

# Awaken of the Suppressed Soul in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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In India, women writers have put forth the problems faced by the educated middle class woman in her everyday life. Right from the ancient days, many women have strived hard to cope up with this male centered world, few have also raised their voice against the ill treatment. In modern era, the difficulties being faced by women may vary, but they still exist. Modern women, being educated are unable to put up with the hindrances of their suppressed life. Women in the past, barely educated, had tolerance to bear the suppression of the society. But, today's woman, being a literate, finds it hard to accept the old traditions as it is. She encounters inner conflicts while travelling with both traditional and modern values. Traditional values being mixed in modern woman blood right from her early age of growth and modernity engulfing her in her later age of maturity, has left her in psychological convulsions.

Shashi Deshpande, a renowned novelist, unfurls the issues of woman in the male centred society in a positive manner. Being a member of male dominant society, Deshpande in all her writings depicts the problems of modern educated women quite genuinely. Shashi Deshpande's novels disclose a sensitive and careful portrayal of modern Indian womanhood with a focus on her search for self identity and her concern for the self value through the life of her protagonists. She throws light on the emotional issues a modern woman faces in the whirlpool of trauma.

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande highlights the image of middle class woman squeezed in between tradition and modernity. In India, arranged marriage is a preferred way for Indians to enter into matrimony in which parents and other relatives take decision in the selection of life partner. Woman is limited in giving her consent for marriage, in selecting her groom and is kept under the shackles of forced patriarchy, having to live under the guardianship of a man in all stages of life, father in her early age, husband after her marriage and son at her old age. Marriage is a social responsibility and the marriage relationship largely depends on how the marriage is settled. The Jaya, after her marriage yields her rights to her husband. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel, know nothing about the groom Mohan

selected for her and Mohan too don't know about her before marriage, both were strangers to each other. Deshpande portrays Jaya as a typical modern woman who has roots in tradition but her husband Mohan a traditionalist has his roots in customs. Their attitude varies and as a result they fail to understand each other. Due to differences in their point of view, their marital life grows tottering and unsound. Their life becomes more of a compromise than love based on social fear rather than mutual need of each other. For example, from the very beginning, Mohan wanted a wife who was well-educated and cultured and never a loving one. Jaya thus realised that so called love and romances were only the things in poems and stories and not in real life.

Shashi Deshpande describes Jays's married life using the imagery of "a pair of bullocks yoked together" performing their duties mechanically. Jaya suppresses her feelings and emotions for the sake of her husband and sacrifices her pleasures. Women, thus, adopt a life style of compromise to keep their family united. The story of the Crow and the Sparrow narrated to Jaya by her 'ai' has deeply induced her mind that Jaya she as the wise and determined sparrow justifies her own role as a mother complying with her husband's words, "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world and you are safe." To please her husband, Jaya appears to be a contented house wife married to an apparently caring man and having two normal healthy children.

In this novel, Deshpande has portrayed the dilemma of a woman-writer who is also a housewife. Jaya is also presented in the image of a worm crawling into the hole hiding inner talent of creating writing herself and suffer the monotony of life caused by household activities. Once after her marriage, when Jaya was on the outset of acquiring name and fame, Mohan displays his dislike. She realises that the writer in her could not come to light because of her husband. Jaya did not want to irritate. To satisfy Mohan's ego and expectations, Jaya is forced to curb her own creative genius. Later, to satisfy readers, she writes light humorous works unveiling the sufferings of the middle class woman under the title 'Sita' which brings her positive review from her readers and appreciation from her husband.

Even as a writer, Jaya finds it hard to express herself completely. In the story there is victory whereas in real life she is mute, living a passive life like Sita following her husband Rama to the countryside in his exile. But in writings she opposes them as unsuitable to the present situation, can only be the citations of the past.

Deshpande has aptly titled her work as 'That Long Silence' indicating the behaviour of the protagonist, Jaya. Though she is a well educated one, she holds silence as a defence mechanism to drive her vehicle of family continuously. She considers silence as one of the trick to maintain her marital relationship. Without revolting, refusing or complaining she surrenders to her husband, Mohan. Even when Kamat, a young widower suggested her to express her anger in her writing, she replies in interrogative sentences, how can she be angry, "... because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?"(147) Moreover she also says that a woman can never be angry, she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated." She realises that in the life of woman many cross roads and choices will be there but to a married woman only a few choices or no choices will be left out, except the wills and desires of her husband.

The hatred, in living with a man who does not love and cares the woman as she expects him, is a burning problem, experienced by most of the educated woman in contemporary society. Deshpande, through Jaya's character, brings out the confused attitude of contemporary educated, independent-Indian women is brought forward who can neither reconcile themselves to a new situation when their husband crush their dreams nor cast off their husbands because the husband is everything for them. Jaya slowly transforms herself. Jaya while living in isolation in her Dadar flat away from her husband and two children, probes deep into her mind and understands aspects of her life and relationships that she has avoided or failed to realize earlier. After a lot of musing of

the disruption in her domestic life Jaya determines to cope up and stand tall and fight for herself. Towards the end of the novel we see her moving on the verge of positivism as she wishes to break that long silence she carries with her and to move ahead. She evolves as a optimistic individual. She has decided to unleash and eradicate all the unwanted thoughts and misunderstanding with Mohan. She truly believes that building this gap of communication and giving voice to her thoughts will lead her to peace and harmony in life.

In the progress of life after self assessment Jaya overcomes her mental crisis and realises that noone is responsible for her disaster. She leaves her blaming attitude. A change has arrived in her behaviour. Now in her disastrous loneliness she realizes and understands what Kamat said to her that ‘pursuit of happiness is meaningless’ and loneliness is the significant condition of human existence. Others cannot be held responsible all the time. To some extent, she too is responsible for her miserable condition. She blames Mohan for her failure but later she realizes that it is not her husband who stopped her interest of writing: ‘I hadn’t stopped writing because of Mohan; I could not possibly make Mohan the scapegoat for my failures, for I had written even after that confrontation with him.’(145) She realizes her own power, “I’m Jaya, Jaya for victory.”(137)

Jaya’s stress increases when she comes to know her husband’s hand in a corruption. She denies go into hiding with her husband as an enquiry is going on against his financial irregularities. She goes through self evaluation and attains self actualization. Viewing the indifferent behaviour of Jaya, Mohan condemns her of being cold towards him, in particular at the time when he is facing the biggest crisis of his professional life. He says angrily “The truth is that you despise me because I’ve failed. As long as I had my job and position, it was. All right; as long as I could give you all the comforts, it was all right. But now, because I am likely to lose it all. . .”His accusations make her hysterical and she bursts into a loud laughter. This wounds Mohan and he leaves the home without a word.

To increase her pain Jaya receives a message that her son Rahul who was on a vacation trip with his family friends was lost. There is no one who can console her. Only at this point Jaya tries to connect her past and the present. A new Jaya emerges as a result of her self evaluation as a new person, believing in herself. She bids goodbye to her anger, frustration, silence and resentment. She understands her self-worth and takes decision to give up the prefixed notions of the society, liberating herself from all the traditional values and valuing her feelings and wishes.

Deshpande herself in an interview has asserted That Long Silence as a hysterical novel in the sense that inside of her she was kind of screaming, but it has come out as one screaming self. There is no point at which Jaya gave to her emotions, self pity or anything. Deshpande, through the protagonist lays a perfect balance between tradition and modernity and this as a working technique for the survival of contemporary woman. Most of her protagonists exhibits the character of suppression in the beginning, rebels against it, undergoes self evaluation and emerges as a matured one being ready to face the reality in a new way.

Jaya is one of Deshpande’s unique protagonists, who faces all individual pains and evolves as a courageous one. Through her, the sufferings of a modern woman in her domestic life, is delicately expressed in That Long Silence. This novel is a bold move by the author to break the silence of many Indian women. One can find an authentic portrayal of a modern educated Indian woman in this novel. The author using the nostalgic narrative technique succeeds in unveiling the woes of woman. On one side the novel teaches womanhood to come-out of their silence and speak for their rights and another side expects man to understand the expectation of woman and to value her wishes.

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