

What Matters for Educated and Uneducated Indian Women: Realizing Identity Struggle for Self and Matriarchal Harmony through Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

*This article is an attempt to explore the challenges faced by educated and uneducated Indian women and the kind of silence and secrecy they maintain in the patriarchal society in search of self-identity. At the outset, it is worth emphasizing that men have traditionally been claiming a superior status in Indian Society and women have not been able to find equal face in affairs pertaining to family and society. This paper engages with the ways in which women characters are illustrated and how they are compelled by both the genders to remain voiceless in accepting their lot. The major focus of this article is to throw light on Shashi Deshpande's views about Indian woman brought up under a traditional set up. The novelist's diligence in story telling is very much evident in the manner in which the protagonist, Jaya, is portrayed in novel *That Long Silence*. It is pertinent to note that by virtue of her resilience and abilities, Jaya is able to establish an identity overcoming the challenges imposed on her by the family and society.*

Keywords: *Oppression, Self-Revelation, Silence as Identity and Woman Empowerment.*

Introduction

Shashi Deshpande has been successful in carving a sufficient niche for herself as a feminist writer by articulating the anguish, agony and clashes of modern society educated women of India. The women, struggling for self-expression and individuality trapped between convention and modernism, are better depicted as a writer in Indian Woman Writer. The novel *That Long Silence* is a self-written story of a family woman who emerges from an urban middle-class family. Shashi Deshpande is mainly concerned about human relationship in marital life. The novel belongs to the realistic genre. The narrative technique is in first person interior monologue. The narrator after many years of silence comes out of her slumber and voices the factors, which are the causes of her failures at all levels (Callaghan, J. E. M., Gambo, Y., & Fellin, L. C. 2015). The novel deals with the narrator's catharsis. The flash back technique is apparently used. The shifts in time are complex and almost unpredictable.

Methodology of the Study

The study was done by close-reading of *That Long Silence* using a literary analysis methodology. This means reading the book closely to find important motifs, themes, and narrative devices connected to cultural difference. Nuanced insights within the text were found by using analytical techniques like character studies, theme mapping, and textual comparisons. Researching pertinent historical events, socioeconomic circumstances, and cultural customs common during the era portrayed in the book was part of this. Knowing the historical background could help one to understand the elements affecting the cultural

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dynamics in the story. Throughout the book, recurrent themes and motifs connected to cultural difference were found using theme analysis. This entailed recognizing important theme clusters, following their evolution throughout the story, and analyzing how they affected character growth, storyline development, and sociocultural criticism.

Critical Analysis / Discussion / Results and Findings

The phrase *That Long Silence* denotes a core message of the protagonist and also the central part of the novel. Silence is perceived as the reference of acceptance and meekness through the main character Jaya Kulkarni. She is basically passive throughout her life as a girl and as a woman (Mishra, Divya, 2016). The epigraph in the beginning is in a proper way to introduce philosophical ideas about human beings (Brito Vieira, M., Jung, T., Gray, S.W.D. *et al.*, 2019). It states the idea that the novel deals with women and their predicament. The prologue that follows the epigraph clearly portrays thoughts of a woman, her dilemmas and the crisis she falls into. Having struggled herself to come out of the crisis, the woman undergoes a change. The prologue presents a clear idea about the structure of the novel in a nutshell. The process of self-revelation, mercilessness, detachment and determination is very essential. This is possible when a person looks onto herself from a distance with a detached mind. Jaya, who had practiced the tactic earlier, used it to write about herself. In this way she is able to discover herself in silence (Røgild-Müller, L, 2022).

Depiction of an educated woman from middle class family is the intention of the writer so as to reveal woman psychology when the quest arises of Jaya, the protagonist. Her literary sensibility is shown by observing silence as silence is rooted in herself from her childhood (Gilbert, Sandra M,1979). The novel deals with the story of an Indian housewife and writer, who observes seventeen long years of silence in the face of tumult of life that has happened to break it. Jaya mirrors the living condition of women in the society in her role model. She observes women in different social condition acting out their starring roles in silence and unconsciousness. In the history of human being, Long silence is a magic wand in tackling all problems (Lynch,M,1999). Deshpande defines silence as both the weapon of women in the patriarchal society and a strategy to succeed in finding solution to a problem, when it arises (Elson,M,2001). Jaya revolts, but she is in silence. She becomes silent as Mohan, her husband, speaks that husbands are treating their wives very cruelly stating this as strength of a male, because Mohan has closely observed his parents. His mother treats her his father as their protector and becomes submissive and silent. But Jaya passionately feels as humiliation. Jaya is wrapped up in the silent stream of thought and affection. She proves herself as a woman knows tricks of maintaining relationship by observing silence as silence is an effective tool in uniting people.

By surrendering and submitting herself to Mohan, she proves to be a common Indian woman. This is where all problems and revolts have immersed. She feels affirming for the hurt of her husband as sin when he asks. Jaya bears and tolerates silently masculine oppressions for the sake her father's brought up. She withholds her reaction for the situation to retaliate her husband's domination and keeps silent if it does not arise. Jaya stays away from other relatives and thinks her life before marriage in custody of her father, who has lived for her, and the present life after marriage she lives for her husband. Deshpande enforces her inner psychological effects through the character Jaya concerning stream of consciousness waving her mind from past to present (Bowling, Lawrence Edward,1950). Her heroine like Jaya is a rebel but only a passive one (Mocnik, N, 2018). Suffering and rebellion in Jaya have inclination, which is transformed into persuasive artistic presentation of this fiction *That Long Silence*. It is obvious that as a well-educated woman Jaya is able to express her inner longings and fulfill her wishes by writing (Ekstrom, E Andersson, AC and Borjesson, U, 2021). Jaya says that she has to hide her disability from everyone as if a disease. As Mohan's sister Vimala is a victim of death in her husband's house without proper medical treatment because she does not reveal her physical problem to any one the relatives even to Jaya and her husband, Mohan when they pay a regular visit. Deshpande through the character Jaya reacts to silent as it was ended as a permanent one to Vimala by giving her last breath. Jaya's urges are silent and mute. At one point, the silence in her is emerged once and makes her become a writer, a self-expresser (Ennals, R, 2007).

Deshpande presents Jaya not like Vimala a woman revolting openly at the beginning but gradually she also accommodates to the situation at later stage for the societal needs. Even though she is not able to express,

her inner turmoil is vibrant. She remains silent without outwardly showing her frustration and disappointment to the society that she is living in. She is unable to disclose the truth (Ritter, M, 2014). Deshpande characterizes not only Jaya is submissive and observing silence but also each and every woman folk of the society through characters starting from Kusum. She is Jaya's aunt's niece, a mother of three children but insane. When Mohan had ostracized her to stay with Jaya, Vanithamani gave Kusum shelter. Nayana is, a sweeper woman, married to frigid husband. She is a mother of two girls and her two sons died after parturition so that she desires to have a male baby because her husband forces her to give birth to a male baby or else, he will marry another for the same. Mohan's mother is an orthodox lady believes that her husband is the protecting shield to her and the family. She prepares food at night for him as he comes by late. Vimala, Mohan's sister lost her life without caring herself. Jeeja is a quite calm for Jaya, a rationalist. Her husband remarried for want of kids. She grumbles that God did not give them any baby so their life turned down in disaster. Mukta is an educated woman but not liberated. Her husband fell out of train and died. She was suffering the battle of widowhood and loneliness. As she is a dancer, she is running her life in dread society but Nilima, Mukta's little girl, rebel and out spoken. Tara is a self-sufficient woman. Jaya's sister-in-law Asha, is Ravi's wife, runs away to their parents having no interest in domestic life with Ravi. Aiji, the eldest woman in the novel, is Jaya's grandmother and an orthodox following old Hindu custom of shaven widow. Deshpande attempts in presenting the secret world of women unknown to patriarchal society and hidden by matriarchal believes.

Jaya reveals the relationship between Mohan and her that they live together but there has been only emptiness, which is in no use but she has solaced that she can live beautifully an identical life with Mohan as she has got enough experience to handle Mohan and found a new avenue in planning their life. The desertion of Mohan has puzzled Jaya. Jaya is a modern woman whereas Mohan is a man of traditionalist, uprooted relishing customs. Mohan presumes a woman waiting for her husband sitting before fire and preparing and eating hot food after her husband eats as he has observed her mother waiting for her husband but Jaya construes there is no meaning more than despair.

She is no more herself. She is forced to ponder on her as a girl, as an adolescent lover, as a married wife, as a mother and as a writer. She is forced to submit herself to seek her identity. There is a parallelism between Maya, the protagonist of *Cry, the Peacock* and Jaya, both pampers children. Maya is love-impoverished, and also sex-starved, but Jaya is not. No wonder the psychological imbalance of Maya results in insanity and violence while Jaya ends only in silly laugh. It is only Jaya herself as a writer that is being crushed and this leads her to be a rebel. Different from Maitreyi, who is concerned with immortality of her husband, Jaya, like most of the modern women, seeks worldly joys, security and family harmony (Ramasamy, R. , et al., 2024). Not only is her married life unhappy but also her pre-married. She does not have any role in taking decision. Her father makes decisions regarding her life as Portia's father in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* but it is desperate. When Jaya wants to listen to film music sung by Rafi and Lata broadcast from Ceylon Radio, her father decides whose music she should listen to (Mills, Sara, 1998).

When Jaya gets married to Mohan, a new name is given to the lady on her wedding. She refuses to accept the new name 'Suhasini' (Deshpande, s p.9, 2008). The identity of an individual as a woman is sought to replace because of this social practice. This is the clear identity of male which is the product of patriarchal ethos. Mohan's demands and orders show his domination over her. Domination is defined as the power of one group or individual over another group or individual. When Mohan faces a crisis in his job, he orders her to move along with him to the Dadar flat and Jaya as a submissive wife obeys and moves along with him. Though she tries to satisfy his demands, there is a conflict in their relationship, which worsens Jaya's role as a wife in distress. As her brother wishes her to choose Mohan as her husband because of her father's death when she is at the age of fifteen, she thinks her husband is important for the happiness of her life as a woman. Her realization is quite different from her early notion as she learns that a husband is to be the sheltering tree, a security and soothing point for pain and problem. She has been taught to follow her husband. There is a deep silence between them (Henderson, D, B, 2002).

Irritated by her slave like situation, finally she decides to live a complete life without any more silence. In their stream of thought both Jaya and Mohan look at their marital relationship where there is nothing but suppressed silence. Disappointed with Mohan, Jaya wants to flee from the restricted family life to find a

new individuality for her by creating a new identity. Despite the fact that she has lost her father and it seems her brother is not happy in keeping her in his house, Jaya tolerates all the new things in practice of her regular but Jaya's sister-in-law, Asha, Ravi's wife stands in different by running way to seek refuge in her parents. Jaya fails miserably at all levels; professionally, emotionally and sexually (White, J.W., Geffner, R, 2022). Throughout the novel she tries intensely to break the long silence which overlaps her life.

In her childhood, it is only her father, who taught her to be courageous and motivated her to do something special in her life. However, his sudden death, when Jaya was at teen age is a shock to her. Her stay at Dadar flat makes her think differently of the image of motherhood as wife to Mohan. She worries for her profession, career and her means to live being mother to Rahul and Rati. Deshpande's recurring technique shows Jaya as seeing her true self from a distance while in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru comes to her understanding when talking about her turmoil. Jaya starts this journey to a consciousness of herself as a person, the journey to end years of silence, as she enters the Dadar flat. Significantly, the flat is bare of furniture and the challenge of housekeeping duties. The notion of rejecting property and possession is linked to the conversation of Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi on the absolute self in the fourth Brahad - Arayanka Upanishad. Maitreyi rejects wealth because it will not give her immortality. The rejection of possession is fore-grounded against the folktale of the sparrows that ruthlessly guards her house. Jaya quotes both myth and folktale to understand possessions.

The breaking of silence says Deshpande that the self- realization occurs within the domestic sphere, what she terms 'The Diaries of a sane Housewife' is the painstaking entries of items bought, price lists, dates of children's schools and insurance payment (Deshpande,S,p.191,2008). These things highlight Jaya's career as a wife and a mother. The record clearly reflects the motif of Jaya's life and her existence 'cut' to 'fit' a role; what is left out is the person Jaya is, the being who is 'myself' outside these roles. Jaya condemns that being a girl child is the first problem in the society (Gould,T. 2018). When Jaya is told by Ramu akka "you have no place here" (Deshpande,S,p.35, 2008), she feels not just negligible but wholly wiped out. The reason given for her missing name in the family tree is that now she is married to some other family. But even no justification is given for the unmentioned names like that of 'kake' or 'ajji' who is a dominant figure (Deshpande,S,p.40, 2008), who single-handedly keeps the family together (Mussi, F, 2020). The narrator investigates that the culture itself ignores a woman, who is also a significant part of the family (Ferguson,K, 2003).

Jaya decides to act according to the situation (Mims, B, 2021). Jaya says that it is not in reality in sharing the burden, though a pair of bullocks yoked together to kart in reaching the pinnacle of happy life. Deshpande portrays the Indian family life through the female protagonist Jaya that they have got enough training as husband and wife so that in real life they can play their roles perfectly (81), but no one can claim their past life as the rewinding system has not found (Himes, S. 2021). It remains silence (Theinová, D, 2020). Her conduct is not the model of righteousness but it should be human and her reaction has a feminine modernist quality, making her a refuge at last. Jaya has attempted to play a role of a socially accepted woman, maintain the status of tolerance, submissiveness and humbleness in her, but Jaya becomes a modern egoistical. Jaya creates a character in her short story as good humoured, sought-after, pea brained but smart, tricky, flick through life (151). Seeta is a mirror to Jaya who lives in the pages of her diary as a wife and a mother. The easily recognizable character which faces the agony of the middle-class housewife makes her acceptable to Mohan. Jaya as seen in her diaries finds that Seeta is secure and comfortable, because they both are unquestioning, without anger, restrained and silenced.

This stereotypical character is acceptable, as the writer or creator is engaged in a respectable happy life, contributing to the women's magazines and the weekly columns. Mohan takes credit for allowing his wife the freedom to explore her creativity and is self-congratulatory about being called "Mr. Seeta" till the story reaches beyond the barrier established by him. The literary value of Jaya's writings is unimportant, because her writings are within boundaries and do not evolve from any personal experience. The core of *That Long Silence* is the theme of waiting as restraint or self-revelation (Gould, T, 2018). The strategy of telling is however, not acceptable, and stories written not under pseudonyms, stories written without restraint are rejected or recommended to be sent to women's magazines. The first step towards self-realization is Jaya's rejection of Seeta when she stops writing about her. The death of Seeta is also the death of Suhasini and

Jaya vents around for her identity. Deshpande admits that from the beginning, the novel is a monologue by Jaya sitting within the four walls of her house. By tearing of the turmoil in her personal life after *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, when, in a different set of circumstances, she finds herself sitting at home, as confined as Jaya is. She realizes that this novel is about silences, the huge silence which surrounds women's lives and which they surround themselves with this laid like a huge weight on her heart (Women Writers' Suffrage League, 1907).

In her deep contemplation, Jaya examines her feelings. The fact is that Jaya is not prepared to exercise a choice of her own that requires more courage and total hold on one's self. She admits her mistakes of remaining silent about Mohan's activities. She never questions his attitude, seldom argues with him leaving everything to his own will and wish. She also finds her faults and she slowly prepares herself to face the reality (Plate, L, 2011). She compares herself with mythical figure Seeta who always obeys her husband without any question. After analyzing all her past events and incidents she understands that self-revelation is a hard process (Deshpande,S,p.1, 2008).

Through her writing Jaya gets mentally relieved of the agony, which is caused to her by certain circumstances. This time it is triggered off her while she is witnessing a girl molested by two men. Thinking her daughter Rati, she becomes crazy in finding a secure home for her daughter (Emmott, E.H, 2021). After this incident, Jaya returns home and frantically goes on pressing the calling bell of her house and then bangs on the door. Acutely conscious of this constricting social environment, the narrator-writer unfolds her story (Wigginton, B., & Lafrance, M. N, 2016). The expression is in the first person related to her experiences from inside and thus giving them immediately an impact (Brauner, D. 2001). However, for an experience it has to be distanced. Shashi Deshpande claims to distance herself from her own self to make it an objective account. The women characters are the silent sufferers, whereas the men folk expressed their agony through irritation and anger. The novel highlights patriarchal power structure in relationships between man and woman in many characters. A forceful example of the power of patriarchy is provided by the episode, which Mohan relates to Jaya who in turn, turned it down in her narrative. Mohan is found strange by Jaya, but is actually not so strange, because it is conformed to the psyche formed by the patriarchal power structure (Olsson, U, 2013). Though Jaya understands the deep-rooted despair in the episode, it is so agonizing that it is not able to get articulated. It is to decide that better be silent and surrender, because it is the only weapons she has found (Olsson, U, 2013). Jiya the maiden servant to Jaya, gets beatings from her husband for money to get liquor. Jiya earns money for the sake of her family and for her husband to drink liquor but she wipes vermillion the day her husband has died. She earns for her family even after the death of her husband as usual. She intends to bring up children of the other woman. Her husband had married to another lady too. The story gets repeated after Jiya's husband's death with changes only in characters. Rajaram, the son of the other woman, imitates his father beating his wife Tara and taking money from her to drink liquor as his father does with Jiya, but Jiya let not her daughter-in-law, Tara, curse Rajaram because he owns her vermillion (Deshpande.S, p.42, 2008). Yet another instance of the scepter used by patriarch is the beating administered by a man to his wife in the building in Dadar where Mohan and Jaya have come to live. There is a sound of blow, followed by soft moans of woman. The man shouts at asking for the place she has gone (Deshpande.S, p.48, 2008). There is no answer and therefore more blows are thrashed, but the woman continues to cling to her silence, abandoning it only to dry softly sound mother (Deshpande.S, p.48, 2008). Her sister-in-law, Vimala too observes the same silence. When she is taken to doctor by Mohan and Jaya, the doctor asks them in disbelief that she hides the actual problem she has (Deshpande.S, p 37, 2008).

A woman is given all kind of advice once she gets into a man's hands in the name of marriage. Jaya is given enough information to run her life with Mohan and his family happily in name of advice and Dadar too enlightens her with noble information, when she is leaving Ambeyaon. Both Vanitamani and Ramuakka contribute by giving advice to Jaya in giving much importance to husband and telling happiness of home and husband is depending on Jaya's (Deshpande.S, p 137-138, 2008). But Jaya has not been told a word about what to do when a marriage is over. It has been over for Kusum, a mother of three children. The marriage with Mohan has ended for all practical benefits. However, Jaya cannot but may reject the body's response: it is simple, direct and irresistible. She resists it and rejects, as she knows that she cannot accept

it. Mohan wants to marry a well-educated and family cultured girl, but Mohan gets a girl finding no answer to the questions of her husband, just remaining in silent. She refuses to flirt with the doctor in the hospital even though she asks for his help for Rajaram. There is a law of women folk in the collective unconscious of all Indian women (Morse, D,1993).

In addition to the protagonist, there are other women characters, who also experience the oppression in a male dominated society. All these women, at various points in the novel are acquainted with Jaya. Kusum has an unhappy married life. Her husband abandons her, which makes her commit suicide. She becomes a victim of patriarchy. Kusum's life is an example of victimization of women by patriarchy. A woman becomes a victim socially, politically, economically and culturally as she is controlled by a man but Indian husbands are customed in the faith that wife will counsel and help in all circumstances at the time of indecisive. When Mohan is accused of corruption, he thinks that her wife will support him and will not question whether he is right or wrong.

Deshpande creates character of Kamat whose significance in the novel is mainly to judge Jaya a self, which can be expressed in writing as a view and vision of a person (Deshpande.S, p 147, 2008). He not only provides a sounding board for Jaya, but also sees her as a being outside the role she performs (Attridge, D, 1996). Being herself crushes; her husband sees her only as a wife with specific characteristic of wifehood. Kamat's role is only to hold up a mirror to Jaya as a self and to the kind of writing of how she should be (Nascimento, B.D. 2021). Deshpande, the writer, warns against uncontrolled outpourings because writing is a kind of self-revelation. Deshpande's delineation of male characters is noteworthy in *That Long Silence*. Both Mohan and Kamat fail to each other as well as hold up mirrors for Jaya to imitate (Schwyzer, P, 2017). Deshpande on being asked about Kamat admits that Kamat for her is a part of Jaya. The readers are brainwashed into believing that the intellectual part is a male part and it is so stupid. The point that Kamat exists in the novel only in the context of Jaya's self-realization is made with Kamat's death. His death, Deshpande says, brings a whole process of defining to a decisive point. If the relationship has gone on, the point of realization never comes. Kamat's purpose is served when Jaya understands the worth of writing.

Mohan's mother also resolves silence like Jaya, when Mohan's father uses power over Mohan's mother by torturing her. When her husband throws chutney, she prepares fresh chutney immediately and confines herself to the role of a housewife which is a feminine role. Working class women like Jaya, Tara and Nayana are physically beaten. Though Jaya's husband beats her, she never complains about her plight but remains silent. Her silence is in contrast to the most restful women's desirable identity (V. Vieth,V.I. (eds), 2022). A woman, especially a home maker finds her security and identity in the company of her husband. Jaya realizes this when she avoids Kamat's sexual approach in spite of her body's intention.

Deshpande focuses on male-female rival as felt by Jaya. The egocentric vein in her temperament does not allow for the total fusion of identity with Mohan. She keeps intact with her own individuality. The ability to identify individuality in oneself is a highly appreciable and advancement of skill in order to live in a society for the sake of societal impacts. Though everyone has their definition for individuality, literature stands between discrimination and recognition of individual (Murphy, F., Nile, R, 2017). When a character in literature identifies how each is different in thinking and acting, it is discriminating oneself from another but recognition is defined as the character does an in-depth analysis by finding individual behaviour of each character and the ability in differentiating one individual from other (Talbot, C.F,2021). As a married woman she has become dependent from Mohan and this she considers insulting. She feels that she is reduced to the stereotype of woman (Deshpande.S, p 77, 2008). In married life, she wishes to maintain her individual identity. Her desire for self-knowledge makes her realize her awesome power over him (Deshpande.S, p 82, 2008). Deshpande evinces keen interest in the empowerment of women in the multifaceted aspect of life. The women of Deshpande face fearsome challenges to gain their rightful place in the society. It is obvious that Deshpande has a credit of giving women characters adorn with noble efforts in finding a well cultured social harmony in their lives and are spiritually satisfied in contributing for the tangible development of their families.

Conclusion

Deshpande has clearly portrayed with critical note of marriage in the Indian context. The lives of women entangled in the traditional society of male domination, suppression and unpleasant feeling triggered by the perception of danger and psychological horror accompanied by increased autonomic activity are well narrated by Deshpande as a female writer (E. Page, Ruth, 2003). It is obvious that the writer attempts to probe the society pressurizing to follow patriarchal concept of traditionalism and the room for self-expression of woman, when need arises (da Correa, D.S.2003). Despite her creative ability, Jaya longs to express her sensitivity remarks, but the traditional concept of being an ideal life partner of a husband stops her thinking of a writer than a submissive wife.

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