



Breaking the Hub of Silence in Select Novels of Shashi Deshpande and Taslima Nasrin

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Abstract

In this study, Shashi Deshpande and Taslima Nasrin, two female novelists from the subcontinent, are analysed. These works serve as a window into the lives of oppressed women looking for solace from hardship. All of this disorder appears to have patriarchy as its primary aetiology. Deshpande and Nasrin's female protagonists are capable of devising plans of action to handle difficult situations brought on by patriarchal forces. When it comes to finding a way to reconcile in various relationships, silence becomes the most crucial instrument. Deshpande and Nasrin's female leads appear to be shattering the stillness.

Keywords: Silence, Suffering, Women, Submission

This long silence takes on the theme of the submission and the very enthusiastic silence. Jaya is a middle-class homemaker. She has great potential to become a talented writer, but her dream of becoming a published author was dashed by Mohan's disturbance. Despite this, she found success as a columnist for a women's magazine. Before getting married, she was a confident and determined girl named Jaya because her father's encouragement and guidance were always in her favor, and she turned into an independent woman. Her father wants to see her go to Oxford and win great honor for the literary genius she has. But by chance, she turns into an agitated and tormenting woman who pays attention to the smallest details in the house, like the housekeeper and the kids' school. She gently accepts her own destiny, as she is infected with misconceptions about security. She continues to believe that genealogy is something she must nurture because without her kids and husband, she has no identity of her own, so she believes. She let go of all her emotions, all feelings, and every

desire—even a small threat about her family. Jaya who was indicted:

“A husband is like a sheltering tree... without the tree, you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable.” (TLS 3)

She admits marriage can be duplicitous and feels she has to “keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies.” (TLS 32) She admits that if Mohan had yelled at her at this point, she probably would have reacted too. Under these circumstances, she would have given up on her career as an anecdote to a lessyist. I don't think so. She thinks:

“if Mohan had been angry, if he had shouted and raged at me, if he had forbidden me to write, perhaps I would have fought him and gone on. But he had only shown me his hurt. And I had not been able to counter that. I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared-scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage”. (TLS 144)

Jaya finds her daily life so dreary that she yearns for a catastrophe—something that can help her escape the buzz of her boring life; something that will wake them up from their lethargy and set them on a path of excitement and adventure. Mohan works as an engineer in the company's purchasing department, and one day he gets caught taking bribes. Mohan was persuaded to accept a commission under Mr. Aggarwal's influence to provide a better life for his spouse and children. As a result, he is involved in commercial fraud, and he must remain in hiding while the investigation into the scams Mohan is accused of is underway. To hide himself, he takes refuge in Jaya's modest Dadar apartment, located on the outskirts of Bombay, and leaves his luxurious Church gate bungalow. Time is ticking for Jaya and Mohan, and there is nothing to keep them busy. Jaya reminisces about the past



seventeen years of wedlock with her spouse as well as her teenage life before marriage. Jaya's introversion and self-analysis began after she moved into Dadar's apartment. Jaya rates herself as a winner as she understands her different roles as a daughter, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a mother, and a writer. She understood how she lived her life, even though she didn't raise any objections. But finally, small silences accumulated in her patience, and after seventeen years of silence, there is still room for silence. So she knew that she had to finally break the silence. It is her silence in oppression, her desires, and her wish for articulateness. Though she eventually had to compromise due to her circumstances, her desire to break the silence didn't go away. In this context S. PrasannaSree observes: "Going through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realization, she emerges as a confident individual, fully in control of herself, significantly more hopeful and able to accept life..." (Sree, 69)

Mohan wanted Jaya's complete submission and unconditional care. He couldn't stand the idea of Jaya avoiding him and his kids. Mohan has repeatedly witnessed his father dominating and mistreating his mother as a traditional man. He was an ordinary man who, like all men, attended his father's funeral and also bore the expenses. It was therefore perfectly normal for him to want, like other Indian men, to demand complete harmony from his wife. Therefore, Jaya also gives her love and care. Like a traditional woman, she also picks up domestic threads and tries to attach them, and she tries to be an ideal wife by society's standards, but that also makes her quite tired. Every time she tries to subdue her desires and personality, she cries and listens, but she has to keep her silence because nothing happens. Thus, Jaya went from a silent realm into a period of balancing power between the sexes. That was her true subjugation and liberation. Jaya transformed from a person who could never consider herself beyond a wife and a mother to someone who confidently asserted herself. She found herself lost when a magazine asked her to give them her biographical data. She finds it very difficult to provide one because, "And I have found myself agonising over what I could write. What there was in my life that meant something." (TLS 2)

Hence in spite of her best endeavors she cannot type in more than, "I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let the third live." (TLS 2).

But in the end, she is able to free herself from the oppressive and suffocating power disparity. In the end, she succeeds. She gains fresh and improved insight. She is aware that she must speak out, even though it may appear that she is speaking out against Mohan. Instead, she learns that speaking up means accepting responsibility for her own actions and living as a partner rather than as a puppet in his hands. She discovers that she is developing as an individual through contemplation. When they happen to visit Dadar's apartment for a hiding, she makes her first move towards being assertive by refusing to give Mohan the key. Jaya herself opens it, and she says:

"He continues to stand there for a moment, the hand held out. It now looks like a supplicatory gesture." (TLS 8)

Through introspection, Jaya also finds the strength to break the prolonged silence that she has adopted as a weapon. Jaya declares with assurance, "I'm not afraid any more, the panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife. I had thought and cut off the bits of that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible" (TLS 191)

Hence, there is still hope that Jaya and Mohan's relationship won't die in hopelessness at the conclusion of this novel; instead, Jaya will try once more to solve their problems, and they will go on to live happy lives in the future. Jaya therefore desires a change:

"...it's possible that we may not change over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: Life has always to be made possible." (TLS 193) In this novel, Shashi Deshpande urges women to stand up for their freedom. Only if women begin to break their long silence, like Jaya did, can the oppression of women be eradicated.

Since 1994, Bangladeshi novelist Nasrin has lived outside of her home nation. The first volume of Taslima Nasrin's autobiography is titled *Meyebela (My Girlhood)*. She is regarded as a rebellious and contentious author who delves into the taboo world of Muslim society while harshly condemning her own faith. She depicts the inner thoughts of a young girl who is discouraged and let down by social and cultural norms in society.

Nasrin consistently rebels against patriarchal conventions and rejects traditional cultural standards. She also makes strong criticisms of the superfluous and undesirable Islamic culture. The identity problem is usually exacerbated by the social and political environment. Nasrin redefined



her reality after becoming aware of the injustice and hardship her mother had suffered. Her increasing gender biases push her in the direction of feminism. Her voice is the universal voice of humanism. She is hesitant to discuss her personal experiences. She is unable to establish a supportive family environment in her house where she can express all of her worries and uncertainties. She therefore establishes herself as a powerful woman and rejects the socially imposed, biased norms and beliefs.

Nasrin meets Rudra Muhammad Shahidulla, a gifted poet, several times in a number of locations before they get married, including the botanical park, a cafeteria, and a hotel. Even in her writing, she broke the rules because she thought:

"We acquire the strength and courage to disobey these restrictions through words, . . . that anybody who read them assumed we were too haughty . . . fierce young women who don't accept restrictions . . . customs, rules and regulations" (MG,134).

As Nasrin publicly begins a relationship with Rudra, a young poet, she defies patriarchal norms and is labelled a "bad girl," in contrast to her father, who had extramarital relationships with Rajia Begum and was still considered a fine man. Patriarchal traditions continue to be supported by hypocritical double standards that benefit men and forbid women from getting married for love. When Rudra was "coming, . . . we walked around the streets of the town, someone known to us would see us, and inform Baba . . . We went to my school friends Nadira and Mahbooba's house. . . for girls of my age to visit anyone's house with a lover was considered indecent, after all, romance itself was considered in bad taste then!" (MG,273).

Women are treated like objects under the guise of traditions and beliefs, with little regard for their sentiments, ideas, or contributions. Women, whether intentionally or unintentionally, internalise this servitude and start to think that their only responsibility is to serve and please their husbands by complying with their demands. Nasrin's mother works arduously to win over her husband as well.

"Ma sometimes wore her sari in pleats, reddened her lips with beetle juice, and went before Baba with a sweet smile. Baba would scold her and tell her to go away . . . Ma would sigh deeply at his reaction. There was nothing Ma could do which was to Baba's liking" (MG,352).

As Nasrin's mother grew up, she was encouraged to uphold all patriarchal customs and to be a "good girl," whose attributes were "modest, humble,

selfless, and caring." She too provided for the family's needs and was "completely satisfied by serving the family" (MG,90).

Nasrin writes: "After feeding everyone, Ma would sit to eat in the kitchen very late, and whoever was around, maid or daughter, sat with her. . . . Ma never sat to eat with her husband and children. . . . When we ate, Ma would stand behind us and serve us. . . . Ma cooked and served very well" (MG,94).

The patriarchal and religious structures do not permit women's individual freedom as they currently exist. Nasrin was forced to violate social conventions in order to wed Rudra covertly. After marriage, Rudra also starts to make decisions for her. After their marriage, Nasrin learns that Rudra has syphilis, a disease transmitted via sexual contact. Despite having engaged in relationships with some other girls and losing his virginity, he still desired that his wife stay chaste. Women's individual freedom is not permitted by the patriarchal and religious structures as they currently exist. Nasrin was forced to violate social conventions in order to wed Rudra covertly. After marriage, Rudra also starts to make decisions for her. After their marriage, Nasrin learns that Rudra has syphilis, a disease transmitted via sexual contact. Despite having engaged in relationships with some other girls and losing his virginity, he still desired that his wife stay chaste. Nasrin asks him:

"Have you slept with a prostitute?" He did not say anything. His eyes turned stony." With the hope of listening to the word no, "I sat waiting like one bewitched. 'Yes', said Rudra. 'Ki, you had sexual relations?' I couldn't recognize my own voice . . . As though a button had been pressed on a machine, and the machine was speaking. 'Yes'" (MG, 439).

Nasrin expressed her desire to protest against such social double standards by saying:

". . . Suppose I too happen to sleep with some man, when you are not with me!' 'Don't talk rubbish', Rudra snarled in reprimand, loads of disgust in his reproof" (MG, 648).

Her husband, Rudra, seemed to be a learned man who supported freedom and equality, but when his pride as a man is wounded, his hypocrisy is revealed. Nasrin made the decision to end the marriage and asked for a divorce. She refused to follow her husband's advice since he saw her as property.

"You are my lawfully wedded wife, you have to listen to whatever I say . . . No son of swine will be able to stop me" (MG, 655)



Nasrin obtains a divorce after succeeding in her goal of living a life of her own choice. She had little faith in either her own religion, Islam, or in the orthodox traditions and ideas, which she thought to be extremely prejudiced. She is a rebel who opposes and rejects all prejudiced and limiting customs and ideologies. Nasrin describes how women are mistreated; she draws on her own sorrow as a woman and a girl, as well as the misery of her mother, aunts, relatives, and patients at her workstation. Nasrin admits: "The pain that I had suffered in my life was the pain of a woman. Was the pain mine alone? I know, it had to be the pain of thousands of other women" (MG,507).

The existence of Nasrin's mother was equally pointless and painful. The circumstances forced her, especially the treachery of her husband, to finally seek refuge in the bizarre religious sermons of Peerbaari. Nasrin occasionally went with her mother, which gave her the opportunity to observe the contradictions in Islam firsthand. She begins to doubt the very existence of Allah as a result of women's lower status in society and the crimes and violence committed against them. Islam makes distinctions on the basis of gender in favour of men, allowing them to wed many women. Islam values a man's testimony in financial affairs equally with that of two women. Nasrin raises questions:

"How can you accept you will not get the seventy-two nymphs in heaven, only your husband will, just because he is a man ! If you are a witness in court, your sole witness will not do, two women witnesses are required. Yet a single man's witness will be acceptable, two men are not required" (MG, 528).

Nasrin's mother quotes key Quranic passages relating to Nabiji marrying numerous defenceless women in an effort to protect them. Nasrin queries the means by which Allah guarded the six-year-old Ayesha, "If he had really wanted to protect Ayesha, then at the age he could have adopted her as a daughter and brought her up instead of marrying her. If he had wanted to help poor girls, he could have provided them with monetary assistance. . . . Was there any need for him to marry them himself?" (MG, 575).

Nasrin's mother constantly has a lot of housework to perform, yet she lacks any resources.

"Ma was considered a rich man's wife by those slum dwellers who came begging. Ma would correct them, 'being a rich man's wife and being a rich man are two different things. My husband may be a rich man, but I am a poor woman. I have no money of my own'" (MG, 291).

Nasrin's mother was a rich man's poor wife who endured terrible pain and sorrow. To Munni's mother, she conveys her sentiments as follows:

"What if she's a rich man's wife, she is sick, and because her body is stinking, no one goes closer to her. Ma was of the view that there was no limit to the woes of women, whether they were poor or rich men's wives" (MG, 291).

Nasrin protests against the customs and practises that make female feel less than males. She records:

"I started with shock at Rudra's words. . . . 'Can't you understand, you are the daughter-in-law of this house?' 'You will have to touch people's feet and slaam.' 'No' 'Why?' 'I have never done it.' 'You will have to. Why can't you understand? It will look bad if you don't slaam'" (MG,422)

Nasrin rejects these oppressive patriarchal customs that denigrate women and their labour. Because Rudra was an intelligent and accomplished poet, she had gone to great lengths to wed him without her parents' permission. Ironically, he encourages equal rights of all types in his poems while pressuring his wife Nasrin to adhere to social norms that devalue women and place them in inferior positions. Yet Nasrin is not willing to give up her independence and originality on the altar of customs and rituals.

Conclusion

Deshpande is a realist author who is dedicated to the plight of women. She despises the social division between men and women. She desires that there be no distinctions between men and women. Nasrin's portrayal of her physical, psychological, and social subjugation serves as a symbol for the entire community of women. By revealing the patriarchy and patrilineal plot under the 'gentility' and decency in daily life and the social connections that underlie the educated middle class, Nasrin brought awareness to these subjugated women. By candidly exposing male abuse and oppression in her own life, Nasrin gradually dismantles religious and patriarchal traditions that are resistant to accepting the autonomous existence of women as individuals and as members of society. She has also publicly acknowledged her extramarital relationships with well-known figures without embarrassment or fear, rejecting the norm.

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