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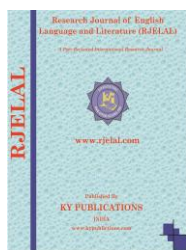
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THE INNER WORLD OF INDIAN MIDDLE CLASS EDUCATED WOMEN: A STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the issues of identity crisis ingrained in Indian middle class educated women in the novel 'That Long Silence' by Shashi Deshpande. She is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in English. She deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels portraying in a realistic manner. 'That Long Silence' is the story of a female protagonist Jaya who is in search of herself, where she spends her seventeen years of life living for her husband and children. The novel conveys the confusion, regret and defeat of middle class educated Indian women. It tells about the woman who is trapped in the institution of marriage. Jaya's character in the novel is like a middle class educated woman, born and brought up in a family with broadminded views. After marriage she becomes the part of a typical Indian traditional middle class family where the wife is known by her husband. Her identity is that she is Mohan's wife and mother of Rahul and Rati. The novel revolves around the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women in the middle class society. This paper specially focuses on the issue of the inactive nature of women and their difficulty in expressing their emotion and patience and how women have been suffering in silence in the male supremacy society because of tradition. Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists redefine the Sati- Savitri image. She tries to re-evaluate the present Indian value system and recommends the importance of equality in man-woman relationship.

Keywords: Identity crisis, self identity, inner world of the Indian women and male supremacy

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is a remarkable Indian woman writer writing in English, Born in Dharwad, Karnataka. *That Long Silence* is the novel in which Shashi Deshpande has tried to portray the circumstance and the depressed plight of women in a traditional society. Through the character of Jaya, the novelist has tried to define the women's

attempts to erase the silence and to give voice to their inner conflicts and traumas, with which the women are intended to live since ages.

The submissiveness on behalf of the women and their succumbing to the traditional roles of wife, mother, etc. were equally responsible for their suppression. The protagonist Jaya in *That Long Silence* is an educated woman who is a writer but

she was not permitted to write by the egoistic husband, where at this point the male chauvinism and domination is revealed by the author. The Indian tradition ply a woman must respect her husband, he is supreme to her. She must make the marital home pleasant, cook the meals, wash the dishes, and take care of the children. She must never enquire about money and she must consent to her husband's every demand. But what happens when the old customs lose their power and the woman no longer believes her life should be dogged in this narrow fashion? This prospect is the underlying theme of Sashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*, in which her lead protagonist, Jaya, undergoes deep changes against the milieu of India.

Sashi Deshpande primarily focuses on the man-woman relationship of family and the community. She captures the problems and overpowering surroundings of her heroines and their struggle to discover their self but does not support separation from the partner. The quest for identity of a woman after marriage is deep rooted in the minds of all Indian women, its major cause is the tradition that been followed for ages. Jaya the protagonist in *That Long Silence* represents the urban, middle-class women exposed to liberal western ideas. But she is unable to free herself entirely from the control of male chauvinist ideas. Jaya though being an educated and well cultured woman in the beginning leads a calm and happy life, but later hardships of life severely joggle her out of her happiness into depressing state. Jaya, as wife of Mohan struggles to put herself into the traditional mould. The complete blend of an active and creative woman like Jaya is a great loss to the society as her inborn talents are just limited to the kitchen and household responsibilities. She becomes a smiling, passive, motherly women thinking that the husband is like a sheltering tree as she cannot afford to live without him.

The novel represents the inner world of Jaya's perception reflecting her unhappiness of personal life and the various dimensions of problems of women in the traditional society of India. Mohan, the husband of Jaya is a materialist man. There is no understanding between the wife and the husband, though they were living together

but there had been only blankness between them. This draws Jaya towards Kamath her neighbor and friend, who was not good looking as Mohan but he is a young man who understands the psychology of a woman. Jaya feels comfortable in his company as he always appreciated her creative power. Jaya lives with her husband Mohan under patriarchal condition. As her father brought up Jaya as an "individual" who has the rights as well as the other gender in the society. But it is the same society that hesitates to accept the woman as an individual. As time goes by Jaya's dutiful behavior to Mohan and his family becomes routine. She was forced to take stock of her life when her husband is suspected of fraud, she moved into a small flat gifted to her by her uncle in a poorer locality of Bombay, giving up their luxurious house with her children.

The marital life of Jaya and Mohan grows unsteady and depressed, due to lack of communication. In the unjustified blame by Mohan that he has taken bribe for her and her children, for the first time Jaya feels a strange emotion of anger. His blame makes her hilarious and she bursts into a loud laughter. This hurts Mohan and he leaves the home without a word. To add to her depression Jaya receives a message that her son Rahul who was on a holiday trip with his family friends was lost. She felt alone, no one who can console her. Thinking over on the past, Jaya sees how her marriage has abridged her to a mere automation. She knows in her heart that her marriage is almost over. She after all these happenings being alone in the apartment realizes how she washed away the most valuable time of her life in arranging and re-arranging things, dusting, polishing, washing, ironing, and changing the sheets.

Jaya, as a girl, was brought up by her father as a person who is confidence enough. He named her Jaya which stands for Victory and has encouraged her to be flexible and brave. However, his untimely death shatters her dreams and makes her to face the reality that she is after all like any other middle class girl intended to be a wife and a mother. She had spent her life immersed in such worthlessness as what she bought, how much she paid for it, the dates the children's schools had begun, the servant's absence, the advance they had taken, etc.

The novelist tries to establish that it is not only the traditional concept of marriage is responsible for the women's condition in the Indian society. The accountability also lies in the victim to refuse, to raise a voice from being silence and to attain the goal. The myths to be followed after marriage are not verdict; it can be on their ease too. The novel *That Long Silence* is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian wife. Deshpande's success lies in her depiction of real life experience in her work. She realistically exemplifies the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for the self, that is the conflict between the narrator's split self; the writer and the housewife.

Deshpande highlights the inferior position and humiliation of Indian women in a male-dominated society. On the perspective of the author, the emotions, likes and dislikes of women are not noticed by the men. The husband never realizes where he lacks and the suffering behind his wife's fated roles. Jaya ponders throughout the novel for her position, her life that she is living for someone else and not for her. She searches her identity as an individual and where her emotions are getting passive. *That Long Silence* realistically gives a picture of the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for self identity. It is an expression of the silence of the modern housewife who equally possesses knowledge, educated, and creative but get trapped in the domination of the husbands and the tradition of marriage. They are put on a routine work of looking after their family, where they forget their self and advised by the elders of the family as such they should respect and obey their husband. On this context the woman loses her individuality and she is just a reflection of the family. The novelist is thus able to impart a multifaceted identity to Jaya, and the philanthropic aspects of womanhood. *That Long Silence* is a gentle and essentially sensitive treatment of the problem of marital relationship of the Indian women.

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