



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 5, Issue 7, July 2022



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.54



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Voicing the Voiceless: the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

Dr. Suresh P. Agale

Dept. of English, Shri Shivaji Vidya Prasarak Sanstha's Bhausaheb N.S.Patil Arts &M.F.M.A. Commerce College,
Dhule, Maharashtra, India

ABSTRACT; Shashi Deshpande (born 1938) is an Indian novelist. She is a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Padma Shri Award in 1990 and 2009 respectively. She was born in Dharwad, Karnataka, the second daughter of the Kannada dramatist and writer Adya Rangacharya and Sharada Adya.^{[1][2]} She was educated in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Bangalore. Deshpande has degrees in Economics and Law. In Mumbai, she studied journalism at the Vidya Bhavan and worked for a few months as a journalist for the magazine 'Onlooker'.^[3]

She published her first collection of short stories in 1978, and her first novel, 'The Dark Holds No Terror', in 1980. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel That Long Silence in 1990 and the Padma Shri award in 2009.^[4] Her novel Shadow Play was shortlisted for The Hindu Literary Prize in 2014.^[5]

Deshpande has written four children's books, a number of short stories, thirteen novels, and an essay collection entitled Writing from the Margin and Other Essays.

On 9 October 2015, she resigned from her position in the Sahitya Akademi's general council and returned her Sahitya Akademi award. In doing so, she joined a broader protest by other writers against the Akademi's perceived inaction and silence on the murder of M. M. Kalburgi.^[6]

On 6 December 2018, during her inaugural address of the ninth edition of the Goa Arts and Literature Festival (GALF), Deshpande urged Indians to think about the consequences of wanting a Hindu nation, and reminded those present of the violence and carnage that had been caused by the India-Pakistan partition.^[7]

KEYWORDS-Shashi, Deshpande, Novels, Voicing, Journalist, Essays, Awards

I. INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence has dealt with the state of the modern Indian women who well know how to keep balance between their life and career. The novelist has depicted the women struggle against all odds without sacrificing their values. In post- colonial New English literature Shashi Deshpande has explored the women struggle to carve their own identity. Being a keen observer she has so dexterously dealt with the burning issues regarding women's position in the family and society in her novel "That Long Silence" and this presented novel brought 'Sahitya Akademi' Award in 1990. The soul female character of the novel is Jaya, who decides to break her silence after the seventeen years to set her own identity. She, more than any other woman novelist, is committed and consistent in presenting realistic view of the educated Indian women of the middle class who are bound to live their lives devoid of all embellishments due to their subjugation to men. Definitely the influx of Western education and culture led them to the speculation about their position. They are badly entangled between tradition and modernity. Despite being capable to uplift their status they are considered inferior and subservient to men. It is seen that the suffering is inevitable fate of the woman. Our family and society impose massive burden of the responsibility upon their shoulders without caring their desires, wills, and aspirations. Shashi Deshpande never intends to go against men but in the depiction of reality. She is also called an ardent feminist. s and others female writers threw adequate light on the role of women in the family and society. More attention is given to the emotional and intellectual conflicts that women encounter in their search for identity. This is highlighted in the various ways by the novelists. Shashi Deshpande depicts women with no voice through her character Jaya in That Long Silence having ambition to be heard but at the end of the novel she overcomes her silence. She holds the solution of her problem developing the positive attitude towards the life.

Deshpande refers to the myths, epics, puranas as well as other holy books in which women, even though innocent, have been presented as the embodiments of pativatra--- obeying male persons and submitting to their wishes. As long as Saru is a student, her husband, Manu is the bread earner. They had peace at home despite its different kind of obstacles. But the problem begins at that moment when Saru is recognized as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu



feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. Saru emerges as a successful and reputed doctor and almost every morning there is a knock at the door and her visitors demand medical attention. As new in the profession, she feels thrill in the profession, but Manu's behavior begins to change.[1,2] He feels totally ignored as Saru gets all the attention Manu's earning now makes her feel that it barely covers her needs. Her profession keeps her away from Manu for longer hours and she reaches later at night. His male ego feels inferior and cool, calm husband becomes treacherous rapist at night and tries to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults upon Saru. She scorns the world of 'love' and refuse to believe that such a thing can never exist between man and woman. Saru changes her attitude towards Manu as well as from her marital life. The world around her life becomes insignificant and Manu's position and place also becomes relatively unimportant. She becomes so unhappy over the situation she desperately takes the decision to sacrifice her lucrative profession. The idea of men going to work, and women staying at home to work, clean, scrap and sweep staying at home to work, clean, scrap and sweep appealed as she finds a kind of harmony in these asks performed by women who stay at home. This kind of contentment as Saru discovers in her new routine life makes her feel that she has a totally new life and now as Saru discovers herself as a changed person. Neighborhood women visit her to talk about their ailments. Although Saru's social and financial status grows, there's no peace for her at her home.[3,4] Her feelings on beings economically, independent individual are worse. In fact, her economic independence though asserted by feminists, brings to fulfillment to her. Another extra marital relationship of Saru is with Padmakar, often called as Padma. He was her classmate in medical college, whom she meets years later, but after a few incidents, she dissuades him from doing so as she wants to bring an end to their relationship. This relationship is neither soothing nor comforting to her.

II.DISCUSSION

Silence speaks louder than words. Amidst the clamour of voices and clatter of self-expression, sometimes silence and mute acceptance speak a lot and compels the reader to read between the lines as well as beyond the lines. Silencing a voice gives rise to inquisitiveness regarding the expression or matter that was so unexpected or dangerous that needed to be restricted. But silence has the fullness of speech."The fullness of silence would have exploded if it had not been able to in speech"(Max Picard 24) So silence has been adopted as a weapon by so many writers to vociferate the voiceless, the ugly, harrowing and deep distressing agony. Shashi Deshpande, a distinguished Indian woman writer, in her novels and stories makes her women protagonists speak louder by keeping them mum. They very effectively give voice to the suppressed feelings of women. In this paper, I have taken into study three of her stories: 'A liberated Women', 'The Stone Woman' and 'Why a Robin'. The three stories present three perspectives of women. Firstly, a woman who is highly educated and liberal yet bullied by her less educated husband because she hurts his ego. Secondly, a woman who does not accept the narcissistic existence of women as it is nothing but a matter to gratify the animal desires of male gaze. Thirdly, a woman who is less educated and sophisticated and finds herself out of place and time because of her being naive and less educated.

So silence has been adopted as a weapon by so many writers to vociferate the voiceless, the ugly, harrowing and deep distressing agony. Shashi Deshpande, a distinguished Indian woman writer, in her novels and stories makes her women protagonists speak louder by keeping them mum. They very effectively give voice to the suppressed feelings of women. Ardhanarishwar form of Lord Shiva is enough to assert the indispensability of women in nature, yet they have always been othered by means of a long cultural conspiracy where they have been subdued by imposing upon them several stereotyped roles and even by elevating them to the height of Goddess calling them "Nari tu Shakti hai" but the real picture is the lines of Mahadevi Verma "Nari Teri Yhi kahani, Aanchal mein hai dudh aankhon mein pani." This pathetic condition has been vociferated by so many women writers. In the patriarchal set up of society, where family is very important and women's status is strongly related to family relations, she has to prove herself at every step, to every relation and if she is working her responsibility is doubled. She has to be perfect both at home and at work place keeping silent.[5,6] Silence becomes synonym to women which is sometimes broken by the rebellious tone of Kamla Das when she says, "Why not let me speak in/any language I like? The language I speak/becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness/All mine, mine alone" ("An Introduction") and by Mamta Kalia who wants to break through all the golden shackles of patriarchy, and says "No, I am no pelican to my sons, nor a dove to my love." (TTOP) She doesn't want to play the sacrificial role. She is not a pelican who will feed her off springs on her blood and be happy to be, "an antibiotic against all infections" In Shashi Deshpande, the silence has been articulated quite vociferously by peeping into the psyche of her women protagonists of her stories and novels. Born in 1938 in Dharwad, Shashi Deshpande is the younger daughter of the Sanskrit scholar novelist actor and dramatist Jagirdar and his wife Sharda Arya. She belongs to an upper middle class family. Her father thought in Sanskrit, wrote in Kannada but sent his daughter to English medium school. She read Jane Austen, Dickens, The Bronte Sisters, George Eliot and Hardy but was also fond of Kalidas. She studied economics and political science and took a second degree in law in Bangalore and started working as a lawyer.



Later on she had the degree of journalism as well. After marriage she settled down in Bombay and started living as a homemaker. Writing did not come to Deshpande as a conscious decision but was a result of isolation and loneliness. So she speaks off physical isolation as well as emotional in her stories. She employs a stream of consciousness technique. The narrative goes back and forth in time so that the narrator can give deep insight into the events. Silence has been articulated quite vociferously in her stories. Silent and struggling women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande have broken the long silence of women. The web of her texts are woven round the day to day life of women deeply impregnated by religious social and cultural traditions and general relations determined by male power structures. In this paper, I have taken into study three of her stories: 'A liberated Women', 'The Stone Woman' and 'Why a Robin'. The three stories present three perspectives of women. Firstly, a woman who is highly educated and liberal yet bullied by her less educated husband because she hurts his ego. Secondly, a woman who does not accept the narcissistic existence of women as it is nothing but a matter to gratify the animal desires of male gaze. Thirdly, a woman who is less educated and sophisticated and finds herself out of place and time because of her being naive and less educated. Silent and struggling women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande have broken the long silence of women. The web of her texts are woven round the day to day life of women deeply impregnated by religious social and cultural traditions and general relations determined by male power structures. In this article I have taken into study three of her stories: 'A liberated Women', 'The Stone Woman' and 'Why a Robin'. The three stories present three perspectives of women. Firstly, a woman who is highly educated and liberal yet bullied by her less educated husband because she hurts his ego. Secondly, a woman who does not accept the narcissistic existence of women as it is nothing but a matter to gratify the animal desires of male gaze. Thirdly, a woman who is less educated and sophisticated and finds herself isolated because of her innocence and less education. She is in a constant search for sound relations. In all these three stories women are the ultimate sufferer whether educated or uneducated, sophisticated or boorish. They are in constant search for identity and room for themselves. In doing so, sometimes they become rebellious and outspoken while at others silent. Women protagonists in these three stories turn silent and leave the readers to ponder over the crucial issues. In 'A liberated Women' the protagonist liberates herself typically but she is like a rat in a trap. The title, quite paradoxically, is highly suggestive of the liberated women, a talented women doctor whose 'romantic run away marriage' turns out to be nightmarish, as she becomes a prey to the fragility of male ego. A professionally qualified, successful and financially independent, viewed by the world as 'the essence of modernity' a 'liberated women' finds herself trapped and suffocated in an unhappy marriage with a husband who is a sexual sadist. She has to suffer because she is more successful and she has to undergo all torments for the sake of her marriage and children. Her suppressed feelings burst out when she meets the narrator after twelve year: "You tell me what to say about a marriage where love making has become an exercise of sadism." The romantic husband becomes morose because of his wife's superior economic and social status and his male ego is bitterly hurt when a girl comes to interview the women for some magazine, innocently asks her husband: "How does it feel when your wife provides not only the butter but most of the bread as well" This turns him into a monster in bed.[7,8]

III. RESULTS

"But at night I become just a terrified animal. I can't scream because the kids in the next room may hear.... I can't fight back either he is too strong for me..... And so I just endure. But we have built a Wall of silence between us." Now the "liberated women" realizes that for the success of marriage, a wife must remain a step behind her husband. "Listen, have you seen really old fashioned couples walking together? Have you noticed the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? I think that is symbolic..... The ideal Hindu wife always walks few steps behind her husband. If he earns 500 she earns 400 if he earns 1000 she earns 999 or less.... And it is not only money. It is in other things too. Never overtake your husband in anything." The woman blamed herself for ruining her marriage by hurting her husband's ego. "It's his way, the only way, perhaps, of taking revenge on me for what I have done to him, to his ego." She cannot get out of this marriage because she does not want to exhibit her sores in public. She wants to leave the job, but the husband would not allow, as he has got used to a comfortable parasitic life "An educated earning competent women" becomes so feeble that she plugs all escape routes herself and acts like a rat in a trap. With utmost silence she endures everything. And later on in the magazine comes out her cool poised face as by the title "A liberated women" a woman who liberates herself by being silent. In "The Stone Woman" the young honeymooning wife does not like the male gaze and the narcissistic appearance of women in the painting "of lush bodied high breasted women..... leaning provocatively looking the mirror doing the hair playing on the musical instrument dancing." Then she realizes that those stone women are sculptured by men to satisfy the animal feelings of males. She objectifies herself with the stone woman who are mere gratifying things to the animals instincts of males. Those stone women have no feelings and emotions of their own and she is like the stone woman and her husband has nothing to do with her feelings, emotions, likings and disliking. She is forbidden to hum film jingles when she is thoughtful. She is compelled to put away her silver bracelet because her husband doesn't like it. She is surrendering her wishes slowly. but definitely moving towards



marginalisation. She does not want to be carved according to male fantasies. She wants to retain her shape and does not want to be reshaped. So she asserts her own personality when her husband nuzzling into her personality comments, "You are wearing something new, I don't like it you. It hides you." She says "I like this and I can see the faint shadow on his face. She asserts herself but not at the cost of her relationship. She melts into the embrace of her husband. She defines herself and vindicates her stand keeping silence. "Why a Robin" is the story of a homely woman who finds herself out of place in her own home as she is less educated and sophisticated. She considers herself a total failure as a wife, as a companion, as a mother. She is trying incessantly to make a room for herself and better her relations. She is left out in her own house "Confronted with two closed rooms." i. e her husband and her daughter. She finds herself helpless as she cannot cope with her daughters fits of excitement, her questions her rage, her tantrums. When she fails to write on the robin that is symbolic of modernity, she questions "why not peacock". Actually she is perplexed at her being neglected. She decides to bridge the gap "They do not come out of nothing, they have to be created." The situation changes dramatically, however, when the daughter needs her mother badly on attaining puberty. The security and support that she needed, is provided only by her mother. The womanhood brought them close. Finally the silent struggling mother finds daughter. But the silent struggle to remove emptiness in her relation with her husband goes in vain because of her husband's insensitivity. "Two single beds.[9]

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Two islands that nothing can, bridge." Her efforts to partake in her husband's means of enjoyment are withdrawn by the apprehensive and unanswerable retort: "What do you want?" She is frightened at the thought of being dismissed. So she does not want to intrude into "his special place his retreat and the place where he can be most alone." So due to this indifferent and insensitive temperament of her husband she feels isolated. But she never complains or reacts. She considers herself to be a chameleon who has to change colour according to her surroundings to please everybody. Her endless efforts to tidy up the house goes in vain keeping it dull and dead. She slogs in the kitchen but she is ignored in the kitchen. "The talk flows above and around me and leaves me inviolate.... An outsider in my home. Men seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women; for women there is no relief for these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structures of her oppression." Thus, the mother and the wife is given no voice, but she never gives up. Keeping on silent, she tries incessantly to end her voiceless relations and ultimately succeeds in reconciling with her daughter. Thus, the women in Shashi Deshpande are silent, but their silence speaks a lot and is constantly heard.[10]

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