

**FROM SUPPRESSED TO ACKNOWLEDGED: ROLE OF JAYA IN
SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE***

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Today in the wake of globalization, women have asserted their own individualistic identity in their own way. In each and every domain of life woman voices her concern. Her voice has been undoubtedly placing her in a new dimension, examining the reintegration and discovery of self. Shashi Deshpande, a prominent feminist writer in her work *That Long Silence* presents a feminist view of her art. Shashi Deshpande has shown a remarkable understanding of woman's psyche, perceived the injustice of an unequal social structure. Shashi Deshpande has presented a new woman consciousness in her novels in which her woman character asserts their own individual self concern and redefines herself. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya presents her own search for identity. This paper is an attempt to highlight a shift of woman's feminine qualities from suppressed to acknowledged one. It further explores how Jaya find her personal life smothering and want to rebel against the circumstances and gives us an exceptionally accomplished portrayal of a woman trying to erase a 'long silence' from her life, a 'victorious' one at the end.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* directly deals with feminist consciousness. It is an expression of resentment at the unequal treatment of any women. One of the major concerns of the contemporary literature is to bring into limelight the plight of women, the suppression, and their increasing problem, physical mental, economical and financial exploitations in this male centric world. She consciously handles the sense of intimacy and empathy with the reader. She led the reader to enter into the situation. One of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. Woman is not an appendage of man. She is not the 'other'. Woman is an autonomous being capable of bearing all pains and turmoil's. Shashi Deshpande positively portrays the women characters that are capable of finding themselves as individuals. In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande explores the inner world of women protagonists who are in quest of finding one selves. The female characters in novel are striving towards their self-realization. In Shashi Deshpande's own words

“Marriage invariably takes you to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self-abnegation. To love another and to retain you intact is that possible? To assert yourself and not be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate?”

This novel is undoubtedly a searching portrait of Indian womanhood in distress. Her protagonist Jaya invariably undertakes an arduous journey which leads her character from a state of self effacement to one of self realization. Deshpande’s main preoccupation with the themes and reception of women writings finds ideal manifestations in *That Long Silence*. Shashi Deshpande herself asserts that “I don’t like to call myself a feminist writer. I say I’ m a feminist, but I don’t write to propogate any ism.”

These words of Shashi Deshpande stresses her inclination to the ideas of Judith Butler, who boldly stated that feminism, reasserts the difference between male and female genders. Deshpande’s realistic view as a true feminist on the condition of middle class. Indian women is well expressed in her novel, *That Long Silence* which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1988. In *That Long Silence*, woman is writing for women, in the real world as well as the fictional world, making an attempt to unburden herself from ‘the weight of that long silence of one half of the world’ (qtd, in Deshpande’s epigraph). Undoubtedly Jaya breaks “that long silence” and voices her concern through her writings. Highly sensitive, intelligent and educated Jaya could be said to be a representative of modern young woman hating the oppression she had to face in her family she breaks away all shackles and marries Mohan. But soon she realizes that “marriage makes one dependent”. Living on the fringes and conditions of her husband, losing her own identity, all this troubles her enormously. There is no doubt she loves Mohan but at the same time, it seems to be shackling her and preventing her from her own self as a separate entity. But marriage to Mohan does not prove to be the haven she desires of becoming a wife and a mother.

Jaya finds herself sandwiched between her love and herself. From the very beginning she neglected her real self. This all lead to stifling and suppression. She is not happy with Mohan. All that she longs for is completeness within her. As the protagonist dictates herself in the course of novel “I was born my father dies when I was fifteen, I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live.” In the novel, we see multifaceted Jaya like a happy mother, a wife, serving her family with love and attention, believed to be “soft, smiling, placid, motherly”. Mohan calls her Suhasini when she marries her. Jaya is sandwiched between her two names, one Jaya and the other Suhasini. She continuously tried to find out whether she is Jaya or Suhasini. Women’s life is primarily defined through interpersonal usually domestic and familial relationship serving the needs of other family members. “Self revelation is a cruel process... the real you never emerges... ten different mirrors show you ten different faces”.

Jaya is interesting in her creative writing but Mohan does not approve it. He fails to her alter ego. Neither is he a sheltering tree to protect her in her weal and woe nor her supporter. Whole of the day caring others, distract women from her own sense of identity, she feels as she has no tangible shape, no form of her own. As Shakuntala Bharvani articulates that:

“The woman of today, therefore speaking in the language of psychology has a near schizophrenia personality. One side steadily ‘accepts’ while the other craves to speak, to think, and to express the life of the mind.”(150)

Jaya and Sushasini are two faces of one personality. Jaya realizes and returns to her writing to rediscover herself as a child “a child wearing a dress with pockets for the first time...heady with the excitement of finding unexpected resources within herself.”(187)

Through writing, Jaya tries to articulate her inner self, her own manifestation. The novel ends on a positive note with a new ray of hope in which she declares that “I will have to speak, to listen. I will have to erase the silence between us.”Jaya’s thought process enables her to come out of her dilemma. Jaya says:

“All this I’ve written it’s like one of those multicolored patchwork quilts the kakis made for any new baby in the family. So many bits and pieces – a crazy conglomeration of shapes, sizes and colors put together.”(188)

Through this, Jaya further proceeds and tries to show that she is not mere Mohan’s wife, to be his wife, is a little bit part of her life. The act of breaking the silence act as a palliative to cure the ailment, her act of speech after “that long silence” is all the more powerful throughout the novel. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan says that the force of Deshpande’s indictment of women’s lives lies in the way she is able to universalize their condition, chiefly by drawing similarities among Jaya and a variety of other female figures, including characters from Indian history like Sita , Draupadi etc and myth and among three generations of women in her family among different classes of women; among different kinds of women of the same class and generation like Kusum, Mukta etc.

Shashi Deshpande reflects on the various dimensions of problems of women in the Indian society which is soaked in traditions. Mohan, Jaya’s husband is an engineer who is materialistic always craving for money, status and comforts. Jaya is a bold lady always having room for love and care. Jaya as we see in the novel has been taught from the very beginning to have confidence in herself. She is a columnist and an aspiring writer with various aspirations not merely a wife and a mother. She sends her stories and articles in magazines. Mohan is not happy with her; he neglects her creativity blaming her for publicizing their personal issues. He never even tried to understand her. Though they both live together there is no understanding between them but there is always an emptiness that exists between them. Instead of a Mohan, Jaya longs for Kamat. She enjoys her company, sharing her ideas with him even that she has not shared with Mohan. Kamat always encourages her to write, but the reaction of Mohan, Rati and Rahul scared her writing and she withdraws herself from writing entering into a private world of her own. She disguised herself as ‘Seeta’ and writes in order to expose the vices and frivolities of the society regarding women issues and futility of personal relationships. This is herself chosen way to avoid any harsh conditions of despair and neglect. The most significant thing of Deshpande’s work is that as a writer she breaks the silence of women and redeems Jaya from her linguistic exile.

At last, we can say that Jaya tries to remove the long silence and she herself struggle with the problems of self revolution and self change. She come out of her home in the open world and shows her talents through her writings. She has decided to break the silence by putting down on paper that entire she had suppressed in her seventeen years. She gathers all the fragments of her life and put them as one. She found out at last that everyone has to fight his/her own battle. She put an end to the darkness that exist in her life and learnt to articulate her predicament. The predicament of Jaya represents the larger predicament of this globalised world where the new concept of western education, economic development has completely shaken the roots of old Indian culture and social values. The novel ends with a positive note with the hope of new dawn. Thus, Shashi Deshpande conveys the message that the modern Indian women should learn to conquer their darkness and assert them.

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