

That Long Silence: A Portrayal of the Female Hope and Urge to Move on with Marital Life**Dr. Tukaram S. Sawant***Associate Professor of English, Tuljaram Chaturchand Arts, Science & Commerce College, Baramati, (M.S.) India***Abstract**

Shashi Deshpande, one of the most popular Indian woman novelists in English, deals with the theme of a man-woman relationship and a natural human urge for relatedness and companionship in her novels. Human relationship in general and man-woman relationship in particular has been one of the major concerns for Deshpande since she started writing. Her novels, rooted in Indian context, move around the female world which is ruled over by the males, in one way or the other, in Indian patriarchy. A sense of relatedness, attachment and companionship and normal human relationships are vital and unique in the sense that they decide and determine the intellectual, psychological and emotional development of a human being, a male or a female. Healthy human relationships deeply rooted in love, trust, adjustment, compromise, co-operation and co-ordination within a family play a nucleus role in shaping, directing and developing the life of the female, in particular. An individual, a male as well a female, being a social creature, can not develop on its own. Every individual is a creation of social relationships. He feels secure and comfortable as a member of a family. A family too can not exist and grow without its members. Growth and development of an individual and a family or a society depends on each other. They are complementary to each other. It is true that an individual is made by circumstances, by milieu, and by the people around while a family or a society grows and develops as a result of joint efforts of its members. The prime aim of the present article is to highlight the woman's hope and desire for attachment and companionship reflected in Deshpande's novel, 'That Long Silence'.

Key Words: That Long Silence, Shashi Deshpande, man-woman relationship, patriarchy

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande, a winner of *Sahitya Academy Award*, is one of the most prolific Indian women writers in English with ten novels, six collections of short stories, four books written for children, and a screen play to her credit. She is known for her realistic portrayal of a middle-class, urban and educated Indian woman with her suppressed dreams and aspirations, her plight and predicament, and with her trials and tribulations. Her novels, usually, have a

woman as a protagonist who has a strong desire to grow, develop and evolve as a free and independent human being. Almost all her novels deal with a crisis in the life of her women protagonists in their relations with the people around them. She is primarily interested in projecting a very intricate web of human relationships, a man-woman relationship, in particular. Though the woman is at the centre of every human relationship, she has been denied a separate and independent existence apart from that of her male-counter-part. She has always been

treated as a parasite depending on others. She has always been kept in a state of dependence. Simone de Beauvoir writes: "History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers". (Beauvoir 171). Man always tries to have complete hold and control on her; he always tries to mould her to his desire. He always aspires the position of complete power and control while she submits passively to his will and desire, and accepts his authority and superiority silently and ungrudgingly. He pursues a dream of power, authority, control and identification while she a dream of total surrender and submission.

Simone de Beauvoir writes: "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being". (Beauvoir 16). The woman is simply what men see, define and decree. She is just what men want her to be. She finds herself living in the world of males where men compel them to accept a secondary and inferior role. According to Eva Figes, the male-ego and dominance is the key note in the analysis of a man-woman relationship. Unfortunately, her identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife, and a mother; and she does not possess an identity of her own. How can we expect a healthy and balanced relationship between a man and a woman under such conditions? A man-woman relationship, a husband-wife relationship in particular, is far from a normal relationship from time immemorial. To establish and maintain a healthy relationship between man and woman, we need to come out of these ruts; we need to discard the age-old notions of superiority,

inferiority and equality and start a fresh. Deshpande is basically concerned with strengthening a man-woman relationship. G. S. Amur remarks: "Women's struggle, in the context of contemporary society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and most important of all, as human being, is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories". (Amur 13).

Deshpande raises a voice of protest against the patriarchal society where the woman has been denied identity, freedom, status and dignity. She considers the woman equal to man, and as competent as man. Ramesh Kumar Gupta says: "Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with women's quest for self, an exploration into the human psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and protagonist's place in it". (Gupta42). Her female protagonists strive to be liberal and independent in thinking, taking action, working and creating on the same terms as men. They strive to move in the direction of self-awareness, self-realization, and self-investigation remaining well within the limits of her society. Caught between the need for familial security and individual freedom, they opt for adjustment and compromise; they prefer attachment to detachment. They marry with a simple hope and desire that marriage can provide them material and emotional security much needed by them, and can free them from loneliness. However, in most cases, their hope and desire, unfortunately, remains unfulfilled. The present article intends to highlight the woman's desire and struggle for relatedness, companionship and

attachment, and her willing preference to face the future course of life hopefully or optimistically, reflected in Deshpande's novel, *That Long Silence*.

Jaya, the protagonist of the novel, strongly, believes: "People don't change . . . It's true. We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even after 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". (Pg.193). She, who has been trained to be silent right from her childhood, is a typical Indian woman who is caught between her dreams and aspirations, on one side, and constraints and restrictions imposed on her by Indian patriarchy, on the other. She is a member of a tradition-bound and male-centric society which does not to accept the woman as a free and independent individual. After her marriage with Mohan, she willingly steps into a new role of a typical middle-class wife. She joins her husband's family as Suhasini, the name her husband gives her after their marriage. She becomes his 'half'; she gives him her person and virginity, a home and two children, Rahul and Riti. She proves Simone de Beauvoir, who said: "A man is socially an independent and complete individual . . . a girl seems absolutely passive . . . In marrying . . . she takes his name; she belongs to his religion, his class; she joins his family, she becomes his 'half' . . . she gives him her person, virginity and a rigorous fidelity being required . . . No doubt marriage can afford certain material and sexual conveniences: it frees the individual from loneliness, it establishes him security in space and time

by giving him a home and children; it is the definite fulfillment of his existence", (Beauvoir 444 -445), right in every respect.

She accepts Mohan as a sheltering tree. She struggles to nurture and to keep that tree ever-green and alive. She moulds herself to the dreams and desires, needs and requirements, beliefs and values of her husband. She dreams to become an ideal wife and mother by becoming a dutiful wife, and a loving and caring mother. She becomes "Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travail". (Pg.11). She follows her husband blindly, obediently and ungrudgingly. She feels proud when she compares herself with Gandhari from the epic, *The Mahabharata*: "If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything. (Pg.61). She shapes herself resolutely to her husband's dreams and aspirations. She lives for her husband, children and home, and not for herself.

An Indian woman represented by Suhasini has been psychologically and emotionally shaped and moulded in such a way that, though she suffers a lot on account of the male-ego and dominance, she willingly offers her husband everything she has and everything she can. She considers herself incomplete without her husband. Simone de Beauvoir rightly says: "Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees . . . she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is

sex – absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential”. (Beauvoir 25). Man always wants the woman to be the object and means of sexual enjoyment. Jaya accepts her husband’s authority willingly and admits: “No, I have to be honest with myself. It was not he who had relinquished his authority; it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him. But I have to be fair to myself as well”. (Pg.9). She has full trust in her husband and his competence. She believes: “Mohan has always had very clear ideas about himself. He was a dutiful son; he is a dutiful father, husband, brother. It had never mattered much to me until he said, ‘It was for you and the children that I did this. I wanted you to have a good life. I wanted the children to have all those things I never had”. (Pg.9).

She decides to be true to her role of a typical middle-class wife looking after her home, husband, and children. She feels happy, safe and comfortable as Mohan’s wife and Rahul and Riti’s mother. She believes that it is better for her to stay at home, look after her husband and children, and to keep herself away from the rest of the world. She consoles herself and says: “Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into. I had mine - as Mohan’s wife, as Rahul’s and Riti’s mother . . . And so I had crawled back into my hole. I had felt safe there, comfortable, unassailable. And so I had stopped writing”. (Pg.148). She obediently follows Vanitamami’s advice: “Remember, Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree . . . Without the tree, you’re dangerously unprotected and

vulnerable . . . This followed logically. And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies”. (Pg.32). this advice given to a future wife becomes a foundation of Jaya’s marital life. Believing that the happiness of her husband, children and family depends only on her, she sacrifices her ‘self’, gives up her writing, and makes silence, endurance, tolerance and sacrifice, an inseparable part of her life.

However, as the time progresses, Jaya’s marital life becomes a routine. She herself admits the truth that her marital life has been monotonous and intolerable. She begins to believe that she and her husband make “a pair of bullocks yoked together . . . a clever phrase, but can it substitute to reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years, a couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons, a man and a woman”. (Pg. 8). She is disillusioned with her marriage and life. She is frustrated by the boredom of unchanging pattern, the unending monotony of her marital life. She considers her marriage a kind of a catastrophe, a disaster. She experiences a conflict between her role as a wife and that of a writer. It is difficult for her to give justice to both the roles. In her attempt to relate her individual self with her creative self, she is compelled into self-exploration which makes her aware of her contribution and responsibility in her husband’s crime of corruption. She strives to maintain a balance between Mohan’s making marriage a trap for her and her own willingness to fit in the

archetypal role model of a happy wife and a mother. She is compelled to reject her creative self because of its incompatibility with her role of a wife. She, in a frustrated state of mind, feels that she is unsuccessful as a wife, a mother and a writer. She carries a sense of failure as a writer owing to her inability and incapability to coordinate between her role as a creative writer and that of a wife and a mother.

Their marital relationship gets affected due to the probability of her husband's joblessness, prosecution and disgrace brought to him by the charge of corruption. Mohan and Jaya begin to lose the props of their lives. After having lost his job, her husband feels hurt and insulted. He seems to be no one at all; certainly not that man, Jaya's husband, around whose needs and desires her own life revolves. They begin to move away from each other. She cries in despair: "There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing for me to do, nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy. The woman who had shopped and cooked, cleaned, organized and cared for her home and her family with such passion . . . where had she gone? We seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies, and after we had dealt with them we faced blankness. The nothingness of what had seemed a busy and full life was frightening". (Pgs.24-25). She feels unsafe and insecure. She considers herself a poor idiotic woman who believes: "I know better now. I know that safety is always unattainable. You are never safe". (Pg.17).

What she needs is love, safety, security, emotional support and shelter from her husband, but in vain. They lose their faith in

each other; they accuse each other. Being submissive, she cannot defend herself against the charges made against her by Mohan. Mohan accuses her of not caring about him, her children, of isolating herself from him and his concerns, and of despising him for his failure. Jaya is terribly shocked and bewildered by these charges. She is full of a sense of angry confusion, guilt and resentment. She kills Suhasini in her when she hears Mohan accusing her: "I've always put you and the children first, I've been patient with all your whims, I've grudged you nothing. But the truth is that you despise me because I've failed. As long as I had my job and position, it was all right; as long as I could give you all the comforts, it was all right. But now, because I'm likely to lose it all . . . Do you think I haven't seen how changed you are since we came here, since I told you about my situation?" (Deshpande 121-122). She cannot defend this ugly accusation. She just loses her temper. She tries to control her anger and her hysterical laughter; but she fails. Laughter bursts out of her. When she recovers herself, she finds herself alone in the room. She feels herself gasping, almost drowning in the darkness. She experiences unbearable mental pain, agony, loneliness, uneasiness, consternation, anxiety, dismay and confusion after Mohan's departure.

Jaya feels that her marriage is almost over. Mohan does not return for days. She receives no news from him. She eagerly waits for his return. She goes to her Churchgate apartment with the hope to see him there, but she is disappointed. She is mentally disturbed. She thinks and thinks to herself. She thinks of her childhood, of her

life before and after marriage, of her children, of everything. Now she is afraid of being alone without her husband. She thinks that she is incomplete, almost nothing without her husband. She just hopes to live with her husband and children, safe, secure, comfortable and enclosed in her family, her mini world. She wants to shut out the darkness which had invaded her marital life. Her mind becomes a battlefield of fears, doubts and confused thoughts. She is awake the whole night waiting for her husband. She is eagerly waiting to listen to the footsteps, to the doorbell to ring. But nothing happens, the night passes in silence.

In the morning, she goes to the balcony and stands there staring at the road, looking into nothingness. For one crazy moment, she dreams: "Mohan and the children were coming towards me, running steadily, all three abreast. When they came closer, I saw they were a father and two daughters, running effortlessly and in unison, all three with healthy trim bodies, relaxed faces. Then they came even closer and I saw that one of the girls was running reluctantly; she stopped, panting, a hand to her side, her face agonized - the father said something angry while the other girl waited, a look of resignation on her face, Then the laggard resumed running and I watched them until they moved round the corner, out of sight". (Deshpande 182). She considers herself a patient suffering from the disease of loneliness. She has a strange feeling that nothing is left in her life. She is wondered by Mukta's peace of mind, her courage, toughness and readiness to face her life with the shadow of her dead husband behind her. Though, it is difficult for her to relate to the

world without her husband, she decides to follow tough and strong Mukta. Besides, a picture of a girl child from a magic peepshow, wearing a dress with pockets, thrusting her hands in them, feeling heady with the excitement of finding unexpected resources within herself, all of a sudden, gives her a new hope and strength to start her life afresh.

She remembers Sanskrit words from the '*Bhagwadgita*', the final words of Krishna's long sermon to Arjuna: '*Yathecchasi tatha kuru*', the words that mean, 'Do as you desire'. She interprets these words in her own way. For her, the words mean: "I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire". (Deshpande192). She, finally, realizes that she has to make her own choice. She sees a new ray of hope which makes her strong and confident to live her life with courage and determination. She is confident when she says: "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 . . . Two bullocks yoked together - that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It's wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I've always thought - there's only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices". (Deshpande 191-192). She hopes that Mohan will be back and she will

go back to a being as she was. She decides to take one more chance and to start a life anew with Mohan when he returns. She decides to speak out and to listen, to erase the long silence between them. She, finally,

comes to the realization that life needs to be made possible. She, armed with new hope, outlook, vigour and enthusiasm, decides to face her marriage.

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