

## **“Silence is a Symbol of Oppression” - Shashi Deshpande’s Heroine Resent This Fact in The Novel *That Long Silence***

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### **Abstract**

*The status of woman all over the world particularly in India has been undergoing a rapid change in recent times. This coincides with the beginning and the growth of Indian writing in English. The personality of the typical Indian woman was overwhelmingly swamped by the male dominated attitudes against the backdrop of an exclusively male oriented culture. The Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferers while she has played different roles as a wife, mother, sister and daughter. She has never been able to claim her own individuality. According to Indian tradition, a woman must defer to her husband in every possible respect. Shashi Deshpande’s fiction is an example of the ways in which a girl child’s particular position. Social reality and Identity and psychological growth determine her personality. Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence* exposes the suffering women undergo in the name of tradition, family values and customs. The novel shows her heroine Jaya’s reversal from a self-respecting aware woman to a submissive middle class traditional woman. The novel deals with the protagonist Jaya’s passage through a maze of self-doubts and fears towards the affirmation of herself. In quest for wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the partner but a diplomatic assertion of one’s identity within marriage.*

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*“In pain perhaps they stand inside, but cannot yet slam  
the door of their voice”*

**Jayantra Mahapatra**

### **Introduction**

The status of woman all over the world particularly in India has been undergoing a rapid change in recent times. This coincides with the beginning and the growth of Indian writing in English. The personality of the typical Indian woman was overwhelmingly swamped by the male dominated attitudes against the backdrop of an exclusively male oriented culture. The woman in life and in literature had no existence save that of a shadowy suffering pathetic creature. The complexities of man-woman relationship specially the context of marriage, the trauma of a disturbed adolescence. The Indian woman has for years been a silent sufferers while she has played different roles as a wife, mother, sister and daughter. She has never been able to claim her own individuality.

### **Women in Indian Society**

According to Indian tradition, a woman must defer to her husband in every possible respect. She must take marital home pleasant for him. She must cook the meals, wash the dishes and take care of the children. She must never enquire about money and she must acquiesce to her husband’s every demand. The male ego has given the woman an inferior status through the ages. Man has relegated her to a second-class citizen. A group of Indian women novelists in there, hybridity of thought and multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi- religious social dimensions have conceptualized the women problem in general and middle-class and upper class women in particular. While the gynocritics think that too many women in too many countries speak the same language in silence. Some Indian women novelists like Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai have tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women.

The emergence of woman writers writing in English in India is of great importance. It brings a new age of brightness for Indian woman. In India, the laws of Manu denies woman are existence apart from that of her husband or his family. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation. Those who have new tones, tenor and content to Indian fiction in English in the last decades include Salmon Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan J. Sealy, Geeta Mehta, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy who among others have earned considerable fame for their fictional contribution. Shashi Deshpande’s fiction is an example of the

ways in which a girl child's particular position. Social reality and Identity and psychological growth determine her personality. There is a shift in values and women have started acknowledging themselves the co-equals of man.

### **Shashi Deshpande**

Shashi Deshpande adds a new leaf to the cap of Indian fiction with her novels. In short, all most all the literary ventures of Shashi Deshpande revolve around the pathetic and heart rending condition of women in a male domination society. The Indian women have for years been a silent sufferers. She deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels. She portrays her heroines in a realistic manner. Shashi Deshpande's fiction is an example of the ways in which a girl child's particular position. Social reality and Identity and psychological growth determine her personality. Shashi Deshpande is an award winning Indian novelist born in 1938 in Dharwad Karnataka, India. She published her first collection of short stories in 1978 and her first novel *The Dark holds no terrors* in 1980. she won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel *That Long Silence* in 1990 and the Padma Shri Award in 2009.

Deshpande generally has the heroine as the narrator, and employs a kind of stream of consciousness technique. All the novels of Deshpande hold the power to deliver the problems of middle class women in a genuine sense. Her novels conceive the elements of personal experience. Her psychological insight into her characters put her on par with the masters of the genre. Her women have a peculiar authenticity, as they seem to be direct offshoots of their peculiar backgrounds. They don't speak much but we have ample opportunity to read the workings of even their inner beings. Deshpande has a rare vitality of language to make her portraits striking as well as convincing.

### **Jaya, the Silent sufferer:**

In ancient times the only image of woman was 'Grihalaxmi' her only function was to produce children and then grandchildren nothing else. For her, there was no life outside the home. The sole aim of her life was to follow her father in childhood, husband in youth, and son in the old age. In a patriarch society the husband is considered to be god of a woman is either goddess or slave but not as human being. She cannot think her own individual identity. Even her name keeps changing according to the desire of her husband.

Example Jaya in *That Long silence* is known by two names Jaya and after marriage Suhashini. Shashi Deshpande in *That Long silence* exposes the suffering women undergo in the name of tradition, family values and customs. The novel shows her heroine Jaya's reversal from a self-respecting aware woman to a submissive middle class traditional woman while her sixth novel *The Binding Vine* which shows

unrealising in a small Indian women extremely westernized and modernized.

Deshpande's third novel *That Long Silence* brought her in to limelight as it was published by the British feminist publishing house, Virago. The novel deals with the protagonist Jaya's passage through a maze of self-doubts and fears towards the affirmation of herself. A crisis in the middle class family of the protagonist triggers off a chain of events which compel her to view her life in retrospect. What follows is an honest and frank account of Jaya's life. In her anxiety to play the role of wife and mother to perfection Jaya realises that she does not do justice to her talents as a writer. Her constant fear of displeasing her husband and inviting the censure of society, not only make her give up writing but also discourage her from acknowledging her friendship with a man who is not her husband, brother and father. Jaya is representative of the modern young woman-educated and aware nevertheless unable to break free from the strange hold of tradition.

The wisdom that Jaya derives in this situation is to follow her will and act accordingly. If we focus our attention on the propriety or justifiability of her will or ego, the result may be mixed. Her conduct is not the model of righteousness or even right, she may be wrong or very wrong, but she is human and her reaction has a feminine modernist quality, making her a modern or new woman without abjuring the totality of the obligations of the typically traditional woman in India. As the title of the novel indicates, Jaya for very long in her past life tried to play the role of traditional woman, the embodiment of tolerance, suffering and courage. However, her courage deserts her and she becomes the modern egotistical self-assertive rebellious woman all these being marks of modern feminist awakening. But Jaya's laughter is a purgative act for her but a stimulant to the misery of Mohan, her husband, whose miseries are increased manifold and who in humiliation deserts the house and runs away in disgust from society because of the accusation of accepting bribe, she is in great emotional turmoil. She says,

*"I had shaped myself so resolutely to his desires all these years, yet  
What was I left with now? Nothing. Just emptiness and Silence"*

In the process of telling her story, she offers us a glimpse into the lives of ostensibly content housewives who are nevertheless suppressed under the weight of male dominance. The title of the novel *That Long Silence* implies a belated rebellion, a postponement of aggressive behaviour for long till postponement cannot be made any more. The dam of silence and tolerance is broken and the result is flood of egotistical assertion and emotional explosion. The contact, the coming together had

been not only momentary, but wholly illusory as well.

*“We had never come together, only our bodies had done that. I had begun to cry then, despairingly, silently, scared that I would wake Mohan up, trying desperately to calm myself.”*

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*“A Pair of Bullocks yoked together....”*

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A typical Indian husband considers his wife as a machine, which speed up or smoothen his day to day work. For them marriage is a means for their social and personal betterment. After accepting dowry, they use their wives as unpaid servants. Indian husbands gain more from the marriage sale. Mohan in *That long silence* is that kind of husband because he married the protagonist for his social betterment. *“I had neither any questions nor any retorts for Mohan now, So many subjects were barred that the silence seemed heavy with uneasiness.”*

### **Conclusion**

A close study of Shashi Deshpande’s novels reveals her enormous sympathy for women and their travails, provoking reviewers to assume that she has joined the band of Indian writers who have achieved much popularity in the west. She gives us a peep into the state and condition of the present-day woman who is intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under weight of male chauvinism. She not only shares her personal concerns but also seeks to awaken readers to the reality of marital life in Indian Society today. Deshpande, however, avoids the facile solution of laying the blame on men alone and tries to view the man –woman relationship objectively. She observes through her novel that both men and women,

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being products of their culture, find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by society. Her women, like those of her predecessor, are tolerant, obedient and submissive. She does not let herself be overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of liberation. In quest for wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the partner but a diplomatic assertion of one’s identity within marriage.

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