Jaya’s Dilemma and Quest of Identity in ‘Shashi Deshpande’s ‘That Long Silence’

Mr. Sanjay Haribhau Zagade
Assistant Professor of English
PDEA’s Shankarrao Bhelke College, Nasarapur, Pune.
Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune,(Maharashtra).

Abstract
This paper examines dilemma and the quest of identity of the Indian middle class women in the novel That Long Silence (1988) written by Shashi Deshpande. The novel mirrors the dilemmas of Indian women in holding familial and social identity with new aspirations and choices in the male-dominated society. The concept of identity consists of two dimensions to the lives of human beings. It takes a shape with the social norms by following them with certain order or by revolting them with proper aspirations. The paper identifies the aspirations of the educated woman like Jaya and her dilemma along with the quest for identity.

Keywords: Dilemma, Identity, quest, social norms

That Long Silence (1988) by Shashi Deshpande won the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award, which has been translated into French and Dutch languages. Shashi Deshpande portrays modern, career-oriented and educated middle class Indian women in her novels, who possibly keep them vibrant with the changing pace of the modernity. They find the disabilities of cultural and social aspects in the male-dominated society. They want to resist the social norms, which make them meek and cause the salient sufferings in their lives. The resistance of the Indian women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande’s novels sets them to search the freedom and identity, though they find themselves up against the well-entrenched social inertia. The novelist presents her women independent economically and ideologically but they are usually found trapped in the familial and professional roles of them along with the individual ambitions and the social demands. Jaya in That Long Silence (1988) is found trembling between the self-expression and the social taboos. Maria Mies rightly says;

“Her problem arises firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity” (Mies, 1980:130).

The women in the novels of Shashi Deshpande do not want any kind of gratification and sympathy from men, but they set to challenge their victimization and find the balance in their roles. Though, the idea of freedom is not followed form the Western culture, they believe in adjustments and compromise in order to seek domestic harmony rather than the disruption of their relationship due to their revolt. Viney Kirpal Says that the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande come out of “inherited patterns of thought and action in favour of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in”(Kirpal,1996:148).

That Long Silence (1988) throws light on the issues of identity by pointing out the man-woman relationship objectively. It is not an attempt of the novelist to assume that the ‘men’ are responsible for the bitterness in the familial harmony. Both men and women have been in a blend of the social norms
that make the cause for the quest of identity. In this story the author reveals an intriguing picture of an ordinary middle class educated woman. The central figure in the novel Jaya lives with her husband Mohan and two children Rahul and Rati in Bombay. Jaya as a girl, was taught by her father to have confidence in herself, he named her Jaya, which stands for victory and has encouraged her to be resilient and courageous.

Gradually identity of the women is known by her relationship with a man;

“...a husband is like a sheltering tree, and it was as she has said ‘mau’ to me, I ignored her. After so many years the words came back to me... sheltering tree, without tree, you are dangerously unprotected and vulnerable” (TLS, 1988:32).

She plays the role of an affectionate mother, dutiful to her in-laws and her relatives. It gives a simple enchanting scenes solely expressed by the author. She reflects her lifestyle, her role clarity, is she living for her or for someone else, etc. Throughout the story she is engaged in searching her identity as an individual. In this story one situation arises when husband and wife’s relation was given an offbeat. Two individuals though very intimate but couldn’t relate each other in terms of feelings or understanding. Many married women might find some instances similar in their everyday lives after reading the story. The novelist has explored the individual and universal predicaments through the female psyche. The modern educated Indian woman even plays of a dedicated wife and a dutiful mother. Jaya feels depressed at the moment of crisis when Mohan insults her and leaves the house. It makes Jaya introspective about her duties as a wife. She says;

“The realization that I am alone overwhelms me. Worse...I do not know where I am, where I have to go and how I can find him. The disorientation is total...I continue to lie there paralysed, aphasic...we will never be able to make it...” (TLS, 1988:86).

Jaya was a perfect harmony with her husband in matters relating to sex. Mohan had become so important ant a necessity of her life that it was beyond her imagination to live without him. When Mohan leaves the house, she feels in the twisted thoughts inside.

The women characters in the novel occupy the centre stage of the story. Naturally, Kusum, Jaya, Mukta, Vanitamami, Jaya’s Mother, and grandmothers, Jeeja, Nayana, Manda, Nilima are shown the victims of male-dominance. Jeeja, Nayana nad Manda are the domestic servants, discharging essential services. The women are rather the spirits of love, service and forgiveness. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan rightly says;

“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” (Ranjan,1993:78).

It is evident from the novel that the “Indian” woman writer for whom writing or any profession for that matter can only be secondary as the only admissible career or profession is the husband. As Jaya once tells Mohan, “I
know you better than you know yourself” (TLS, 1988: 75) to further deliberate that he was her career, her profession, her means of livelihood, and not to know him amounted to failing at her job. In such a situation writing can never be a full-blooded passion, or even a consuming career. By penetrating such a situation, the novelist is able to foreground not only Jaya’s predicament, but also the dilemma of Indian middle class educated woman.

Jaya’s search of identity turns back on Kusum and fails to know the understanding that has not maintained any relationship with Mr. Kamat. She finds out her significant role in the parental duties which is the reorder of the relationship she desires to find out at the end of the story. It makes her to realize that the relationship of husband and wife is not only cordial but it is also based on the intimacy and endurance. The relationship of Mohan and Jaya is an instance of the failure, disgust and disappointment. The depression caused between them due to the expectations of a educated woman form the tradition-stricken husband, which remained unchanged.

In the quest of identity, Jaya is trapped in the dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife for Mohan and secondly, struggling to express the emotions of women’s experience in the male-dominated society. Jaya is a silent sufferer in finding out herself very different with noble vision as a writer. Prasanna sree Sathupati says;

“Jaya knows that their relationship is spoiled by incompatibility and lack of communication. If she suffers, it is in silence and if she revolts, it is also in silence. She suppresses her feelings lest they should spoil her relationship with her husband” (Sathupati, 2003:79).

The novelist tries to focus on not only the patriarchal set up which is responsible for silencing the women but also the responsibility of women lies within the victim to refuse, to raise a voice and to break that silence. The novel traces the dilemma and the quest for identity of Jaya from the feelings of existence, freedom, resilience and adjustments.

Conclusion
Jaya represents the middle class educated woman in India during 1990s. She tries to find her identity throughout the novel for her role clarity, her life or is she living for someone else! She searches her identity as an individual and where her emotions are getting subdued. It suggests that the endemic imbalance in a marriage causes the frustrations, disappointments, failures rather than the endurance and solace.

Reference:
- Ibid. P.32
- Ibid. P.86
- Ibid. P.75