



Woman in Marriage: A Probe into the Relationship Dilemma in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Recipient of the Sahitya Academy and Padma Shree Award, Shashi Deshpande is an eminent Indian woman writer writing in English. One of the leading feminist writers, Shashi Deshpande has been widely appreciated for her writings on the marginalized women and their issues. Her literary writings portray the middle class educated women who are often trying to establishing their identities in the patriarchal society. Deshpande's literary canvas embodies women as mostly controlled, exploited and submissive to patriarchy. Shashi Deshpande in her writings has clearly exposed the incongruities within the marital framework.

The role of the Indian woman novelists to promote the position of women in every sphere of life is quite commendable. The writings of contemporary Indian woman writers concentrate on the latest burning issues related to women as well as the issues that have caused women's subjugation. The novels of Deshpande reflect the lives of suffocated women under the patriarchal norms. Her writings are replete with colourful and touching studies of human life. Her novels reveals her deep involvement for the upliftment of women who are seen as worst sufferers as victim of male hegemony under patriarchal domination. *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande's notable work gained much popularity for its realistic portrayal of the issues and sufferings of contemporary middle class educated women. The narrative revolves around the life of the protagonist, Jaya who is torn between the clutches of tradition and modernity.

That Long Silence is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian housewife. The term Silence in the title of the novel has been used symbolically which equals with the passivity of living in a patriarchal society. Commenting on Shashi Deshpande's novels, Geetanjali Singh Chandra opines that,

"In Shashi Deshpande's novels, womanly silence is often seen as a silencing of women by patriarchy. In *That Long Silence*, particularly Jaya's silence and her writing are linked. In the biography she has to submit to a newspaper she pares herself down to the barebones of "I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live". In literary terms this

would be the plot of her life. The sum total of the actions that happen. It does not at all reveal who she is.” (Chandra 45)

Marriage occupies a crucial place in Indian society. It plays a decisive role in influencing human relationships. But this relationship is yet to find a niche in the socio cultural milieu. The exploration of women’s experience becomes essential in determining the position of women in the patriarchal set-up. The happiness, anguish, including the identity of a woman is assessed in the familial bond by harmonious living through the sacred institution of marriage.

Deshpande’s fictional writings give us a glimpse of the marginalized women who are caught in the vortex of poor marital relationship and patriarchal subjugation. The husband wife relation in the novel, *That Long Silence* fails to realize the concept of harmonious conjugal life as viewed by Joseph Addison as,

“A happy marriage has in it all the pleasures of friendships, all the enjoyment of sense and reason – and indeed all the sweets of life.” (Joseph Addison: 1826:340)

Shashi Deshpande is truly concerned with the troubled lives of the women in her novels. Through her wide repertoire of women characters, the novelist closely examines the crisis meted out to the middle class women with the existential search for meaning in their married life. The crisis meted out to women in Deshpande’s novels mostly results from incompatible marriages and poor marital relationships which fail to provide any solid foundation to develop their individuality. Jaya the protagonist of the novel is married without her choice to a person whom she never meted. After the death of her father she was reduced to a marriageable candidate (Hadole 95). Just to free himself from his responsibility Jaya’s brother, gave her marriage to Mohan. Wifehood is offered to woman through the institution of marriage. But the marriage of Jaya and Mohan was just a relation only in name. Both were strangers to each other. They hold different views and attitudes. Jaya’s fantasies and imagination of married life was curtailed when she has to adjust to her husband’s taste leaving aside all her hopes and aspirations.

Though Jaya and Mohan were married for seventeen years with two children the feeling of detachment increases day by day. What patriarchy demands is the total subservient of women to the male domination. An ideal wife is expected to live according to the wishes of the husband. A woman is considered to be an ideal wife if she does not question her husband but acts according to her husband’s choices. Jaya too like a traditional wife submits passively performing the role of an ideal homemaker. Jaya says,

I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I, Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband’s travails.... (Deshpande 147-148)

After she shift to Dadar flat, Jaya transforms into a stereotypical woman. The traumatic experience of her domestic life has totally changed her and now she determines to cope up and fight for her existence. She now started to look life from a different perspective. Jaya feels that she has shaped her life according to the wish of her husband and in doing so, she loses her own self. She looks back on her life after marriage and finds that this long fourteen years of the married life brings nothing but boredom, dullness and monotony. In her introspection of her married life, Jaya realizes that she has wasted her time in trivialities.

The husband wife conflict in the novel attributes to diverse reason affecting the blissful conjugal life of the couple. Jaya definitely turns out to be a victim of poor marital relation and patriarchal subjugation. The discouraging picture of the mismatched life of the couple is well projected in the novel when she (Jaya) says, that,

“I remember now how often I had sighed for a catastrophe, a disaster, no, not a personal one, but anything to shake us out of our dull grooves” (Deshpande 4).

Jaya’s stress further increases when she comes to know about her husband’s involvement in the case of corruption in his office. She resolves to break the silence by continuing her writing. But Mohan displays dislike for which she has to curb her own creative writing. The trauma of an educated middle class woman is well reflected through the character of Jaya, where they can neither adapt to a new situation nor they can realize their dreams. They cannot cast off their husbands because the patriarchal society assumes that women are nothing without their husbands. Torn between her individual and family identity, Jaya’s selfhood is crushed. She says, “Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it as bewildering as trying to know how you really look” (Deshpande1). Shashi Deshpande describes the discontented marriage of Jaya and Mohan as “a pair of bullocks yoked together” performing their duties mechanically. Jaya suppresses her feelings and surrenders herself to the family wishes. After her marriage with Mohan she started to realize the state of dependency. Her aim of becoming an ideal wife prevents her from complaining anything. A woman’s urge, her aspiration holds no value in the male dictated society. Jaya becomes what Mohan wants her to be. Beauvoir has rightly stated that “a wife is what her husband makes her” (Beauvoir 484). Jaya is compelled to adopt a life of compromise just for the sake of her husband’s satisfaction and to keep the family united. Thus, she holds silence as a defence mechanism to maintain her family relationship.

A woman never enjoys her submission. But as woman has no other option, she submits for the family wishes. Like a submissive wife, Jaya too becomes submissive and tackle the marital problems for the sake of the statuesque of her family life. Jaya realizes that her very compromise shatters her individuality and allows to be victimized. So she redefines her position by articulating her voice. Jaya determines to never let such long silence come to her. The self-realization of her inability to express her view or to speak has disrupted their conjugal life which in turn estranged both Mohan and Jaya and both grow apart. Though Jaya wants to say but she never gathers the courage to speak as the fear of being scolded always keep disturbing her psyche. Mohan exerts his male ego and superiority over his wife causing her to cling to

silence. It seems, “Between two of them the relationship was a noiseless flow of judgement, lack of communication and opinions. Mohan was having the prime position and Jaya the inferior one” (Siddiqui 60)

The inability to utter words compels Jaya to maintain a long silent journey. Jaya decides to cope up and fight for her individual self. The novelist tries to establish that the patriarchal set up alone cannot be blamed for silencing the women rather the responsibility lies within the victim to refuse to lodge their complaint, to raise the voice and to reclaim their identity. Towards the end of the novel, Jaya embarks on a new journey of strength by breaking her silence that had entrapped her so long. The shift in her image presents her moving on the verge of positivism. Her understanding of the suppressed silence leads her to realize the necessity to break the silence, to articulate her predicaments and reclaim her identity.

The real position of a woman in literature is a burning theme that finds place in most of the writings of the women novelists in the contemporary period. In the patriarchal culture, women are subject to suppression, oppression and victimization both in the domestic and social spheres. Indian society, chiefly patriarchal in nature glorifies the traditional role of woman as housewife, mother and caretaker of the family. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel is left to suffer alone inhibiting her silences. She has suppressed her existential self.

Deshpande’s writings often showcase women’s miseries who are subjected to accept a suppressed life in the male authoritative society. The women in her novels are placed in such a position not because they are part of society but because they are chiefly woman. Jaya’s world is no exception to it. Marriage seems to provide happiness and sense of security to woman. But Jaya’s selfhood is crushed in the unhappy married life with Mohan. Jaya’s rights and freedom get restricted from enjoying every little interest of her. The marital bond that binds the two seems very fragile and weak.

In the novel, the silence symbolically presents the anguish of the frustrated soul of Jaya who is driven to a sense of despair and dissonance. The bond of marriage which provides self-fulfilment and self-knowledge disrupt all women and shatters their aspirations and hopes as independent being. Twinkle B. Manaver opines that, “most marriages prove to be unions of incompatibility. Men are apt to be rational and matter of fact while are sentimental and emotional.” (Maanver 16). Husband wife relation usually gets disrupted when one share differences in them. Jaya and Mohan’s relationship is also stained because of the incompatibilities and indifferences they share as human being. The expectations and the aspirations of the women get crushed within the framework of relationship, marriage, love and sex. Simone de Beauvoir says that “Marriage subjugates and enslaves women and leads her to aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose” (Beauvoir 500). The lack of communication between husband and wife is felt throughout the novel.

That Long Silence presents a stale marriage, leaving the couple arid. Mohan's irresponsible behaviour, his indifference, lack of reciprocation left Jaya lonely and forlorn. Marriage is the union of two souls where both the partners have to make adjustments. But it is true that, in the conflicts and crises that takes place in the husband wife relation, it is always the woman who sacrifice selflessly suppressing her hopes and aspirations.

The documentation of ill- matched marriage in Deshpande's novels demonstrate the very condition of women who are gripped in their psychological problems and are labouring hard to come to terms to reality. Women's space is limited to confining bondage through the consequent sufferings and pains inflicted on women. It is observed that the women's role as wife in Shashi Deshpande's novels is not a pleasant experience. Her fictional writings project a new vision of Indian wives who invariably have to sacrifice to the patriarchal subjugation and socially constructed norms. Being a product of social construct, the wives become victims of socio cultural practices and related to man only as an object. *That Long Silence* presents the real disparity that causes in the relationship between Jaya and Mohan. Jaya is definitely a victim of marital discord who feels trapped in the loveless married life with Mohan, whose thoughts and actions are in extreme polarisation with Jaya.

The literary texts of the modern women novelists strive to project women's voice, to break the silence and her effort to reclaim their identity. Deshpande's women characters do not suffer from material poverty. They are mostly victims of mental and spiritual poverty. Though Deshpande's women belong to the upper middle classes, they suffer due to male chauvinism, gender discrimination and mental upheaval due to the indifferent and arrogant husbands. But her women characters seek liberation and freedom for which they oppose the dictates of patriarchy. All of them directly or indirectly question or at least raise their voice against the accepted codes of patriarchal society.

Conflicts are a part of life that exists in husband wife relationship. The women Deshpande presents in her novels exemplifies the growing change in the Indian women of this century. Jaya, discards the ideal of a subdued womanhood and chooses her way of fulfilling her dreams. Jaya finally emerges as a free woman who gathers her courage to come out of her pitied self and lead a life of self fulfilment and self-realization. Thus, she becomes successful in carving a niche for herself in the male dominated society. *That Long Silence* demonstrates the changing facet of Indian womanhood. The protagonist, Jaya sets an example for the women to become conscious and assert for their self in order to lead a meaningful and well deserved life. Thus, Jaya's life replicates the dilemma of many Indian women who are torn between their hopes and traditions.

As a woman centric novelist, Deshpande's writings exhibit a strong feminist sensibility. The novelist does not challenge the incongruities involved in incompatible marriage but she is closer to the subtle nuances of social behaviour to the complex structures of man and woman's inner life and their feelings. She pleads for a better life of the women and raised her voice against all stereotypes rules and regulations imposed on women in the name of tradition. Through the presentation of the life of Jaya Shashi Deshpande has shown the grim realities of women who live a life of displeasure and disillusionment within the circumscribed space of matrimony.

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