

SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*: A FEMINIST STUDY AND HUMANISTIC VIEWPOINT

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Accepted: 07.01.2023

Published: 01.02.2023

Keywords: Patriarchy, Women Role, Silence, Humanistic Vision.

Abstract

*A prominent place has been achieved by Shashi Deshpande in post-colonial New English literature. She was a sharp observer and noticed that the family and society were plagued by many pressing difficulties. She skillfully addressed the pressing themes relating to women's place in the family and society in her work *That Long Silence*, which was published in 1990 and won the Sahitya Akademi Award. The main female character in the book is Jaya, who makes the decision to end her silence after 17 years. She is more dedicated and consistent than any other female novelist in her portrayal of a realistic image of middle-class educated Indian women. They undoubtedly began to wonder about their situation as a result of the introduction of Western education and culture. They are deeply interwoven in both modernity and tradition. Despite having the power to advance their status, women are viewed as inferior to men and their servitors. It is evident that the woman's pain is her fate. Their desires, wills, and aspirations are ignored as a great deal of responsibility is placed on their shoulders by our family and society. Shashi Deshpande never intends to oppose men; instead, he focuses on portraying truth. She is also referred to as a fierce feminist. The roles of women in the family and society were adequately illuminated by female writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, and others. The novelists draw attention to this in a number of different ways. Through Jaya, a character who has aspirations to be heard in *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande represents women who lack a voice. The writers occasionally make an effort to stay as true to reality as they can, but they never make an effort to express the women's deepest emotions. Therefore, it*

cannot be said that Pande's book *That Long Stillness* captures readers' interest or increases their curiosity concerning that silence.

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The current novel *That Long Silence* features Shashi Deshpande has expressed her opinions on a variety of topics, including marriage, love, understanding, gender discrimination, tradition against modernization, marginalisation, and other issues. She does not, however, seek to be recognised as a feminist or in any other way; rather, she promotes a humanistic viewpoint that emphasises equality without any discrimination between caste, creed, and class. They all feel the same because they are all composed of flesh and blood, so they should be treated on a par. Women are resisted by androcentric ideas while having the capability and ability to obtain equal opportunities and rights. They are marginalised as a result. Our patriarchal system obstructs them with distortion. Women writers who come forward to announce their status are labelled as stern feminists, despite the fact that the term "feminism" is by no means a static concept. When thoroughly studied, studies reveal that it is nothing more than a critique of patriarchal ideology that promotes male dominance and female submission. Inculcation is expected of women as a component of socialisation.

Jaya experiences this because she always wants to break the stillness but the elders' preaching instructions forbid her from doing so. The book indirectly raises a lot of questions while presenting Jaya's existence as being filled with boredom, frustration, alienation, ennui, and other negative emotions. One of them is if women should have no say because their sole responsibility is to consider their husband's wishes, comfort, likes, dislikes, happiness, and sadness; they are not responsible for thinking about their own needs. As reflecting on oneself has significance for them in their families and social circles. So in her book *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande takes the risk of exploring the humanistic viewpoint. In her book "*That Long Silence*," Shashi Deshpande skillfully addressed the pressing concerns pertaining to women's place in the family and society. For the current novel, she received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. Jaya, who maintains her silence for the entire narrative, is the main character. Her upbringing has prevented

her from speaking out against men or the patriarchal society. The author of this character dives deeply into the minds and hearts of typical married women, who are perpetually torn between patriarchy and imperialism.

Jaya leads a fragmented life after marriage. Jaya continually worries for her loved ones and Mohan, but she yearns for something. She doesn't think about what she might be missing, though. She understands how her quietness forces her to live up to Mohan's standards. There is nothing except repressed quiet in their relationship. Through Jaya, the novelist illustrates the crawling creature that is exposed and unshelled. As the mother of Rahul and Rati and the wife of Mohan, her condition is appalling. She explains; "Distance from real life, scared of writing, scared of failing on God I had thought, I cannot take any more. Even a worm has it can crawl into" (*That Long Silence* 148). When she contrasts herself with us, who have shelter, while she does not. Jaya's sentiment is reminiscent of the narrator's longing for a place to work in creativity in Virginia Woolf's story *A Room of One's Own*. She lacks a personal space where she could autonomously think, write, and act. The narrator thinks she could have written better had she had more money and a place to live because one's living situation always influences creativity.

Jaya wants to continue her writing. In her work, she breaks her seventeen-year silence. As long as she writes, she believes that she has failed as a writer since she cannot fully satisfy her urge to create an identity for herself. Her works lack an overarching voice. She is responsible to Mohan for the written works she produces. She lacks freedom and liberty in both her personal and professional lives, therefore this signifies Jaya recognises herself as a result of the self-discovery she experiences via writing.

She could also be said to be distant from herself. She is liberated from her constrained and oppressive domestic roles by her creative urge and artistic fervour. She has the right to express her true feelings and emotions once she recognises and cannot keep quiet any longer. She makes the decision to end that quiet by writing down all she has been holding back for the past seventeen years. She was broken up into countless pieces by that Long Silence. She explains; "The panic has gone. I am Mohan's wife I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible. The child, hands in pocket, has been with me through the years." (*That Long Silence* 191).

She knowingly accepts that her writing is a form of fiction around the end of the current book. She then makes the decision to fill that gap, as previously stated, by talking, listening, and eliminating the space between herself and Mohan. Her decision to erase the silence is her

assertion of her feminine voice—a voice full of potential and hope—and an articulate voice. The narrative does not entirely paint Jaya's life as a hopeless battle. She longs for a better life without chains tying her legs together as she strives for success in her work. She says; “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” (*That Long Silence* 193).

The humanistic perspective of Shashi Deshpande opens doors for women who feel they are beneath males. They believed that only when men are protecting them are women safe. As a result, men can even control them in the roles of father, brother, spouse, and son, which is incredibly unhuman. The lives of women do not stop with them. Women are psychologically conditioned to view men as status symbols. A critic Sunita Goyal writes:

The contemporary Indian women novelists are delineating the changing socio-cultural scenario where the modern educated middle class Indian women find themselves crushed between the conflicting demands of traditional idea of womanhood and their own wish for self-assertion and autonomy. These women are shown struggling to adjust themselves in this changing social set-up. Shashi Deshpande's female characters are also making consistent efforts to live as autonomous individuals besides performing the roles of a daughter, wife and mother. (Goyal 54).

When under stress or enraged, Mohan sneaks out of the house without saying anything to his wife. For a while, she doesn't hear him. The moment he leaves the house, she is severely startled. She feels uncomfortable without him and starts to ruminate. She believes he is permanently gone. Her standing as a wife is in jeopardy. She feels stirred by the idea of shouldering children's duties because she doesn't want her to fall apart. She is therefore perpetually plagued by the feeling of being incomplete without Mohan. Mohan is someone she views as a social safety net. She shares these sentiments with Mukta:

A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were only two persons. A man, Woman (*That Long Silence* 8).

Jaya is aware that they are apart. The sense of detachment Jaya experiences is the result of this emotion. Despite sharing a home, there is minimal emotional connection between them. Prior to getting married, Mohan is drawn to her because of her English proficiency. He considers getting married to her, but he never gives a thought to her needs, wants, or emotions. To her spouse, she

is a status symbol. Husbands do not view their women as having an equal place in the household and society. As a result, both unintentionally and knowingly, they degrade and disrespect them. It will be appropriate to recall Kiran Desai's protagonist from her book *The Inheritance of Loss*, who verbally abuses his wife for her impolite behaviour and constantly corrects her for not speaking English. She has provided him with financial support, without which he would not have been able to realise his dream. She is the key that unlocked the success doors for him. However, he never regards her as his wife and treats her cruelly. In between them, it creates a wide chasm. The similar gap exists between Jaya and Mohan since there is no love or understanding between them. She was raised in a non-emotional environment and does not comprehend what true love is. She is perplexed by this crucial relationship, which serves as the connecting thread between various human relationships. She says that she misunderstands what love is just after getting married:

Love...? yes, what else could I call it but love, when? Thought of how I had longed for his physical presence, when I remembered how readily, almost greedily, I had responded to his touch? What else could I name it when I thought of the agony it had been to be without him, when his desires, his approval, his love had seemed, to be the most important thing in my life. (*That Long Silence*15).

Only Mohan occupies her thoughts, so she is aware of both his and her needs. In her relationship with him, she never experiences warmth. Her satisfaction and happiness on a personal level are meaningless to Mohan and to him as well. She is completely aware of her relationship with him and her future. Despite this, she lacks the courage to completely reject her society. Even though her marriage is unable to provide her with fulfillment, tranquilly, or love, she cannot deny her status as Mohan's wife. His remarks convey the emotional hole she is experiencing; “Love But what did I know of love? Even the love stories I’d written they had been as if I had gone spinning out the fantasies of my adolescence love? No, I knew nothing of it” (*That Long Silence*152).

Shashi Deshpande explains the goal of simply individual happiness in marriage quite well. Jaya lives in a typical family. She had a speech phobia from the start because she was afraid of being made fun of by her father, masculine Appa, who would always stop her from doing anything she wanted to do. When they had the chance to correct her, her father and brother did so. She consequently leaps into silence, which is more comfortable for her. Later, she resists telling Mohan that she prefers to watch heads in movies over movies for the reason that freedom and liberty are portrayed in threads. Due to her incapacity to speak, Jaya is forced to take a protracted

silent voyage. She has been instructed to worship Mohan. Her traditional upbringing forces her to make a self-sacrificing marriage. Bertrand Russel;

Love, like everything that is great and precious, demands its own morality, and frequently entails a sacrifice of the less to the greater; but the sacrifice must be voluntary for , where it is not, it will destroy the very basis of the love for the sake for which it is made.(Russel 215).

After getting married, a girl's entire life changes; Jaya is a good example of this. Because she was misled into thinking that her spouse was her career, her profession, and her source of income, she gives up her aspiration to become a writer. Shashi Deshpande has brought to light a number of urgent challenges in the current feminism discourse. The novelist illustrates the complexity of contemporary Indian women through the characters of Jaya, Asha, Mukta, Kusum, etc. Marriage plays a crucial role in the lives of Indian women. Their entire existence is altered by it. When it comes to their wives' lifestyles, husbands lead similar lives to their own. They take joy in living a life devoid of any signs of marriage. As Sanjoy Saksena comments:

Jaya was an educated girl who understood feminist thought and she confesses to it throughout the novel. There is nothing militant about her feminism for it remains a desire to seek self-gratification and she was not prepared deep down to divorce Mohan or simply give him up due to his suspected liaison with some other woman. Kamat was her admirer and facilitator but no substitute for the more successful Mohan. The crisis that befalls Jaya and Mohan's poor relatives reinforces the woman's desire for greater autonomy, wealth and security. (qtd. in Dwivedi 07)

Even the strongest person is viewed as weak without male support, according to Shashi Deshpande, yet a wife's presence or absence in a husband's life does not seem to affect anything. Woman is plagued by the fear of being alone without a guy. Jaya considers what her brother Ravi, whose wife Asha has left following an argument, would have liked her to say to Asha as Jaya considers the silent progress of divorce and widowhood in marriage; "Go home like a good girl, Asha... Go back home and obey your husband. And never mind, whatever it is he has done , he's your husband,...(*That Long Silence* 115).

In Jaya's marriage, treachery rules, with lies and deception replacing love, adoration, and understanding. Jaya is hence unhappy with her marriage. She is preoccupied with thoughts of childhood, girlhood, and femininity. She has been trained since she was a young child to obey male commands without grumbling. But she accomplishes tasks to her satisfaction covertly. She dislikes the idea of herself as a helpless, foolish lady. She believes it is cruel to force a new

identity, complete with whims and aspirations, upon anyone. She discovers that there were only the bare skeletal contours of her life as she reads through the pages of her diaries. Its vital centre had been omitted. The wretched cries of I can't handle this, I can't manage this, I can't go on had been skillfully muffled. She had endured a life filled with insignificant details for a very long time, as well as accusations from her husband that she had neglected the kids and cut herself off from him and his worries. Finally, she comes to terms with herself and no longer feels the urge to Mohan.

Through the personas of Jaya, Kusum, Aasha, and Mukta, Shashi Deshpande paints a portrait of the downtrodden Indian women. The book finishes on a positive note. Through Jaya, the author of the novel illustrates the inhumane treatment of women by man-made society, despite the fact that they are inseparable as the two sides of the same coin. Without freedom and liberty, life has no purpose and is no longer worth living. It is undeniable that one must make concessions and adaptations in order to have a prominent social life, yet one can make some of these changes. After much conjecture, Jaya ultimately returns to her former life since she is content with Kamat. She wants to reach a compromise so she can get back to being domestic. But after that, a new Jaya appeared.

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