

## **Patriarchal Dominance In Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence***

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The domination of a male in the life of a woman is a natural phenomenon in patriarchal society and consequent relegation of a woman to secondary position promoted some women writers like Shashi Deshpande to take up issues of women. Indian mythology and ancient literature, both, internalized concept of an enduring wife and a sacrificing mother through the images of 'Sati, Savitri and Shakuntala'. Indian Woman, like any other society, is controlled in numerous ways to preserve the ethnic collectivities and national identities. Shashi Deshpande, a popular Indian woman writer deals with the inner and social world of women. She took up the cause of Indian women to shake them out of the patriarchal order. She stresses the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and recognize their need for self-fulfillment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their children and husbands. Deshpande's art lies in selecting situations with which most Indian women can identify. Her focus is on the women within marital, domestic relationships. Her novels, featuring female protagonists, reconstruct aspect of women's experience and attempt to give voice to muted ideologies, registering resistance and on her own admission. She charts the inner landscapes of women in her novels, where the women characters are provided with a context to understand themselves. Deshpande consistently explores the nature of the female world and reconstructs the suppressed records of female experience. She represents different facets of the trapped female psyche and attempts to transcend its' boundaries.

*That Long Silence*, an acclaimed masterpiece of feminist writing in Indo-Anglian fiction highlights the image of the middle-class woman sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

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If one looks at the Indian society of 1950-1970 and post 1980, there is a great difference between the female and male psyche. There was a scope for every male heir to run the business and globalization was not a common concept to middle class. Females were not aware of the feminist theories dominant in the Western World. Even though there was discontent in the minds of women about their secondary position in society, they were not allowed to express their feelings or opinion. Most of them were contented in their roles assigned and imposed on them by the males. They were satisfied in rearing children and doing the house chores etc. After 1980, with the change in times, their outlook also changed. They started becoming aware of their identity and status in the society. When they became familiar with the feminist theories, they also became conscious of their status. Social conformity for a woman was always obligatory than for a male. That is why Shashi Deshpande's protagonist Jaya chose to be silent when she had to urge to revolt. Educated women like Jaya are confused whether to continue their traditional role of a wife or revolt against the tradition that puts them in shackles.

Deshpande is a feminist writer who focuses on feminine sufferings in her novels. She presents a concept of a New Woman in the context of present day world situation in general and Indian society in particular. Her novels take us deep into a woman's world and highlight female endeavour in search of true identity. In her other novels also, we find the same woman's quest for self and an exploration into the female psyche. The novel *That Long Silence* brings under focus the anxieties, difficulties and hardships of a middle class family. In view of Deshpande, when women undertake journey of pursuit of their self-knowledge, they do not start light, " we are already

burdened with a baggage that has been given to us by others that determine our behavior, ideas, expectations and dreams.” (WFM 87). Her Novels are not only gender-specific and depict the predicament of an educated middle class Indian woman but also the life which a woman leads in a male dominated society. She gives minute analysis of the unwholesome situations in which a woman has to work, to adjust herself, and to live and move about. She is caught between two powerful currents of traditional patriarchy and modernity, of terror and suppression.

*That Long Silence* is a story of a woman who remains a sufferer throughout her life. In her Childhood, she is criticized for her inquisitive and witty nature. Her grandmother is not happy with her and says, “for everything a question, for everything, a retort, what husband can be comfortable with that?” (TLS, 24). Thus she is given a heavy dose of advice all the time that for a woman, husband is like a sheltering tree which she must not leave in any circumstances. Her husband is her career, her treasure, her happiness of life, which she must preserve by all possible means. Initially after her marriage with Mohan, she leads a contented life with no disturbance and no tension in their conjugal life. She is apparently a satisfied house-wife, living happily with her husband, well placed in life and with two children, Rahul and Rati. Jaya’s life is not much different from a sparrow’s who has built an edifice of security around her and feels completely satisfied amidst her loving her husband and children. She confined her activities to attending to the needs of husband and children as it was for her full-time occupation. Thus she becomes totally dependent on her husband and allows her personality to become dwarfed and stunted. So when the testing time comes and she faces a crisis, she fumbles, stumbles and proves herself a complete failure as a wife, mother and as an individual.

In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande depicts two different pictures of Indian women- the lower strata of women, engaged in domestic chores to earn their living and educated middle class women. “ The story entirely revolves around Jaya, her married life and her role as a dutiful wife, affectionate mother, ‘carefully being’ dutiful to her in laws, the ...Aai...Aji...kaka and her relatives. It gives simple enchanting scenes solely expressed by the author...the travails of being a middle class educated yet confined to restrictions posed by the conservative society is well established. According to the author, husbands take in for granted their wives’ emotions...likes and dislikes to be same like them and these emotions are expressed in vivid detail like that of love-making...relationship with children” (mouthshut.com). Jaya was brought up in a traditional family full of culture and etiquettes. Since her childhood, she had to bear the comment of being “dark complexioned” by her mother, which could be a hurdle in marrying her to a suitable boy. As for the girls, “fair complexion” is a mark of beauty. This was so deeply engraved in her psyche that the first question she asked was whether ‘he was fair.’

Deshpande in the novel focuses on a woman who has lost her voice of self-assertion, which ultimately leads to confusion and tormentation. She shows her protagonist, Jaya, on the road of self-discovery after the tormentation she goes through. Jaya is taught right from her childhood that a woman's position and status is inferior to a man in a family where husband's will reigns supreme and wife is orderly pushed into the background. A wife is supposed to be in the house ‘to serve, to obey and to suffer’ (TLS, 84). She is destined to go on waiting throughout her life as if she has no independent will and power to regulate her life. Her life is a series of endless waiting. "This process of waiting starts right from her childhood days. As she attains adulthood and puberty, she waits for the right man to marry and settle down in family. She is waiting all the time for one thing or the other. As she grows up and goes to her in-law's house, she is waiting for the baby to be born. With the passage of time, the game of waiting for the life continues and she is waiting for sometime children going to school and then for them to come back so that they can all enjoy meals together” (mouthshut.com). The habit of waiting goes so deep into her psyche that when she has nothing to wait for, she starts waiting for some catastrophe and disaster.

Jaya suffered more because she was told that “they are two bullocks yoked to together and husband is a place of refuge and protection and without a husband, she is non entity for everybody in society” (TLS, 36). She was supposed to stand by her husband, through thick and thin, justification or no justification. Here was a grim situation developing which cracked the relationship

of husband and wife. Mohan wanted Jaya to justify his act of bravery but Jaya's silence made him restless and irritated. She knows she cannot dare to protest, but "I had learnt it at last-no question, no retorts. Only silence" (TLS, 193). As a matter of fact, Mohan had assumed that he would get full support from Jaya and she would agree to his plans. "She would follow him as every Indian orthodox wife follows her husband. Sita followed Rama in exile, Savitri dodged the God of death and Draupadi shared her husband's travails" (TLS, 64). Jaya is unhappy not only as a wife and mother but also as a writer. She remains under the guilt that the writer in her could not see the light as to her husband; she was 'no writer'. She writes the kind of stuff which gets approval from both the publisher and her husband but does not satisfy her.

Jaya had to suppress her emotions as Mohan warns her, "My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her" (TLS,83). Mohan often told Jaya how his mother was ill-treated by his father. As we go deeper into stories of all the women characters, it is seen that 'Silence' is the only weapon of these women, who felt terrorized by their husbands. Mohan and Jaya had a different reaction about his mother who faced hardships of life without grumbling, patiently. To Jaya, she was an image of despair rather than a woman of strength. She felt that her life was all struggle with no respite and 'Silence' was the only weapon left with her. Mohan's sister, Vimla's life was no better. She had no issue for five years after her marriage Her death, too was mysterious like her mother as they both died in peculiar circumstances and a common thing in both these deaths was the deep 'Silence' in which they died. Jeeja, Jaya's maid servant is another example of the oppressed woman. She supports her alcoholic husband even after she is battered about by him. She observes 'Silence' when he brings another woman home and justifies it by saying that God didn't give her any children. She even accepts the child of her husband and his mistress. Not only does she accept him but also sides up with her son when Tara, his wife abuses or curses him." Stop that, and don't forget, he keeps the kum-kum on your forehead. What is a woman without that? (TLS,53)

Jaya's silence in not speaking in favour of Mohan's act is misinterpreted by Mohan as indifferent attitude to the problem he faced and touched him the most. She wondered why she could not speak out what her husband wanted to know and why she fumbled. She felt herself foolishly inadequate, for not giving him satisfactory answer to his charges when she was not at fault? Why did she allow the situation to drift to such a pass? Mohan had accused her of not caring about children, of isolation from husband and his concerns, and that she was behaving in a very revengeful way. While he taunts her with his accusations, she cannot restrain herself and cries out, "No, that is not true. It is terrible thing to say, it is stupid"(TLS, 79). Mohan in his mood of annoyance retaliates in the same tone. "It is not just you. It is all women. My mother" (TLS, 79). Jaya feels so enraged at these false accusations that instead of crying, she bursts into a loud laughter. She goes on laughing in a historical manner soon to realize that she is laughing in a manner that is mad, unwarranted and uncalled for. But the realization comes to her too late. She tries to explain to Mohan, "I am sorry, I did not mean to laugh. I was not laughing at you. I was only laughing at every thought, marriage, as this whole absurd thing and exercise, we call life." She tries to explain to Mohan everything but her body becomes sagged and she begins to perspire. She suddenly sees him retreating his steps towards the door and he is gone forever. She rushes to the balcony to look for him but he takes a taxi and disappears.

The thought of Mohan's leaving home for good pushes Jaya to a trauma. She felt as if she was losing not only her peace of mind but mental equilibrium and Sanity as well. Life seems to have no meaning and charm to her without Mohan. Her body feels paralyzed and she is panic stricken. She starts turning the needles of the radio frantically, listening to various sounds and stories. After listening to various screeching sounds, she ultimately says to herself, "Am I going crazy like Kusum" (TLS, 102). With the thought of Kusum, she falls in a reverie and visualizes deranged Kusum welcoming her as an additional member in the category of 'Unwanted Wives' deserted by their husbands. She recollects how people would use two names together – Jaya and Kusum. Both of them have met the same fate, rejected by their husbands, by their families, devoid of all comforts and happiness. Initially, she thought of herself as far more superior and intelligent than Kusum but

now she feels they all both victims of hostile circumstances. Kusum was sure of her sanity and in a crazy mood, Jaya says, "No, Kusum, you are not crazy. It is I who is crazy. It is poor jaya who is crazy" (TLS,102).

Another thought grips her the next moment and she says to herself in a mood of self-examination, "Mohan has not left me. He would be back" (TLS, 104). She rebukes herself for not breaking her silence to stop him. She should have screamed, Do not go, don't leave me and go. What if I had done that" (TLS, 105). She remembers the fate of Kusum. How Kusum got maltreatment at the hands of cruel world and cried out to stop her, "Do not go Jaya, do not leave me here and stay with me" (TLS, 58). After torturing herself with a sequence of thoughts, she suddenly sits up abruptly, ties her hair in a determined bun and resolves to push herself out of the self inflicted pitiable condition. She forgets her sorrows and tells herself, "Mohan would never leave me. I was Jaya, Jaya for a victory. Retreat you Kusum, poor pitiable unwanted ghost. I have so much to do. I must do that ( TLS, 98).

Her name in the novel changes as per the wishes of other people. Deshpande has given two names to her protagonist - Jaya and Suhasini; Jaya meaning victory, a name given to her by her father at the time of her birth and Suhasini meaning a smiling, soft, motherly and a placid woman, a name given to her at the time of her marriage (P.16). Both the names symbolizing different traits of the personality. One symbolizing revolt and the other submission. The dreams of Jaya's childhood-to change the situation so that the women can achieve their goals which are often shattered by the surroundings, environment and the society that imposes restrictions on women. When she gets helpless and is not able to improve her situation, she starts revolting in silence. When Mohan talks about women who bear the cruelty of their husbands, he calls it strength, 'He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and Surrender" (TLS, 36). Jaya cannot say 'yes' when asked by Mohan if he hurt her during their physical relationship. "The emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit to being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him.(P.98).

Shashi Deshpande, in her novel, emphasizes the need of educated women analyzing their position with respect to the society and taking time out for themselves to rejuvenate their lost identity. She wants to give to the society a message that it needs to understand the importance of a woman's economic independence and education which only can uplift both the personal and social status of a woman in any society. The writer is aware of the duties of an ideal wife but at the same time, wants to portray a woman's inner struggle. Deshpande's protagonist wakes up towards the end of the novel but makes herself move to a position where she can maximize her potential.

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