

## UNAVOIDABLE SILENCE OF INDIAN WOMEN IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S "THAT LONG SILENCE"

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### Abstract

*That Long Silence, the title of the novel depicts the intention of the novelist in order to reveal the female psyche during the quest of Jaya, the protagonist, for self. That Long Silence who is an intelligent woman with graduation in English, Writer and a Columnist had a bright career. None of these attributes would provide her a respectable position in the eyes of her husband Mohan, who had socialization in a typical traditional environment. Mohan's mother and sister Vimala were submissive to father for taking decisions in both financial and familial matters. So he wanted his wife to be submissive like them as a homemaker. In a male dominated society, a woman has no space to be independent and Dependent to her husband and father or son for everything. Thus the novel "That long Silence" proved that raised to be an eternal question whether lives for them or for someone their husband or children. There is sufficient proof that the silence will be broken at any time and articulation and assertion are only hinted at as the novel ends. Mohan leaves home due to his failure in his career and to avoid the situation of "two bullocks yoked together" which is indicative of a loveless couple. By the end of the novel, Jaya gets back to her destined role of being present to the happiness of the family and ready to subdue her emotions.*

### Introduction

"I don't like to call myself a feminist writer

I say I'm a feminist, but I don't write to propagate an ism"

Shashi Deshpande, 15:09 (IST)

The words of Shashi Deshpande stresses her inclination to the ideas of Judith Butler, who boldly stated that feminism, reasserts the difference between male and female

genders. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is well expressed true feminist condition of middle class Indian women novel. It is a story that happens in every middle class and educated Indian woman's life. Yes, the Indian women in this era are born at a time when there is much awareness about her rights, liberty to express her ideas, freedom to enjoy finance and the chance to stand for a cause, still..... The silence continues!

*That Long Silence* is not an imaginary story but the story of every middle class educated woman in India. Jaya, the protagonist is an educated middleclass woman who lives with her husband, Mohan and two children, Rahul and Rati. She is the typical Indian woman in the present century that is confined between her realizations and restrictions. Her father brought up Jaya as an "individual" who has the rights as well as the other gender in the society. But it is the same society that hesitates to accept the woman as an individual. Immediately after graduation she is married and steps into the role of a dutiful wife, affectionate mother, "carefully being" dutiful to her in-laws to Aai, Aiji, Kaka and all other relatives. Her husband Mohan also plays the role of the dutiful Indian husband and never looks up to consider any imperfections in life. As time goes by Jaya's dutiful behavior to Mohan and his family becomes routine. Like the mythological character Gandhari, she kept her eyes shut to her husband's illegal earning at office. Even her journalistic writings are circumscribed by her husband's likes and dislikes. Finally she is able to evaluate her expectations of life.

The novel is about Jaya's hopes, fears, aspirations, frustrations and later triumph in life. Deshpande's best work is, *That Long Silence*. The narrator Jaya, an upper-middle-class housewife with two teenage children, is forced to take stock of her life when her husband is suspected of fraud. They move into a small flat in a poorer locality of Bombay, giving up their luxurious house. The novel reveals the hollowness of modern Indian life, where success is seen as a convenient arranged marriage to an upwardly mobile husband with the children studying in "good" schools. The repetitiveness and sheer drabness of the life of a woman with material comforts is vividly represented, "the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curious that had to be kept spotless and dust-free, and those clothes, God, all those never-ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again" (*That Long Silence* 57). Though she is a writer, Jaya has not achieved true self expression. There is something almost suffocating about the narrowness of the narrator's life.

The novel contains nothing outside the narrator's narrow ambit. We get a glimpse of Hinduism in the numerous fasts observed by women for the well being of husbands, sons or brothers. Jaya's irritation at such sexist rituals is palpable; it is clear that she feels strongly about the ill-treatment of the girl child in India. In spite of her English education, Jaya is like the other women in the novel, such as the half-crazed Kusum, a distant relative, or Jeeja, their poor maid-servant. They are all trapped in their own self-created silence, and are incapable of breaking away from the supportive yet stifling extended

family. In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande raises the strong voice of protest against the male-dominated Indian society and against man-made rules and conventions. *That Long Silence* is a first person narrative; the story is unfolded by Jaya, ironically again symbolizing victory, while in the actual life situation, she is supposed to lead a traditional, passive life like; "Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri, dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails....." She refuses these role models because in modern life these references are simply allusions of the past with no relevance to the present? While these legendary women followed their husbands willingly, Jaya is accompanying Mohan everywhere because of compulsion. There is a frank, even brutal, realization of this evil necessity in her conjugal life.

"Two bullocks yoked together.....it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful: and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?"

Jaya, the protagonist in the very early life, realizes that 'girl child' is her first problem. The preference shown to the male children is because they are permanent members of the family, and are inheritors of the family name. The novel also interrogates the nature of the relationship between the narrator and her husband and the disposition of their married life. Their relationship is affected adversely by their incapability to understand each other. Due to lack of communication the growing 'silence' between them, their marital life grows unsteady and dismal. For the first time, Jaya feels a strange emotion of anger in the unjustified accusation by Mohan that he has taken bribe for her and her children. The very idea of "being a partner in the crime and ally, when she has no role to play in the whole affair is revolting." But this anger transformed into a 'long silence' because for Jaya 'silence and surrender' is the real strength of an Indian woman. Shashi Deshpande has not portrayed Jaya as a feminist character. Jaya hovers between submission and assertion, the former rather a more dominant note in her character. But the repeated allegations and accusations of her husband compel her to react sharply. She (Jaya) once tells Kamat (her neighbor) ".....no women can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman? A woman can never be angry, she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated" (There are three distinct phases of feminism. The early means imitation of role models, Jaya has already crossed that limit. The first phase of imitation is followed by anger and protest, the major thrust of the novel is the depiction of this second phase in the life of Jaya. Whenever she looks back on her life, there is hardly any sense of nostalgia or yearning for the past; it is much more a feeling of suppressed anger which can burst out any time. The last phase of feminism that of articulation and assertion are only hinted in this novel as one of the future possibilities for Jaya. The whole novel is a preparation for that articulation which will break her long silence. The reader is given sufficient hint that she is going to break her passivity; even Jaya asserts " will have to erase the silence

between us, but the actual drama is postponed to the future" Having realized her position, Jaya would not accept the earlier image of a pair of bullocks yoked together, signaling a loveless couple. She comes to realize that life can always be made possible.

The earlier impulsive Jaya becomes a mature woman, and with her realization, shadows that befall between wife and husband tend to disappear. The novelist tries to establish that it is not only the patriarchal set up which is responsible for the women's condition in the Indian society. The responsibility also lies within the victim to refuse, to raise a voice and to achieve the goal. The novel also traces the growth of the protagonist from a state of weakness, feeling of failure to that of relaxation. She accomplishes this through self-assessment and self criticism. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian wife. Although many women writers tried their hand at expressing this long silence that had turned woman into non entities, they could only provide psychological depths to their characters. They neither created unreal sentimental romances nor finally succumbed to the temptation of mouthing feminist ideology. But Shashi Deshpande's success lies in her representation of real life experience. She realistically depicts the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for the self or identity. Jaya represents half the humanity.

The novel sustains its credibility from the fact that Jaya is a convent-educated English-speaking lady with a literary taste. It portrays the conflict raging between the narrator's split self; the writer and the housewife. She highlights their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a male-dominated society. Deshpande's women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination first as daughter and later as wives. Although she has a small volume of literary works to her credit, her works have drawn great critical attention and acclaim for her sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle-class women. Shashi Deshpande's sincere concern for women and her craft as a novelist is reflected strongly in all her novels. Deshpande is not against the institution of marriage, as her women protagonists strive to make their marriages work in their endeavor to lead a meaningful existence Shashi Deshpande keep her narratives female centered and gives an intimate insight into the psyche of the middle class Indian women who feel Oppressed by their patriarchal socialization. She provides new ideals for better man-women relationship, there by broadening the scope of a woman's existence. She prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a After having rejected traditional role models, Deshpande's protagonists display great strength and courage in evolving, as their own role models as per the requirement of their social milieu. Her characters go through a process of self - examination before they reach self actualization.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande has been successful in creating strong women protagonists who refuse to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies, and face life with great courage and strength. Comparatively, they appear to more life – like and

more akin to the educated, middle class, urban Indian woman of today. According to the author, Indian husbands take it for granted that their wife's emotions, likes and dislikes are same like them and here the author reciprocates the emotions in vivid detail. The husband never realizes where he lacks and the agony behind his wife's destined roles. Jaya ponders throughout the novel for her role clarity, her life or that she is living for someone else. She searches her identity as an individual and where her emotions are getting subdued. As a failed writer and forced to be called Suhasini after marriage, to get submissive after marriage gets haunted by memories of the past. Whenever she looks back at her life, there is hardly any nostalgia but mostly suppressed anger which can burst out at any time.

### Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is an expression of the silence of the modern housewife. She realistically depicts the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for self or identity. The novel sustains its credibility from the fact that Jaya is a convent educated English speaking lady with a literary taste. It portrays the narrator's split self; the writer and the housewife. It is the representation of the modern Indian wife which has turned her into a non-entity. Shashi Deshpande says about "*That Long Silence*" ..... and then I wrote *That Long Silence* almost entirely a woman's nevertheless, a book about the silencing of the one half of the humanity. There is sufficient proof that the silence will be broken at any time and articulation and assertion are only hinted at as the novel ends. Mohan leaves home due to his failure in his career and to avoid the situation of "two bullocks yoked together" which is indicative of a loveless couple. By the end of the novel, Jaya gets back to her destined role of being present to the happiness of the family and ready to subdue her emotions.

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