

**IDENTITY CRISIS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVEL 'THAT LONG SILENCE'**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Shashi Deshpande, a Sahitya Akademi award winning novelist and short story writer, is one of the most powerful voices in the context of contemporary women novelists in Indian writing in English. Her novels include 'The Dark Holds No Terrors' (1980), 'Roots and Shadows' (1983), 'That Long Silence' (1988), 'The Binding Vine' (1993), 'A Matter of Time' (1996) and 'Small remedies' (2000). Besides it, she has six volumes of short stories and several books for children to her account. The novel, 'That Long Silence', a Sahitya Akademi award winning novel in 1990, depicts a realistic view of identity crisis. Shashi Deshpande throws light on the predicaments faced by a woman in India. Although, an Indian woman is born in an era where she has equal rights, freedom to express her ideas, freedom to choose her finance and freedom to possess everything as a man does. But the novel focuses on the bitter truth of Indian society where a woman having all kinds of liberties provided by the law, continues to suffer in silence. Shashi Deshpande portrays the protagonist Jaya, an English graduate, born in an upper middle class family, brought up in traditional manner who suffers due to the orthodox and prejudiced socialization in which she has been brought up.*

**Keywords:** Feminist, predicament, era, patriarchal, socialization, quest, orthodox, subservient.

**Introduction:** The aim of the paper is to bring out the feminist perspective in the novel *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande. As we know that the novelist Shashi Deshpande's works concern with the issues related to women i.e., a woman's quest for identity, man-woman relationship, marital affairs and her surrender before established patriarchal domain. The novelist portrays the relationship between Jaya Kulkarni and her husband Mohan and shows the gender inequalities in the patriarchal culture which ruins the married life of the narrator, Jaya. The relationship between husband and wife results in to disappointment, mutual disharmony and misunderstanding due to lack of mutual communication and the silence of the narrator. Jaya had been taught to keep silence and adopt the established norms of the orthodox male dominated Indian society.

Jaya's family members and Vanita Mami have taught her that a husband is like a sheltering tree. A man is all in all for the safety and protection of woman. Shashi Deshpande shows how a woman is underestimated in spite of the fact that a woman has equality like man in all spheres of life. She is considered inferior to man in patriarchal society and she is practiced to learn that a husband is an umbrella for her to protect her in every season of life:

'a husband is like a sheltering tree'.(32)

Jaya had been very close to her father who always encouraged her. He named her Jaya which stands for victory. She had been continuously told by her father that she was not like any other ordinary person as he says, 'I named you Jaya' and he further adds 'Jaya for victory'. (15) It meant a lot to Jaya. Her father dreamt that Jaya either win an international award or go to Oxford. But the death of her father shattered her dreams and made her to surrender before the reality of life. Jaya is married to Mohan and from here she starts married life and undergoes several changes. First of all, she loses her identity reflected by her name, Jaya. Her name stands for victory. But after marriage she is named Suhasini by her husband which stands for being submissive, docile and meek.

Thus Jaya's true identity given by her father has gone with the change of her name after marriage. Her new name Suhasini stands for being a mild one as opposed to Jaya meaning victorious and self esteemed lady. It shows that a woman has no identity of her own. A

woman is a creature who is dominated by a father, a husband and finally a son. As Jaya's father gives her identity in her childhood and later her husband defines her identity according to his own wishes. Shashi Deshpande realistically portrays the unjustifiable patriarchal setup of Indian society which denies even the individual self of a woman. This happens almost universally as one of the western feminist writers Simone de Beauvoir states in her book, *The Second Sex*:

'Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being. In patriarchal social order, man creates woman subservient part of man.'

In the same way, Jaya's self identity is modified by two men. First one is her father and the second one is Mohan, her husband. It may be further followed by her son as well.

As far as biology and sexual exploitation are concerned, society expects women to be meek, docile, silent and sexually passive. Sex is considered biological need of a man whereas gender is categorized in two categories. One considers his sexual desires as biological needs and on the other hand, the second category which is female, is considered only a child production machine. This leads to upheavals in relationships between two sexes. Same happens in the novel, *That Long Silence* where Shashi Deshpande presents the image of marriage as an institution which fails due to misunderstanding and gender biases. In the novel, we see that Mohan is a man of orthodox views who has seen his mother and sister, Vimala being suppressed in his family. He expects his wife Jaya to be Docile, meek and only a husband loving woman. Mohan and Jaya never interact about their sexual life. Jaya had dreamt about her marital life that she would love her husband. But the sexual aspect dominates over love in their relationship which leads to the failure of marriage as an institution. Jaya gets tired of the acts of sex. She could not fulfill her expected desires of love from her husband.

In other words, she rarely enjoyed her married life as she would have dreamt earlier. She never expresses her desires with Mohan. Her feelings of love and sex are marred as she utters:

‘In any case, whatever my feelings had been then, I had never spoken of them to him. In fact, we had never spoken of sex at all. It had been as if the experience was erased each time after it happened, it never existed in words. The only words between us had been his question, ‘Did I hurt you?’ and my answer, ‘No’.’ (95)

This shows that the lack of understanding between husband and wife leads to the destruction of marital relations where two bullocks yoked together march in opposite directions.

The novel, *That Long Silence* also depicts the pathetic condition of a writer and columnist. Jaya, the protagonist, has the potential of being a successful writer. Through her writing, she could break her silence with the help of Kamat. When Jaya was introduced to Kamat, her neighbor, she got some confidence. Kamat motivated her to think and act independently. He appreciated Jaya’s writing skills and inspired her to be serious, to be real and true to herself as he says: ‘Take yourself serious, woman’. (99)

Kamat made Jaya to be frank on issues related to her. It was for the first after her marriage with Mohan that she realized her ‘self’ identity with the inspiring words of Kamat. Kamat made her to break ‘long silence’ which was like a heavy weight on Jaya. Jaya could realize her individual identity by breaking the ‘long silence’ of her life which had been suppressed for seventeen years. It was only because of positive changes brought in her life by Kamat as she says:

‘With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself --- Jaya. There had been ease in our relationship, I had never known in any other. There had been nothing I could not say to him.’ (153)

Thus Kamat’s efforts to make Jaya realize her individual ‘self’ were fruitful. But she could not gather enough courage to challenge the established pattern of the society.

Jaya is such a rare narrative voice in Indian English fiction who displays a literary sensibility with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story. But unfortunately, she struggles to be a successful writer in the novel. Her husband, Mohan encouraged her to write. But when her story was published and awarded, he could not tolerate it. Because according to him, it was the revelation of their own life. He gets furious and says, ‘How can you reveal us, how can

you reveal our lives to the world in this way.’ (144) He further says, ‘I never can imagine you writing this.’ (149)

It shows that Jaya has no option except surrendering and be silent before her husband. She lacks the assistance and a co-operative atmosphere to continue her writings.

Virginia Woolf is absolutely right when she says that, ‘A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.’ (A Room of One’s Own)

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, we find that an Indian woman having all types of freedoms in post independent India, has not become bold enough to challenge the prevailing orthodox system of social set up. In the novel, the protagonist Jaya has been continuously taught by her family members that a man is like a sheltering tree for a woman in the role of a father, husband and finally the son. She silently suffers for almost seventeen years of her married life. However, she gets some confidence with the encouraging assistance of her neighbor, Kamat. She realizes that she has her ‘self’ identity as she says:

‘I’m Mohan’s wife, I had thought, I’m only Mohan’s wife, and I had run away.’ (186)

But knowing this fact, she decides to keep silence and surrenders here as well. She silently faces the identity crisis like Sita of Ramayana who follows her husband in to exile and later passes an ordeal of fire test. Jaya suffers like Savitri who has to suffer after her husband’s death and she follows the God of death, Yama to revive her husband. In the same way, Jaya too keeps waiting for her husband to return at home. It shows that a woman has no identity of her ‘self’ and she remains a subservient to man.

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