed, forcing the existence on her and also mentioning out her faults. Mohan's sister Tara never leaves no occasion to put her down. She has to endure apathy of all, at many occasions and no one in the family leaves her to her fate, they make her feel guilty of her shortcomings, be it a torn shirt or badly cooked meal, she has to be responsible. Despite her intelligence she is unable to cast aside patriarchal values.

Mohan always wants to stay at home and dislikes Rahul crying, who is naughty and unquiet child as it this is also her fault. Jaya keeps him in the kitchen so as to allow her husband have his sleep. She wants to be a good wife to her husband and never asks why he has not managed to get another job yet. She states:

"If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly; I didn't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have things I needed... decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, travelling first class." (61-62)

As a wife, Jaya recollects why she decided to marry Mohan. She thought that this marriage was a good escape from her parental home. As a married woman she read magazines that would describe how to be good wife and how to please one's husband and how to become an integral part of his life.

The contradictions embedded in the social system baffles Jaya all the time. She is not able to

confront the situation that she has been put into. But she cannot endure it all the time, there has to be a way to get out with it that too with a dignity, she has to rediscover herself respect which she has lost in course of time. She analyses the situation and cannot retain the façade that she has been wearing all the time. She wants and longs to be Jaya and not Suhasini:

"Suhasini was dead, yes, that was it, she was the one Mohan was mourning, she walked into the sea at last. No, the fact was that I'd finally done it. I'd killed her. No, that was not right, either; we had killed her between us, Mohan and me. But in dying she'd given me back the burden she'd been carrying for me all these years. I had finally to bear it myself, the burden of wifehood." (121)

Mohan is unable to adjust to the new situation and feels that this changed reaction is due to his loss of job. Jaya identifies her situation with that of Kusum who is also rejected by her husband. However, Jaya consoles herself with the thought that:

"Mohan had not left me, he would be back. If there was nothing else to reassure me, there was my knowledge of Mohan, of the utter strength of his convictions: a husband and wife care for each other, live with each other until they are dead, parents care for their children and children in turn look after their parents when they are needed; marriages never end, they cannot- they are a state of being." (127)

Until, the present times Jaya saw her marriage as two bullocks yoked together, but now no more and she rightfully rejects the image. In the meantime she receives a telegram from Mohan, which tells her about his return. She now realizes that this silence can prove fatal and harmful and should erase this silence. She ends up with the philosophical attitude that people don't change overnight; sometimes they don't change over long periods of time. But they should always be hopeful and life without hope can be impossible. In any healthy relationship, compromises are inexorable, but it is also important to make sure that these adjustments and compromises do not affect one's individuality. The novel can be read as a journey of

a woman from darkness to insight, from silence to speech to be bold and confident. Jaya at this juncture finally makes a choice, not based on ideologies or convictions but on her personal experience, a sense of human life and a definite perception of herself as a growing individual capable of rejecting constraints. Yet, willing to regenerate her in the familial system in which she could realize her potentials as a creator artist and a mother.

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