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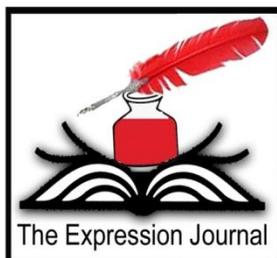
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FEMINISM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*

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Abstract

The present paper titled "Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*" aims to highlight the theme of feminism. The paper discusses the silence of Jaya, the main protagonist. It also highlights that a woman has no equal rights like the male members of the society and that results in suffocation, subjugation and dissatisfaction, which is well discussed by Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence*. A woman changes her identity after her marriage and becomes a woman to a girl and is dominated by male partner for her whole life. She accepts silently and acts according to new role. Even she feels herself tied with invisible chains many times but these invisible chains are stronger and harder than invisible chains.

Key-Words

Feminism, dissatisfaction, identity, suffocation, subjugation.
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Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande reveals the hidden gap of married life, that suppresses the female partner and due to that sometimes that leads to failure. Jaya, the main protagonist of the novel is a father supported and ambitious girl. She wants to search her real identity in different roles assigned to her by her family and society. Jaya begins her life with the name 'Jaya' given by her father and passes through many phases of her life with different identifications as Suhasini and Sita. Jaya's father always supports her and wants to see her as a winner. Jaya thinks herself different from other girls of the society. She does not want to become only a typical house wife just like her mother. She is a carrier oriented girl and has high dreams. She does not go to temple like other typical domestic girls to get a nice and charming husband. Jaya's father helps her to be different from others and does not force her to follow social rules and familial rituals. He says:

You are not like others, Jaya,' Appa had said to me out of the safe circle in which the other girls had stood... You are going to be different from others, Appa had assured me. (Deshpande, 136)

After the death of her father, Jaya feels alone and does not want to come home and feels more comfortable in hostel. She is not attached with her mother and brother. From here she starts her journey to search herself. She wants to prove herself in a world dominated by male members. She feels: "A woman is not born, but rather becomes a woman." (Nair, 88) Jaya gets married to Mohan, an engineer, not because she likes him and he is a good match for her but

because Mohan likes her. Jaya's brother also wants to get rid of his responsibility that is left unfinished by his father. Jaya becomes the choice of Mohan as she is a convent student and it is considered a matter of pride to be the husband's choice and to reject such a good offer is only considered foolishness in Indian society. Jaya's dreams and ambitions are different but she does not react as she knows she has no one to share her feelings and wishes. She gets married to Mohan without speaking a single word. After her marriage, she gets a new identity and a new name also, Suhasini.

Jaya tries her best to adjust herself in a new environment. She forgets herself in her new life and future life. She completes her all duties and responsibilities with full devotion and dedication without any delay and disgust. She completes all her duties from cooking to cleaning, washing to waiting, making to serving without any complain. Because in our traditional society it is thought that all these are duties of a wife not a husband. Alfred Tennyson writes:

Man for the field and woman for the hearth. Man for the sword and for the needle she,
man with the head and woman with the heart; man to command and woman to obey. All
else confusion. (Mundra and Mundra, 29)

In her new life, being Suhasini, she shares everything with her husband, Mohan. She loves her husband and waits for him. But Mohan does not care for her and her desired. Jaya also does not care for her own desires. She loses her own identity and feels happy with the identity given by her husband. She also decides everything by asking her in laws and she also tolerates pinchable pranks and does not mind those. She has only emptiness in her life and she tries to fill that but Mohan does not make any effort to make her happy. She says:

Ever since I got married, I had done nothing but wait, waiting for Mohan to come home,
waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come
home, waiting for the milk, the servant, the lunch- carrier man. (Deshpande, 30)

Mohan is also not honest and sincere towards his official work and also found indulged in wrong practice. At this time, she does not have courage to ask her husband about all these and to put a question mark. Jaya is also shocked when Mohan defends himself just by saying, "It was for you and the children that I did this, I wanted you to have a good life. I wanted the children to have all those things I never had" (19). She lives a life of exile, separation from her home and children with her husband just to save his false reputation. She starts writing just to reveal her disappointment and suppression. She writes realistic story of man woman relationship. Mohan always blames her for everything that is wrong in their life. He presents their personal life to the world. She thinks:

I had known then that it had not mattered to Mohan that I had written a good story, a story about a couple, a man who could not reach out to his wife except her body. For Mohan it mattered that people might think that couple was us, that the man was him. To whom, I had been no writer, only an exhibitionist. (Deshpande, 144)

For seventeen years, her family possesses her body and mind. She does not think anything apart from her family. For her family she gives up all her dreams and aspirations and living a life without any purpose. Jaya is a sufferer from her childhood days to even after marriage. Jaya thinks Mohan, her husband as a sheltering tree. She is also forced to follow the mythological role of Sita and she compares herself with Gandhari:

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 don't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay; that we could have the things we needed- decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, travelling 1st class. (144)

In orthodox Indian family, women are taught to follow their husband mutely and without any question. This can be seen in the case of Mohan's mother. Mohan sees the harassment of her mother by father but he never stops her father and praises her mother as a virtuous woman. Mohan's sister Vimala also dies in silence and never complains and informs her mother in law about her problems and ill health. She kills herself.

God knows what's wrong with her, she has been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her away if you want to. I never heard of women going to hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don't have heavy periods, what a fuss. But these women who have never had any children are like that. (89)

Shashi Deshpande highlights victimized women in a patriarchal system. Jaya sacrifices her creative writing for her insensitive husband. Mohan is not only insensitive for Jaya but he is also insensitive for his mother and sister. When he tells Jaya about the rude and insensitive behavior of his father towards his mother then he feels no sympathy for his mother and thinks it is the duty of a lady to tolerate such type of behavior of her husband. According to him, rights are for man and duties are for woman. He does not think that his father is wrong and he expects Jaya to be just like his mother doing her duties silently and without asking a single word. Mohan narrates Jaya about his mother:

I can see a picture of extra ordinary clarity and vividness- the woman (Mohan's mother) crouching in front of the dying fire sitting blank and motionless, the huddled bundles of sleeping children (Mohan, his brothers and sisters) on the floor, the utter silence, the loud knock at the door...They had all had their food, except her. Though she always awaited for him, their father, however late, he was. (15)

Mohan's mother is so much dedicated to her duties even after this she gets no reward and she gets only complains and insensitive behave. Mohan's father asks for fresh chutney and throws the plate on the floor but his mother does not speak a single word and cleans the floor and the wall, and wipes it and cooks rice and prepares fresh chutney and waits for her husband to come back. "She was still sitting there in front of the fire, silent, motionless" (36). Mohan's reaction after telling this incident is quite surprising. He says, "God...She was tough. Women in those days were tough" (36). But Jaya is in deep shock after listening this, she feels the pain, humiliation, insult, suppression, disappointment and emptiness of a wounded woman. From the early childhood, a girl is taught to wait and for a man wait means restlessness. Shashi Deshpande says:

Wait until you get married, wait until your husband comes, wait until you go to your in law's home, wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I got married, I has done wait. (30)

In this regard Simon De Beavoure says, "The woman has no value or identity by herself- she is defined in relation to the man. More precisely, she is defined as what man is not." (Nair, 87) Jaya realizes her fault and wants to come out of the disguise of Seeta. She also feels that her major fault is her silence and not asking questions regarding her husband's behave and activities. She also sees her faults in the faults done by Mohan. In reality Mohan is faulty for neglecting Jaya, her feelings, her emotions and also her existence and he is also found involved in corrupt affairs. Even after all this Jaya finds fault in herself. She analyses:

Self revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces. (Deshpande, 1)

Jaya gets confuse whether she should continue this traditional role of a wife or revolt against this system. Mohan does not love Jaya in a way as she expects from him. Here the image of 'a pair of bullocks' is clear to describe a married couple. Mohan always runs after the money as he thinks that only money can bring happiness in their lives. Jaya has a fruitful relationship with Mr. Kamat who is a neighbour of Jaya in Dadar. He treats with Jaya in a fatherly way and advises her to be honest to self. He says:

Spare me your complexes. And you're a fool if you think I was joking. I'm warning you- beware of this "women are the victims" theory of yours...Take yourself seriously, woman. Don't sulk behind a false name. And work- work if you want others to take you seriously. (Deshpande, 148)

Mr. Kamat asks her to break her long silence and awares her about her physical as well as emotional needs. But Jaya is too much afraid of her marriage failure; she leaves Mr. Kamat to die alone even after his support and encouragement. She leaves him to die alone due to social

fear. He dies of heart attack and Jaya witnesses this but she does nothing and leaves from there. She also becomes in different towards him and carries this guilt always with in her without speaking a single word. Now she realizes her weakness. She does have the courage to reject the traditional role and decides to continue that. She also blames herself for her failures due to her own limitations and comments, "With whom I shall be angry? With myself, of course." (Deshpande, 192)

Jaya knows very well in a society in which she is living, it is believed there whether man is sad or happy with his married life that totally depends on his wife only. But no one cares the wife is happy or not in that relationship, she has to show herself happy and satisfied at every cost and in every situation. In anger Mohan leaves Jaya and due to these Jaya is also under suspicion. Her neighbor, Mukha also suspects on her character and her relationship with Mr. Kamat and because of that Jaya feels herself as a failure and the biggest failure as a wife. Although she plays the role of a wife with full energy and dedication yet she does not get success. Mr. Kamat's death leaves a question in her mind. She asks:

The loneliness of a man facing his death- is there anything like it in this world? His pain filled this room and we could both of us feel it, Mukta and I. (Deshpande, 186)

Jaya's dreams, limitations and ambitions are shattered when all these come into contact with hard reality of life. Jaya searches for her real identity and feels very much disturbed. When her son Rahul comes back for his ailing mother, Jaya, she feels comfort and she also gets a telegram from Mohan written "All Well" then she also feels joy. She thinks about her past and present. She wings between what she desired and what she achieved and now she decides she will not live silent any more. She thinks, "But it is no longer possible for me. 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." (Deshpande, 192)

Man always dominates woman and is considered her master. On the other side, a woman is always expected as a silent bearer without any desire and complains. She has to complete her all responsibilities and duties without any delay and negligence. She always tries to fit herself in her family and social codes. But Jaya tries to find her identity as an individual in her writing.

Shashi Deshpande depicts man woman relationship and reality of their relationship. She does not portray attractive love story but instead of that she highlights the hard and bitter reality of married life. A life where a well educated girl has to spend her whole life in the invisible chains of society. But later Jaya realizes her power and decides to give voice to her different roles. Then she appears as real Jaya. Here Shashi Deshpande gets success to raise her voice against male dominated society.

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