



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE COLOR PURPLE AND THAT LONG SILENCE

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Abstract:

The paper analyzes the reproduction of violence in two novels namely 'The Color Purple' and 'That Long Silence' penned by Alice Walker and Shashi Deshpande respectively. The paper zero in on the Afro-American and Indian women and the suffering they endure on account of the fact that before and after the Harlem Renaissance and the Independence in Afro-America and India respectively, women are still in chains. It focuses on the position of women in their respective patriarchal communities which seems to torn between the human being and women and between the present day new practices due to women's access to education and stereotyped ancient patriarchal culture. Both these novels taken for the study depict the nature of violences against women which are legions and in different forms. It also concentrates on the grounds of similarities and differences in novels to be scrutinized. Women, born to be free as a man, finds herself constrained and curbed by the patriarchal society, not only in India but in most parts of the world. This is due to the primarily patriarchal culture of the world.

Keywords: Alice Walker, Shashi Deshpande, The Color Purple, That Long Silence, Domestic Violence, Feminism.

Introduction:

In 21st century, multitudinous authors have given voice to the question of women's place and identity in a patriarchal society. Authors across the world have triumphantly highlighted injustice done to the women in their patriarchal societies as well as unceasing dictatorship of ingrained customs and traditions in their respective countries. There are end numbers of variegated problems of women which are full of woe and tears. Lack of individuality, financial helplessness, political



negligence, social exploitation, dowry, child marriage, honour killings, widowhood, mental turmoil, rape, atrocities and killings and torments by sadistic husbands are some of such issues. In modern era the plight of women is undergoing both gradual and rapid changes in various acts of their routine life. But the Violence against women seems a routine occurrence. The violence against women is not a recent and natural but ancient and man-made phenomenon. Since time immemorial women are getting bad treatment in all walks of life. But in recent time it has become an extremely volatile and sensitive issue and it needs to be addressed with proper perceptiveness.

Alice Walker and Shashi Deshpande both are renowned women novelists who have carved a permanent place in the field of novel writing in English with their most productive works. Alice Walker won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for her novel *The Color Purple* in the year 1982. It has become so popular that Walker is almost universally recognized as a spokeswoman for black women. Peter S. Prescott has described it as an American novel of permanent importance. Mel Watkins' book review for *New York Times* described *The Color Purple* as a poignant tale of woman's struggle for equality and independence. Deshpande's fifth novel 'That Long Silence' won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the best book in 1987. These women novelists explore the issues of freedom and equality which were denied to women for a long time. Both the novelists usually have women as the protagonists. This has led the readers to label them as feminist writers.

The Color Purple that emerges out of Alice Walker's central concern with defining the existence, experience and culture of Afro- American women and the brutality of complex systems of oppression that shapes these. It deals with the role of male dominance in frustrating the black women's struggle for identity and independence. It shows how women are oppressed and manipulated by men and humiliated into powerlessness.

Walker shows her protagonist, Celie (a black girl) as a victim of sexual, mental and physical abuse, which she has to endure under her mother's husband, a man whom Celie calls 'Pa' named Alphonso, as a child and her own husband as an adult. The horrifying account of Celie's sexual abuse is presented in the very outset and very first page of the novel when she is of just fourteen years old. This can be interpreted as a commentary on the andocentric culture which condemns women to a subordinate state. Defenseless and threatened Celie cannot share her trauma with other



members of her family. Her step-father also denies her the benefit of education, rapes her repeatedly and systematically shatters her self confidence. She herself is a victim, yet feels defiled and corrupt. She interprets her position from the viewpoint of male supremacy and is not able to overcome her feelings of guilt. The cancellation of words “I am” on the very first page is a testimony to the extent women have been conditioned to blame themselves for the atrocities committed on them. (Shahida, Chakranarayan)

Then Celie is forced to marry a man of almost her step-father’s age whom Celie in her letters calls Mr. He has already four children from his previous wife who is now dead. Mr. Abuses and Beats Celie, even the children ill treat her. She is completely powerless and has no voice as such. Celie is abused by her husband in an unloved marriage. She is controlled and mastered by her husband, goes through the secondary enslavement represented in being beaten, subjugated, governed mentally and physically and bartered off. Celie, calling her husband Mr_ and confirming him with “Yessir” (*The Color 47*), commemorates those slaves who called the whites land owners. This master and slave relationship is indicated in his tyrannical and totalitarian treatment, delineated more clearly in Celie’s quotation “he never do any work around the place” (*The Color 49*) but orders “...git on back to the field” (*The Color 28*). Throughout the novel Celie is beaten to be reminded of her own place as a woman and her husband’s property in order to provide him with superior interpretation acquired by his treatment to Celie.

Indian women, unlike their western counterparts, have always been socially and psychologically oppressed, sexually colonized and biologically subjugated against a male-dominant social set-up. Any attempt by a woman to rise above the oppressive forces rooted in the middle class margins has either been curbed mercilessly or ignored in the name of social dignity. Shashi Deshpande all through the gamut of her ever expanding creative horizon always makes it a point to provide a separate space for her characters. That Long Silence is apparently different from the other novels as far the theme is concerned but the motif remains the same. Here also we find the novelist projecting a character that hails from a conservative, middle-class family background, possesses the inherent strength of character but is inhibited by constricting traditional influences. Jaya is in no way different from that of the other female characters of Deshpande in regard to her critique of her



relationship with her husband, with her mother, brother, the society and her strong resentment against the social taboos. (Nayak)

Jaya is the main protagonist of That Long Silence who represents the woeful plight of women in given social structure, attempting to rigorously scrutinize the portrayed gender roles that impose social norms, expectations and traditions on the grounds of gender discrimination. As she feels unsecured and suffocated, surrenders herself to constant psychological pressure of male superiority (her husband-Mohan) and social conventions.

Jaya, after her wedding, becomes a silent woman as to the desire of her husband, Mohan. She does not protest the change of her name from Jaya to Suhashini at her marriage just to keep Mohan happy. Her smile, work and even her love transforms into lifeless actions. She entangles herself in the Indian family system that husband is a sheltering tree, and the happiness of wife lies in keeping her husband happy. Her potential of writing undergoes transformation due to her husband's interference. She has nothing of her choice. She changes her appearance to the desire of Mohan. Her best had crushed both the woman and the writer in her as he neither loved nor encouraged her.

Mohan, her husband, is full of praise for his mother who silently bore all humiliations heaped upon her by his father but Jaya has a different interpretation for this. She sees the silence in Mohan's mother 'a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon (36). Jaya too tries to fall into the same pattern by suppressing her own wishes and act according to her husband's intentions. She follows him so closely that finally she's left with no identity of her own, 'just emptiness and silence' (144).

Jaya writes for the women's column under the pen name Sita and remains docile Sita or Gandhari, who have followed their husbands blindfolded.

If Gandhari who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything (61).

But her stories written under the pseudonym are rejected one after another. The reason behind the successive rejections is lack of strong emotions as she has suppressed her anger and frustrations. She had learnt to control her anger, as Mohan considers this trait in woman as 'unwomanly'. She becomes submissive in this way.



Conclusion:

Women, born to be free as a man, finds herself constrained and curbed by the patriarchal society, not only in India but in most parts of the world. This is due to the primarily patriarchal culture of the world. Both these women novelists have succeeded in penning down about the real problems of afro-American and Indian women and their lives inside the four walls of their house. The life of afro-American women is different when compared to the Indian women and of other nations. Novelists have successfully depicted an old stock of traditional patriarchal norms in their writings, which pulls back the social betterment of female community such as the identity of women being incomplete, if lacking the name of their husbands or fathers along with their names. Women characters in both the novels have no independent existence and have no identity. The Color Purple is portrayal of not only Celie but also the whole community of black women living under the long lasting oppressive conditions. That Long Silence on the other hand is not just the story of Jaya but of all Indian women. Novelists have shown the harsh realities of the patriarchal societies. The women characters didn't have well-balanced sexual life, it is important that husband and wife be at same wavelength. They should supplement and not supplant each other.

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