

PRAGMATIC SELF: A READING OF SHASHI DESHPANDE'S THAT LONG SILENCE**Ms. Sheema Quraishi**

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to discuss pragmatic self in Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence. I discuss the character of Jaya in the light of William James' theory of Pragmatism. Deshpande presents her characters in dilemma of modern human society in which each human being is turning into a pragmatic one for self benefit. After independence there are multitudes revolutionary changes in Indian society and one of them is pragmatic approach of human. In this exploration of pragmatic self, my point of view is to discuss how Jaya acquires pragmatic vision which creates and removes hurdles in her life and how she losses and acquires mental peace.

Keywords: Pragmatic, Self,**Introduction**

Pragmatic humanly self is not any literary word term which I use here for the purpose but simply a phrase which suits with modern interpretations of human's psyche. Pragmatic generally is defined as “*solving problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist now, rather than obeying fixed theories, ideas or rules.*”¹ Self denotes the man's and woman's consciousness of their being as a human being. The word 'pragmatic' is quite near to pragmatism which has same connotation as the word pragmatic according to Cambridge Dictionary. So, for the better comprehension of the term I cast some glances over the philosophy of pragmatism by William James, who is one of the most famous philosophers of nineteenth century after Pierce. James observes, “*Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empirist attitude, but it represents it, as it seems to me, both in a more radical and in a less objectionable form than it has ever yet assumed.*”²

So William James pragmatic theory is connected with the thought that knowledge derives from experience instead of following theories and principles. A pragmatist purposefully drives away from

whatever exists prior. James' pragmatist is one who turns down from generalization, incompetence, hypothetical or theoretical reasons, fixed principals, closed system and pretended absolutes and origins but one who is towards concreteness and adequacy, facts, action and power. So in this sense, modern man chooses some objects to have belief and on the basis of that belief he searches his own truth and acquires knowledge. By going through this process he makes decisions in his life. So pragmatic is one who does not follow any fixed dogma and particular principle in life but he makes decision on the basis of his experiences. In the beginning of the twentieth century, this concept has been developed by James is vividly seen in Deshpande's novels.

Analysis

That Long Silence is a novel which presents Jaya's journey to turn into pragmatist. Deshpande pragmatically presents the time where man and woman both are cautious to their duties and their roles in the society and make pragmatic decisions and suffer its consequences. The time she represents is when Indian women are quite familiar with feministic theories. And these theories are enough to realize their status in the society and the self which they were suppressing for long period of time.

Jaya is a leading character whose narration builds the story. Some starting pages of the novel give the glimpse of Jaya's life. Mohan and Jaya shifted to their Dadar flat in Bombay and their children were outside with her friends: Ashok and Rupa. The story advances with the perfect mingling of present and past presenting Jaya with tattered self and haunted memories. Shifting in Dadar flat familiarizes Jaya about enquiry on Mohan and she is indifferent towards her husband; she has no concerns for him but always tangles in her thoughts. Each happening memorizes her past event even a bit. An ongoing process and chain of thoughts occur in her mind and her mental condition does not suit normal. She talks little to Mohan but thinks much about her past. She thinks almost each family member and the relationship about her and even the trivial incident which is not of much importance. This introspection and orientation derive her psyche into the pragmatic state. Each fact of her life is reinterpreted by her and in this way she makes an exploration of her inner self. If we talk about Jaya's pragmatic self we think about the beliefs which shape her life. As James discuss pierce's views:

Our beliefs are really rules for actions. To develop a thought's meaning we need only determine what conduct it is felled to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought- distinctions, however subtle, is that

*there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice.*³

Jaya's father named her 'Jaya' a Hindi word which means 'victory'. Her life runs on the belief which her father imbues in her psyche until her father dies. He wants her daughter to walk with the pace of time that's why he got her admitted in English convent school for better knowledge of English than those of her cousins and wants to send Oxford for study. Jaya acquires modern vision of life and her vision a basic platform on which she wants to build her life cracks when she got married with Mohan: an engineer with traditional bent of mind. Pragmatic vision of Jaya's father is the foundation in forming Jaya's psyche. When she got marriage proposal from Mohan's side she is confused and unwilling to marry him but has no proper reason of rejection except Mohan's assertion on cultured wife which bothers her and her mother much. *"Cultured! Damn, damn. Dada, I can't possibly marry a man who uses that word."* (*That Long Silence-92*) After marriage with Mohan, she identifies him a stranger in her life. Vanita mami's advice *'A husband is sheltering tree'* (*That Long Silence-32*) somewhere deep ensconced in her mind. *'A pair of bullocks yoked together'* (*That Long Silence-7*) that is how she tries to be in her marriage. Jaya is modern educated English medium rational girl but marriage in traditional family and in cultural ambience she tries fitting herself. She knows what freedom is but slowly and slowly she is confined within the limitations of marriage in playing a role of a wife. After marriage, in Mohan's family she finds role models of perfect wife and she tries to fit in that case through the years. As James states Pierce, "all realities influence our practice."⁴

One of their early marriage conversations soon turn into a dispute and Jaya angered over the Mohan, more she became furious and accusative, leaves Mohan blank faced. To get angered is not a serious offence for Jaya but she startles when Mohan stop talking with her after that. At first, she could not sense his silence but after days past, she moves to reconcile first. The incidence shatters Mohan who had never seen woman angered over man. *"My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her"* (*That Long Silence-83*) He thinks to be angered on a woman's part is unwomanly activity.

For Jaya, at this dimension, her life is changed even she starts to change herself *"I had decided I would pattern myself after them... well, if not happens, at least the consciousness of doing right, freedom from guilt."* (*That Long Silence-84*) Jaya suppresses her humanly self as a woman. She shapes her life accordingly to the need of Mohan. She makes no revelation of her choice before him lest he should feel

like Appa, *“what poor taste you have, Jaya!?”* (That Long Silence-3) She pays all the responsibility of household core and her life rests only to Mohan and she follows those magazines like the Bible which states how to attract a man. *“Don't let yourself go. How to keep your husband in love with you. Keep romance alive in a marriage. The quality of charm in a woman... where does it come from?”* (That Long Silence-96) What else she did, she cuts her hair short like *“Mehra's wife (and Gupta's wife, and Yadav's wife, and Raman's wife.”* (That Long Silence-96)

She lost her self and deep attached with Mohan so much that each time she frightens of losing him. If there is any delay in his usual time of return, she feels him dead. *“The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks.”* (That Long Silence-97) Mohan is ignorant about her feeling. Through Jaya, Deshpande shows human's need for family ties with different perspective. She projects the pragmatic vision of human who pays relationship only for self benefit and his need of survival. Jaya says, *“we're all frightened of the dark, frightened of being alone, so we cling to one another, saying... I love you, I want you, I need you.”* (That Long Silence-97)

There are other instances when Jaya puts down her vision as we see Mohan is charged in corruption and an inquiry is set on him and his fellow being Agrawal. He is terrified with the thought of quitting his job and for the short period of time they shifted another place. Jaya never goes against Mohan's will even she does not put her vision before him. She follows him in each of his decisions like as she says, *“Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails..”* (That Long Silence-11) And result is complete collapse of her pragmatic self.

Shifting in Dadar flat breaks the routine of their life. There is a change in their behavior. Both lost in their world. Mohan who is always indifferent from Jaya's inner world, he never thinks to peep inside her mind. Jaya in her silence senses the gulf between the two. She thinks, *“We had stopped speaking, except for the essentials of daily living.”* (That Long Silence-55) She escapes from the daily routine of house wife coming here in Dadar flat and this routine captures her imagination and after getting rid of the monotonous actions her inner self feels freedom: freedom from the demands and needs of the other households of her home. *“There was nothing to be cleaned, noting to be arranged... I was free, after years.”* (That Long Silence-25) This sense of freedom gives her enough time to think, interpret and reinterpret her action and search the truth of her life as James Observes that the truth, *“that ideas (which themselves are but parts of her own experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experiences.”*⁵ Jaya's pragmatic self could no longer be

suppressed; and she comprehends and identifies the voice of her inner self being indifferent to Mohan. The life she was living as Mohan wishes is not satisfactory to her and she tries to find the truth beneath the layers. She realizes, *"I had to admit the truth to myself- that I had often found family life unendurable worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony."* (That Long Silence-4)

For an individual identity what she wants to do heartily is writing: writing about those women who are suppressed, tortured through the centuries and she wrote for the causes of women but the revelation of the fact before Mohan compels her writing confined. Mohan burst into anger and worried what if people think they are their own stories shrills to Jaya and she abandons that kind of writing instead of that she writes in other forms and themes and finally with the current flow of time, she stops writing. Now, what she finds in her hands only mere some diaries stating the expenditure of homemaking. She gives the title to the stories, *"The Diaries of the Same House Life"* (That Long Silence-70) Skimming of those diaries makes her vulnerable and she thinks, *"Reading through the entries, I could feel her dwindling the woman who had lived this life."* (That Long Silence-70) Her pragmatic self while going through the pragmatic method acquires new vision while conserving old one. She agonizes, *"I can't cope, I can't manage, I can't go on- had been neatly smothered."* (That Long Silence-70)

Lingering with the past Jaya makes new interpretation of each fact of her life. Another instance we find Jaya to be moulded when she thinks that her father named her Jaya but after marriage she acquires new name 'Suhasini'- the name which Mohan has given her. The distinction between the two names 'Jaya and Suhasini' defines and makes a perfect picture of her life. The journey from Jaya to Suhasini glimpses Jaya's life as how modern-English medium educated liberal, courageous girl turns into a *"soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman... a woman who coped."* (That Long Silence-16) And interestingly she was unaware of the changes inside her. *"I can remember a time when I was not so full of fears, when the unknown, when darkness and insects did not terrify me, so when did the process of change begin?"* (That Long Silence-76)

Deshpande all protagonists have same notions about religion; they do not blindly follow it. They achieves pragmatic vision while follow religion. Modern human has given new interpretation to religion: they do not completely devoid of the vision of God but reshaped the text according to need. Although, Jaya being a Brahmin follows Hindu code of living but on the same point she discards the concept of moksha which God has created. *"So many chariots of Jagannath promising us moksha. But there was no moksha any more. I knew that."* (That Long Silence-13) Life after death is rejected by human and this rejection forms the very basic of the formation of their psyche. Jaya whose grandmother believed in all the theories but Jaya disowns the vision. *"Now I knew better, we didn't have to wait for another life for our*

punishment. It was all reserved for us right here and now. And act and retribution- they followed each other naturally and inevitably.”(That Long Silence-128) She doesn't believe in immortality, she wants “just to live!(That Long Silence-181) This living leaves behind all the dogmas of previous centuries.

Jaya's very psyche is formed on her English education which transforms when she arrives in Mohan's family. This psyche is somewhere in her conscious buries but comes on surface and visible when she makes pragmatic decisions. James writes, “Individual has a stock of old opinions already but he meets a new experience that puts them to a strain”.⁶ In her exploration of her self Jaya thinks about her third child whom she does not let live. She makes practical decision of aborting a child without given any hint to Mohan. She hides the fact from the Mohan. Mohan is equally ignorant about her relationship with Kamat and she never let him know about anything.

Conclusion

To sum up my discussion on Jaya's transformation it is clear that Deshpande visualizes us such circumstances in which Jaya's psyche starts to reshape. She unleashes the human conduct beneath the experiences as she goes through them. From the initial days of her married life she starts to suppress her vision but what she ensconced in mind (The views which her father imbues in her) comes on the surface while going through multiple experiences in married life. And at last, by her introspection she turns into a pragmatic one. In her introspection, she understands the Lord Krishna's words fully and means that God has bestowed human a precious thing- to make choice by knowledge, so humans are free for their actions. “Krishna confers humanness on Arjuna. I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire.”(That Long Silence-192)

References:

1. Cambridge Dictionary
2. James, W. Pragmatism: A New Name for the Some Old Ways of Thinking. NewYork: , Green and co, 1907.pp51
3. Ibid.,46
4. Ibid.,48
5. Ibid.,58
6. Ibid.,59