

QUEST FOR SELF IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S *NECTAR IN A SIEVE* AND SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*.

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**ABSTRACT:** In this male-dominated culture, women are the ultimate victims. In reality, society considers them to be ideal kind, compassionate, reliant, and obedient beings. Women should be submissive to and dependent on men, according to family life and employment norms. Women authors have a unique perspective on their position since they can view and comprehend it from a feminine perspective. On paper, their personal experiences with women may be eloquently portrayed. The pitiful position of women, the taboos imposed by society, and their never-ending quest for identity are shown in this article through the rural and middle-class female protagonists in Markandaya's *Nectar in A Sieve* and Deshpande's *That Long Silence*.

**Keywords**— Appraisal, *Nectar in A Sieve*, *Self*, *That Long Silence*, Women writers.

Various Indo-Anglian novelists have attempted, with varied degrees of success, to represent a woman's persistent worry. M.R.Anand, R.K.Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, and Khushwant Singh, for example, have provided glimpses of rural life on occasion. Individuals must grapple with their unconscious as well as social factors in order to achieve completeness of being.

Kamala Markandaya was the lone woman among a group of Indians who wrote in English in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite her fame, she remained a deeply private writer who kept her personal inspirations hidden. She was so secretive that she went under a pen name. Kamala Purnaiya was her given name. We may learn more about her work by looking at the religious, political, and social circumstances in which she lived and wrote. Markandaya's characterization is obvious in light of the cultural and social process, and the manner of living she describes has meaning. Because the compelling need for self-preservation leads her to accept the conditions under which she must live, the individual's way of existence, as established by the peculiarities of an economic system, becomes the major factor in forming his whole character structure.

In the realm of Indian literature, Shashi Deshpande is a well-known name. She was born in the Karnataka town of Dharwad, the daughter of Sriranga, a well-known Kannada playwright and Sanskrit scholar. She went to school at Dharwad, Bombay, and Bangalore.

She began writing while working at the magazine, and her first short story was published in 1970. Her short tales were published in periodicals such as *Femina*, *Eve's Weekly*, and others. In 1978, she released her first collection of short tales under the title *Legacy*. She had written a novel called *That Long Silence*, which received a lot of positive feedback. In fact, she earned the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Nanjangud Thirumalamba Award for her outstanding effort in this novel. She has been actively involved in the creation of children's books.

Shashi Deshpande has a lot of different personalities. She is best known for her novel *That Long Silence*, which won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1990 and was afterwards published by London's Virago press. She advocates for the acknowledgment of women as persons and champions the cause of English as an Indian language in intellectual discourses. Her words remain long after she has left, as she communicates her truth gently yet strongly.

In terms of the trajectory of feminists, Shashi Deshpande's writings differ from those of feminist women authors in the west. These concerns are mostly relational in her situation, but they become individualistic in the west. Her concepts of women's emancipation and autonomy are firmly embedded in the Indian women's predicament inside the country's socio-cultural and economic spaces and paradigms; yet western women feminist writers are rather distant from them. She tries to stay out of the shackles of many labels. She refuses to take on a gendered authorial role since her "I" can act as both female and male and is gender agnostic.

Self-awareness is a psychological phenomenon. It's a fluid term that suggests a feeling of self. It is the whole of a person's physical and mental characteristics, as well as his volition and deeds, in both the individual and societal aspects. The notion of self poses questions such as "Who am I?" to a person. What is the best way for me to find out? What exactly am I? To answer such issues, each individual must have a thorough understanding of his or her "self." Many people in the modern world feel dissatisfied with themselves as objects as a result of societal developments.

Because social systems are inherently unstable and dynamic, people cannot truly identify with others, both individuals and organizations. In such instances, the growth of self as a process might produce a distinct element of self that is reflected in the self-development process.

According to Gardner Murphy, "*Self is a center, an anchorage point, a standard of comparison, an ultimate real. Inevitably, it takes its place as a supreme value.*" [1]

Shashi Deshpande's female protagonist is on a quest to find her "self" or reclaims her identity. Self-discovery is, without a doubt, an adult activity. The novel's crisis concludes in the achievement of resolution, which means the achievement of the freedom to think and decide for oneself. Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, has only one goal: to be free of her gender. Her womanly self is smothering, and she is fighting for survival. Shashi Deshpande raises her forceful voice of protest against the male-dominated Indian culture and against man-made laws and traditions in all of her stories. The family becomes a cage where her "wild self" is caged, and it is unnaturally with all security reared. There are numerous situations in which men's cruelty to women is brought to the reader's attention.

*"In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth  
Under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her sons,  
she should not have independence..."* [2]

The value of human experience is skewed and perverted when women's voices are silenced. Men have had a distinct advantage in telling us their own stories since the dawn of time. They had the education, and a far greater level of education, to articulate and speak their power. Women, on the other hand, lacked knowledge and were unable to speak up for themselves. Women have been fighting for their rights in a male-dominated world since Christine de Pisan, Mary Wollstone Craft, Simone de Beauvoir, Jane Austen, and beyond. Feminism is a feminist movement that advocates for equal social, political, legal, spiritual, and cultural rights for men and women in the West. It is a feminist anti-masculinity movement led by women, for women, and by women.

Kamala Markandaya takes a genuine and empathetic approach to her work. Her success in the story stems from her wise choice of Rukmini as the novel's major consciousness. Rukmani's story might be told by any village lady in India in the 1950s. She is the family's mainstay and unifying influence. She, a strong lady with a deep knowledge, is the one who takes the brunt of the pain. The ideals of motherhood and love are upheld by Markandaya. She is not a militant feminist, but rather a realistic and humane writer.

Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in A Sieve* is a social, pastoral, and naturalist fiction. Rukmani is both the narrator and the protagonist in this story. She recalls the choices and decisions that have brought her joy and sadness with clarity and unflinching honesty. Approximately five years after the events, she relates her narrative in remembrance. She narrates her own firsthand observations, motivations, and feelings, as well as describing other characters through her own eyes, in the first

person. Even when she relates unpleasant and embarrassing incidents, her voice is plain, uncomplicated, and unrelentingly honest. Despite her poverty, she is content and contented with what she has. However, the incursion of industrialism on the one hand, and the whims of nature on the other, combined with landlordism, undermines the exquisite harmony of the peasant family, as well as the joy and calm rhythm of their simple life.

The novel's relevance resides in Rukmani's spiritual fortitude in the face of such tremendous cultural foes as the dictatorial landlord and the soulless industrial. With the end of the Zamindari system, the local headman was no longer important, hurting Rukmani, who was forced to marry off below her family position due to a lack of dowry. When the hamlet's children moved out to the city, the practice of arranged marriage, which had been so widespread and acceptable in the village, was facing a setback.

A childless lady - even one with a daughter but no boy - is also regarded as an ill-fated woman in the village, much more so than in the city. Rukmani's marital happiness was once jeopardized due to her inability to conceive a male kid while having a female one. As a result, the husband in the rural area had social permission to divorce his soulless or barren wife. It's only natural that Rukmani simply accepts and consoles her daughter Ira's bad luck

*"You must not blame him. He has taken another woman."* [3]

Citing another incident, when recalling the days after she had become a widow, the old granny tells Rukmani, *"It is not unbearable. One gets used to it"* Rukmani too, finds no profit in bewailing the desire which has been their *"Companion from birth to death, varying only in degree, particularly so when it has always been and cannot change."* [4]

Markandaya analyses the impact of change on human psyche in novel after novel; for her, culture is fundamentally an idea that unifies a million people and confers on each of them. What Lionel Trilling refers to as, "an integral selfhood".

Indian traditions have contributed to some of the most serious issues confronting Indian women. It's interesting to remember that during the Middle Ages, Indian Rajput used to murder their daughters at birth so that they wouldn't have to confront inferiority in their marriages.

Shashi Deshpande on the other hand, presents modern, educated, and career-oriented middle-class women who are acutely aware of the ever-changing time and circumstances. Her women are well aware of the cultural and societal injustices they face in this male-dominated society. In their drive for freedom and identity, they revolt against their males, but they eventually run into well-entrenched social stagnation. The author shows her women as striving to become economically and ideologically independent, as she is well aware of the position of a woman in this male-chauvinist culture, especially when she is not monetarily independent. Her ladies are torn between their familial and professional obligations, as well as individual aspiration and social expectations. Her women are at a fork in the route of history. They want change, but only within the confines of cultural norms; they don't want to reinterpret them, but rather to bring dignity and self-respect to them. Her ladies desire marriage as a source of stability. They saw it as an alternative to the paternal family's forced bonding and chose it.

In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande explored the themes of dominance and cunning via a folktale, the story of the sparrow and the crow, one of the earliest fables that Indian children are exposed to, complete with a repeated pattern, stark contrast, and a moral at the end. The familiar story is retold in these for its relevance to the individual's experience and to give it the breadth of universal truth. It's a form of arch that's been put into an unusual frame.

She calls her readers' attention to the challenges that women face and the decisions they make when they are caught in the swirl of complicated man-woman relationships. Despite being pressured in clumsy, knotted relationships, her female heroines resolutely refuse to become prisoners of

orthodoxies, fossilized customs, and stereotypically idealized identities. By doing so, she takes a critical look at the fundamental dynamics of society that are working against the female species. Her novels depict their lives, including their *flux and fragility*, differences and clashes, sorrows and struggles, societal and interiorized levels of experience, as well as the extent of intersubjectivity and self-reflexivity of these women and her own self.

A writer writes not only from her own perspective, but also from the perspective of the society, its traditions, and the life she lives in. In her writing, she constantly keeps the human being in mind. Society is the backdrop; it is what society does to an individual that the author is most concerned about. People are complex and intricate, thus writing portrays them in a complex and convoluted manner. Shashi Deshpande had no goal of producing a feminist tract when she created the novel *That Long Silence*, but it was in the telling of the tale of Jaya, a woman who found herself questioning her life, her views, and her connections with others—all of which her gender played a large role in. The novel is, of course, this protagonist Jaya's mental and emotional journey, a feminist picture emerged, which was not the intention, but new the novel has been tagged as a “feminist novel”, the writer being troubled by some problems, and it is out of this turmoil that the writers writing emerges, and her own views take a back seat many times.

*That Long Silence* is Deshpande's best novel to date because it delves deeper into the emotions of ordinary people in ordinary situations and paints more realistic portraits of an extended family with its peculiar misfits. Deshpande makes Jaya, the protagonist, a writer, mostly of women's magazine fiction, in a self-referential satire. They lived happily ever after in Jaya's stories, despite the fact that she is well aware of the fallacy of that vision of life. She also understands that every story will change as it is told; she rewrites Mohan's memories about his impoverished background, and she is now rewriting her own life.

Along with this, are words once heard by Jaya that have made a lasting impression on her. They are the norms by which she measures & interprets her experience. Instances of these are, “A husband is like a sheltering tree “ &” Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, don't let it escape ” These may come as part of the narrative, placed as a comment, be repeated as a truism or occur in a flash of sarcasm. Extended with a phrase, the drift of meaning changes when Jaya contemplates on the metaphor-“A Sheltering tree”,

“A Sheltering tree without the tree, you are dangerously unprotected equally  
logically & vulnerable. This followed logically. And so you have to keep tree alive &  
flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit & lies. This too followed, equally  
logically.”[5]

Shashi Deshpande takes up the study of contemporary middle-class women's difficulties and problems. Her heroines are intelligent, sympathetic, and career-driven. She joins Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal in not just portraying the miserable lives of Indian women, but also attempting to comprehend and propose solutions.

Women authors' fictional worlds now are more diverse than their predecessors' narrow social universes. Women's characters in today's movies don't only comply with masculine standards or fight against the male society. Instead, they try to make a living as women. Women have suffered greatly throughout history, and she now want to breathe a new breath of fresh life. Deshpande clearly demonstrates that marriage is not the end of a woman's life; when marriage fails to provide her protagonists with the love or freedom they desire, they become restless, hurt, and seek a brief separation from their immediate family-husband and children-only to return with self-awareness.

Both novels examine the conditions and circumstances in which a sensitive woman finds herself caught between tremendous currents of tradition and patriarchy, horror and oppression. In society, these women are inescapably subjected to physical torture and sexual attacks. Her identity and personality are completely destroyed, her voice is silenced, and her urge for self-assertion is surrendered. As a result, she is completely befuddled and tormented, as well as losing her sense of

self-identity and self-esteem. “A woman’s identity is often determined by her relationship with a man as a daughter, wife, and mother. “It essentially indicates that a woman lacks her own identity.” Women’s fiction is a significant component of Indian English literature. They had to battle hard to create their identity and demonstrate their uniqueness, leading to a tremendous war against the established social order of the time. As a result, it is critical for women to express their role models and renegotiate the parameters of their roles. Their worries and preoccupations laid the way for the growth and continuation of women’s subjectivity in relational terms. The parallels and differences in the writers’ perspectives on women's selfhood, given their diverse socio cultural contexts, indicate hundreds of viable replies.

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