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Fractured Self of Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract: Shashi Deshpande in her novel *That Long Silence*, through the character of Jaya, brings forth the emotional and psychological clashes that any middle class married female experiences when confronted with a choice. The paper is an attempt to analyse and explore the fractured female self on account of disharmony that exists within one's inner self and the outer self with reference to Jaya of That Long Silence.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, That Long Silence, identity.

But I know that I shall move. The door will open slowly, and I shall see what there is behind the door. It is the future. The door to the future will open. Slowly. Unrelentingly. I am on the threshold. There is only this door and what is watching behind it. I am afraid. And I cannot call to anyone for help. I am afraid. – Simone De Beauvoir

Shashi Deshpande is a popular Indian novelist who has brought out the various aspects of female psyche through her novels, mainly the conflicts of the self with the cultural and social dimensions defined by the patriarchy. Her novels are characterized by the struggle of an Indian middle class female trying to work out her ways in order to establish her own identity within the male dominated social set up and the cultural construct. Shashi Deshpande is considered as the author of the 70's and the 80's. Her contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle class woman:

> I realize that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing. (Deshpande interview)

In her novel *That Long Silence*, through the character of Jaya, Deshpande brings forth the emotional and psychological clashes that any middle class married female experiences when confronted with a choice. About *That Long Silence*, Deshpande remarks:

> And then I wrote *That Long Silence* almost entirely a woman's novel nevertheless, a book about the silencing of one half of humanity. A lifetime of introspection went into this novel, the one closest to me personally; the thinking and ideas in this are closest to my own. (Prasad, 58)

The protagonist Jaya belongs to the post independence era and as such carries and nurtures values different from the mythological symbols of womanhood Sita and Gandhari who chose to follow and be whatever the patriarchy represented by their husbands wanted from them and in this

regard she even thinks differently from her mother or aunts, the representatives of the older generation. As against these epitomes of devotion and submission, Jaya though a dutiful wife, mother and a daughter in law questions her 'self' throughout and faces emotional as well as psychological conflicts. Such clashes render a fractured identity to her Self compelling her to seek and sustain the tender balance between her individual identity and growth and conformity to the socially defined roles. Are these clashes because of cultural or social developments or more sense of realization of the self by the females? S. Prasanna writes in his 'Introduction' to *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A Study*, "Vieweing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on men for subjugation of women. She observes that both men women find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by the society."(21)However, this quest for identity leaves Jaya in a state of despair as she struggles for meaning in her life and questions the choices she made in her life. As she moves back and forth mentally, reflecting on the past events and relating it with her present situation she realizes how that long silence has made her self fractured because she is no longer in a situation to assert herself, apprehending the consequences.

The paper is an attempt to examine how the emotional and mental conflicts leave the self of Jaya fractured as she wavers between choosing the Self and the family. The novel begins in the middle of action in a typical style of Deshpande. "My novels always begin in a moment of crisis. Most of us go on unquestioningly until we are shaken out of the rut by something catastrophic or disastrous. Suddenly all that you have taken for granted becomes doubtful, everything falls apart. You begin then to question everything. And it is through this questioning, through this thinking that you move on, pick up your life once again. But you are never the same after this. This is true of all human beings, not just women. My protagonists being women, one of the things they question is the fact of their being females, what it has done to them." (Deshpande interview). Here we learn about Mohan's career being jeopardized eventually uprooting whole of the family from their home and comfortable lifestyle. It is only here that we learn of Jaya's torn self, which now undergoes a series of mental upheavals bringing out her so far silent frustration and dissatisfaction with the life. In the words of Adele King, "Jaya find her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is." (97) Superficially a contended soul, now through a peep into her thoughts we learn about her fractured self. Her dual self surfaces in the beginning of the novel when she talks about her relationship with Kamat with whom she not only shared physical but also emotional comfort as she says:

> We were husband and wife (Mohan and Jaya) and he could hold me, touch me, caress me. But it was never a casual or light-hearted thing for either of us. And then this man (Kamat) …I can remember how his gift of casual, physical contact had amazed me. (15)

We are introduced to the tug of emotions within her when she confesses how she left Kamat to die alone, loveless and emotionless, because she

was frightened. "I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, I am only Mohan's wife, and I had run away." (186) She values and cherishes her relationship with Kamat, but such powerful is the trauma and such strong is the realization of society and its norms that she even loses her humanitarian self in her attempt to protect the social self. Her move of leaving Kamat alone at the time of his death projects this emotional and psychological conflict within her and between her projected and real self, quite overtly. "In the seclusion of his apartment she had ample opportunity for physical indulgence but she dare not do so for fear of jeopardizing her marriage. It is yet again for this reason she feigns detachment towards his death, when on one of her visits to his apartment, she finds him lying dead on the floor in his flat. She remains passive, as she does not want to endanger her marriage. The incident is proof enough of the fettered selves of so-called educated middle-class wives." (Sharma, 41). Another instance of Jaya's torn identity is indicated when she herself realizes and pours forth the emotional turmoil that she is experiencing while "being the peacemaker in the family, the bridge between the father and son" (50) As a woman she realizes that her responsibilities as a wife and mother are supreme as compared to her responsibilities towards the self. She fulfils all her responsibilities towards the family but during the time of crisis when Rahul is to be sent away from home, she finds herself failing in her role as the binding force of the family."….being the peacemaker in the family, the bridge between father and son-whatever it was I'd tried to do."(50) The whole incident is suggestive of her divided self which is rendering her identity a torn image. Standing at a crossroad between her son and her husband and her duty as a mother and wife, she is feeling perplexed by her failure to bind the family together and particularly by the fact that the sacrifice of her Self to the family has been rendered futile. Through Jaya, Deshpande also ridicules the Indian system of marriage where women are not allowed to exercise any kind of choice in the person they are going to marry.

> The future strtched ahead, full not of possibilities but of cosy, comfortable certainties. It had been our parents who had taken charge of these vague desires of oura and translated them into hard facts. It was like the game we had played as children on our buttons-tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor. Only for us it had been- doctor, engineer, government official, college lecturer, if the young man was of the right sort, that is. (91)

The whole question of being married to Mohan was based on the calm acceptance of her surrender to the wishes of her parents,

> But all this is actually a futile exercise, trying to figure out why I married Mohan; the truth is that he had decided to marry me, I had only to acquiesce. (94)

After being married too she is trying to identify the elements of love in the marriage through different emotions and beliefs for she no longer nurtures her childhood notion of a wedding. Her experiences and learning from the life have made her realize the ground reality of marriage and in this quest for finding that almost perfect marriage, she

has reached a settlement and has built for herself that citadel where she is all happy in world of fairy tale. As Mohan's wife, Jaya also faces a kind of identity crisis when she takes up a writing career and faces her husband's disapproval for having written article on topics dealing entirely with feminine issues. This makes her realize more the domination of her social self (as a wife to Mohan) over her individual self as a writer as she remarks

> I had known then that it hadn't 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 through her body. For Mohan it had mattered that people might think the couple was us, that the man was him. To Mohan, I had been no writer, only an exhibitionist. (144)

Despite all such feelings and traumas veiled underneath the silence that she wears at everything that happens around her, the absence of Mohan perplexes her to the core. This newly found freedom poses a threat to her social identity as Mohan's wife and she utterly refuses to give it up and gets disturbed both mentally and emotionally. She again wavers between her dependent self and the independent one and this time when faced with a choice, she opts for her existence as Mohan's wife. The point that Deshpande here is trying to drive home is that for an Indian female it is only the balance that can bring happiness. She wants her individual identity and asserts it time and again but for that she cannot imperil her marriage and social status. "While her women are confused and unhappy about their roles and the expectations placed upon them by a patriarchal society, they are often aware of the strength a woman can have in a traditional marriage."(Palekar, 57). The novel ends on a positive note with a message subtly woven within it and gives a kind of completeness and well rounded close to the novel by making the torn self of Jaya reach a decision taken by herself and out of her own happy choice. She realizes that it is not only man but also a woman who is responsible for the type of life she lives. She wants both man and woman to play their social roles and does not want them to be reverted with ultimate freedom for woman and domestic responsibilities for man, however, with a sense of fulfillment in the lives of both. This kind of a conscious realization brings into her arid heart, a shower of hope as she says,

> We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. (193)

Regarding this acceptance of Jaya, projected by Deshpande, N.Sethuraman rightly remarks.

> Deshpande never supported the radical view of "Amazon Utopias', female realms where men have been relegated to secondary roles. The novelist moved a step ahead of the female dominated vision and portrayed the female psyche. (37)

The novels of Shashi Deshpande are pretty realistic in approach for she does not show men in negative light or women in absolute positive light. In this novel she "does not put the blame of their marital crisis squarely on Mohan's shoulders but also on Jaya's." (Sharma, 45) Thus the novels of Deshpande do not reflect staunch feminist beliefs but a react ion

against the suppression of women by the patriarchal set up. As a woman writer, she writes about women not propogating their existence as independent entities but as the nucleus of the family, striving for a bond and an identity.

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Hope

- Itishri Sarangi

I gazed longingly at the dark clouds
With unwavering attention
The dark clouds lulled my heart's desire
That comforts me from the fear of the unknown
From the unspoken tears rolling over my eyes
I gave up the urge to justify myself
Hear me out, oh my gloominess
I bare my heart from the shattering experience
And break the monotony creeping in.

The long term psychological effect
The mental affliction
The memoir of suffering where hopes are harder than despair
Enough of it now
Everybody on earth wants a space
To see happiness as a way of life
And believe in the philosophy of hedonism in bliss.
And want days of pure ecstasy
Want to scream in piercing voice
Let the world hear my voice
And let the voice shrill and penetrate in all ears.
Journey of life passes away
Alas! Not they come again
There are millions of excuses to live
But I want to make my life worth.