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A Feminist Reading of Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence

Dr. Raj Kamal Mishra*

Abstract:

Shashi Deshpande's writing explores the myths and truths about women in Indian society, allowing them to reinterpret their ideas and discover what is important to them. Drawing from her deep involvement with her society, she rejects stereotypes and questions the attitudes that have shaped women's image in each novel. Deshpande's novels portray the struggles and failures of women in India's rapidly changing socio-economic environment. She presents middle-class women and their experiences, including silent and sobbing women, mothers, aunts, sisters, and daughters. Before the feminist movement, women's work was undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions. Deshpande's novels highlight the opportunities and preferences of women, highlighting their economic, social, and cultural fulfillment in history. The true spirit of feminism focuses on treating women and men as human beings, promoting justice and gender equity. Gender discrimination exists in family environments, and violence is not the solution. Deshpande advocates for equal rights and opportunities for women, highlighting the importance of patience and optimism in bringing change.

Keywords: Patriarchal, Dilemma, Conflict, Traumas, Agonies, oppression, victimization, Fragmented, Disintegration, Existential, Absurdity, Subjugation, Domination, Marginalization.

The novel, *That Long Silence*, is a realistic portrayal of real-life experiences, with its credibility attributed to the protagonist, Jaya, who is well-read and has literary sensitivity. The author successfully creates articulate women characters in a culture of silence.

In the words of Vimala Rama Rao, "Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English fiction who possesses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is an achievement." (Vimala Rama Rao, 1993, No.1, 72.) Greatly conscious of the stifling social milieu, the narrator/writer unfolds her story 'she relates it as the story of a particular couple, but the power relations in the patriarchal structure, the gender differentiation with all its ramifications, and the typical travails of the woman struggling to define herself take on the dimension of the condition and place of the Indian woman in society.' (Subhash Chandra, 1991, p. 148.)

The Long Silence is a story about the conflict between a writer and a housewife, Jaya. For seventeen years, Jaya suppresses her feelings, believing it is more important to be a good wife than a good writer. Her husband, Mohan, becomes involved in a shady deal and faces corruption charges, leading to an enquiry. Jaya follows her husband into exile, where she undergoes intense introspection.

Jaya appears to be a satisfied housewife with two healthy children. However, her life is shaped by her suppression of traits that do not fit her role as a wife and mother. Her

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writing career and her relationship with her neighbor Kamal are two of the most striking aspects of her life.

In the early years of her marriage, Jaya was on the threshold of acquiring a name as a creative writer. One of her short stories won a prize and was published in a magazine. Mohan, who initially tolerated her writing, displays insensitivity and intolerance towards her writing. This jeopardizes her career as a writer.

Jaya begins writing under an assumed name, but her stories are rejected by various publishers. Kamal, who reads the rejected stories, tells her that they are impersonal and shorn of a personal vision. Jaya argues that it is not a womanly trait to show anger, and Kamat warns her against the "women are the victims" theory.

Jaya later starts writing light, humorous pieces on the travails of a middle-class housewife in a column called "Seeta," which receives positive feedback from editors and readers. Kamat, a hard critic, is contemptuous of Jaya's writing, knowing she is capable of writing better content devious, skimming over life." As Adele King observes:

"In a self-referential parody, Deshpande makes Jaya a writer of woman's magazine fiction. In Jaya's stories they lived happily ever after although she knows the falsity of the view of life. Also, the mixture of surrealism and fantasy in some of the experiences the writer undergoes is an important aspect of the making and unmaking of fictions in *That Long Silence*." (Adele King, 1990, 166.)

Jaya's personality clashes with her image of wife and mother due to her association with Kamat, a widower living above her flat in Dadar. Kamat is a lonely man who treats Jaya as an equal and doesn't let her wallow in self-pity. He is objective and rational, offering constructive criticism on Jaya's writing. Kamat understands Jaya's fears and even volunteers to receive her mail at his address to avoid confrontation with her husband who disapproves of her writing. He is a well-read and well-educated man who doesn't let Jaya wallow in self-pity.

Feminist development in Indian literature highlights the challenges faced by women in male-dominated societies and family institutions. To achieve social congruity, it is crucial to address discrimination based on sexual orientation. Sexual orientation should be valued, justice, and balanced to achieve harmony, agreement, and love in family relationships. Shashi Deshpande, an Indian English novelist, is known for her anecdotal work and concerns, particularly in depicting the struggles of working-class women. Her novels often feature a womanish demeanor, addressing the struggles of women who have never left their quiet.

Historically, women faced numerous issues due to male-dominated culture and traditional practices, such as childbearing and tyke raising. In the advanced world, women still face challenges in performing both family and professional responsibilities without the help of their spouses. Women often feel more humiliated when they are tormented by their relatives rather than seeking help. Overall, feminist writings highlight the struggles faced by women in male-dominated societies and the importance of addressing these issues in order to achieve social harmony and harmony.

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