

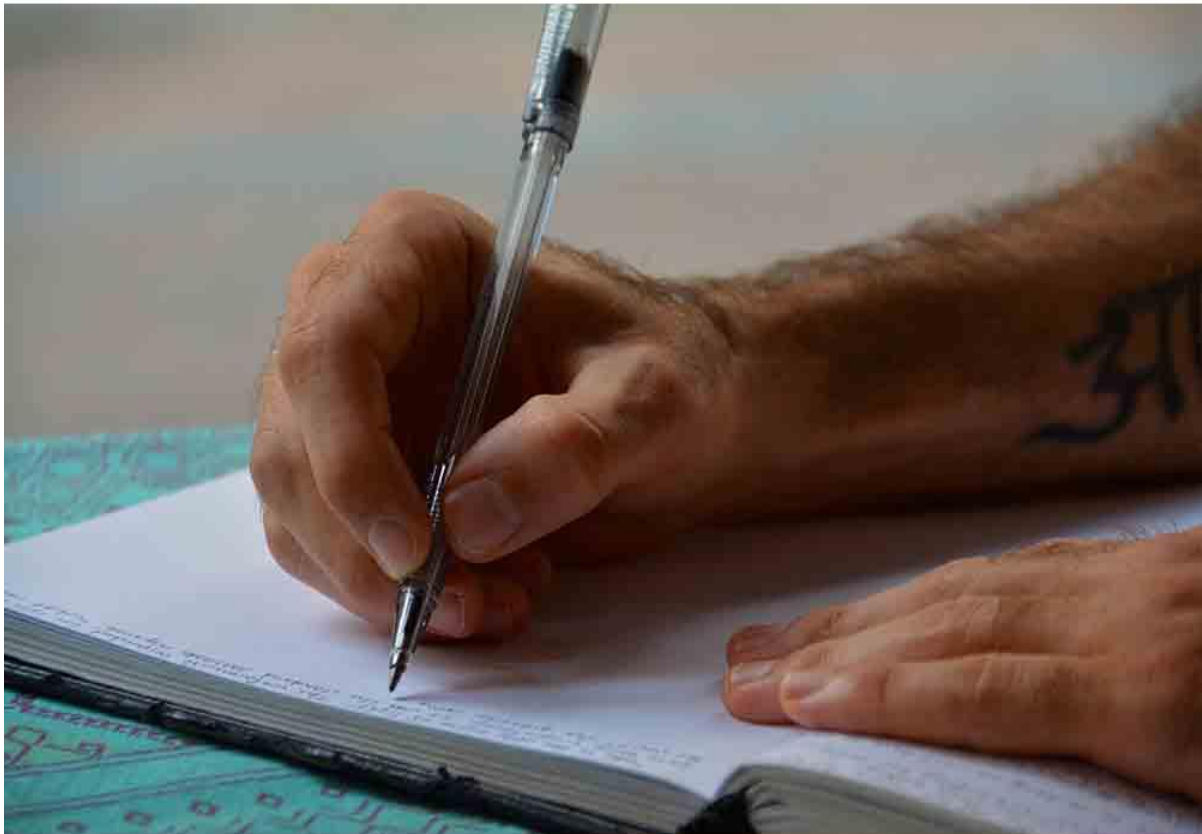
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Feminism in India with reference to Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

Abstract

With access to education women improved and benefitted a lot in the postcolonial India by availing themselves good jobs and marriages. But women belonging to well off families cannot play as role model for average women of India. Truly no 'ism' is required to materialize harmony and peace in relationships. For, relations get jeopardized as they are aided by legalities. It is possible only through mutual understanding. True feminism will not be materialized and realized unless or until both- man and woman learn to honour and respect either one's self-respect and dignity. Both are incomplete in absentia either. No doubt, both feel different, work different but both have to get ready to go together for relation's health

and wealth. For the fulfillment of goals and aspirations of women of once colonized countries, they paved the path of 'postcolonial feminism'.

Keywords: Feminism; postcolonial feminism; othering; patriarchy.

Feminism challenges the age-long tradition of gender differentiation and aims to remove real life problems in the light of traditionally-gendered role-playing. Feminism negates women's secondary and inferior position in the society. They no longer hide seek to hide their feminine urges, feelings and sensibilities. Postcolonial Feminism as a new ray of hope emerged in India with regard to understand the feminine psyche and to redefine woman's role in the society. Postcolonial feminists who believe in human relationships argue for an egalitarian society. They believe in 'equality in difference'. They hold the biological and cultural distinction between man and woman. The recent trends in this field of study seek to dismantle masculinism but not sexual dualism. Feminism in India is pro-woman but not anti-man.

Postcolonial feminism no way seeks to disturb the continuation of life; and sees things in terms of relationships. Postcolonial feminism is a humanist approach. Patriarchy relegated women to male superiority in both the social and economic spheres. They never sought seriously to change all this. The Indian women never launched campaign like bra-burning-libber movement of the West nor did she take the extreme stance of a misogynist.

The moment women started questioning their subordinate status, it got continuously fractured, divided, and developed; it at present does not imply to a single and coherent trajectory of thought (Tolan 319). In the course of development especially, with the fall of European colonies in Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America, and the Caribbean islands, it was felt by feminists belonging to once-colonized territories in eighties that much amount

of time passed and it is nonsensical to continue to be represented by aliens; we should represent ourselves in our own terms instead, hence postcolonial feminism emerged.

Feminism in real sense should/does mean reform. Since time immemorial, why women have been relegated and denied equal rights and opportunities; and why women enjoy lesser freedom than men, these are some crucial questions whose answers are just to dig out old graves. Any attempt to answer these questions does not matter much. Although intermittent reformation programmes were brought in but could not change. It may be the deep-rooted othering strategy of male superiority. Hence 'postcolonial feminism' consolidated. Postcolonial feminist brought the view of universal sisterhood under threat. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park define, "Postcolonial feminism cannot be regarded simply as a subset of postcolonial studies, or, alternatively, as another variety of feminism. Rather it is an intervention that is changing the configurations of both postcolonial and feminist studies. Postcolonial feminism is an exploration of and at the intersections of colonialism and neocolonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities in the different contexts of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights" (Schwarz and Ray 53). Rober J.C. Young enumerates key issues of 'postcolonial feminist' endeavour:

Postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics. Where its feminist focus is foregrounded, it comprises non-western feminisms which negotiate the political demands of nationalism, socialist feminism, liberalism, and ecofeminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse. Feminism in a postcolonial frame begins with the situation of the ordinary woman in a particular

place, while also thinking her situation through in relation to broader issues to give her the more powerful basis of collectivity. It will highlight the degree to which women are still working against a colonial legacy that was itself powerfully patriarchal - institutional, economic, political, and ideological (Young 116).

Uma Narayan on the another instance writes justly, “Third World feminism is not a mindless mimicking of ‘western agendas’ in one clear and simple sense- Indian feminism is clearly a response to the issues specifically confronting many Indian women” (Weeden 13).

The othering strategy is one of the most effective ways employed by male supremacy. This prolonged women subalternity. Male dominance feels better having sidelined female experiences. The male othering strategy does not mind class, caste, or clan variants. It learnt only silencing which is not male. In the othering process, women suffered double colonization.

The question of voice that is who speaks for whom and whose voices are being heard in discussions on postcolonial women’s issues; is another moot point in postcolonial feminism. Gayatri Spivak raises the question of voice in her most popular essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’(1988). In it she explores possibilities to recover the long silenced voices of the subaltern women. And it is duty of postcolonial feminists to represent them. But when Western women speak for the others, they only displace them, replacing their voices with their own (Boehmer, 354). Sufficient already said on the literature of postcolonial women. Deshpande in the novel *That Long Silence* (1988) blames men and women equally. Now, it is better to take stock of the position of Jaya in present scenario.

Shashi Deshpande chose middle class educated women as her protagonist to show what man has made of woman. Her women are anti-patriarchal protagonists. Their search for identity makes one to consider her novels as feminist texts. However she does not like her novels to be addressed as feminist texts. She is of the opinion:

A Woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her roused her strong feeling. I don't see why this has to be labeled feminist (Deshpande 33).

She repeatedly objected to be labeled as a feminist. In an interview with The Times of India on July 22, 2001 she says: "I am a human being and I write about other human beings who happen to be women." But later on she softened her stand a little and admitted herself to be a feminist but only as an individual but not as novelist. She says in an interview with Lakshmi Holmstorm her: "I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist", in my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually and mainly out of any own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first, and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it (Pathak 248). She frankly declares in an interview given to Prasanna Sree:

...I am a feminist, I'm very staunch feminist in my personal life... cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders, this is my idea of feminism. I am feminist very much and I strongly react against any kind of cruelty or oppression, denial of opportunities to women because they are women... the important thing is we have the right to live ourselves. But as writer I'm not going to use my novels carry the message of feminism then it becomes propaganda (Sree 22).

What if her bold declaration, she does not joins the company of radicals? She expresses her desire to be a humanist in an interview with Vanamala Vishwanath: -

...I want to reach a stage where I can write about human being and not about women in relation to men. I don't believe in having a protagonist or sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective, it's only a coincidence (Pathak 237).

Moreover, in her latest novels she appears more than feminist or any other designations. She depicts her characters enjoying all freedoms inside and outside home. This stand might associate her provisionally with 'postfeminists'. Postfeminism turns from identity crisis to human relationships. It distributes equal freedom among both genders. Postfeminists don't take womanhood or motherhood as hindrance. They hold that women no longer can be subjugated as they have liberated and emancipated themselves and acquired equality in the social, cultural, and economic spectrum. Hence 'postfeminists' are humanist. They think that none can be happy in absentia of other. They argue for unity in difference.

Deshpande's novels and stories engage themes and issues related to marriage, identity crisis, emotional breakdown, non communication, making adjustments with, haunting pasts, pangs of migrancy, and feelings of subalternity. Her entire fictional world of women is torn between tradition and modernity. Shashi Deshpande in all her novels protests male-dominance, and man-made rules and conventions prevalent in Indian society. Above all her interest in human relationships is predominant. She hints in an interview with Geetha Gangadharan:

We know a lot about the physical and organic world and the universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it. And still find it tremendously intriguing, fascinating (Gangadharan 11).

That Long Silence is basically a critique on patriarchy, patriarchal ideology, male dominance, and male chauvianism. Deshpande explores reasons why and how women are silenced. Although women sufferings in the Indian context differ women to women, she demystifies various women-silencing strategies. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan is of the opinion:

The force of Deshpande's indictment of women's lives lies in the way she is able to universalize their condition, chiefly by drawing similarities among Jaya and a variety of other female figures, including characters from Indian history and myth; and among three generations of women in her family (Jaya, her mother, her grandmother); among different classes of women (Jaya, her maid Jeeja); among different kinds of women of the same class and generation (Jaya, her cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbour Mukta). So compellingly realistic is this rendering that no Indian woman reader can read this novel without a steady sympathetic identification and, indeed, frequent shocks of recognition (Rajan 78).

That Long Silence is the most reliable account of silence observed by most of women instead of turning into eloquent. Deshpande depicts realistically the cravings of Jaya pricking at her heart for identity which is frustrated and threatened at every attempt by male superiority. Jaya one of the most sensitive heroines of Deshpande feels estranged and alienated as most of Indian girls feel and is trained to feel at their father's home. Jaya as daughter, wife, and the writer is othered by the codes of male supremacy. Silence on either side may prove destructive. Hence Deshpande as a novelist and socialist doesn't approve of silence. Only mutual understanding can solve this problem. The othering process is not bound to unite the family, society, and nation. The matter of fact is that it begins from the very day of birth. If it is male baby, he will receive and enjoy lots of family love and affection. Comparatively, female baby is taken by family not less than a kind of burden. This is ideologically rampant in our society. Once, Ramu Kaka was detailing about his family-line eliminating girl child. This proceeding tortures Jaya utterly and compromises her heart to look for identity somewhere else, that is, husbands' home. Ramu Kaka traces the family line going back two hundred years. He avers:

‘I’ve been able to go back for nearly two hundred years. There are a few gaps, of course, but I’ll fill them up eventually. Look, Jaya, this is our branch. This is our grandfather – your great grandfather – and here’s father, and then us – Laxman, Vasu and me. And here are the boys – Shridhar, Jannu, Dinkar, Ravi...’(TLS 142).

Jaya at such discriminated stand taken by Ramu Kaka out of agony exclaims, ‘I’m not here!’ (TLS143). Ramu Kaka justifies his stand – ‘How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family! You are married; you’re now part of Mohan’s family. You have no place here’ (TLS 143). No doubt it was quite surprising to her as she found no place for females; even Kakis and Ajjis have no place. She tried to grill Ramu Kaka and later on even her husband Mohan but every time it was put aside taking it all non-serious issue. This shows victimization of women via male superiority. In fact Jaya feels overly sorry for the loss of identity for women alongside herself. This was one of the ways of silencing women. Finding no way out, she suspends temporarily her ways of enquiry and learns ‘only silence’ (TLS 143). Consequently, ‘she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated’ (TLS 147).

Soon after Jaya’s arrival to Mohan’s home, the emotional crisis begins. Jaya’s vision of husband as a ‘sheltering tree’ (TLS 137) gets shattered when she finds Mohan as another-version of Ramu Kaka. And she feels that she is just adopted in the family, no significance at all for females except a link. This type of situation for females in the long run yields silence as only option curbing growth in female personality. Jaya feels and finds no safe zone for her identity and place either in Mohan’s house or Ramu Kaka’s house. After many years of their conjugal life Mohan accuses her for not being enough careful and watchful to his needs and requirements. He says:

He accused me of not caring about the children, of isolating myself from him and his concerns, even of some obscure revengeful feelings that were driving me to act this way (TLS 120).

As a result, both became total stranger to each other. But this move affected Jaya adversely. Even she took onus entirely herself. She feels as if she were a failed lady in her duties. But Mohan on the hand starts to see all women callous, and says: 'It's not just you, it is all women' (TLS 120).

Jaya the writer in the beginning of her career sought to depict the crude reality of women's lives. But this attempt could not get warm welcome. Even Mohan her husband and Kamat doesn't approve of her attempt. Kamat warns her that it may spoil her career. No sooner had she started writing than her husband Mohan took her stories mere an act of profanation. He took that people will see all her like-stories just written version of their actual life. This yields up family feud. Mohan says:

They will all know, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us, they will think I am this kind of a man, they will think I *am* this man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write these things, how could you write such ugly things, how will you face people after this (TLS 143-44)?

Consequently, she being compelled set out writing under feigned name SEETA. This time she chose to fabricate some light and humorous pieces. They got good responses from all sides of section including Mohan. In the core of her turn to newer role, by and large Mohan and to some extent Kamat both are responsible. She thought of peace for doing so. The matter of fact is that she was othered by Mohan and other patriarchal advocates. In fact she feels sorry being not more than a male-taste caterer. When her first story dealing with

man-woman relationship got published, Mohan became so disturbed that it was sensed easily by Jaya. Finally she decided to discontinue writing:

Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced, I had done him wrong. And I stopped writing after that (TLS 144).

Her writing career felt embarrassed and othered by male dominance. Even men cannot tolerate female experiences and take it other having no immediate way out. For the time being the entire matter is put into the chilled bottle. Jaya says:

And so I had crawled back into my hole. I had felt safe there. Comfortable. Unassailable. And so I stopped writing. It hadn't been Mohan's fault at all. And it had been just a coincidence, though it had helped, that just then Mohan had propelled me into that other kind of writing. 'I encouraged you', he had said to me. He was right. But I went on with my chest-beating fit of penitence; I'd gone into it myself. With my eyes wide open (TLS 148).

Jaya the writer is othered by dint of her use of Prakrit too as she was expected to speak Sanskrit. Jaya realizes that it will continue until I set out writing like male discourse. Otherwise, the danger of being unheard would stay ever. This is the requirement of patriarchal institution of language and communication. Patriarchy does not see favorably women's language, experience, and aspiration of life. This implies that Jaya is othered for her use of language unrecognized by male discourse. To the conclusion, it can be said that the real cause of trouble in the life of Jaya is the othering nature of society. It cannot bear anyone or anything which is not male oriented. Jaya seeks to fight against and bring about change however; she has to do now and then compromise with the situation. On the whole, Shashi Deshpande in the novel finds rays of hope and feels assured that one day the society will come round as the relation of Mohan and Jaya goes in their real life. Mohan himself does not feel comfortable with the attitudes of Jaya but tacitly he tries to approve of Jaya.

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