

## Quest for Identity in That Long Silence by Shashi Deshpande

Ms. Kajalben Paghdal<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Snehal Vaghela<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Bhagwan Mahavir University-Surat, Gujarat, India

<sup>2</sup> Research Guide, Department of Arts & Humanities, Bhagwan Mahavir University-Surat, Gujarat, India

**Abstract:** *Feminism plays pivotal role to lift up the life of Indian women in man dominated society. The true spirit of feminism is to look at man and woman as equal human being. The present research focuses on dilemma of woman in man dominated world, the plight of women and problems faced by women in India, especially their position in family and society. The present paper attempts to study Shashi Deshpande's women characters, her portrayal of women needs to be studied from a feminist angle. As an author of the '70s and 80s', she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman through the character of Jaya. Through her novel That Long Silence, she portrays the miserable plight of the contemporary middleclass, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their life has not changed much even in the twentieth century. This paper discusses the dilemma of a married woman living in anguish and helplessness. In her loneliness, Jaya goes through a self- evaluation of her life and identity. This paper tries to illuminate the impact of silence in Indian women's life and Jaya's overcoming of it. The study tries to understand what makes a woman to stay silent and what eventually forces her to speak up.*

**Key Words:** That Long Silence, Indian tradition, Male dominated society, Marriage, identity, silence.

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Feminism began to have equal space for man and woman and to look at them as equal human being. There are many feminist movements focused on equal rights and equal opportunities for women. According to Indian tradition, wives have to step in the shoes of their husband in all situations and everything after marriage. They are always subservient to their husbands and family. Even women's life is completely controlled either by her family or her husband. Women sacrifice their dreams and desires for the sake of their families and centre rounds the necessities of husband and children. They are not allowed to share their thoughts or opinions on anything. All they can do is to accept the decision taken by a man with great silence, which reflects through the female protagonist- Jaya. The writer wants such women who suffer to break their silence in the wake of feminist movement.

The novel illustrates the image of women in the middle-class family and the way she is sandwiched between the tradition and modernity. The sacrifice made by women counterpart is hardly noticed by the male dominated society.

Shashi Deshpande, a creative post-colonial writer, has wonderfully presented the problems, issues, and challenges of a middle-class married woman of modern India. Jaya the protagonist of That Long Silence represents the 90's women in our society. The title of the novel itself refers to the conditions of women in a patriarchal setup. Deshpande's novel directly deals with the dilemmas of housewives. The novel itself can be said to be an autobiographical novel of Deshpande. Deshpande has mainly focused on the life of middle-class educated women in the late 90s Indian society.

In her novel, That Long Silence Deshpande has portrayed educated middle-class Indian women who get entangled in

marriage and traditions. Jaya is the protagonist of the novel. Jaya gets married to Mohan who is an educated man working as an engineer in a company. Jaya and Mohan are married for seventeen years and have two children Rahul and Rati. Jaya is not happy in her married life due to the dominance of Mohan in each phase of life.. Even in these seventeen years of married life, they do not grow close to one another to understand each-other. However the long silence grew between them which affect Jaya the most. Jaya is in despair in a male-dominated family. Mohan is a man who plays a dominant and leading role in the family. Jaya is dependent on him as a married lady, wife, and mother. Mohan controls her personal and professional life decisions. Like typical Indian mentality Jaya has to follow everything without sharing her thoughts. At one point in the novel she expressed her thoughts by saying,

"I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stocically sharing her husband's travails..." (TLS 11)

Jaya in That Long Silence is educated girl with a sense of being unique and extraordinary. In spite of, education she stuck in the house and feels suffocated and trapped in the traditional Sita-role defined in patriarchal society. After marriage Mohan changed her name from Jaya to Suhasini, which affects her a lot. But she silently accepts it and becomes a so called good Indian wife.

"Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped." (TLS 15-16)

However being an educated girl, Jaya follows her husband's command silently without any kind of revolt. Jaya accept this without protest because quite at an early age she was taught that her husband is a tree of protection, a security. Jaya, therefore, shuts her doors of dreams and accept life as it comes to her. She is a good writer. But her freedom of thoughts through her imagination also destroyed by Mohan. She, like a puppet performs a perfect role of Indian wife to meet the every desire of her man. Even in their sexual life Jaya has to accept everything what Mohan wants. Throughout the novel, she constantly compromises her dreams which made her a typical Indian wife. She remembers the story of the crow and sparrow very well and thought that no girl can forget the end of the story. It ironically reflects the cage life of Indian woman.

"they will become that damnably, insufferably priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their babies...and to hell with the rest of the world. Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you are safe." (TLS 17)

The poor Suhasini believes in this story, but Jaya would not think to be like it. Deshpande tries to focus not only on the patriarchal set up which is responsible for silencing the women but also the responsibility of women lies within the victim to refuse, to raise a voice and to break that silence. The novel traces the dilemma and the quest for identity of Jaya from the feelings of existence, freedom, resilience and adjustments. In the quest for identity, Jaya is trapped in the dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife for Mohan and secondly, struggling to express the emotions of women's experience in the male-dominated society. She thought that woman's life becomes a waiting game to express her desires and willingness. Since she got married she had done nothing for herself except to wait to and fulfill needs and wishes of family. She expresses her inner thought that this waiting game begins at the very point when a girl child born.

"Wait until you got married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-law's home. Wait until you have kids." (TLS 30)

She is a silent sufferer in finding out herself very different with noble vision as a writer. She represents the middle class educated woman in India during 1990s who tries to find her identity throughout the novel. She searches her identity as an individual and where her emotions are getting subdued. It suggests that the endemic imbalance in a marriage causes the frustrations, disappointments, failures rather than the endurance and solace.

The novel is also set against the theme of identity crisis that Jaya is searching her own identity and is set ideally against the Indian backdrop. The novel raises eternal question whether a woman lives for her husband or children or for someone else. The protagonist raises her voice against the straight-jacketed role models of daughter, sister, wife and mother, and refuses to be the objects of cultural or social oppression of the age old patriarchal society.

To conclude, Shashi Deshpande, an eminent novelist, has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital relation, she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in the family. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them. Shashi Deshpande uses this point of view of the present social reality as is experienced by women. To present the world of mothers, daughters and wives is also to present indirectly the fathers, sons and husbands, the relation between men and woman, and between women themselves. Her young heroines rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal values. The words which we always associate with what we consider to be the concept of an ideal woman are self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. Shashi Deshpande's fiction is an example of the ways in which a girl child's particular.

This paper discusses the dilemmas of a married woman living in anguish and hopelessness. In her loneliness, Jaya goes through a self-evaluation of her life. It's in this fragmented state of the trauma she realizes that her silence cannot solve her marriage. So she decides to break her silence and speak with her husband Mohan with the hope to find a solution and restore their marriage.

Towards the end of the present novel she consciously acknowledges her writing as a kind of fiction and quotes Defoe's description of fiction as a king of lying which may make 'a great hope in the heart'. So she decides to plug that hole 'as said earlier by speaking and listening and erasing the silence between her and Mohan, her erasing of the silence stands for her assertion of her feminine voice, a voice with hope and promise, a voice that articulates her thoughts. The novel does not depict Jaya's life as a totally dismal and hopeless struggle. It suggests "hope" and "change" for the better. She pines for better life where there is no shackle to tie the legs forwarding towards career and success.

"We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope without that, life would be impossible." (TLS 193)

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