



Rejection of Silence :A voice of feminine sensibility in Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and Devi's *Draupadi*

Saloni Prasad (Mrs Kumar)
Professor, Dept. of English
College of Commerce,
Magadh University, Bodhgaya

Abstract

The history of woman's oppression has been the origin to 'feminism'. In general women are viewed as subordinates to men. They are the secondary in almost all the society. Though women are physically and mentally equipped to perform on par with men, they are deprived of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their thoughts, and their anguish. Feminism in literature has given the women perception along with the female experience interrogating the cultural prescriptions. The greatest problem for women is the preservation and expression of their identity. The psychological factors are responsible for the sufferings of the women characters in most of the novels. They represent the real psyche of Indian woman and therefore the problem of identity is based on the psychological factors of women. Shashi Deshpande holds a significant place among the women novelists. Her protagonists are young modern women who are in quest for identity in the male dominated and tradition bound society. Her flawless depiction of the psyche of urban middle class women is present in all her novels. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is the award winning novel which depicts the prolonged silence of women in the society. She realistically portrays the inner conflict of the protagonist Jaya and her quest for self or identity. In the novel, the protagonist Jaya, understands her mistake of being in a long silence neglecting her own voice. The female characters of Mahasweta Devi are placed at the heart of multiple victimhood due to caste discrimination and economic exploitation, patriarchy and sexual exploitation. They become the epitome of suffering, pain and anguish, the silence of which pierces and insists on some definite change in their favour. But the victims have the great energy to stand up against all odds and show a tremendous desire for life. They resist authority, stereotyping, icons, and gender-based survival and self-definition. Whatever the onslaught, they carry out their struggle by adopting a variety of survival aids rising again and again from ashes like a Phoenix. Devi's stories are giving a



voice to these voiceless marginalized women. Her stories are explaining the exploitation of female body as well as forming of a resistance factor of female body. In *Draupadi Mahasweta* Devi presents a strong woman who despite being marginalized and exploited, transgresses conventional sexual and societal standards. Dopdi deconstructs the whole notion of womanhood. Her female body becomes a symbol of voice or a symbol of protest.

Keywords: Feminism, Patriarchy, Marginalization, Struggle, Protest.

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is a well-known name in the field of Indian literature. She was born in 1938 in Dharwad in Karnataka as the daughter of the renowned Kannada dramatist as well as a great Sanskrit scholar Sriranga. In 1978 her first anthology of short stories has published. She is a leading woman novelist in the Indian Literary Horizon with ten novels including *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980); *If I Die Today*; *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983); *Roots and Shadows* (1986); *That Long Silence* (1987); *The Binding Vine* (1993); *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Small Remedies* (2000), four books for children, over eighty short stories including *The Legacy* (1978); *The Miracle* (1986); *It was Dark* (1986), and *It was the Nightingale* (1986), and a screenplay to her credit. Her books have been published both in India and abroad, and three of her Novels have been presented with awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Nanjangud Thirumalamba award for her novel *That Long Silence*, published by the Virago Press, London, has entrenched Deshpande as a reputed novelist of substantial worth. Deshpande, in her novels, deals with certain chronic themes, like the inner conflict, identity crisis, and parent-child relationship, especially the mother-daughter relationship, and the concept of marriage and sex. Her novels are mainly based on women their problems particularly in the Indian context for this reason she has been labelled feminist. She explored the realities behind the silence of women. She raised her voice against torment on women and also created mass unawareness in this matter through her writings. Her books are translated into Indian languages. Above all, the theme of silence embedded in the complex relationship between a man and a woman forms the major part of Deshpande's novels. Deshpande, in a nutshell, describes the inequality, prejudices, tyranny, brutality, and suppression faced by women in a patriarchal society, because she is the other. Though her women protagonists are

consistently pressured in uncoordinated, gnarled relationships, her women firmly refuse to become prisoners of orthodox, fossilized traditions and stereotypically idealized identities.

Mahasweta Devi was born in 1926 in Dhaka, Bangladesh in the erstwhile British India. She was born to Manish Ghatak. Manish Ghatak is a well-known novelist and poet. She completed B.A.(Hons) in English, Vishvabharathi University in Santiniketan and then finished M.A. in English at Calcutta University. She passed away on 28th July, 2016. She became a renowned and prolific writer. She was also a journalist and eminent social activist. She worked as a lecturer, journalist and then completely dedicated herself to the cause of the downtrodden. She started writing from an early age for various literary magazines. She has to her credit over 20 collections of short stories and over 100 novels primarily in her native language, Bengali. She was influenced by the Naxalite movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the major themes of works of Mahasweta Devi involves position of tribal communities within India. She had been working very hard since a very long time for the political, social and economic development and advancement of these communities. She had been a regular contributor to several literary magazines as 'Bortika' dedicated to the cause of oppressed communities in India. In 1984, she got retired from her job as an English lecturer at Calcutta University only to concentrate more on her writing and to dedicate herself more towards the upliftment of these tribal communities. Devi has a fertile literary career that spanned over five decades. Her works were translated into other languages. Her first novel *Jhansi Rani* was written in 1956 and was based on the biography of Rani of Jhansi. Most of her works have been translated into English. Some of her works are *The Queen of Jhansi* (1956), *Nati* (A Dancer, 1957), *Hajar Churashir Ma* (Mother of 1084, 1974), *Aranyer Adhikar* (Right to the Forest, 1977), *Agnigarbha* (Womb of Fire, 1978), *Murti* (Collection of Short Stories, 1979) *Neerete Megh* (Collection of Short Stories, 1979) *Chotti Munda evam Tar Tir* (Chotti Munda and His Arrow, 1980), *Five Plays*. (Mother of 1084, Aajir, Urvashi O Johnny, Bayen and Water, 1986) Mahasweta Devi depicts women's anguish, that is, both psychological and physical torment they experience. She portrays women's agony for the separation and loss of their children and express the mothers' pathos. She makes a conspicuous outlook of the patriarchal and male-dominated society, which threaten the existence of women.



Major Thrust

Feminine sensibility has occurred as one of the most significant themes adopted by the Indian English fiction writers. Feminism is considered as an uplifting concept dealt by the writers very sensitively in India. Many Indian women writers have effectively highlighted the “women’s issues” through their works. Feminism literature is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society and their corresponding fluid position. Most of the attempts to define what it is to be a woman assume a universal connotation in that a woman is considered more as a product of cultural norms and restraints rather than as a creation of nature. Indian women writers deal with women’s issues and consequent predicament of women existed in the society. They have raised their voice through their works against gender inequality which is proved as supportive in getting women’s liberty as well as to improve their status.

That Long Silence is an excellent work of art. The title of the novel depicts the intention of the novelist in order to reveal the female psyche. Jaya, is the protagonist of ‘The Long Silence’ who is an intelligent woman with graduation in English, a writer and columnist who had a bright career. Unfortunately, none of these attributes would provide her a respectable position in the eyes of her husband Mohan, who is socialized in a typical tradition and environment. He perceives his wife on par with Seeta, Savitri and Draupadi. His mother and sister are very much submissive to father. The decisions relating to familial and financial matters are taken by the male members of the family. So he wants his wife to be submissive like them as a homemaker. In a male-dominated society, a woman has no space to be independent. She is dependent on men either on father, husband or son. They are hardly given freedom and independence. Slavery to man makes them suffer from dual roles of child bearing and domestic chores. She has no freedom regarding the selection of her life partners and marriage. Marriage becomes their destiny and Jaya thinks; as we grew into young women, we realize it was not love, but marriage that was the destiny waiting for her. Jaya is perpetually probing and protecting her autonomy. She revolts but in silence. Silence was her natural condition. When her husband Mohan talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands which he calls strength, she passionately bursts into rumination: *He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender* (TLS, 36). In *That*



Long Silence, the protagonist Jaya journey towards self-actualization. The novel embarks on with the receptive appearance of the solitude of a woman and the poignant question of the eventual purpose of her life in the milieu of her familial bond. The novel is an individual's journey in search of one's true self who confronts the gender oriented tradition. It depicts the plight of a wife who suffers silently in the name of family. Marriage is still a social necessity, where women seek security and men respectability. In her early married life, Jaya had yielded her decision to her husband. The forced isolated stay in Dadar flat facilitates her to reconsider her life built around the needs of a husband only. Jaya's creativity provides her an outlet for her dissatisfaction. The novel ends with a renewal of faith. Jaya's decision to wipe out the silence and have a balanced contented life is a decision in the right direction. Self-actualization is possible if a woman decides to be herself, to reveal the genuine value of her free and inborn individuality in its entirety.

That Long Silence is very close to real life experience and achieves its consistency from the actuality that the protagonist Jaya is a well educated person with a literary sensitivity equivalent with her fictional role. Silence for her is a kind of Defense Mechanism, which helps her to express herself more comprehensively. But the repeated allegations and accusations of her husband compel her to react sharply. The novel deals with feminism at its core. In the beginning, the imitation of role model has been crossed by Jaya. Then it is followed by anger and protest. Whenever she looks back on her life, she has no nostalgia or yearning for the past; but it is exhibited as a feeling of suppressed anger which can burst out any time. Finally, articulation and assertion of the protagonist are only hinted as one of the future potentials for Jaya. After a long silence, Jaya finally comes to the phase of self-realization or the female phase. She stops blaming others for her failures. She examines her past life and comes to know the truth about her failures as a writer. She decides to plug that hole as she did earlier by speaking and listening and erasing the silence between her and Mohan. It is this erasing of the silence that symbolizes the assertion of the feminine voice, a voice with hope and promise, a voice that articulates her thoughts. The novel doesn't depict Jaya's life as a totally dismal and hopeless struggle. It suggests "hope" and "change" for a better life. Jaya is one among Shashi Deshpande's victorious strong women protagonists who repudiates to get trampled under the influence of her personal tragedy, and faces life with great courage and strength.

In this way, Shashi Deshpande has successfully presented a female character who suffers a lot as she remains silent. Her attitude to be silence made her suffer a lot. The novel is an perfect example of female and feminist writing. Through the portrayal of Jaya, novelist has managed to highlight women suffering in a traditional Indian society and circumstances she undergoes. The protagonist has the Freudian traits where she is troubled by her inner feelings and outer challenges. At last she manages to come out of it as inner feelings started dominating. Novelist has skilfully depicted a perfect picture of woman who becomes victim of her attitude to be silence.

Mahasweta Devi's story *Draupadi* is named after the heroine Draupadi of *The Mahabharata*. Draupadi is the central character. She is introduced to the readers between two uniforms and two versions of her name; Dopdi and Draupadi. It is either that as a tribal she can't pronounce her own Sanskrit name or the tribalized form 'Dopdi' is the proper name of the ancient Draupadi. The name is used in homonyms sense. The word Dopdi is derived from Draupadi, the inscription of the elite name. The story of 'Draupadi' reminds us the epical Draupadi '*The Mahabharata*'. The story talks about the another Kurukshetra. Mahasweta Devi rewrote the story of Dopdi to reanimate the obscure territory of the lives of subaltern. Only when we read through the mythic method point of view, only when we read the text contrapuntally then we understand the problems of women are treated as marginalised entities in society. In 'The Mahabharata' Draupadi was battered in the game of dice for being a woman. So, she is subalternised gender wisely. She is married to the five sons of the impotent Pandu. Within a patriarchal and patronymic context, she is exceptional, indeed 'singular' in the sense of odd, unpaired, uncoupled. When she is disrobing, she silently prays to Lord Krishna to save her. The idea of sustaining law materializes itself as clothing and Draupadi is infinitely clothes and cannot be publicly stripped. She got the divine blessing. But if we juxtapose the character Dopdi and the epic character Draupadi side by side we find there are many similarities between them, but at the same time there are enough ground of departure. Mahasweta Devi departs as we find that in the epic Draupadi legitimized pluralization as a wife among husband in singularity is used to demonstrate the glory. She questions the singularity by placing Dopdi first in a comradely, activist monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rape.



Unlike Draupadi, Dopdi uses her feminine nakedness as a weapon against her enemy. She unveils herself to turn the violence that she endured, upon the man responsible for the violence against her. Dopdi's reaction to her rape is completely contradictory to society's view of rape. Instead of letting this abhorrent rape, she is empowered by the rape. The disrobing of garment simulates powerful male reaction. Disrobing her garment is most importantly a symbol of her remarkable survival. Rape can make woman as it did Dopdi. Rape is commonly viewed by society as a symbol of female degradation, female submission and the stripping of honour and humanity. In the story of Devi, Draupadi, a tribal rebel is raped by authorities of state, the portrayal of rape and the reaction of the young woman is exceedingly different. In Draupadi the unveiling of garments reveals immense female power and it symbolizes the remarkable survival of these battered and abused women. The circumstance and personalities of the rape victims are very different in Dopdi and Draupadi in *The Mahabharata*. Mahasweta Devi shows that degradation was in the past, and also remain in the present.

Mahasweta Devi's Dopdi is a recreation of Draupadi of the epic, in which there is one villain who dares to pull her sari and confiscate her modesty whereas Devi's Dopdi has to face so many villains. Of Krishna Devi presents a contrast. Mythological character Draupadi is saved by the tribal Dopdi is tortured and subjected by the patriarchy. But tribal Dopdi is represented as a very strong and a powerful character. In spite of so many oppression, before an unarmed she remains determined and firm. *For the first time a dominated male has target, to feel terribly inferior afraid.* (D, p. 402). This statement highlights that at the end, male power structure before a female. The voice of Dopdi weakens the voices of a Since ages, the man in power always tries to exploit and oppress the inferior by the men in power. After the capture of Dopdi, *"She feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts, something sticky under her arms and waist. Only the gag has been removed."* (D, p. 401). Like other passive rape victims, Dopdi does not suffer in silence. With unbeatable spirit vigorous marginalized Dopdi faces her rapist with resistant and firm spirit. Devi presents Dopdi as a character who takes stand against the injustice done by upper class men. Conquering her pain and oppression, she emerges as a most powerful "subject". Devi exposes the patriarchal society where Dopdi became a symbol of millions of tribal women who are oppressed,



marginalized the atrocity committed and humiliated by the agents of politics. She challenges the authorities to behold can you clothe by them and states 'What's the uses of clothes? You can strip me but how (D, p.402).

This based short on the story reverberates the bitter, powerful and shocking realities of present time of patriarchal tradition of Indian culture, Devi shows what actually happen to a woman when they are seen as merely 'target object'. Dopdi displays her mutilated body story to Senanayak as "the object of your search." The words of Rajeshwari Sundar Ranjan in the of Draupadi's disrobing are: "*Sexual molestation of any form happens to be Patriarchy's method of social control rather than pathology of sexual violence as such.*" (Ranjan, p.102).

Devi's stories are giving a voice to these voiceless marginalized women. Her stories are explaining the exploitation of female body as well as forming of a resistance factor of female body. These marginalized women do exercise power within a restricted structure. This power has achieved through long term suffering by suppressing her voice and sacrifice which is by mutilating off female body. However they possess a voice in many forms but ultimate goal is to be heard which is done by Mahasweta Devi, wonderfully. Therefore, Devi's stories are echoing the repressive power of resistance.

Conclusion

Deshpande establishes a perspective that women should be recognized, heard and understood; they must not be kept as cage birds; they must triumphantly sing of their true selves and transcend all sorts of oppressions. The silent suffering of woman is socio-psychic in nature. In her quest for identity, the Deshpande's female protagonist moves from despair to hope, from self-negation to self-assertion. Her struggle throughout is to attain wholeness, completeness and an authentic selfhood. Deshpande's protagonists are in search of authentic and distinct self. Jaya's journey has the potential to inspire women in her community, who are going through similar challenges. Her journey becomes a beacon of hope, demonstrating that change is possible and that silence can be overcome. Breaking away from the familial ties and the stifling milieu of the family they are all agog to find meaning and value in their own life, their self-styled roles, their autonomous existence. The quest is an attempt to assert human values, to

affirm their rights as human beings. Through her depiction of draught with various images and symbols, Mahasweta Devi presents a message of interior mental strength, resistant power and possession of agency. Draupadi is an exemplary embodiment for modern society. Her struggle for marginalized women is also a noteworthy sight. Reclaiming her own agency in the face of systemic violence makes her a fearless fighter. A profound commentary lies in this story, making the text more vital from a feminist viewpoint.

Works Cited

Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1989

Devi, Mahasweta. *Draupadi. Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. Ed and trans. Gayatri Spivak. London: Routledge 1988

Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post-Colonialism*. Routledge, 1993.