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ORIGINAL ARTICLE



**NO MORE SILENCE: JAYA IN SHASHIDESPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE***

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**ABSTRACT:**

The present paper attempts to analyze Shashi Deshpande's popular novel *That Long Silence* from the feminist perspective. Feminism is a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes. It examines women's and men's social roles, experiences, interests, chores, and feminist politics in a variety of fields; such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, literature, education, and philosophy, etc. Feminist literature deals with themes like gender discrimination, objectification (especially sexual), stereotyping and oppression of women in patriarchy. The paper argues that Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is the example of a typical Indian feminist novel. Shashi Deshpande is a Sahitya Academy Award winner Indian woman novelist. In her works, she strongly depicts the issues like the degradation that women experience and the subordination and inequality in male dominated society.

**KEY WORDS:** Feminism, gender discrimination, oppression and subordination of women, etc.

**INTRODUCTION:**

It is a universal truth that women form the most underprivileged section of society, all over the world. They have been denied opportunities at all walks of life and have been denied existence as equal human beings as men. The traditional male dominated society has refused to listen to her feelings, thoughts and anguish as a fellow human being. A critic, Sushila Singh has rightly pointed out, "Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with the masculine experience with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one sided and incomplete. Woman has not been defined as a subject in her own right but merely has an entity that concerns man either in his real life or his fantasy life." This imbalance at all walks of life was prevalent for centuries. In case of Indian Literature and culture, one finds references in *Manu Smriti* which denied any right to women.

The feminist movement started to raise the flag of revolt against male chauvinism since 1960s at European fronts. The concept of feminism, no doubt first appeared through political front.

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Alexander Dumas, the 19<sup>th</sup> century French Dramatists used it to refer to denote the then emerging political movement. Gradually, it started spreading all over the world demanding equal rights to women in all spheres of human life. Feminism is now a well-established school of thinking all over the world. It is a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes.

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, fictional, or philosophical discourse. It examines women's and men's social roles, experiences, interests, chores, and feminist politics in a variety of fields; such as anthropology, sociology, communication, media studies, psychoanalysis, economics, literature, education, and philosophy. Feminist theory focuses on analyzing gender inequality. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping, art history and contemporary art, and aesthetics. Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Betty Friedman, and Kate Millet are the key feminist scholars whose writings have exerted the great influence on many feminist writers all over the world. The prominent feminist writers are Sylvia Plath, Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Marilyn French, Margaret Atwood, and many others in European literature. In case of Indian English Literature the torch bearers of feminism include Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande and others. The tradition continues up to the present writers like Arundhati Roy and Shobha de etc.

Shashi Deshpande (born in 1938) is a Sahitya Academy Award winner Indian woman novelist. She has been honoured with 'Padmashri Award' in 2009. Her major novels include – *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1982), *If I Die Today* (1983), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1989) *A Matter of Time* (1996), *The Binding Vine* (2002) *Small Remedies* (2000), *In the County of Deceits* (2008) *Shadow Play* (2013), etc. Though not a confirmed feminist like her Western counterparts, she occupies a significant place among the contemporary Indian women novelists who concern with the problems of women and their quest for identity. Though she has denied being a feminist, she has given an honest portrayal of the sufferings, disappointments and frustrations of modern Indian women in general who try to bring a balance between the traditional roles that a woman has been assigned and her inner urge to be independent. The issues which she has strongly depicted are the degradation that women experience and continue to experience and the subordination and inequality in male dominated society. The present paper attempts to analyze Shashi Deshpande's popular novel *That Long Silence* through feminist perspective.

*That Long Silence* is Shashi Deshpande's third novel. Published in 1989 by the British publisher Virago, the novel presents Jaya the protagonist passing through a maze of self doubts and fears towards the affirmation of her self. She is the representative of the modern young women who are educated and are aware of the traditional bondages a woman has to bear. She attempts but finds it difficult to break away from the strangle hold of traditions. Her story presents a glimpse into the lives of those housewives who are aware of the suppression under the weight of male domination. They have the capacity and power to revolt against them but prefer a medium way of avoiding direct confrontation with male domination. On the other hand, they appear to be content with the situation. Instead of blaming the men alone, they try to understand man woman relationship objectively and arrive at the decision that both men and women are the products of

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their particular cultures. They find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by male dominated society like India.

The novel opens with a classic statement by Elizabeth Robins. It reads, "If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shady uneasy, the weight of that long silence." The novel presents the conflict in the mind of the protagonist, Jaya who is a writer and a housewife. She is the representative of the educated, urban, middle class women exposed to liberal Western ideas. But she is unable free herself from the clutches of male chauvinist ideas. These ideas are a part and parcel of her life and culture which are thrust upon her by those around. She has tried to be happy and content for seventeen years of her married life managing to suppress her inner urge to write. She has been married to Mohan and have two grown up children, Rahul and Rati. Jaya's husband works in an office. Jaya leads an enviable life of a housewife by any standard, having a caring husband and a comfortable house with all modern amenities. She would have lead an apparently happy life like any Indian married woman surrendering herself for the well being of family. Then suddenly a catastrophe occurs. Mohan has been accused of certain corruption charges in his office dealings which he does not deny. To be away from inquiry and defame they decide to shift to Dadar in a flat, temporarily. Jaya follows her husband like the mythological Sita displaying her '*Sati dharma*'.

As a creative writer, Jaya has achieved name and fame in the early years of her married life. But then in one of her stories published, she portrayed the husband who was unable to reach his wife except her body. Mohan didn't approve the story thinking that he might be considered to the husband. Jaya's career as a writer comes to an abrupt end. Without arguing or reasoning with him Jaya closes the door for the writer inside her. But in the silence of their Dadar flat Jaya's loneliness further accentuates leading her to intense introspection. She begins to write under a pseudo name but her stories have lost the original fervor and glow. She comes in close contact with Mr. Kamat, a neighbor living alone and an advertiser and a well read person. He realizes Jaya's situation properly. He becomes a stern critic to tell her openly of her faults. Jaya also feels very much comfortable while in his company which she had never found in her husband. The platonic relation later on turns to physical level but Jaya realizes her role as a wife to safeguard her marriage. Her cold and apathetic reaction after the sudden death of Mr. Kamat is also surprising and inhuman. A critic Sarla Palkar has analyzed, "She, perhaps does her role of wife to perfection but fails as human being."

Thus , Jaya who was an independent woman before marriage is transformed into the stereotype Indian married woman who is silent, passive, nervous needing her husband's help at all levels. It does not mean that she has lost the spark inside her. She wants to rebel and exercise her free will but prefers the dictates of society above her private feelings. She compromises her stand for she is taught the importance and necessity of stable marriage and family as the source of emotional strength. She has been taught and advised by relatives like Vanita Mami. For instance Jaya has been told just before her marriage, "Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flowering, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies." The same woman later on told Jaya, "If your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it. Take up a hobby instead, cats, maybe, or your sister 's children." (32) Her husband, on the other hand feels that his involvement in the scam was to fulfill the expectations of his family. He needs Jaya at this time of crisis but only as a buffer, an opiate to soften the situation. Jaya on the other hand experiences a

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traumatic upheaval. She feels to be jolted out of the false complacency. She breaks away the self imposed silence. At a particular night, she pours out her innermost thoughts, her pent up feelings, her doubts, her fears and her seventeen years old silence. A realization comes to her when she utters, "The panic has gone, I am Mohan's wife, 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."(191)

To underline Jaya's situation and stand, the novelist has introduced a few more female characters who are Jaya's close relatives. They include Kusum: Jaya's mad cousin, Mohan's mother, his sister Vimala, Jaya's maid servant Jeeja. Their individual tragedies are woven in the tapestry of the novel to point out Jaya's rebellious way of accepting the problems of life. All these women accept multiple levels of dehumanizing situations without complaint. Only Jaya has the courage of breaking the age old silence in her own way. At the end of the novel, she honestly questions herself: "But why am I making the heroine of this story? Why do I presume that the understanding is mine alone?"(193)

In this way, it becomes clear that *That Silence Longis* a typical Indianfeminist novel which presents the story of Jaya, a middle class woman who not only plays the conventional role of Indian woman but also raises her voice against the exploitation and subordination of women in male dominated family. A scholar,K.C. Nambiyar has rightly pointed out,"It is a muted and essentially sympathetic treatment of the problems of marital relationships; maintaining a credible balance between the sexes." Jaya suffers a lot but it is inward suffering like traditional Indian women but when the time comes she has the courage to speak it out openly. She is 'no more silent' like other Indian women.

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