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The Evolution of Feminine Freedom: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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The evolution of Feminine Freedom – A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* Woman is a currently complex being and her evolution is a study of perennial interest. In recent times the image of the middle class Indian woman has undergone a rapid change. Women are now more articulate. A sizeable portion of them are active in professional and public life. Although there is an apparent change, the basic roles and presumptions about women's world remain the same. The move of the New Woman from home to the world and the hurdles she has to cross analyze factors hampering the movement of the modern Indian woman.

Women have been both a centripetal and centrifugal force for many creative artists. In India, they are idolized, the most idealized, and canonized image in art, literature sculpture and religion. These artists have exposed only their external physic but none cared to explore and express the psyche and the inmost passions of their mind. Indian women are still bogged down by the invisible fetters of religion, tradition and culture. The myth of collective unconscious prized by a society is prevalent in Indian women. The Indian women are in the transitional stage of moving towards freedom.

Three Stages of Feminine Freedom:

1. The first stage is Embryo-Incipience and the second stage is Incubation-Transition and the third stage is Fledgelings-Transformation. In the first phase the Indian women assimilate the native culture. Brought up in a joint family, which is patriarchal, they themselves internalize the values of the period during their formation and growth. Their evolution in their embryo stage is in the conventional mode. It is a retreat into silence dwelling as in a dark chamber.
2. In the second phase Incubation-Transition, there is a slow development, change in the mental makeup of the heroine. They continue to be what they are, for a long time after their marriage until in a moment of crisis. They are shaken and then start questioning themselves. It is an introspection of their life, a refrain of reticence. Due to the different ideologies and education they try to move towards awareness. They realize that they are no longer in the dark chamber, but in a dark tunnel and there may be an opening somewhere.
3. The third phase Fledglings portrays the struggle of the protagonist against the occupying power and shakes herself out from indecisiveness. They wake up to reality of their own selves. They then search for an authentic identity and help other women to fight against patriarchy in different ways. Unlike the heroines of other feminine novelists, Deshpande's heroines emerge as

bold and self-confident. Freedom means the individual coming to terms with her own past and with herself accepting her limitation and going on from there, however terrified may be.

In the novel *That Long Silence* Deshpande depicts the fine swings of moods, the wax and wane of the moments of joy and despair, the bits of feelings perceived and suppressed the life of senses as well as the heart wringing anguish of the narrator, Jaya. It displays the process of Jaya's self analysis and self-recognition that help her to emerge from her cozy corner that she has long preferred to reality. Jaya is a representative of the urban, middle-class woman exposed to liberal Western ideas. But she is unable to free herself entirely from the clutches of male chauvinist ideas. These ideas are a part and parcel of her culture, thrust upon by her family and her patriarchal society. Her early training at home has made her obedient and submissive towards her husband, Mohan. Since her childhood, she has designed her life according to the desire and design of her family members' choice. Her relatives taught her the importance of being with a husband. According to them a husband is like a 'sheltering tree' and she proceeds to keep the tree alive and flourishing.

Jaya discovers how sharply defined is a woman's role in the patriarchal set up. This discovery is a revelation to her when she sees the women in her husband's family are so definite about their roles, well trained in their duties. She accepts Mohan as her 'profession,' her 'career,' and her 'means of livelihood.' She plays the role of mythic Sita and she is appreciated by her husband and Jaya receives a sense of security. She has to sacrifice her individuality and had to mould her as per Mohan's desires. As a typical Indian girl, she tries to merge her will in the will of her husband and that of the society. Before her introspection, Jaya accepted Mohan as a sheltering tree. She never questioned him as she may lose her sheltered existence. In the early years of her marriage, Jaya is on the threshold of acquiring a name as a creative writer of some merit. In both the roles as a faithful wife and as a writer, she has failed to establish her individuality strongly

The sudden catastrophe of the corruption charges against Mohan and their exile to the Dadar flat however, compel Jaya to "excavate her own truths and those of other women" in her life that unlock the individual self. In contrast to her mythical counterpart Sita, the Indian model womanhood, Sita was not willing to sneak away like a thief into hiding with her husband, unquestioningly. The sense of shame pervades her being, and her sense of security is shattered with the sudden prospect of Mohan facing the enquiry. It is ironical to note that Mohan makes his wife and children responsible for his malpractice in order to provide comforts and luxury for their sake. He accuses her of not taking care of his children, of isolating herself from the family and her own feeble defenses fail before the fierce onslaught. Mohan leaves home without a word. His absence unnerves Jaya and she thinks she would fall apart. She begins to vegetate. Her inner conflict and turmoil are so bitter she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in order to be frustrated and disappointed after disapproval of her action by the society.

The words of Kamath, Jaya's neighbour proved to be a source of awakening. This stage of introspection is an indication of the beginning of an awakening. She understands that though

basically she is modern, she is rooted in traditions and customs. Kamath encourages her to take up her writing. Her own incompleteness makes her more sensitive to the emotional needs of her husband. She realizes that her failure of establishing normal reciprocal relationship with her husband had resulted in herself alienation. A wife's relation with her husband must take form within the totality of her life as a woman, only then it can lead to a harmonious existence. She feels that the intense search for self has brought knowledge of life which cannot be lived in a vacuum. She journeys a full circle, from searching for her identity in loneliness to her relationship with Mohan and her children. Her search for a positive response from her life to obtain self actualized behavior, a holistic approach towards life is essential and one must be resilient in her approach. Her resurgence of faith is revealed in her decision to erase the silence which had defined and distorted her communication with her husband, the silence to sound should be interpreted as the harbinger of new hope. If marriage or love is without independence, it dissipates a woman's personality into nothingness. Interdependence without love also exhausts her sensitivity in a constant tussle with the self and her society. In short, self actualization is possible if a woman decides to be herself, to exhibit genuine significance of her free, innate and uninhibited personality in totality. She becomes aware that meaningful co-existence can come only through understanding, respect and compassion, not through domination or subjugation. Choice is the right of both man and woman. The only thing to remember is that choice is relevant only there is knowledge. In the same way freedom is relevant only when there is responsibility- responsibility to oneself, Freedom to survive 'the whole' within the system, and Jaya ultimately feels it is possible. She acquires moral strength after a long silence. She decides to sound like a true fledgling with the rational capacity developed by education. She propels herself in the right direction towards feminine freedom. She breaks out the cocooned existence and comes out as a fledgling of the new sought freedom.

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