

Floundering or Flourishing Self of Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's Novel That Long Silence

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Abstract: - In the present paper genuine efforts have been made to unfurl protagonist Jaya's floundering self identity which eventually leads her to the path of flourishing. In this male chauvinist society, Jaya's women centric introspect, into the inner psyche of feminism, probes wherein she feels that she should have her own independency and individuality beyond the burdens of the patriarchal society. Shashi Deshpande, an eminent and closely focused Indian novelist, in her novel 'That Long Silence' envisage the suppressed voice of Jaya's feminine consciousness ensnared between the infringe demands of life and delineates the struggle for her autonomy. This study aptly reveals as to how Jaya, alike the psychoanalytical theory of coping strategies, comes out of the bereavement by coping and emerging out of the predicament of life. What makes Deshpande differ from the other contemporary Indian novelists is that her characters always find a silver lining in the dark cloud and thus Jaya's newly evolved consciousness soars high and flourishes with serenity and bliss.

Keywords: floundering, flourishing, autonomy, emotions, self-identity, behavior, coping.

Nelson Mandela's observation that "resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for your enemy to die." (2)

I. INTRODUCTION

It is vividly seen in many instances that there has been an unabated quest for a blue-sky state of mind, in pursuit of perpetual tenancy on the spectrum between complacency and ecstasy. But this is not always true as our emotions keep oscillating like a pendulum of watch and sometimes even reaching the fag end of floundering like that of protagonist Jaya in Shashi deshpande's renowned novel 'That Long Silence'. The term floundering indicates, to wobble around like a fish out of water or struggle mentally or be out of one's depth in a directionless manner is a state of a person when he/she is going through a self-identity crisis. Precisely saying it means that an individual submerged himself in the pit of wretchedness and failing to cope up with the situation, suppressed, afflicted and bewildered making mistakes as one is unable to give oneself time to think and rethink while undergoing the mental or physical upheaval in life.

In the firmament of literature, Deshpande, a contemporary and eminent Indian writer, portrays the piteous plight of persecuted women in the male dominated society. She is a scintillating Indian woman novelist who delineates the identity crisis of modern educated women in the patriarchal system of family. Her novels and stories focus on the experiences and struggles of women trying to find their own identities. Besides, her versatility in few of her renowned novels depicts that since times immemorial, women are seen sabotaging her inner voice and suppressing her feelings due to the harsh and ruthless society. She published her first collection of short stories in 1978, and her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in 1980. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel 'That Long Silence' in 1990. She won Padma Shri award in 2009. Her novels throw light on the issues of modern, educated, middle class Indian women who is engulfed in the whirlpool of trauma and loneliness in her life. (3) Author has adroitly portrayed an excellent balance between the two extremes –tradition and modernity in her splendid characterization of Jaya, in the present novel, whose name symbolizes victory. Some of her other novels are *If I Die Today* (1982), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), *The Binding Vine* (1992), *A Matter of Time* (1996) *Small Remedies* (2000), *Moving on* (2004), *Country of Deceit* (2008), *Ships That Pass* (2012) etc.

The present paper evinces how remarkably Shashi Deshpande depicts in her novel the inner turmoil and conflict of the learned, Indian women trapped inside the four walls of the house, aloof, alienated, and oppressed on the one hand and striving to seek her lost self-identity, individuality and independence on the other hand. She diligently reconnoitered the inner mind of Jaya who as an individual is liberated, self-contained, and self-reliant in her thoughts and behavior but who after her marriage is floundering to find her lost identity and self esteem.

Author aptly expressed in her own words: "My novels are about women trying to understand themselves, their history, their roles and their place in this society, and above all their relationship with others... In all my novels ... I have rejected stereotypes and re-questioned the myths which have so shaped the image of women, even the self image of women in this country. In away, through my writing, I have tried to break the long silence of women in our country."(4)

II. FLOUNDERING SELF OF JAYA

That Long Silence unravels Jaya's brooding after her husband Mohan deserts her. They were married for seventeen years with two children. They both have scrupulously balanced and maintained the delicacy of their marital relationship by keeping the scales on an even keel always. She has wonderfully symbolized their pairing and oneness with the image of two bullocks which uniquely defines their relationship as:

"Two 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 animal would voluntarily choose pain?"(1)

Women in India have always been viewed from the perspective of men. She has always been expected to work for the contentment and happiness of others ignoring and sacrificing her own. She is always been taken for granted whether she do wish to agree with it or not. Having given secondary status and sub standard treatment Jaya moves in her life journey without any self-esteem and identity. Her stress intensifies when she comes to know that her husband is trapped in a corruption case and wants to make himself unavailable by shifting to their Dadar flat. He as usual takes Jaya for granted without paying heed to her wishes and desires. In her own words she says as if "...he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I." (1) Alike in Hindu mythology 'Sita' followed her husband "Shri Rama' into exile, 'Savitri' closely and persistently followed Death to retrieve her husband and Draupadi indomitably share her husband's agony, Mohan too expected and assumed the same from his wife. (5) Today's modern Indian girls and women are torn between two cultures, traditional woman playing a role of a mother, wife, and daughter and on the other hand reflecting modernity in her outlook, attitude and self reliant approach towards life. Jaya acknowledges through her experiences that after marriage mere physical convergence of a couple is not enough. There should be a marriage of mind, body and soul. In her solitude she got infatuated towards Kamat, a lonely young widower who supported her to unleash her suppressed feelings and desires. He not only helped her to redeem her latent potential of writing which was restricted due to Mohan's notion of what to include and what to exclude but also gave a vent to her inner anguish which every other Indian women undergoes in her life. This is vivid in her conversation with Kamat when he insisted her to express her anger in her writing, she promptly answered by saying how can she be angry "...because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?"(1) Moreover she also said that "a woman can never be angry, she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated." (1).Hence this signifies the fact that the vacuum and stress in Jaya's life was not yet filled with her extra- marital relationship with Kamat. She still had a fragmented self which reveals that the coming back of Mohan will only result in filling her life with poise.

Rashmi Gaur observes: "Jaya's journey towards a well-defined selfhood is mired in the labyrinthine mazes of societal pressures, feminine conditioning to fashion oneself according to the accepted norms of behavior, suppressive and egotistic male chauvinism and the continued dilemma of attaching a purpose to her life, culminating in a long silence. Her silence is symptomatic of alienation and apprehension rioted in every

woman's soul in different forms –a silence which is often misunderstood by men as a symbol of woman's contentment". (6)

The study of the novel divulge the fact that Jaya's floundering state of mind is still perplexed and yet is fluttering to move ahead and flourish in life. In her own words she propounded that, "Self revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real you never emerge. Looking for it as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces."(1).Further she elaborates this by saying: "The mirror is always treacherous, it shows you only what you want to see. And perhaps, others too, see in your face what they want to see." (1) In other words we can co-relate Jaya's stressful phase to negative emotional discernment analogous to bodily and mental changes like behavioral, bio-chemical and physiological changes that are concomitant to perceived dire or perennial challenges. According to psychologist we can associate her stress and floundering to her temperament, resilience, adaptive skills and available social support. (7) Susceptibility increases the probability of a dysfunctional personality. This is obvious from the fact that she undergoes hallucinations and delusions of the coming back of Mohan. While pondering she often heard the sound of his footsteps and imagine him climbing up the stairs. In the weird of her day dreaming she even thought that he had probably died as there was no intimation from him.

The study of this paper also unveil that as the title of the book goes the 'silence' talked about is not that of serenity, peace or tranquility as always thought about instead it is 'that long silence' which has created a lot of chaos and confusion in the mind and soul of the protagonist making her flounder and submerge herself in inevitable silence, the one bristling with repressed anger, disillusionment, disownment and disdain. She has long been excruciated by this persistent agony of his absence and sudden disappearance which in turn also made her contemplate on her own expedition of life, its ups and downs. Besides, she also envisaged, and noodle around her 'absence of status' (8) and identity, as a profound artist, and a distinguished and confident individual. She compares her lot with Kusum her distant cousin who was too exasperated by rejection, indifference, and shunning by her husband in her marital life. In a fit of rage Jaya said to herself, "I came floundering out of the depths, thinking am I going crazy like Kusum." Jaya in her comparison to Kusum is categorizing both of them as "unwanted wives" or "deserted wives". (1)

Her guilt-conscious soul is also recollecting her past memories of forsaking Kusum at her time of need. Thus she recalls her grandmother's appalling dictum that if one lies in his life he/she will be a lizard in the next life, further cheating people will make one snake in the next life etc. But in Jaya's words it is a viscous circle, wherein she believes 'what you sow so shall you reap.' "An act and retribution - they followed each other naturally and inevitably" (1) Moreover she says "We didn't have to wait for another life for our punishment. It was all reserved for us right here and now."(1). Shashi Deshpande has wisely elaborated this point in her novel by giving example of King Dasarath who unknowingly killed innocent Young boy 'Shravan' whose agony stricken parents died in his grief cursing similar type of death to the king. Destiny took its toll when Dasarath too died under similar circumstances and had to undergo the same desolation and loss in his life as he was unable to meet his son 'Rama' who was exiled at the time of his death. Jaya bethink Kusum's penetrating voice and all her anguished cries of stopping Jaya to go back to her husband's home leaving Kusum alone. The same distress she is now undergoing herself. What a helplessness and vexation in which she is floundering instead of taking strong action by accepting?

III. FLOURISHING SELF OF JAYA

After a lot of musing of the disruption in her domestic life Jaya resolves to cope up and stand tall and fight for herself. Towards the end of the novel we see her moving on the verge of positivism as she wishes to break that long silence, move ahead and flourish. "In Positive Psychology flourishing is living "within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generatively, growth, and resilience."(9)

We seek Jaya emerges as an optimistic person. She has decided to unshackle and erase all the unwanted thoughts and misunderstanding with Mohan. She truly believes that building this gap of communication and giving vent to her thoughts will lead her to peace and harmony in life. Instead of leading a

saddened and petrified her life she indeed wants to emerge as a new woman by eradicating all the misunderstandings with Mohan. Thus through her own self talk Jaya decides to cope up by dealing with her own problems confidently and heroically.

“In psychology, ‘coping’ is expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress or conflict. The effectiveness of the coping efforts depends on the type of stress and/or conflict, the particular individual, and the circumstances.” (7) A renowned German Psychoanalyst Karen Horney has propounded her theory in which human beings cope up and deal with their disquiet and perturbation engendered by low self esteem, insecurity, lack of safety, love and value in life repudiating their real emotions and thoughts and in-turn trying to combat the defense mechanism. She defined four coping strategies to define interpersonal relations, wonderfully construing an individual who is psychological healthy and the others portraying “neurotic” states. They are:

Moving with
Moving toward
Moving away
Moving against

Amongst which, “The healthy strategy she termed "Moving with" is that with which psychologically healthy people develop relationships. It involves compromise. In order to move with, there must be communication, agreement, disagreement, compromise, and decisions. The three other strategies she described – "Moving toward", "Moving against" and "Moving away" – represented neurotic, unhealthy strategies people utilize in order to protect themselves.”(10).The other three coping strategies are elaborated in a nutshell; “Moving towards” is a strategy wherein an individual moves towards people because of coercion of being punished. The next phase is that of “Moving away” wherein an individual encompasses himself in his own bud and tends to become an escapist, self-effacing his own persona. In the last strategy stated here an individual fulminate the one who is deemed as a peril. Horney in her “Self-theory” also observes that a neurotic “sways between his ideal self” and “despised self”. Further she states that such an individual is unable to assess his real destination in life and reach the stage of self- actualization and realization.(10)Thus, the protagonist Jaya opted for the coping strategy “Moving with” instead of the other three coping strategies, as she wanted to embrace her dignity and self-identity in life with confidence instead of becoming a neurotic. She desires to move and flourish and not exploit her life being a neurotic.

IV. CONCLUSION

Hence, it can be concluded that in Shashi Deshpande’s novel pain and joy are inter-knit together beautifully. The arresting quality of her novels as compared to other contemporary feminist writers is that, towards the end of her novel she anticipates the positivism, realism and naturalism to further explore the ultimate rectitude, virtue and conviction. Coming of Mohan’s telegram saying “All Well” (1) at the end of the novel indicates a ray of hope for Jaya which rejuvenates her real self striving to fathom the darkness in her life. It is pertinently said, “Jaya’s struggle is like a torch to many women who have been searching for the life of freedom.” (11)

Nietzsche has wisely said:

What can every human being affirm?

We can all say “Yes” to more positive emotion in life.

We can all say “Yes” to more engagement with the people we love, in our work, in our leisure.

We can all say “Yes” to better relationships with people.

We can all say “Yes” to more meaning in life.

We can all say “Yes” to more positive accomplishment.

We can all say “Yes” to human flourishing. (12)

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