



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2017; 3(5): 287-289
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 01-03-2017
Accepted: 02-04-2017

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Empowerment through Education: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

*"Give me strength
To fight the toil of the day
To fight the kernel out of the hay
Give me light to discern
Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram..... (50)*

The sole motto of this trivial effort is to attract the attention of the readers towards the importance of education in the life of women in modern society. Shashi Deshpande is concerned about the problems of women of middle class society and *That Long Silence* is about freedom and the urge of every person to discover his or her true-self. A note about the question of women's rights during her time is also necessary for a clear understanding of this novel's theme. It is proper to say that in a large sense, *That Long Silence* is the ideal of human relationship based on mutual partnership, mutual responsibility, faith and confidence. It declares that a relationship like marriage is false if not based on love. Thus, the novel is about freedom and the urge of every woman to discover her true self. Educated women deserve more freedom & independence and its absence leads them to bitter confusion, tension and anxiety. Their psychology is still wedded to tradition. No doubt, they have started recognizing the need for change, but at the same time they continue to cling to the traditions. Education is an essential part of civilized life. The goal of education is to elevate the all-around development and especially the intellectual and professional standards. In addition, the elevation of moral standard is extremely necessary in the sphere of education to meet the stress, which arises due to material & technological advancement. It is observed that women are these days as powerful as men and they have the equal rights to take decision. Shashi Deshpande unfolds the problems of women in the patriarchal society in a very positive way. According to her, woman has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decisions, to be independent and to take charge of her destiny. Jaya of *That Long Silence* emerges as a confident individual who has full control of herself and refuses to be led by nose. With her new confidence, Jaya becomes dignified & independent spirit.

Keywords: Education, Advancement, Patriarchal, Human relationship, Mutual partnership, Mutual responsibility, Faith, Confidence, Freedom

Introduction

It has rightly been said, "Education or literature is the real source of joy, pleasure and delight because it is a thing of beauty of form, beauty of thought and beauty of emotions. It is intimately connected with life. It is sounder than sight. Education appeals principally to the ear and heart than eye. It educates our feelings and emotions. It is a real source of enjoyment and encouragement. With the help of literature, readers and scholars are able to develop their power of imagination. They feel aesthetic sense, too. It is the best means to develop the readers' aesthetic sense and provide pleasure. Literature is the soul of English literature. It is a thing of beauty of form, beauty of ideas, thoughts and emotions."

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most renowned Indian novelists writing in English. She is gifted with an inborn literary bent of mind which matured with her experiences in life. Some of her well-known novels include, *The Dark Holds No Terrors; Roots and Shadows; That Long Silence; The Binding Vine, A Matter of Time, Small Remedies.* *That Long Silence* (1988) was her fifth novel which was recognized with 'Sahitya Academy Award' in 1990. Her works primarily deal with the problems of women in the present social context. Deshpande's "quest for identity and freedom" has become dominant theme in literature. *That Long Silence* is one of the unique works of

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Shashi Deshpande which signifies the pathetic condition of Indian woman. It is a reflection of sufferings of an Indian woman in the dogmatic social milieu i.e., family. It also reflects how woman suffers deeply and end up life silently baring molestations of male. The sacrifice made by women is hardly noticed by the male dominated society. The novel illustrates the image of women in the middle-class family and the way she is sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

Most of the marital relationships in Deshpande's fiction are characterized by silence. Her protagonist practice silence to find an easy way out of all their troubles. Jaya in *That Long Silence* symbolizes the silence of the entire womankind. Jaya after her marriage with Mohan, decides to perform her role as "duty bound wife" confining herself to the prescribed norms of the society. At the time of their marriage, Mohan worked as Junior Engineer in the new steel plant at Lohanagar. Mohan always had a clear vision of his life where there is no place for poverty, shabbiness and ugliness. He determines to marry a well-educated and cultured girl, who can speak good English. Mohan who is money-centric and traditionalist, marries Jaya only for his societal betterment. On their wedding day Mohan renames his wife Jaya as "Suhashini" wanting her to be always, "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman." (p. 16)

Jaya is the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, who is an intelligent woman with graduation in English, who as a writer and a columnist had a bright career. Unfortunately, none of these attributes would provide her a respectable position in the eyes of her husband Mohan, who had socialization in a typical traditional environment. He perceived his wife at par with Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. His mother and sister Vimala were very much submissive to father. The decisions relating to familial and financial matters were taken by the male members of his family. So he wanted his wife to be submissive like his mother and sister.

In a male-dominated society, women are not independent. They are not able to take their decision. They are dependent on men – either on father, husband or son. They are hardly given freedom and independence. Slavery to man makes them suffer from dual roles of child bearing and domestic chores. They are unable to select their life partner. Marriage becomes their destiny as Jaya thinks; "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out of the rest of the world, and you're safe." For all outside appearances hers was a happy family, her husband was in a top position, they had children – one boy and one girl – and she was yet another wife and mother whose life centered around her family and her home – nothing more. (15-16)

Jaya was introduced to her neighbor Kamat, who motivated her to think and act independently about her writing by appreciating and admiring her. He inspires and cheers her to get serious, to be real and true to herself. This made her regain her self-confidence which had been lost. He further makes her to speak frankly about sex. What she could not speak with Mohan, was able to speak to Kamat. It makes her realize her 'self'. In this way, Kamat enables her to break 'long silence'. Jaya now resolves to assert her individuality by breaking '*that long silence*', putting down on paper that in her entire seventeen years of silence she had suppressed her desires.

Jaya had lost faith in her husband, she wanted to adjust with her present setup. She tells that changes do not come

immediately, it takes time. Kamat always motivated and encouraged Jaya to make her own identity. Human happiness consists in harmonizing the opposites of life. The husband-wife relationship needs to be built on the values of democracy and socialism. In other words, rebelliousness is not the solution to the problems of life. Shashi Deshpande writes, "It's not just that life is cruel, but that in the very process of our birth we submit to life's cruelty"

At the end of the novel Jaya's husband loses his confidence, his position as an engineer. In the urban and global society, her husband becomes the victim of corruption. During the 17 years of their marriage Mohan never asks her opinion on any matter but when an inquiry is set up against him, he holds Jaya's hand and asks her to support the family through her career as a writer. But Jaya remains silent without knowing what to say. This is a kind of protest against her long silence, which makes her strong at the end of the novel. Jaya, armed with her new knowledge, does not turn her back to her marriage. With a renewed vigour, she marches ahead and discovers that the solution to problem within relationship does not lie in walking away from them, but rather in rebuilding them in such a way as to give little space to problems.

The feminist writings of Indian literature probe into the pathetic situation of women in the male-dominated society in general and in the institution of family in particular. In order to establish social harmony, the harmony in the family needs to be established. There has to be an end to the discriminations on women based on the gender. Gender equity, justice and equality have a bearing on attaining gender development in order to have peace, harmony and love in the family relationships.

Summing up

To sum up, we can say that Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English. She always supports women and she also fights for their rights. Education is very essential for all women because it makes them bold and strong. It is true that these days women are free to go to college for education or they are given freedom to work but it is also true that there are still many guardians and husbands who are traditional minded and they even today do not like to send their female children to school or college for education. The present paper is an honest attempt to attract the attention of the readers of the traditional minded people towards the importance of education as well as the rights of women in the society.

Acknowledgements

I consider it my moral duty to pay regards and thanks to the authors, editors and publishers of all the books and papers which I have consulted during the preparation of this Research Paper.

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