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From Silence to Speech: A Study of Jaya's Transformation in *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

The paper examines the patriarchal bent of society in which Jaya lives and how this male oriented system creates ideological beliefs whereby, women are flung to marginalized positions of those social structures whose centers are constituted by males. The paper brings to the surface the inner dissatisfaction and maladjustment that Jaya suffers but about which she remains silent. Jaya as a subordinate character, a subject, seems to have internalized the code of conduct which the society has framed for her, considering it to be a natural order for most of her life, thereby, imparting on her a kind of perpetual silence about her desires, needs and ideas. Deshpande has tried to define this silence as a full-fledged character who accompanies Jaya like a shadow almost throughout the novel. The ideology that Jaya stands for doesn't find a soil to flourish; instead she is made to surrender in every aspect of her life and furnish sacrifice after sacrifice to effectuate her role as a dutiful daughter, wife and mother. The paper, however, also gives an insight into the emerging consciousness in Jaya which enables her to understand that a balanced life is happier and more successful than a life of subordination and obligation.

Keywords: Patriarchal, Ideological Beliefs, Marginalized, Dissatisfaction, Maladjustment, Silence, Subordination, Domination

Introduction

The novel which figures fifth in the repertoire of Deshpande's fiction brought Sahitya Akademi Award to its credit. Deshpande's portrayal of Jaya is the representative of all those women who assume a subservient role in the patriarchal families, thereby investing her with a larger than life dimension which otherwise her position would not have warranted. Jaya after getting married to Mohan finds herself in an invisible tangle of customs and traditions which she is supposed to take the burden of. In her journey of proving herself a dutiful wife, she

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gradually finds herself drifting apart from her real self, to the extent that the agony of total alienation begins to haunt her. It is only because of her being in a society which assumes specific roles for men and women that she is reduced to a mere object devoid of individuality. The novel acts as a diatribe which eliminates all the stereotypes related to women and also gives a female reader a chance to introspect her own life from these subtle points of view which don't seem to be imposed by the society rather inherent in it. In order to applaud Deshpande's effort, *The Evening Post* labeled the novel as "A book that will change lives. Unforgettable."

Jaya's Walk into Silence:

In the award winning novel *That Long Silence*, Deshpande explores how a woman is separated from her real self and how an invisible wall is constructed between her own identity and what she is coerced to become under the aegis of patriarchy so that she also becomes an oblivious agent to propagate the concept of gender whereby, women are to assume a role much lower and inferior to that of men. In this context, Mary Ellman refers to what is called "the sexual analogy" which according to her is a false analogy. She says that such an analogy has been a readymade device in the hands of patriarchy to constrict the roles of women who in comparison to males are said to be inferior and hence lesser achievers. She continues to say:

The same fixed mode of thought runs uninterruptedly beneath the seeming expansion of our modern intellectual opinions. For example when Bruno Bettelheim characterizes the male mind as expansive and exploratory and the female mind as interiorizing, it is ludicrously clear that he envisages a mental copulation between the two. So too, when Louis Auchincloss characterizes several American women novelists as conservers or caretakers. And, when Norman Mailer pronounces that 'Temples are for Women'. The female mind is repeatedly seen as an enclosed space in which what other and(as we always say) seminal minds have stored away is tended or worshipped. (Elizabeth Stevenson)

In the novel the similar concept is propagated when Jaya is taught by Ramukaka that she doesn't actually belong to the household of her father; instead to her husband's family and that the sole responsibility of their happiness lies on her: "Remember Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (138) It is in order to carry out this responsibility ascribed to her that she loses herself and becomes an amalgamation of what the males want her to be thereby suffocating her in the life of loveless mechanical routine that she wanted any disaster to break her out of fruitless complacency. She says:

I had to admit the truth to myself-that I had often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony. I remember how often I had

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sighed for a catastrophe, a disaster, no, not personal one, but anything to shake us out of our dull grooves. (4)

The novel relegates Jaya to the position of the other, inferior to her male counterparts, be it her father or husband. Just as in *Orientalism* Edward Said explains how the concept of East is constructed by the West as an inferior and exotic other which needs to be civilized, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* explains the reasons whereby, women acquire the position of an inferior being. She says

The whole of feminine history has been man-made. Just as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem; just as anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem, it is our problem; so the woman problem has always been a man problem.

It implies that the male dominated ideology overpowers even the women folk so that they start considering themselves dependent on males who appear as superior to them. This is pointed in the novel when Vanitamami explains to Jaya the higher status of husband in a marriage as:

Remember Jaya...a husband is like a sheltering tree...without the tree, you are dangerously unprotected and vulnerable and so you have to keep the tree flourishing and alive, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. (32)

Jaya was an educated lady differently dealt by her father. She got her father's support when such a thing was rarely possible. This made her conceive herself a different child coupled with the encouraging words of her father, "You are not like others, Jaya... You are going to be different from others" (136). In spite of her better position as a daughter and her father's household being characterized by the domination of modernity over tradition, she fails to maintain her individual dignity after marriage and falls victim to the prejudices of societal setup which doesn't appreciate a woman's sense of selfhood. Even in her parental home she has to face a subtle subjugation in terms of not getting the freedom to exercise her choice in her likes and dislikes e.g. her father's ridicule when she comes up with her own choice of music and is scorned to comply with his choice whose authority is ultimate. She says:

...it had to be furtive, for my father whose own tastes in music had been austere classical, had despised my addiction to what he called 'that disgusting mush'. He had tried his best to wean me from the habit, to make me love Paluskar and Fayaz Khan instead of Rafi and Lata...' What poor taste you have, Jaya,' I can remember him saying to me once.

It was the shame of this which continued in her life after marriage and along with other circumstances induced a state of silence in her. What Simone de Beauvoir puts as, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" aptly fits on Jaya's condition in her married life. Jaya would prefer to let the words remain inside her rather than facing an insult if she happened to contradict the interests of the men in the society. She never confessed to her husband that she

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likes watching ads whenever they went for a movie fearing that he too would brand her taste as poor. This went on to the extent where the word formation almost stopped in her, what remained were just the ideas which she visualized within her mind's eye. Remembering the picture of her family of four she says, "A visual-yes it had to be only that for I could not find the words to match the picture."

Jaya herself marginalized her existence by avoiding entering into that circle which the society had drawn round her husband, getting into which she didn't deem her right. The fact that she lost her voice was that she never exercised it beyond her own imagination. She says:

I never asked him how he did it...I was an ideal wife... [Like Gandhari] I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools...have things we needed... (61-62)

Rousseau had said in his educational treatise Emile that women must be taught to adorn themselves so that they become attractive to men. This was the slogan of the whole patriarchy which promoted the weakness of women on account of their bodies. It was incorporated in them that they have to look beautiful to sustain their husbands' attention even if they themselves do not want to do so. This is exactly what Jaya had been doing relentlessly in her married life without realizing that potential of such a submission on adversely affecting her own decision. In the novel such a thing is represented from the point of view of Jaya herself as:

There had been a time... when I had so faithfully followed all the edicts laid down by the women's magazines. They had been my Bible and I had poured over the wisdom contained in them. *Don't let yourself go. How to keep your husband in love with you. Keep romance alive in a marriage. The quality of charm in a woman...where does it come from?* ... Thinking of all that, I felt nothing but pity for the girl who had sat and creamed her face at night, rubbing the cream in circles...Round and round, and upward strokes when you came to the neck. I had brushed my hair religiously too, fifty strokes on either side, a hundred strokes altogether. (95-96)

In spite of all this she didn't get the things she wanted. She had always imagined love and sex in coexistence, rather first love and then sex but in her relation to Mohan, things were the other way round. Their relation had been so mechanical and loveless that the words like emotion had seemed to her as abnormal which needed to be hidden as she says: "The strength of my feelings for him had both shamed and terrified me. I had never confessed my frenetic emotions to him. It had seemed like a disease, a disability I had to hide from everyone."

It was not only in what Jaya did that made her lose control over herself but also what Mohan did considering it a part of his authority over Jaya. The identity with which she was born suffered a jolt at her marriage when she was renamed as Suhasini which means 'ever-

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smiling'. Thus she was indirectly given a framework in which she had to fit herself. Likewise Mohan never considered Jaya's art of writing as anything extraordinary. As a result when she wrote out of her interest and curiosity, she received a snub from Mohan who felt that she was politicizing her personal life thereby causing her to change the content and orientation of her writing. Thus she began to write the newspaper snippets which was never her forte. In doing so, she acquires pseudonym, Sita, while all the time trying to associate herself with the mythical Sita-the symbol of an ideal wife (Dr. Romina).

Betty Friedan says:

Each suburban wife struggles with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Club Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night- she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question- Is this all?

Jaya in the novel goes through the similar situation where she does everything and performs every role she is assigned but doesn't dare to ask or to assert herself in her relations. It is her own allegiance to the age old customs and traditions which prevents her to emerge as a conscious individual and depict the growth that she had acquired over the years.

Breaking the Silence:

However, there comes a time in Jaya's life when she introspects and with Kamad's suggestion she begins to fine herself, both in writing and in her personal life. She says, "Why had I done that? Why had I suppressed that desperate woman?" The things which had hitherto appeared smooth and acceptable now appear doubtful to her. She even cannot connect her present image to the one that had lived in her parental house as her identity has completely changed, however, her consciousness which she gains after self analysis enables her to understand a gap between the real and present self as she herself says:

And now nothing seemed to connect me to this place, nothing seemed to bridge the chasm between this prowling woman and the woman who had lived here. I was conscious of a faint chagrin at her disappearance. Wasn't it I who had painfully, laboriously created her? (168)

Jaya begins to have her own perception of things, people and situations around her and in doing so she finds a way towards her own inner self. In seeing the world from her own uninhibited point of view, she begins to develop her own individuality and subsequently forms her identity wherein, she is at liberty to do of her heart. She says, "I feel unusually light myself as if Rahul's buoyancy has communicated itself to me. Or is my feeling of lightness connected somehow to that odd view of Rahul and Vasant I had? As if in releasing them from the slots I'd put them in I've released myself somehow" (190). And in this liberty that she has begun to accept for herself, she behaves unusually, but it satisfies her hitherto tormented psychological self. She throws out all the burden and her thoughts move aimlessly for a moment so that she could make space to accommodate her true wishes and desires.

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Late in her life, Jaya realizes that not only her husband but also patriarchy and she herself was responsible for her plight. The author says that, “It is not that life is cruel, but that in the very process of our birth, we submit to life’s cruelty.” In the novel we get a clear example of this behavior from Jaya as she herself says:

But it was I who acquired these things, I who hankered after them. No, that’s not wholly true, it was Mohan and I, both of us together, who wanted these things. No, even this is not the real truth. The truth was that it was Mohan who had a clear idea of what he wanted; the kind of life he wanted to lead, the kind of home he would live in, and I went along with him. But I cannot blame Mohan, for even if he had asked me-what do you want?-I would have found it hard to give him a reply. (25)

Freidan is of the opinion that “the only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own.” Jaya adopts the same mode of self understanding and encouragement and talks about a couple wherein she brings out her inner chaos and dilemmas that women in general have to face. Betty encourages women to find their place in the society of men by opining that those women who themselves confine their identity to the role of housewives achieve no more than that. Their fate is no less than those who walked down to the concentration camps towards their own death and created means for their slow death of mind and spirit. Jaya take a similar encouragement from her marital life of silence and obscurity and begins to tread the path towards self assertion as she understands that writing has been a means of liberation for her:

What have I achieved by writing? The thought occurs to me again as I look at the neat pile of papers. Well I have achieved this. I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I am 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 (191).

The achievement of self identity induces in Jaya an ability to reassess her status in the society especially as a wife. She discards being in the watertight compartments and looks at herself from an entirely new position, that of authority and a sense of secure grounding in the matters of her life and the society. She says, “Two bullocks yoked together-that’s how I saw the two of us...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 (191).”

Towards the end of the novel Jaya understands the true meaning of the Sanskrit saying ‘*Yathechhasi tatha kuru*’. It wasn’t a lesson towards the waywardness as she had thought in her childhood but it was a freedom to exercise the knowledge and wisdom that people acquired over long periods of time. She embraced this teaching in her own life and decided to do what she perceived right and not what she was expected to do by others. It is

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under the influence of this that she begins a life of individual worth and pledges to herself that she will continue to live under her own rules and regulations even when Mohan returns in her life. This becomes clear when she says, “But it is no longer possible for me. If I have to plug that ‘hole in the heart’, I will have to speak, to listen; I will have to erase the silence between us...”

Conclusion:

The paper has focused on the working of patriarchy in the lives of women especially after marriage and analyzed how this institution which has been in existence since ages suppresses the identity of women and prevents them to hold a respectable position in the society of men. It illustrates the process whereby women gradually lose control of their lives and live according to the wishes and whims of their husbands without getting a chance to materialize their own desires and needs. They work like laborers, from day till night, but still do not get appropriate recognition for their work. This doesn't give them a chance to groom their personality and assert themselves in their marriages till a time comes when they are reduced to mere mechanical objects devoid of any individuality. The writer has, however, suitably delineated into the ways by which a woman can find herself and assert decision at least in her own life and for her own benefit. This is what the protagonist also does in the novel and projects herself as a subject in process rather than simply a subject under subordination and domination.

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