



Research Paper

A Gender Study: Confluence of Modernity and Tradition in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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ABSTRACT

Gender studies have been given importance since the dawn of the twentieth century by Indian writers. The perceptions of the writers were to break the oppressive systems through education for the girls. The second wave of writers in the mid-twentieth century voiced their concern and gave preeminence of selfhood above nationhood, speaking about the sexuality that was subjected through generations. This paper explores impressions about women's dilemma to be attuned to modernity or tradition. The characters entangled between double standards are observed thereby they fail to make potential contributions to the family as well as the society. They struggle to overcome the androcentric norms and regulations that come up in life. Further, it is observed that the labour division that exists inside the institution of marriage is detrimental to the female survival. It is concluded that consciousness rising among women gives a progressive trend that not only reduces the burden in the family and also promotes female gender well-being as to determine their individuality.

KEYWORDS: Double standards, androcentric, labour division, female sexuality, oppressive systems, nationhood, consciousness-raising.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English Literature has its unique space in the world of literature in portraying the realities of the societies. The writings of the Indian literary personals particularly women writers used literature as a vehicle to voice their own experiences and overall life issues of women who belong to India in particular and Asia in general. N.D.R. Chandra (2004) opines "If we look at the development of Indo-Anglican novel, we will find that the novel is the latest literary form. The novel, whether in Hindi or English or any regional, language, as a literary phenomenon, is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short- stories and fables have their respectable ancestries, going back by several centuries, but it is only during a period of little more than a century that the novel has occurred and taken root in India. It was basically a result of western impact on Indian cultural front" (28). The significant contribution of the women writers is to portray the suffering of the housewife despite their education, sceptical towards the patriarchal ideology that was in place over the years. The thematic concerns of the women writers are crisis in the identity of women, female sexuality, and alienation. Shashi Deshpande is one such author who focused on various themes such as incoherent male-female relationships, and identity crises in women. This paper explores how a woman is suspended between tradition and modernity in the novel *That Long Silence*.

II. DISCUSSIONS

One of the significant features of modernity is to deconstruct the existing hierarchy that was detrimental to the feminine gender. Jaya, the heroine of the novel *That Long Silence*, an educated middle-class woman with artistic capacities, tries to come out of the clutches of tradition in her parental abode. Despite the decent profession of her husband, she is not able to come to terms with herself and the distracting environ that engulfs her husband's abode. The impact of the West on Indian writers is obvious and is expressed through the characters by redefining the empowerment of the female gender through education. The dominant ideological structure that gives gender roles is wide prevalent in Indian culture. Bharthi Arora opines in *Writing Gender*,

Writing Nation: Women's Fiction in Post – Independence India "The ideological constructions of gender within the nationalist paradigms, in both the colonial and post-independence period, have made it imperative to engage with the gendered contexts of Indian reality. What is at stake here is the status of women as individual citizen subjects and how it is impinged upon by a structure of masculinism extent in both the domestic and public spheres" (2). The modern educated woman is suspended between tradition and modernity and there is conflict in the protagonist whether to take the image of the writer or the role of a homemaker. Despite her blessed home with a husband and two children, she feels that she is not able to live a life according to her innermost desire and creative passion. She has accepted the traditional perceptions put forth by her aunt Vanithamami that 'husband is like a sheltering tree' (Deshpande, 32).

One of the aims of traditional women, like Vanitamami, a matriarch in Jaya's family, is to instil the norms of tradition through epics that is specific to traditional Indian culture. The women was ought to design their life according to the mythological characters like Gandhari from Mahabharatha and Sita from Ramayana which results in dependence syndrome which is evident from the traumatic dreams of Jaya about the death of her husband Mohan. Deshpande opines about the state of Jaya, "I had lived in constant panic that he would die. I had clung to him at night, feeling with relief the warmth of his body, stroking his chest, letting my palms move with his even deep breaths" (96).

The behaviour of the protagonist in domestic and social life is governed by the androcentric norms that result in double standards. This is evident in the life of Jaya, the protagonist when she has a relationship with Kamat, a neighbor who appreciates the creative potential of Jaya. She shows inhibition when she communicates with Kamat and is reluctant to take the role of a traditional women who is accustomed to chastity or as a modern woman with sexual freedom. Deshpande portrays the state of the protagonist in that she is not able to identify her true self. Sometimes, he behaves like a father and sometimes like a lover. The author portrays the description of Jaya by Kamat: "Jaya – your name is like face', Kamat had said. And I had asked him, 'How?' It's small and sharp and clear, like your face'. . . . Your eyes brown too. The fingers had drawn two straight lines in the air above my brows. Then he had sat back and gazed seriously at my face" (Deshpande, 14). The gender disparity in terms of morals and behaviours has been documented by Jane Pitcher and Imelda Whelehan in *50 Key Concepts in Gender Studies* "Holland and her colleagues argue that both young women and young men constructed their sexuality in response to the rules of masculine – dominated heterosexuality. Young women had to safeguard their sexual reputation and avoid being labelled as sexually promiscuous, while young men had to demonstrate their sexual reputation in order to standing with their masculine peer group" (35).

The power politics inside the family and in the social world is evident in the women's cry for justice in the streets of metropolis in evident. The delayed justice that is equal to the denied justice is witnessed in the life of women for the martyred husbands. Women and children are the worst victims. R.G. Hegde opines in *Studies in Indian English Political Fiction* "The problems of identifying political behaviour have been further compounded by the vast semantic changes the term 'politics' has undergone in the recent years. The connotation of the term 'politics' has undergone in the recent years. The connotation of the term 'politics' now expands to the previously unimaginable, mind- boggling, contexts, breaking all the conventional barriers . . . the underlying notions of politics in these works indicate a substantial shift in the connotation of the term 'politics'"(4).

Despite her predicaments within the family and the injustice that was done to Kusum who ended her life by drowning, Jaya gets the courage to rise from her miserable situation and denounces fear. The objective of her future life is to bring about awareness about the self. She gains the confidence to encounter reality and declares: "I'm not afraid anymore. The panic has gone' (Deshpande, 191). This is considered as a consciousness-raising endeavor that takes the feminine gender from a hysterical state progressive state of health and well-being. Peter Nicholls in his groundbreaking book *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* opines "The sense of personal difference, couples with that of peaking' a special language', now complicated the Romantic concept of uniqueness by locating the trauma of division and separation within subjectivity rather than in the external relation of self to others. As writers abandoned the communicative spaces of the public sphere, so they were increasingly haunted by the spectra of the double - the other, we might say, was now 'inside' (18). Jaya the protagonist indulges in consciousness-raising by challenging the attitude of the feminine self-hood from a longing wife to a person of confidence through creative writing. She understands that relying on herself is prime important than longing for others whether it might be her husband or children in her married life thereby she can redefine the gender role. It is considered to be empowering oneself by accepting the reality and waiting with hope for her family reunion that things will change over time. Consciousness rising in the life of Jaya could be attributed to recognizing the imbalance in gender role that economic activity is destined for men and over time it could cause havoc in the family. It is further characterized by the act of self-discovery by identifying the turmoil within and the identity crisis she experienced. Consciousness-raising starts with the individual first by relying on art to express her subjectivity thereby to escape from the impacts of psychological distress that she encountered in their personal life.

III. CONCLUSION

It is observed that women not only victims of patriarchy but also emerge as modern women who rise from the clutches of the patriarchy. The characters in the novel are not subject to eternal subordination to the masculinity as in the case of traditional women but they can raise the consciousness and emerge as a new woman. N. B Masal in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time as an Exploration of a Woman's Inner Life* explains "Shashi Deshpande's novel present a social world of many complex relationships. Many men and women live together and journey across life in their different age groups, classes and gendered roles. Doubt, anxiety and often a feeling of void of values push characters in her novel to intense self-examination. The women are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationships within their given social world" (144). Thus, the novel could be considered a woman's journey from a wife who falls in distrust thereby finding her real selfhood and finding herself in creative expression to emerge as an empowered woman.

Primary Source:

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