

## MARRIAGE AS A CAGE OF STORMY SILENCE

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*Abstract: The woman's voice is stifled in the patriarchal society. She feels that if she gave respect to all the members of the society, cared for them, catered to their needs, as per the set pattern of patriarchy, then she might be able to create a place for herself, without changing her identity, in her in-laws house. But this is not to be. The protagonists feel suffocated in such a marriage, where her very rights of being a human are denied to her. Let us view how they struggle out of such traps of marriage.*

**Keywords :-** catered, in-laws, stifled, suffocated, traps.

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### **Introduction:-**

Marriage has become no less than a trap for a woman due to the patriarchal society, its tradition and culture. It has a tendency to send her into a Stormy Silence or maybe it is a silence before the storm – which shall herald the second coming of a woman. This new woman would be more courageous, organized and decisive, and shall have an identity of her own.

“In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.” Erik Erikson (Erikson, *20 Inspiring Quotes on Identity*)

A woman brought up in an Indian patriarchal culture has yet to learn this. She lives under the roof of mistaken identity. She takes pains to develop identities like Sita, Subhadra, Savitri and other such mythological figures in herself rather than her own. She imitates the myths and tries to live with them. She feels overjoyed to satisfy her husband's ego, cater to his needs and satisfy his wishes. Until she realizes that this caring, rearing and serving, leaves her with no time of hers. She is all the time beckoned, ill- treated, humiliated, dishonored and exhausted. She realizes that her wishes, desires and needs have been tampered with to such an extent that now she does not have any left. Her identity has been changed. She is not what she used to be or what she wants to be. This realization of being in a state where she does not wish to be engulfs her in a gloomy silence. She loses her voice. She does not know how to come out of it. She loses her power of reasoning along with speech. A feminist searches out a way to rebel against such a situation. During this struggle her situation is nothing less than that of a trapped animal in a cage. The Indian woman has yet to learn this. That there is --

“No need to hurry.

No need to sparkle.

No need to be anybody but oneself,”

Virginia Woolf observes in *A Room of One's Own*.

In Anita Desai's, *Fire on the Mountain*, we have Nanda Kaul, the ideal wife of a University Vice- Chancellor. She is trapped in the ideal role model of an Indian wife set by the traditional society. She is busy trying hard to live up to this mirage.

Actually she lives a loveless life without any desires or wishes. Nanda Kaul is afraid to question her husband on his extra marital affair. Lest her voice may become a cause of havoc in her house, she may lose her position and she knows well society will not listen to her.

Nanda Kaul gets deeply hit by the impact of this tyranny- the tyranny of being made to selflessly serve the ones who neglect her needs, to be humiliated and made to suffer the envy of friends that what a good husband she has, to bear the infidelity of the husband so near at hand and be exhausted all the time. Her frustrations, irritations and fury against the situation all boil up and keep her heart burning in it. Her marriage was a stormy cage which settled in her burning heart a quiet fury. It took away her freedom of speech.

After her husband's death she realizes that she was alone not by choice but because she had no other choice. She was left alone by her family and children as her services were no longer needed. All her selfless toil towards them, her sacrifice of her wills, wishes and desires for them, her swallowing of all humiliation, insults and frustrations for them, and her loveless live, all zoom before her. But, again these emotions do not find an outlet. All these sufferings swallowed in solitude darken her heart and suffocate her, all at once. She can't digest the agony and dies due to a heart attack.

The situation of an Indian woman is no different in a nuclear family. The thoughts of Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* of Anita Desai, best describes the situation of a married woman in a loveless house. The solitude of the house, the unconcerned behaviour of her husband, the death of her dog and being away from her loving fatherly home, all add up to her sense of alienation and loneliness.

"Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment – these were the four walls of my private hell, one that no one could survive in long. Death was certain." (*Cry, the Peacock*, 88)

Maya cannot change the attitude of her husband towards herself, so chooses to alienate herself from life. She thinks her death shall make things finer for her husband. So she first pushes her husband from the parapet and then eliminates herself by committing suicide. Failure to change the situation for herself, she chooses murder and suicide.

This is quite true that the four walls of the house had turned into a prison and a trap for both women. Nanda Kaul feels released from the trap after her husband's death, but its deep scar's eliminate her in the end. Maya feels revenge may release her from the agony burning within her, but realizes only death can consume it. Such are the marks of elongated sufferings which can't be easily done away with. Maybe death washes or purges them out of its agony.

Barbara Ehrenreich says that: “Socialist feminists, while agreeing that there is something timeless and universal about women’s oppression, have insisted it takes different forms in different settings, and that the differences are of vital importance.”

We recall Jaya in Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, struggling for the ‘right’ answer. She loses her ‘voice’ as she tries to stand firm. Women’s upbringing often encourages her to suppress her aggression. Thus obedience and submission is instilled in women, since childhood. These nurturing leaves such pox-marks that the women – the subordinate sex, develops “a tendency to prevail by passive means.” (Klein 167)

Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, did not have any place in the family tree or family. It makes her realize that her womanhood marginalized her freedom, existence and identity.

The monotony of the married family life also contributes towards it. The impact of this continuous monotonous tyranny is great; it leaves every Indian woman emotionless and speechless. This monotony has the tendency to make one neurotic.

The protagonist Jaya falls prey to this trap of conventions and comes to realization only when she has been reduced to a slave. The driving force, which leads her to this trap, is the psychology of fear – *the fear of failure*

Thus Jaya gets caught in the clutches of traditional patriarchal, mythological ideas. She becomes another stone woman – a woman who has frozen into the role her creator wants her to be into. This is the plight of every Indian married woman.

When tragedy falls on her husband and he leaves her, during this time her son also runs away, it is then that her view of husband and marriage, as being her emotional strength and security collapses. She breaks her seventeen years of silence and pours out her suppressed feelings, doubts, fears and panics into a story.

Thus, Jaya a modern educated woman is able to break her silence. While many others, are still suffocating in the hopeless silence.

Shashi Deshpande’s women make an effort to break through the “encagement and entrapment” by asserting their feminist thoughts through self-realization and self-discovery. Three phases contributing towards “the growth of feminist tradition: imitation, protest and self-discovery” (Bhatnagar49) are evident in her novels.

Nayantara Sahgal is also aware that the Indians are ready to accept everything in the name of tradition. She too, stresses on the need of a liberated and enlightened attitude in the modern times. Prabha, the wife of Harilal Mathur, accepts her husband’s second marriage as she thinks that a wife should not question her husband. Maya, the second wife of Harilal Mathur, cannot think of a divorce as she believes that marriage is a sacrament.

In Sahgal’s *This Time of Morning*, Rashmi’s unhappiness is in part related to the growing indifferences of contemporary society to humanistic values. She tries to find an

identity of her own, an identity not based on severance with tradition. Rashmi moves towards her identity through suffering and self-questioning.

Indu in *Roots and Shadows* of Deshpande on contemplation ultimately realizes that she has been chasing shadows. She had left her roots far behind in the family and in Jayant, her husband. Naren, with whom she develops an adulterous relationship, is nothing more than a mere shadow to her. He has no permanent place in her memory. Hence she decides to go back to Jayant. It is she, she feels, who is to blame for the marital discord in their lives. She has created a hell out of a heaven. She was being a narcissist, “had locked herself in a cage and thrown away the keys.” (Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows* 85) She realizes that marriage had stunted and hampered her individuality because she had regarded it as a ‘trap’ and not a bond. Indu explores through wasteland and then through contemplation is able to reach her true self – her identity.

### Conclusion:-

Thus marriage has been portrayed as a Chakravyuha – a trap by the Indian women novelists. For some protagonists there is hope of reconciliation in marriage, for some this marriage brings grief and suffering, for some it is a fight back and for some it is not possible in any way, as marriage is not for all. It all depends on how you cope with it – with the human bonds it brings along with it. As life has its own rewards, so has this spring of life, marriage. Hence the show goes on.

“... you can never opt out, you can never lay it down, the burden of belonging to the human race. There’s only one way out of this Chakravyuha – Abhimanyu had to die” (Deshpande, *The Binding Vine* 201). Similarly in this Chakravyuha of marriage if you dare to enter, then you are your own refuge.

When these protagonist’s feel trapped in their marriages and are searching for a proper solution they undergo through a crisis of decaying values. They are in a confused state, frightened and panicky they clutch at the first support that comes by. Some cannot come out of their neurotic state. Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* and Maya of *Cry, the Peacock*, do not see this world fit to live in; they unknowingly or knowingly eliminate themselves from it. The suffocating atmosphere ends them up. Some try to seek a solution from that state of restlessness, through the help of another person – like Jaya and mother of Bhusan Singh. Some put themselves in the hands of another person for obtaining guidance and reaching self realization – like Indu. When they fall, they have the strength to rise again and move towards progress. Sarita and Rashmi reach self realization through contemplation.

If silence is an untold medicine on grief, a German proverb says that – Silence is a fence around wisdom. To reach the wisdom of self realization, not only education but also contemplation is very necessary. To come out of all types of oppression the victimized woman should be courageous enough to express her thoughts. She should try to express herself through writing or by contemplating on her thoughts or by relating her thoughts to a

friend or articulate them through actions like anger or by discussing them with her partner. This shall show her the path of survival.

A woman should try to come out of the stormy silence which engulfs her in her marriage. This stormy silence has the strength to reduce her to a puppet, to make her neurotic and sap her very aspiration to live. For a healthy survival freedom of thought and speech is as important as food for the body.

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