

A Married Woman's Dilemma– A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande is a creative post-colonial writer. She has wonderfully presented the problems, issues, and challenges of a middle-class married woman of modern India. In her novel 'That Long Silence' she has portrayed educated middle-class Indian women who get entangled in marriage and traditions. Jaya is the name of the main character presented by Shashi Deshpande. Jaya gets married to Mohan who is an educated man working as an engineer in a company. Jaya and Mohan are married for seventeen years and have two children Rahul and Rati. Jaya is not happy in her married life due to the patriarchal role of her husband Mohan. But in these seventeen years, they do not grow close to one another in married life, rather a long silence grew between them. Jaya is in despair in a male-dominated family. Mohan is a man who plays a dominant and leading role in the family. Jaya is dependent on him as a married lady, wife, and mother. Mohan controls her personal and professional life decisions. He limits her freedom of writing and expression as a writer and wants Jaya to write according to his choice. This paper discusses the dilemmas of a married woman living in anguish and hopelessness. In her loneliness, Jaya goes through a self-evaluation of her life. It's in this fragmented state of

the trauma she realizes that her silence can not solve her marriage. So she decides to break her silence and speak with her husband Mohan with the hope to find a solution and restore their marriage.

Keywords – Dilemma of Married Woman, Fragmentation, Patriarchy, Alienation

I. Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is a famous Indian English novelist who is known for portraying the problems and difficulties faced by modern Indian women. She throws light on the condition of the woman caught between patriarchy, marriage, family, and culture on one side and the respect and freedom as an individual independent woman on the other side. Shashi Deshpande received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1990 for her novel 'That Long Silence'. Shashi Deshpande has been quite vocal about the unspoken problems of women in Indian society. She can see and feel the problems, trauma, and sadness in a woman's life and beautifully express this in her novels. She presents a picture of the post-colonial Indian society which thinks a woman needs a strong shelter that is a man (husband, brother, father, son), Man can only be that strong pillar and shelter for the woman. Shashi Deshpande creatively presents the woman's struggle for self-identity, self-respect, and freedom.

Dilemma 1: Accepting Patriarchy without Questioning

Jaya Kulkarni is a bright educated middle-class girl. She also writes in her free time. She desires to be a good writer one day. While growing up in her paternal home, Jaya is taught by her elders that a girl/woman has to be submissive to her husband. She has to accept the patriarchal order of her husband in her family after her marriage without questioning her husband. We can see this when Vanita Mami speaks to her,

“Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies”.

Jaya is advised by her Mami before her marriage that woman needs a husband for protection and safety. The husband provides social security to the wife and is a strong pillar for the wife. So wife must learn to accept male domination in her married life. A woman is taught to accept the patriarchy and live under male dominance after her marriage. She is taught that it is not wrong to live under the patriarchal suppression of her husband. Jaya is psychologically prepared enough to be submissive to her husband and after her marriage, she tries to be a humble wife. She has to accept Mohan's decision in her personal and professional life. Even though she is unhappy about it she does not speak and confront Mohan.

Jaya as a woman faced the dilemma to accept husband's authority in marriage and she has no choice and power to even think and decide about the life she will live after her marriage. We can see the patriarchy so deeply rooted in the Indian Middle-class family in which a woman has no freedom of thought.

After her marriage, Jaya's experience with her husband is nothing different from what she expected. Mohan is a dominating male who expects his wife to be a humble and submissive lady. He changes her maiden name, 'Jaya' meaning victory to 'Suhasini' meaning a humble and submissive lady. He controls Jaya's life with his dominance and decisions. Jaya can do nothing because she is taught to live under male authority in a marriage wedlock. Their marriage is not based on the bond of love and mutual trust but rather it is a silent compromise. This can be quite evident when Jaya speaks about their marriage,

“A pair of bullocks yoked together. It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful and what animals would voluntarily choose pain?”

Dilemma 2: Loneliness in Marriage

Jaya is quite lonely in her life. She is living in suppression and is not able to speak her feelings to her husband. She can not confront and argue with her dominating Husband.

This leads to a gap between Jaya and Mohan and creates a feeling of emptiness and hopelessness in their marriage. Her sadness is visible through her words.

“We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us”.

The above words reflect the distance between husband and wife. It shows that their relationship is empty and not fruitful and happy. Both of them have a problem with communication between them. Lack of communication leads to the feeling of emptiness. These words reflect her sadness and despair. As a wife, she is not leading a happy marriage and this leads to a feeling of alienation and loneliness even though she is staying in the family.

Dilemma 3: Accepting Sexual Marriage Relationship without Questioning

Jaya while marrying Mohan always felt that husband and wife would first love one another and then they will have a sexual relationship. For Jaya, the feeling of being in love and romance was prime whereas, in her real life, it was quite opposite. For Mohan, it was a sexual relationship that was prime and foremost then love. Jaya felt that Mohan was not caring about her feelings, emotions, and desires. They had a routine sexual relationship that was devoid of affection. For Mohan Jaya was an object to fulfill his sexual desire and so he never bothered to understand her feelings in their relationship. Jaya was not happy in such kind of husband and-wife relationship in which only their bodies met not their hearts. We can see this through the words spoken by Jaya,

“First there’s love then there’s sex- that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I had realized that it could so easily be the other way round”.

Jaya was unhappy in her sexual life with her husband Mohan. As her husband needed her only for sex and never cared about her feelings and desires. She did not feel any affection

and love in their physical relationship rather it was a quite mechanical process of sex. Jaya longed for love and companionship but she could not get it from Mohan.

Dilemma 4: Relationship and Affection between Jaya and Kamat

Kamat was a neighbour of Jaya living on the upper floor of Dadar apartment. Kamat is living alone as he is a widower. Kamat is quite different from Mohan. Kamat shows sympathy and understanding towards Jaya. Jaya is quite free and comfortable speaking with Mr. Kamat. Jaya knows about society and the culture she is living in. She knows that society will never accept their friendship. Kamat is a person who encourages Jaya to write. He makes Jaya realize her mistakes and suggests she be honest with herself. Mr. Kamat is a mature elderly person with good understanding. When Jaya is feeling disheartened about her father's death Kamat gives her comfort and peace. Both of them come close to one another and she wants to get close to him and give a physical response to his closeness and kiss, but she stops and controls her feeling for him.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kamat says. “ **The relationship of man and woman is so natural of one person to another**”

Jaya can control her physical feelings towards Mr. Kamat. Jaya understands society and culture very well. When she sees Mr. Kamat dying in his house alone, she leaves him alone. She knows that she can not help him as a married woman. So she does not dare to give him any medical help and thus leaves him and goes.

As a married woman Jaya to save her marriage does not help a dying man in whom she found solace and comfort. We can see the condition of a helpless married woman who is not able to give any kind of life-saving help just because she is married and society will not accept it so she has to behave in an unhuman manner. Kamat dies in front of Jaya because of a heart attack. Jaya leaves him alone.

Jaya feels guilty about not helping Mr. Kamat. Thus we can see the pressure of society and culture so deep that it is almost difficult for a married woman Jaya to break it. To save her marriage Jaya has no choice but to leave Mr. Kamat alone. The helplessness of a married woman is depicted very tragically.

Jaya – Looking for Hope to find a Solution

When Jaya is left alone in her house, she is in deep anguish. She thinks about her life past, and present and begins to evaluate life. In her loneliness, Jaya goes through a self-evaluation of her life. It's in this fragmented state of the trauma she realizes that her silence can not solve her marriage. So she decides to break her silence and speak with her husband Mohan with the hope to find a solution and restore their marriage.

Conclusion

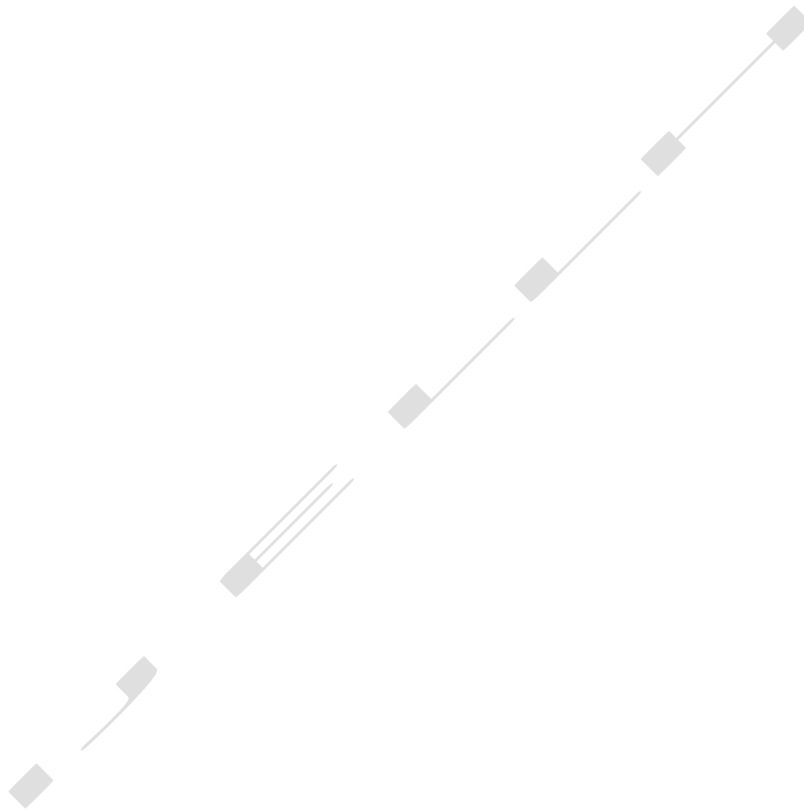
Jaya the main character of the novel is taught by her paternal family to be a submissive wife to her husband after her marriage. She is trained in a way to accept the patriarchy of her husband and live in a male-dominated family. So we find Jaya submissive to her husband and not confronting him in any way. We can see the helplessness of a girl and wife in a male-dominated home and society.

We find that Jaya is not happy in such a husband-and-wife relationship. Her husband Mohan is not bothered about her feelings and emotions. For him, Jaya as a wife is his status symbol in society. At home, she needs to fulfill her role as a wife satisfying her husband sexually and taking care of children and all other duties as a wife. We find the helplessness of a wife in marriage and physical relationship.

Jaya in her isolation and loneliness finds Mr. Kamat her neighbor. Mr. Kamat is quite supportive and encouraging toward Jaya. He tells her to be honest in her writing and supports her. Jaya finds solace and comfort in Mr. Kamat and draws closer to him. But she quickly realizes that society will not accept the friendship between a married woman and a widower.

So she controls her feelings and leaves Mr, Kamat alone when he is dying. We can find the helplessness of a married woman while dealing with other men.

Jaya a woman faces a dilemma in her personal life as a married woman. The realistic condition of a woman living in our Indiansociety is presented by Shashi Despande. Many women in our society today are facing different dilemmas in their personal and professional life.



Reference

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