



Study about the theme of submission and assertion of a women in Shashi Deshpande’s Novel “*That Long Silence*”

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Abstract : That Long Silence, is not an imaginary story. It is a story that happens in every middle class and educated Indian woman’s life. This is a story of submission and assertion of a woman. The Indian women in this era are born at a time when there is much awareness about her rights, liberty to express her ideas, freedom to enjoy finance and the chance to stand for a cause. Still... the silence continues!

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According to the author Indian husbands take in for granted their wives emotions, likes and dislikes to be same like them and here author reciprocates the emotions in vivid detail. The husband never realizes where he lacks and the agony behind his wife"s destined roles.

It is a story of an urban middle class women, born in a small place but living in Mumbai, whose identity is trapped in being a wife and a mother, amongst other family relationships, who feels she has lived in silence all her life, only in the end to realize that it was her choice and not something others had imposed on her. It is actually not a story; these are monologues happening in the mind of the protagonist Jaya, as she strikes a point in life where things around her may change, status quo may go, although it does not happen in the end. It all happens in her mind, she keeps thinking about things that happened, that did not happen, that could have happened, that should have happened, that may happen and that may not happen. In a period of a few days, she goes through all her life, talking about all her relationships with each and every member in the family and with other people around her, her hiding behind the veil of a wife and a writer.

The protagonist Jaya is an educated middle class woman who lives with her husband Mohan and their kids Rahul and Rati. She is the typical Indian middle class woman in the present century who is confined between her realizations and the restrictions. Her father brought up Jaya as an



"individual", who has the rights in the society as well as family irrespective of gender. Yet, this upbringing still looks strange in front a society that hesitates to accept the woman as an individual. Immediately after her graduation Jaya gets married and steps into her role as a dutiful wife, affectionate mother, "carefully being" dutiful to her in-laws.... to Aa, Ajji, kaka and her relatives. Her husband Mohan also plays his role as a dutiful Indian husband and never looks up to consider any imperfections in the life. As time goes Jaya's dutiful behaviour to Mohan and his family becomes a routine.

Jaya ponders throughout the novel for her role clarity, her life or is she living for someone else! She searches her identity as an individual and where her emotions are getting subdued. She, a failed writer and who had been forced to change her name as "Suhasini" to get submissive in marriage, gets haunted by memories of the past. Mohan leaves home due to his failure in career and to avoid the situation of "two bullocks yoked together." By the end of the novel Jaya gets back to her destined role, being present to the happiness of the family and ready to subdue her emotions. As a middle class and educated Indian woman, as one reads through, one may intend to question one's own identity. I recommend this book to anyone with endemic imbalance in a marriage. Relate to it as one's own expression of frustrations

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya undergoes great mental trauma because she has refused to go into hiding with her husband as an enquiry against his financial irregularities is on. Like the mythological character Gandhari, she kept her eyes shut to her husband's illegal earning at office. Even her journalistic writings are circumscribed by her husband's likes and dislikes. Finally she is able to evaluate her expectations of life. After having rejected traditional role models, Deshpande's protagonists who display great strength and courage in evolving, as their own role models as per the requirement of their social mileau. Her characters go through a process of self - examination before they reach self actualization. Thus, Shashi Deshpande has been successful in creating strong women protagonists who refuse to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies, and face life with great courage and strength. Comparatively, they appear more life - like and more akin to the educated, middle class, urban Indian woman of today.



Speaking of the narrative technique in *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande avoids the simple technique of straight forward narration in the novel. She employs the flash back method instead to draw her reader's attention. The first chapter deals with the present, but the later chapters are more anachronic with the final chapter ending in the present. Critic Shama Futehally writes: " It is a device which is useful either when some element of suspense is needed. For this novel chronologically charity is essential as the reader already has to cope with an abundance of characters and their complex interactions.

Jaya, the protagonist in the very early life, realizes that being a 'girl child' is her first problem. The preference shown to the male children is because they are permanent members of the family, and are inheritors of the family name.

The novel also interrogates the nature of the relationship between the narrator and her husband and the disposition of their married life. Their relationship is affected adversely by their incapability to understand each other. Due to lack of communication the growing 'silence' between them, their marital life grows unsteady and dismal. For the first time, Jaya feels a strange emotion of anger in the unjustified accusation by Mohan that he has taken bribe for her and her children. The very idea of "being a partner in the crime and ally, when she has no role to play in the whole affair is revolting." (*That Long Silence* 31) But this anger transformed into a 'long silence' because for Jaya 'silence and surrender' is the real strength of an Indian woman.

Shashi Deshpande has not portrayed Jaya as a feminist character. Jaya hovers between submission and assertion, the former rather a more dominant note in her character. But the repeated allegations and accusations of her husband compel her to react sharply. She (Jaya) once tells Kamat (her neighbour) ".....no women can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?.....A woman can never be angry, she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated" (*That Long Silence* 147).

Deshpande focuses on the issues regarding women struggles, rights and victories. Her 'new women' dare to question and challenge the age-old traditions. Her sole aim is to harmonize the



man-woman relationship as equal partners. Her heroines are often bolder, self-reliant and rebellious. At that end they realize that ‘walking out’ does not solve their problems.

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