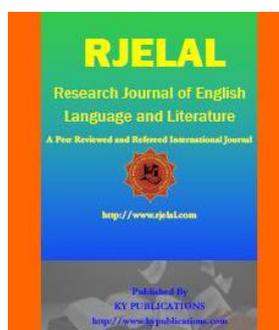




**TRANSITION FROM SELF SACRIFICE TO SELF ACTUALIZATION IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S
"THAT LONG SILENCE"**

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ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande is one among the most momentous novelists who have been portraying woman as the hub of concern in their writings. Her deep innate insight into women's concerns and dilemmas enables her drawing a pragmatic portrait of a contemporary Indian woman. The main protagonists in her writings are female characters who are in steady search for meaning and purpose of life. In many of her writings she offers a circumstantial struggle of a woman who refuses to get along with the current and denies to submit her self esteem. . Shashi Deshpande through her novels sketches a woman's transition from self-denial to self-assertion, from self-negation to self-affirmation and from self-sacrifice to self-realization. The feminine realization is perceived in all her novels. Shashi Deshpande presents us a glance into the lives of apparently content housewives who are on the other hand suppressed by their male counterparts. The current paper is an effort to draw attention to the shift of Indian woman's feminine characteristics from self surrender to self esteem. Shashi Deshpande's *That long silence* which won her the Sahitya academy award for 1990. It subsequently explores how Jaya discovers her personal life oppressed and wants to rebel against the conditions and gives us a remarkably accomplished representation of a woman trying to wipe out a 'long silence' from her life, triumphant at the end. In this novel Shashi Deshpande puts across the message that the women of modern India should learn how to conquer and come out of their darkness so as to assert themselves

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Article Info

Received on :10/03/2015

Revised on: 20/03/2015

Accepted on: 27/03/2015

Women novelists of India in English have been portraying woman as the hub of concern in their writings. Shashi Deshpande is one among such most momentous novelists. She portrays women's issues and concerns very profoundly in her novels. A woman's pursuit for self and redefining herself discovers reflection in her narratives and constitutes an important motif of the female roles in her fiction.

Her deep innate insight into women's concerns and dilemmas enables her drawing a pragmatic portrait of a contemporary Indian woman. She discovers and interprets the heart touching reactions and spiritual reactions of Indian women and their dilemma with sympathetic and proper understanding.

The main protagonists in her writings are female characters who are in steady search for

meaning and purpose of life. In many of her writings she offers a circumstantial struggle of a woman who refuses to get along with the current and denies to submit her self esteem. The woman rising out of such circumstances is a defeated personality undergoing a lot of mental agony and physical suffering. Such characters show sense of anxiety because of their painful experiences and as well due to the fall down of one value system and the lack of any everlasting values. Shashi Deshpande through her novels sketches a woman's transition from self-denial to self-assertion, from self-negation to self-affirmation and from self-sacrifice to self-realization. The feminine realization is perceived in all her novels. Shashi Deshpande presents us a glance into the lives of apparently content housewives who are on the other hand suppressed by their male counterparts.

The marriage system in India confirms the power and possession of man. This system leads women to submit, suffer, tolerate and ultimately manoeuvre towards silence. Marriage places a woman in web of relationships and when she undergoes through different threads of relationship, she notices herself unrecognized and subjugated each time. It just happens in respect of woman whereas conditions never change for a man. He continues to be head of the family and rules and dictates the fate of woman. This rule of patriarchy narrows the role of woman and makes her life miserable and is kept at the mercy of man. Simone de Beauvoir condemned marriage system in her own words "The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage..... Marriage is reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at or even indifferent to this institution. Thus we must continue this study by analysing marriage." In Indian society, girls have very little role in taking decisions effecting her life. Despite this, they adhere to traditional system of marriage. Jaya, the main protagonist in *That long silence*, is naturally not an exception in this regard. Despite her independent thoughts, she calmly accepts the domination of society which caused her to marry Mohan and have two children. After marriage, she assumed different roles that of mother, wife and woman.

The current paper is an effort to draw attention to the shift of Indian woman's feminine characteristics from self surrender to self esteem. Shashi Deshpande's "That long silence" which won her the Sahitya academy award for 1990. It subsequently explores how Jaya discovers her personal life oppressed and wants to rebel against the conditions and gives us a remarkably accomplished representation of a woman trying to wipe out a 'long silence' from her life, triumphant at the end.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* openly deals with feminist awareness. It is an expression of anger at the uneven treatment of any women. One of the chief concerns of the current literature is to bring to light the plight of women, the oppression, and their rising problem, physical, psychological, economical and fiscal exploitations in this male dominated world. She deliberately handles the sense of familiarity and sympathy with the reader. One of the prime and decisive concerns of feminism is to assert that a woman is a being. Female is not an accessory of man. She is independent being capable of bearing all pains. Shashi Deshpande definitely portrays the women roles that are capable of discovering themselves as individuals. In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande depicts the inside world of women characters who are in search of finding one selves. The women characters in novel strive towards their self-recognition.

In Shashi Deshpande's own words *Marriage invariably takes you to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self-abnegation. To love another and to retain you intact is that possible? To assert yourself and not be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate?* This novel undoubtedly shows the portrait of Indian womanhood in agony. Her character Jaya always assumes an arduous journey which drives her character from state of self surrender to one of self realization. Deshpande's main obsession with the topics and reception of female writings finds ideal exhibitions in *That Long Silence*. Shashi Deshpande herself states that *I don't like to call myself a feminist writer. I say I'm a feminist, but I don't write to propagate any ism.*

Deshpande describes two different shades of Indian women parallel in the novel – the lower class women occupied in small domestic chores to earn their basic living; and middle class women of some financial freedom. She further partitions middle class women into two classes: those who never challenge their marriage and surrender to insult, injuries and disgrace without any protest; and those who, deny to become the victims, raise voice against their domination. Jaya, the protagonist, denotes the second class of middle class women. In the beginning, she is not very different from other females of her class, but at the end, we see immense change in her personality. Deshpande brings out the parallels and dissimilarities among Jaya and other woman characters in the novel i.e among women of three generations (Jaya, her mother and her grandmother), among women of the three classes (Jaya, Nayana and Jeeja), among women characters of the same generation and class (Jaya, her neighbour, Mukta and her cousin, Kusum).

The main character Jaya discovers herself squeezed in between her love and self. Since the beginning she ignored her real self. This caused her to feel suppression and stifling. She is unhappy with Mohan, her husband. All that she craves for is completeness within her. As the character dictates her in the course of novel *I was born my father dies when I was fifteen, I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live*. In this novel, we find multifaceted Jaya like a contented mother, a wife helping her family with love, care and attention, supposed to be “soft, smiling, placid, motherly”. Mohan names her Suhasini when he marries her. Jaya is squeezed in between her two names, first Jaya and the second Suhasini . She constantly tried to discover whether she is Suhasini or Jaya. Women’s life is mainly defined through the relationship usually domestic and familial serving the needs of family members. *Self revelation is a cruel process... the real you never emerges...ten different mirrors show you ten different faces*.

Jaya represents modern young educated woman and is aware that nevertheless she is unable to become free from the smother hold of tradition. She is faced with the primary problem of discovering her real self from the role of devoted daughter, loyal

wife and dutiful and caring mother. Shashi Deshpande presents us a glimpse into the life histories of apparently content housewives who are nonetheless suppressed and harassed under the heavy weight of male dominance. The main protagonist Jaya is very much taken for granted by all of her family members. Her calmness is symbolic of many of the women in the world who are not able to express their selves as individuals.

Mohan is by profession an engineer who is money-orientated and always craving for money, status and comforts. Jaya is a brave woman having room for affection, love and care always. Jaya as we notice in the novel has been trained from the beginning to have faith and confidence in herself. She is a newspaper columnist and a creative aspiring writer with many aspirations not simply a wife and a mother. She writes stories and articles for magazines. Mohan is unhappy with her; he discourages her creativity by blaming her for publicizing their personal matters. He never ever tried to understand her. Despite they both stay together there has been no understanding between him and her nevertheless there is emptiness exists between them. Jaya longs for Kamat instead of Mohan. She enjoys his company and shares with him the ideas which she has not shared with Mohan. Kamat always supports her to write, but because of Mohan, Rati and Rahul she is scared to write and withdraw from writing. She disguises herself as ‘Seeta’ and writes down so as to expose the frivolities of the society with regard to women affairs and uselessness of personal relationships. She chooses this way to avoid any harsh circumstances of desolation and neglect. The most important thing of Deshpande’s effort is that as a writer she cracks silence of women and brings back Jaya from linguistic exile.

In the current novel, ‘That Long Silence’ Deshpande describes the life of the character, Jaya’s journey from a web of doubts and fears to self affirmation. Crisis in protagonist’s middle class family triggers off a series of events which force her to analyse her present life in retrospection. Her continuous fear of making her husband unhappy and buying problems from the society compels her to giving up writing and discourages her from

pursuing her friendship with a man who is neither her husband nor brother nor father.

At the end she decides to venture in pursuit of her identity by breaking the silence. She leaves her home to enter into the open world and shows her talent with her writings. She decides to put down on paper how she had been suppressed and harassed in her seventeen years. She brings all fragments of her life together and joins them as one. She discovers at last that everybody has to struggle for his or her own battle. She thus ends the darkness that was there in her life and learns to express her predicament. Jaya's predicament represents the predicament in large of this globalised and free world where the concept of western education, industrialization and economic development has completely uprooted the roots of very old Indian culture.

This novel is finished with one positive note of hoping new dawn. Thus, Shashi Deshpande puts across the message that the women of modern India should learn how to conquer and come out of their darkness so as to assert themselves. It confers the meaning to discover self-realisation to create space for oneself and to become one's own.

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