

Women And Their Relationship With Men In Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence

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ABSTRACT: *The novels of Shashi Deshpande are realistic and an optimistic portrayal of the Indian middle class educated women. Deshpande successfully presents these women as they are engaged in the complex and difficult social and psychological problem of defining an authentic self. She delineates them with their variegated swings of mood, the ebb and flow of joy and despair. We also get an insight into their feelings perceived and desires suppressed. Deshpande's novels remind us of the reality that traditionally India has a mealist society and culture. The feminine world is covered with many thick and slack layers of prejudice, convention and ignorance. The women have no autonomous existence.*

KEY WORDS: *optimistic, middle class, women, psychological, tradition*

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In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, the husband completely dominates over her. If the wife does not conform to the norms and ideas set by husband, there is disharmony and tension. Jaya is essentially a modern women rooted in tradition where as her husband, Mohan, a traditionalist is rooted in age-old customs. The novel thus seeks to portray a woman, who becomes aware of the biased attitude of her husband. Jaya, who stands for a modern emancipated woman, has asserted her individuality by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms. Behind this simple story of the novel lies the ground swell of frustration in the married life of the protagonist, who failed to be closer to her husband mentally. She suffered from isolation, despite her marriage to Mohan and subsequently becoming a mother of two children, she was lonely. Her husband could not understand her feelings, as a result of which she was torn from within.

The image of a pair of bullocks yoked together suggests a world of meanings. It means that the bullocks so yoked share the burden between themselves. No one knows whether they love each other or not the image of the beats performing the duty mechanically undermines the husband wife relationships, who are supposed to be united in marriage for love and not for leading a mechanical life terminating in mutual hatred and distrust. Jaya resents the role assigned to a wife in our country, when she is called upon to stay at home, look after the babies and keep out the rest of world. She could not continue her modern thought of the west and other advanced countries, and is herself a writer; she still wants to compare herself with her image of Sita, Draupadi and other real and mythological characters. She had always tried her best to keep a balance between husband and wife. Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship. So much so that we have even snipped of bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even kneel.

In *That Long Silence*, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya who is known by two names, Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born and Suhasini is the name given after her marriage, which means a "soft, smiling placid motherly women". The dreams of her childhood too change the ascribed situation of woman resulting in achieving her goals or shattered by the environment, the surroundings, and above all by society which imposes all sorts of restriction on women. She is absolutely helpless and is unable to do anything longs to be called an ideal one when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and he calls it "Strength".

Coming to the physical relationship between husband and wife, it is again a case of a dominating husband and a suffering wife. Even if the husband hurts the wife, she remains silent. Jaya, too, has been cast in the same mould. She cannot say "yes", when her husband asks whether he has hurt her. She has to tolerate everything. "The emotion that governed her behavior to him, there was still the habit of being a wife of sustaining and supporting him". All this certainly doesn't show a natural and harmonious relationship between the two when we see that none is unable to express his or her real feelings to the other. Their physical relationship always ends up with Mohan's question whether he has hurt her. It obviously shows a forced relationship and not a natural one. Jaya doesn't immediately react to the situation but her reader is informed through the flash back technique used by author. Lying along in a small house, her mind travels the past and present and thus covers the whole span of her life.

Jaya's husband, Mohan, always interprets things in relation to the effect many have on the society. She unobtrusively likes to conform to the social norms even if they are strong. Jaya, a representative of the typical Indian woman, in the present context, wants to mould herself as her husband wills. But all this male chauvinistic idea is not her own but has been thrust upon her by the society in general and her father in particular. Her father made her think that she was different from others. Hence she could not cope with her hostel mates and kept herself aloof from other girls.

After so many years Jaya heard these words "a Sheltering tree". Without the tree she is dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. Mohan idolizes her: "He saw strength in the woman's suffering saliently". But Jaya being a woman sees it differently. She finds in Mohan's mother despair so great that it could not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon Mohan's sister Vimala too suffers without complaining. An ovarian tumor gradually destroys her. And in the end she is left with no identity of her own, Mohan's character is perhaps deliberately weakened in order to glorify the image of a woman as a prudent wife, compromising and adaptable to the situation. Jaya describes the character of her husband thus. His old air authority and confidence. Then the old self vanished, leaving behind us a bewildered man. She further compares him with Graham Greene's Scobie, a sad, obsessed man reconciled to the future.

Deshpande's heroines are not passive or static, nor do they remain mere clinging vines, depending parasitically upon the husbands. Jaya is no different, she puts up a painful, uphill struggle to become more and more independent and strong to fall back upon her inner resources. She does not flinch from facing up to the past and seeking to overcome her limitations. It is Jaya's father who taught her to have confidence in herself. He gave his affection unstinted to his daughter. Jaya's father is not only a source of some of her strongest emotions but also a part of her moral make-up. It is he, who inspires her to be resilient and courageous. She knows it is easier to acquiesce, to be passive; to struggle is to invite suffering upon oneself.

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