

SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THAT LONG SILENCE as a Psychological Novel

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Abstract: Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka. Deshpande had her early education in Dharwad, and then moved to Bombay where she took a degree in economics from Elphinstone College. Later she also acquired degrees in law and English and a diploma in journalism. As a student of law at Mysore University she won two gold medals for academic achievement. Shashi Deshpande is an Indian English woman writer writing about the travails of another Indian English woman writer. She was in England for about a year, during which period she felt compelled to write down her experiences in the form of short articles. The Bangalore-based newspaper Deccan Herald published these articles, and this marked the birth of a freelance journalist. Later while she was working for the journal Onlooker, a colleague persuaded her to write a short story. Throughout the play she gives portrayal of women and psychic issues.

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Full paper

Problem of Arranged Marriages

Marital relations largely depend on how the marriage was settled and how the understanding grew between the couples. Jaya's marriage was settled in somewhat different way. Her father had died and her elder brother was in a way forced by the uncles and other people to discharge his duty to his younger sister. Mohan knew nothing about, Jaya, nor did Jaya know Mohan before marriage-both were strangers to each other. In such marriages happiness has but little chance to come in the life of the couple.

Desired an English Speaking Wife

Mohan had nothing to desire from his wife except that she should be fluent in English. He had seen in his boyhood that three women who spoke English fluently were given warm welcome at Corssword House. He was so much impressed by them that he harboured the desire of getting a wife that could speak English like them. Jaya had fulfilled that qualification. Therefore Mohan decided to marry with Jaya the first day he saw her. He told Jaya, “You know, the first day I met you at your Ramukaka’s house, you were talking to your brother, Dinkar, and somehow you sounded so much like that girl, I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you.” Mohan wanted to marry any girl that could speak good English. Luckily or unluckily, Jaya came to be that girl.

A Girl’s Views about Her Husband

Jaya, like all other young girls, had no particular idea about a good husband. The girls in general had a vague idea. Jaya explained, “If we had been forced to name it, the thing we were trailing. I suppose we would have called it love. Something we saw in movies between Raj Kapoor and Nargis, Cary Grant and Deborah Karr”. The girls dreamt that a handsome youngman would come and say to them ‘I Love you’. They wished that their husbands should be doctor, engineer, government official, college lecturer. They never gave any thought to the personal qualities of man.

Brother Imposed his Views

After the death of Jaya’s father, Jaya’s Kakas(uncles) asked her elder brother to find a match for his younger sister and marry her off. Jaya recalled, “Dada had wanted me off his hands; he had wanted to be free of his responsibility for an unmarried younger sister, so that he could go ahead with his plans. After Appa’s death, the Kakas had never let Dada forget his role as the man of the house. And so Dada had manoeuvred me into a position from which not marrying Mohan would have been childish, irresponsible and unfair to Dada.” It became such a situation that there was no reason for not marrying Mohan as there was no reason for marrying him. Obviously, Jaya had not found any quality in Mohan which made him different from others.

Brother’s Attempt to Bring her Round

Jaya’s elder brother pleaded for Mohan in a very clear and clever manner. He told Jaya in the first instance that Mohan was an Engineer which responded to the dreams of a young girl.

But Jaya seemed to be a little more intelligent than other girls of her age. She was not taken in by merely this one qualification. She was not taken in by merely this one qualification. She stated on knowing more about him. Therefore her Dada further said that Mohan ‘was quite good-looking, no squint, no glasses, even teeth’. But Jaya was sensible enough to say that everyone was so-even Kamla Kaki was like that. Then, her Dada added that Mohan was ‘hard-working, ambitious and will go far’, but these in the opinion of Jaya, were the qualities of a common man like Ramukaka. Her Dada further said that Mohan had no vices, didn’t smoke or eat in hotels and belonged to a good Brahmin family. But in the opinion of Jaya none of these qualities made him different from common men.

Normal Considerations of a Guardian

Perhaps Jaya wanted to know about Mohan’s concepts of life. Instead of asking directly, she asked her brother what was his personal opinion about Mohan. Jaya’s brother said that he considered Mohan a good match for Jaya. He said, ”I’m all for it. He seems a very decent chap, soft-spoken and very quiet, but determined ,you know. He’ll make his way, he’s very independent. And he has a good job, as Junior Engineer in the new steel plant in Lohanagar. What more do you want ?” A good guardian cannot have any other considerations in settling marriages. Jaya was also convinced that there was no reason for her to reject the match.

An Indian Mother’s Considerations

Jaya’s mother discarded the proposal right away, but Jaya’s brother was a clever arguer. He knew what women looked for in a man. He told his mother that Mohan was fairer than Jaya, but his mother was not prepared to accept that Jaya was less fair than Mohan. Therefore, Jaya’s brother played his next card very carefully. He said that Mohan was a decent chap, and had a good job. An Indian mother’s only consideration is that the boy must have money, and the more money he has, the better match he is. In short, Mohan was handsome, had no vices, had a good job, was soft-spoken, and ambitious. It was sufficient to convince an Indian mother.

Dowry was a big Question

Jaya gave her approval, but for a different reason. She knew that her mother and brother would not be able to give dowry. She thought, “I would be going away from Ambegaon; he wasn’t asking for money; the Kakas and Chandumama wouldn’t have to make up the money

for my dowry.” Thus the issue was clinched. Jaya married Mohan because her brother wanted to be free of the responsibility, and Mohan did not ask for dowry. Nobody cared to know how Jaya’s nature, her ideals, etc. were different from Mohan’s.

Differences in Nature

Differences in the natures and habits of the wife and husband are to appear soon and may cause a rift between them unless they know them and decide to put up with them. Jaya was conscious that the man she was going to be married was a stranger to her-she knew nothing about him. Therefore she thought that intimacy with him straightway would be indecent. She wanted to go slow in this direction. She thought, “It was not expected of me, not at once, anyway! We would achieve, it gradually, by degrees of stages. I’d optimistically reassure myself.” But Mohan was crude and abrupt. For him, they were husband and wife from day one. So everything was permissible. He didn’t try to know his wife’s mind, nor did he persuade her for it. so Jaya was taken unawares when intimacy came all of a sudden-she was surprised.

Lack of Romance

Jaya was, in a way, in a shocked state. She realized that all those vague longings, all those suppressed thoughts, all those whispers, the hints, even the things that she had called love and romance, were only the things of poems and stories-they had no place in real life. Her dreams of life were dashed to pieces. The feelings of sensual pleasure in a routine way did not make up for love. Jaya reminisced, “Those emotions and responses (of love) seemed to belong to two other people, not to the two of us lying together.” Jaya and Mohan never had any discussions on their feelings about sex ‘as if (Jaya felt) the experience was erased each time after it happened, it never existed in words.’ The question of having any talk about it simply didn’t arise because neither felt there was anything worth-talking about.

Sensual Pleasure

Jaya had imagined that love-making would culminate in the act, but it happened the other way; it was devoid of love and romance. Jaya had learnt that the things had taken a different turn in her life. The desire for each other was the only thing that they had experienced and they knew not that love had any other meaning. Jaya recollected, “What else could I call it but love when I thought of how I had longed for his physical presence, when I remembered

how readily, almost greedily I had responded to his touch.” She thought of the agony she had felt without him. They regularly rehearsed the roles of husband and wife flawlessly, word perfect’, and felt fully satisfied. The desire for any other form of love had submerged into that.

A Crude Way

Jaya remembered that she had read about ways and means to keep love and romance alive in life. She had read articles on such topics as ‘Don’t let yourself go, How to keep your husband in love with you, keep romance alive in marriage, The quality of charm in a woman..... where does it come from?’ The articles advised the girls to apply cream on the face, rub it in circles, with upward strokes when they came to the neck. Jaya had pity for those who did it. she had never-done it and never felt the necessity of doing that. Mohan also never felt that his wife had never followed the tips that magazines gave to women to keep whether I creamed my face or not, whether I brushed my hair a hundred times or not , whether I wanted him to or not. The sex-crazy persons required nothing of those things.

Inevitable Fondness

Love had taken a different shape. Her feelings for Mohan had their beginnings in the act of sex but they had grown a way beyond that. The thought of living without him twisted her insides. The idea of his death gave her a severe blow-“The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. If he had been a little late coming home, I had been sure he was dead”. The thought was extremely tormenting. She had never confessed her frenzied thoughts about him, but her emotion for him had become a disease she had hidden from everybody. Jaya realized that she was afraid of being alone. Therefore they clung to each other.

CONCLUSION:

However one truth that had dawned upon her was that ‘love is a myth, without which sex with the same person for a life-time would be unendurable’. Jaya somehow made it possible for herself to copulate with the same person. She read about an American poet who could not get on with her husband, but Jaya knew that she would never be able ‘to shake off this monstrous burden’. She was so disgusted with Mohan’s same gestures, positions and movements, that she could stay apart from him without a twinge or sleep with him without

desire. In spite of her disgust and indifference, she felt the compunction and sense of guilt when she heard the cry of Mohan, which she felt was the cry of despair. She, being an Indian wife, felt that she had failed, 'failed at what I had been trying to achieve since we got married'.

In fact, she had failed to get moral alignment with her husband because Mohan always approached her through body. He was angry when he read Jaya's story about a husband who reached out to his wife through body because he felt that Jaya had deprecated Mohan's own attitude. Jaya was of the view that an act of sex affirmed the loneliness. She believed, perhaps rightly, that one felt like going to somebody when one felt lonely and alone. It was her own experience. She felt alone even when Mohan was beside her-the bodies had met, but not the minds.

This scene gives the message that marriage means more a unity of minds and souls than of bodies. In fact the physical union becomes dreary after a lapse of time, but intellectual or spiritual union becomes a foundation of a long and happy life.

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