

CONFLICTS AND ADJUSTMENTS IN THE MAJOR WORKS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

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ABSTRACT

Adjustment is of utmost importance for an individual's leading a blissful life. Be it the Professional life or domestic life or the natural surroundings, one needs to and one must adjust. Adjustment is the key to one's happiness and this applies not only to human beings but also to animals. If we look around, we are adjusting to the climate, the weather conditions, the society, the people and so on irrespective of our liking or disliking. Women, in our society, are considered to be the most adjustable beings. They adjust with their parents in the way they bring them up; they adjust with their husbands and their new families after their marriage; they also adjust with their sons in their old age. Though conflicts are an important part of everyone's life, one can resolve them by adjusting to the demand of the situation. The present paper is an attempt to study the conflicts in the minds of the female protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's three famous novels-That Long Silence, The Dark Holds No Terrors and Roots and Shadows. These protagonists achieve individuality and authentic self-identity without antagonizing the cultural and traditional ethos of the society, mainly through their adjustment capacity.

Keywords: Adjustment, blissful, conflicts, individuality, self-identity

INTRODUCTION

A Hindu woman is generally taken as an embodiment of Goddess Sita, who puts up with all the repressions and suppressions for the sake of her children and the honour of her family. A woman's sexuality, her experience of love, desire, sorrow, pain or pleasure are the matters that are routinely ignored. A man who is 'dispossessed' of culture and sexual selfhood looks to a woman as the ultimate, unconquered original space. This is true for the predicament of the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande. Her protagonists find themselves entangled in different complexities of domestic life but they achieve self-identity and independence within the boundaries of their marriage. They use 'silence' as a weapon to show their protests and to pave way through their problems. They resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. Their returning home is not defeatism but the vindication of the independence of women. They learn to live in the modern society with self-identity and self-realization. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are basically middle-class educated women in the patriarchal Hindu society. Her novels deal with the psychic mayhem of women within the limits of domesticity. Her women do not appear to be stronger than they actually are in their real life. They are presented as they are.

In an interview to Vanamala Viswanatha, Shashi Deshpande says about her women characters: "My characters take their own ways. I have heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are. Most of the women I've known are like that- their decisions are made for them. Due to being over protected, they are people who think one way and do another".(235)

THAT LONG SILENCE

Jaya, the main protagonist of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, symbolizes majority of the women of the world who are incapable of expressing themselves as individuals. Before her wedding, Jaya was quite optimistic because of her father's upbringing. Her father encouraged her with words, "I named you Jaya", he said "Jaya for victory" (15). But the sudden death of her father disappoints her. Her mother does not support her in any way and this attitude of her mother makes her weak and vulnerable. Her mother's preferential treatment wounds her more and makes her aggrieved. These childhood disappointments develop a kind of inner silence within her and deprive her of the strength to face life boldly. After her marriage with Mohan, Jaya decides to perform her role as a "duty bound wife" "adhering to the established norms of the society. Mohan, traditionalist and money-centric person, marries Jaya only for his societal betterment. On the wedding day itself, he renames Jaya as "Suhashini" wanting her to be always, "Soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman." (16)- an adjustment which Jaya readily makes so as to make her marriage work. Mohan's ideology about womanhood is based on what he has seen in his family- women should perform their well-defined roles assigned to them by the society. Jaya also learns from Mohan that women should never be angry for anger makes a woman "unwomanly". He even quotes his mother's silent suffering despite his father's harassment as strength. "My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her", said Mohan once. (83) Jaya compromises with all her desires for marital harmony. She realizes that that her words of resentment affected Mohan's personality. This knowledge therefore, freezes her into silence. She always recalls the advice given to her by Vanithamami that, "a husband is like a sheltering tree" (32) and words of Ramukakka: "Remember, Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you".(138) Therefore, Jaya completely adjusts herself to the needs of Mohan by suppressing her needs and desires. She understands that, "I knew his mood was best met with silence". (78) Mohan believes that a successful life can be measured only in terms of earnings, talking good English, wearing expensive clothes and sending children to good schools. Jaya and Mohan's inability to express their real feelings to each other keeps them both detached. This cold atmosphere in her seventeen years of marriage drives Jaya towards extra-marital relationship with her one time neighbor Kamat whom she finds a reliable companion and his "gift of casual, physical contact" amazed Jaya. Kamat disparages Jaya's writing in a cheerful manner. Jaya finds herself distinctive only in the presence of Kamat. She says: "With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself – Jaya. There had been an ease in our relationship I had never known in any other. There had been nothing I could not say to him. And he too . . ." (153) Unfortunately, Kamat dies unexpectedly. Jaya is scared to acknowledge her secretive relationship with Kamat for fear of devastating her marital life. But, she carries this guilt throughout her life. She finds her normal routine quite disrupted. Her roles as a mother and as a dutiful wife fail to provide her with any emotional and intellectual fulfillment. She admits: "Mohan's wife. Rahul's and Rati's mother. Not myself".(69) When one of her novels won the prize, Mohan is not at all happy because he relates the theme of Jaya's story to their own life and warns her not to write on such themes henceforth. At this, she retreats into silence since she thought that, "It was so much simpler to say nothing, so much less complicated" (99). In due course, Jaya becomes dwarfed and starts to lose her true identity. She finds herself a disappointed mother, a failed writer and an unfulfilled wife. When Mohan is accused of corrupt practice in his office, Jaya feels that the disaster has come to her as a gift, neatly packed with colourful ribbons. When Mohan plans to move to Dadar flat for a temporary stay, he takes Jaya's approval for granted. Jaya too moves with him silently just like Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband. Mohan tries to justify his action stating that he did everything only for the

sake of his wife and children. At this, Jaya gets infuriated as she could not accept her husband's fake reasons. The Dadar flat intensifies their silence all the more. Silence stumbles up and squanders their physical intimacy too. In this context, S. P. Swain aptly remarks, "Temperamental incompatibility between Jaya and Mohan accounts for their in communication and quizzical silence." (70) Their strained relationship creates an empty space in their married life. Jaya could never find an outlet to give vent to her feelings and solve her problems, not even with her mother. In such helpless condition, she criticizes her mother as, "It was all her fault, I had thought; she had prepared me for none of the duties of a woman's life." (83) She badly longs for motherly support yet she never approaches her mother. She believes in staying back at home and looking after children to be safer but comes to understanding that, safety is never unattainable. When Mohan cannot bear to extend this conflict of silence, he attacks Jaya with volley of questions that Jaya could not answer. She is accused of not being supportive to him. Jaya too blames Mohan for ending her writing career. After these allegations on to each other, Jaya goes into a state of despair and realizes the exit of Mohan. Mohan's departure gives her enough space to interrogate her inner self. In her introspection, she decides to put an end to the guerrilla warfare which she has waged with her husband for so long. She realizes that life comprises mostly of compromises rather than true affection. She finally comprehends that she too was responsible for her failure in understanding her husband and her children. She also admits that Mohan was not the sole reason for the end of her writing career. She confesses to Mukta and accepts her failure and feels herself inferior without Mohan in her life.

Jaya finally understands and accepts that she too is responsible for her own oppression. According to Vinay Kumar Pandey, "She realizes that she was being defeated: her voice was being hushed up by the male-dominated society. Towards the end of the novel Jaya emerges as a bold and mature woman who refuses to be merely a shadow that has been at the roof of all troubles in her life." (60) After a long struggle in her search for true identity she decides to break "that long silence" that she has maintained in her seventeen years of married life with Mohan. She sums up on a positive note that, "I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible. The child, hands in pockets, has been with me through the years. She is with me still." (191) Thus, silence reveals different kinds of feelings like protest, pain, fear, endurance and suffering besides being a harbinger of joy. Breaking of silence by Deshpande's protagonists makes their voice heard. Jaya decides to continue with her marriage and rejects all the traditional ideas in the course of her thinking. She begins to see the world differently. And therefore, she goes back into the marriage a changed person, knowing her life can never be the same again." (14) Thus, Shashi Deshpande in portraying Jaya's silence, suggests women to break their silence of protest to identify their true self.

ROOTS AND SHADOWS

'*Roots and Shadows*' explores the inner self of an artist named Indu- a representative of the 'New women' who are educated and who live in close proximity with society brushing aside all narrow social conventions. They have the freedom to talk about anything they like and are also free to think of their own. Though Indu is married to Jayant, she freely moves with Naren and uses words as "Rape", "kiss", "orgasm", "deflowered", etc.

Deshpande uses Indu to portray the inner struggle of a woman to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potentiality i.e. creative writing. Through the character of Indu, Deshpande presents the inner turmoil of an artist to express herself and to discover her real self through her inherent talent i.e. creative writing. Indu wants to part with

her monotonous life but her husband, an obstruction to her feminine urge for self-expression, believes that a single person like Indu cannot do anything against the whole system by wielding her pen. In the family, Indu was an incomplete being but with Jayant she feels a sense of completion and wholeness. "I had felt incomplete not as a woman, but as a person and in Jayant I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self". Thus Indu represents the traditional Indian woman who feels that completeness can be attained only through her husband. The male chauvinistic society not only suppresses the female voice but also brings dullness, silence and repulsion to their lives. Women such as Indu have to be content with "silence" that marriage and their upbringing had taught them. She is left with little choice except submit to her husband's whims and fancies. Her feminine instinct is curbed and suppressed. Despite all this, she is reluctant to admit failure and yanks on with her marital life, imprisons her true self and makes a greater adjustment for the benefit of the family. It is quite late when she realizes that she has been pursuing shadows, leaving her roots behind in her family and in Jayant. Naren is a mere shadow to her; so she decides to return to Jayant. She blames herself for the marital discord in their lives so she locks herself in a cage and throws away the keys, forgetting the roots and feeding on only dreams and shadows. She realizes that it is she who has failed in love not Jayant. Her categorical and contradictory feminine self finally finds its roots in the family with her husband. Shadows disappear from her vision and she is exposed to the clear light of day with the realization of her authentic female self. In the end, she realizes that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is right and the resolve to stick to it. That alone can bring harmony in life. So she decides to go back to Jayant with the hope that she would do what she thinks is correct and not be dishonest to her inner-self. So she takes a firm decision regarding her job and life.

"There were other things I had to tell him (Jayant). That I was resigning my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing, that I could not enrich myself with Akka's money. That I would on the other hand, pay for Mini's wedding." (205).

Though Indu dislikes the idea of a woman as a rearing machine and a caretaker of the child, she yields herself before patriarchy. Indu knows that she has to be an ideal mother, if she at all has a 'maternal instinct' and must not give it up in the name of freedom. In order to assert herself and realizing that since motherhood is a patriarchal institution, each woman should deny herself, though for the short time, the existence of mothering, so that the patriarchal institution is destroyed forever. This is Indu's feminist vision. The meek and compliant Indu finally emerges as a challenging, bold, daring, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus resisting the male authority and the irony of a woman's veiled existence. She comes out of her emotional struggle and tries to lead a meaningful life with Jayant. Her homecoming is ironical since the home she had discarded earlier becomes a safe haven, a place of solace and consolation. The novel thus affirms Indu's individuality and also the principle of life, which is endless. It is in this realization, reconciliation and thoughtfulness that she goes back to Jayant. Thus Deshpande beautifully presents the compromise attitude by investigating the inner psyche of a typical modern middle class woman in India.

THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

'*The Dark Holds No Terror*' is about the distressing tale of an educated economically independent, middle class wife Sarita (often referred to as Saru). Saru grows up in a traditional Brahmin family where parental favours and care go to the male child. Saru is blinded by her love and romantic fervor for Manu. To her, he is still Manu of the college days, the smart young man who was a budding poet and the secretary of literary magazine. The initial days of marriage do not disturb Saru's happiness though Manu has a meager

income and the corridors smell of urine. Saru thinks that her marriage to Manu fulfils all her desires. Unhappiness begins to crop into their marriage when Saru climbs up the ladder of success as a lady doctor. Saru's career and her hectic Schedule in the hospital make her neglect her home and children and develop inferiority complex in Manu.

Thus, Saru's being a victim of gender discrimination as a child and her loveless relationship with her parents and later on unbearably strained relations with her husband lead her to an excruciating quest for identity. After 15 years, she returns to her parents' home for seeking solace and it is here that she gets a chance to rethink her relationships with her dead brother, Dhruva, her husband, her parents and her children. She takes a practical view of the circumstances and neither does she become completely liberated like her western counterpart nor becomes an orthodox Indian one. She does not resort to separation from her spouse-Manu but tactfully asserts her identity within the boundaries of marriage. She realizes that running away from Manu cannot be the right decision. Thus Saru's is a voyage from diffidence to confidence; from negation to assertion; from self-alienation to self-identification; and this is what makes her return to her husband. She says:

And oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can. (202)

This is how she expresses her willingness to face reality instead of running from it and asserts her individuality. Saru is thus an epitome of the struggle of the modern Indian working woman and her struggle for the liberation of the self.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the novels of Shashi Deshpande deal with a woman's impassioned quest for self- an examination into the female psyche that is mostly under conflict and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonists' place in it. Through her portrayal of the Indian middle class woman's existence in India, Deshpande not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values but also advocates a balance between tradition and modernity and making adjustments as a working philosophy for the present day woman. Deshpande suggests that to realize herself, the woman must be true to her own self. A woman must venture out of the familial framework in order to realize her potential as an individual and give expression to her inner space and self not rejecting her marriage or family in the process. Deshpande's novels promote that women must try to come out of their suppressed roles. In this context, Shashi Deshpande has been successful in creating strong women protagonists who despite so many conflicts in their lives, refuse to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies and confront life with great audacity and strength.

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