



Quest for self-actualization in Shashi Deshpande's *That long silence* and Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant*: A comparative study

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Abstract

Through their writings some female authors endeavor to sensitize the middle class Indian woman to the overweening male-controlled culture. Their motive is to make the latter aware of her self-effacing persona in the interpersonal relationships where she cannot assert her individuality and personality, subsequently prompting a dependence syndrome in her. Crushing her rights and choices matrimony also proffers her a life full of thorns and prickles. The hypocritical and torturous marital relations make her meek and mild, consequently reducing her merely to an insignificant creature. These writers concentrate on the lives of the middle class Indian woman who is sandwiched between stereotyped practice and modernity. They wish that the Indian woman should bloom up to the mark so they motivate her to transcend the patriarchal threshold and polish her potential and talent. The present research paper brings about a comparative study of the novels *That Long Silence* and *The Immigrant* by Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur respectively, in the light of self-actualization by the protagonists. Both writers penetrate into the female psyche. Their utmost concern has been a revelation of subtle mutual relationships and inner life of the women characters.

Keywords: marginalization, macho counterpart, submissive, dominating society

Introduction

Indian female novelists in the field of Indian writing in English realistically sketch the extremity of the sad state of the middle class Indian woman who is ensnared in the conventional patriarchal ideals characterized by marginalization and mistreatment of woman. In the male controlled culture she has been rendered to second-rate position and has become an underling to her macho counterpart. A deep analysis of some works from feminist perspective reveals that the novelists, through their leading female characters, try to expose the financial, psychological and other existential issues which a woman has to bear in marital relationships in patriarchal system. The authors effectively depict how the institution of traditional marriage in the male dominating society reduces woman to the derivative position. She is expected to be a submissive and sacrificial creature that annihilates her individual self. Both authors, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur apparently reveal their feministic attitude and approach in their novels *That Long Silence* and *Immigrant* respectively. These works vividly depict a picture of the contemporary woman whom the institution of marriage reduces to a yielding and accommodative creature.

Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur wish to bring a transformation in the life of the woman who is seized in the oppressive clutches of patriarchal doctrine by analyzing the latter's position and condition in the domineering set-up. The writers desire that the Indian woman should get autonomy and individuality so they delineate their protagonists in a manner in which the later rebels against the patriarchal ideology for self-actualization this paper presents a comparative study of the novels- *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande and *The Immigrant* by Manju Kapur. Both the novelists reveal the gender biasness prevailing in the society similarly, but rebel against male- chauvinism

differently. Whereas Shashi Deshpande advocates for liberation of Indian woman from the stereotyped tradition safeguarding the wedlock, Manju Kapur opines that if the woman doesn't get fulfilment in marriage, she should breakup the conjugality, and start a new life to establish her identity.

Both the writers draw up their leading characters in a manner in which the wedlock becomes a web of misfortunes for the protagonists ultimately depriving them of their rights and choices. In this context Gur Pyari Jandial aptly remarks in her article, "Towards a New World Order: The Female self in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*":

While she has played different roles – as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her own individuality. The words which we always associate with what we consider to be the concept of an ideal woman are- self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. A woman was and is expected to subordinate every wish and every desire to someone else a parent, a husband or a child. (211)

But as these writers wish that Indian woman should attain liberty and autonomy so the protagonists of both the novels, Jaya and Nina reject the male ascendancy and patriarchal value-system for attaining self-actualization. In the quest for individuality they erase their image of the sacrificial & deferential women by transcending the patriarchal threshold. Jaya and Nina aspire for volition and self-assertion by rejecting self-effacement in man-woman relationship. But both of them rebel against the stereotyped tradition differently. As Shashi Deshpande believes that woman can't remain elated sans man so she constructs the character of Jaya in *That Long Silence* in a manner in which Jaya, in the end of the novel, seems creepy and heartbroken in the

absence of her husband, Mohan. Whereas Manju Kapur takes her protagonists one step ahead of her forerunners handling salient issues such as disloyalty, desertion and marriage-dissolution because she opines that woman should go up to the extent of break-up to escape from the oppressive web of misfortunes. Nina in the end of the novel, *The Immigrant*, leaves her home and husband in search of completeness and togetherness. Now she wants to go where she can realize her individuality and self-identity in which lies her real contentment.

Shashi Deshpande presents the odyssey of the middle class Indian woman from self-effacement to self-actualization. Jaya, the central character of the novel embraces silence to please her husband for a long period but as inner turmoil rests on her mind and soul, she ultimately breaks the silence. The writer explicitly depicts the stark reality of the society where man subjugates woman to his will neglecting her feelings, potential and talent, consequently making her a silent sufferer. He inflicts psychological and emotional atrocity on her through his male ego, apathy and cynicism. N. Sharda Iyer observes:

Deshpande unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation at work in the family and in the male oriented society.... Her major novels, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* trace the quest for self-definition of women, who are educated and modern. (206)

In spite of being a bright and modern woman having a good academic qualification, potential and talent, Jaya cannot carve her identity. Neglecting her merits, she is told that "a husband is like a sheltering tree" (Deshpande 137) and that "the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (Deshpande 138). Ultimately rendering her to a sacrificial being, Simon de Beauvoir asserts:

Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees..... She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental as apposed to the essential. (qtd. in Reena 90)

In spite of being a good match Jaya cannot obtain fulfillment in her husband as his male ego does not allow him to appreciate her feelings and potential, subsequently creating an emotional void in her. Through the mouthpiece of Jaya, Deshpande exposes the bitter truth of the callous patriarchal society, "We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us" (Deshpande 185). Reena in her article, "from Self-Annihilation to self-realization: A critical Study of Shashi Deshpande's Novel, *That Long Silence*" asserts aptly:

Through this novel the writer unearths the reality of the hypocritical patriarchal society where on the one hand woman is considered as a goddess, on the other hand she gets only exploitation and suffocation. Man curbs her happiness and makes her a silent sufferer. (78)

After her marriage Jaya becomes Suhasini because she realizes that her husband's happiness lies in her silence. At her father's home Jaya was a lively spirit but the oppressive marital relations change her to Suhasini? Parvati Bhatnagar aptly remarks, "Jaya has always been a bold and fearless person. But she tried to behave like Suhasini, a nervous, incompetent woman needing male support all the time" (138). Now she adopts forced silence for the sake of her

husband's satisfaction. The novelist evidently exposes that in the patriarchal society the woman only who tolerates every suffering silently gets respect. Jaya becomes Suhasini because Mohan, her husband tells her, "My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her" (Deshpande 83). Through this line Deshpande explicitly exposes the repressive nature of male who thinks that woman is an insignificant entity having no emotions and feelings, and her duty is only to serve the husband and the family annihilating her own individuality.

Because of the ill-mentality and patriarchal nature of Mohan, Jaya never feels the togetherness and warmth of the relationship. In spite of getting no fulfillment in marriage she suppresses her feelings because of the fear of dissolution of the marriage, consequently having an inner turmoil that is a psychological torment on her. But when her mental state affects the personality of her son she realizes the fact that her adopted silence has become a curse for her & her son. Having realized the stark reality she firmly, resolves to break the silence, "I will have to speak... if I will have to erase the silence between us" (Deshpande 192).

Deshpande has a firm faith in the institution of family so she advocates the liberation of woman from the oppressive male domineering set-up by living together with man. So she paints the character of Suhasini in a manner in which she later rebels against the patriarchal mindset of her husband by breaking the silence which she has adopted for years, but feels ill at ease when Mohan goes away from home because she doesn't want to dissolve the marriage. P. D. Nimsarkar explicitly points out, "Deshpande doesn't want a separate place for women sans men but a compassionate union based on love, understanding and emotional involvement". (qtd. in Reena 79)

Through the life of Nina, the protagonist of *The Immigrant*, Manju Kapur emphatically exhibits the predicament of an immigrant woman who leaves her job of a lecturer in India and migrates to Canada for leading a dreamy married life with her husband, Ananda who is a doctor in Canada. But as the story of the novel progresses we observe that instead of enjoying the bliss of life she faces a whirlpool of afflictions because of the patriarchal instinct in her husband who endeavors to be the controller of her lifestyle completely. He passes satirical remarks on her Indian food habits and dressing sense, and proffers her little choice, ultimately successfully compelling her to leave her Indian food habits and Indian dresses. The subsequent dialogue between Ananda and his wife clearly depicts a husband's dominating patriarchal mind:

"Here I'm thought of as a cultured man. that I don't want folks to get the wrong impression... That you are a traditional, backward Indian girl." (Kapur 147)

The author effectively brings to light the misery of a woman who suffers from frustration sexually and remains unsuccessful in getting conception because of her husband's apathy towards his sexual dysfunction. Moreover, the patriarchal male ego in her husband refuses him to consult a physician, consequently creating an emotional turmoil in Nina due to which she suffers from pangs of nostalgia. Nina feels herself as a self-effaced persona, as she asserts, "I miss home. I miss a job. I miss doing things. I feel like a shadow" (Kapur 237).

The author underlines the torture inflicted on Nina by revealing a patriarchal check on the latter's outlays. Ananda himself is free to spend money on his extra-marital relationship, but on purchasing a sweater for three hundred dollars, Ananda scolds Nina bitterly, as he says:

"Three hundred dollars: You spent three hundred dollars on your clothes? Why? (Kapur 273).

The author reveals the bitter truth of the patriarchal society where man is an authority of the economic power within the institution of the family. Being the chief of the family he is not accountable for his expenditure to anybody else but does have a patriarchal restraint on his wife's expenses as she is a subservient partner (qtd. in Reena 108)

Manju Kapur wants that Indian woman should not live an unassertive existence but the later should establish self-identity by crossing the patriarchal threshold. So when Nina comes to know about Ananda's treachery she decides to abandon home and the spouse. Kapur comments, "When one was reinventing one self, anywhere could be home, pull up your shallow roots and move to find a new place, new friends, a new family. It had been possible once, it would be possible again" (Kapur 330).

The comparative study of both the novels – That Long Silence and the Immigrant, analyzes that both authors Shashi Deshpande, and Manju Kapur raise a feminist voice through these novels. They make the middle class Indian woman aware of the repressive nature of the patriarchal credo, and advocate for the liberation of woman from the torturous male-domination. But they try to bring the transformation in the lot of the middle class Indian woman differently. Deshpande longs for woman emancipation but she cannot imagine a blissful life for woman sans man. So she doesn't recommend dissolution of marriage. She opines that a woman should try to establish her autonomy and individuality and rebel against the patriarchal ideals safeguarding the marital relationships. Hence Deshpande portrays the character of Suhasini, the protagonist of the novel in a manner in which the later rebels against the male chauvinism by breaking the silence but gets depressed when her husband leaves the home.

Whereas Manju Kapur doesn't desire her protagonist to be bound by the family if it becomes atrocious for her. She believes that a woman should break up the wedlock if it proves a web of adversities and afflictions for her, and should start a new life where she can carve her identity and bloom up to the mark. That is why Manju Kapur presents Nina, the heroine of the novel, The Immigrant going away from home and marriage in search of new moorings where she can get fulfillment.

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