



## Review of the theme of the novel *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande

Sanjay Kumar, sanjay35197811@rediffmail.com

**Abstract :** Shashi Deshpande's award winning novel, *That Long Silence* was published in 1989, The story, revolves around Jaya and Mohan, who belong to a middle-class Indian Brahmin family. In this novel a sensitive portrayal of Indian Womanhood probing the complexities of human psyche is presented by Shashi Deshpande. She precisely describes the struggle and anguish of the narrator Jaya, a housewife and a failed writer. Jaya manages to suppress her feelings ever since seventeen years of her marriage in order to become a good wife, a good mother and a good writer.

ISSN 2454-308X



**Introduction :** Suman Ahuja reviewing the novel for The Times of India observes that “Jaya caught in an emotional eddy, endeavors to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying albeit in vain, to rediscover her true self, which is but a ephemera of unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and a failed writer.” Male supremacy discourages Jaya as a writer .Her story gets awards but she gets annoyed when her husband takes objection on one of her stories as he feels that the story is about him, the story she wrote is about a man who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body. Jaya undergoes the feelings of frustration, alienation and mental and emotional trauma. She had totally absorbed herself in the family and in doing so she is no more aggressive and inquisitive but she becomes a docile, meek, passive, nervous and dependent upon her husband. She suffers from isolation .The novel traces how Jaya gradually emerges as a confident individual fully in control of her own-self and refuses to be led by others.

Jaya's husband Mohan is involved in mal-practice in his office and is advised to move from the Church gate house to somewhere to avoid defame and shame. Her family moves to Makarandmama's flat in Dadar. Mohan's excuse by saying that he was engaged in malpractices for his wife and children 'I did it for you, for you and the children' (That Long p.10)15 makes Jaya angry;she compares herself “ Like the mythical woman – Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dodging Death to reclaim her husband, Draudpadi stoically sharing her husband's travails,” (That Long p 11), Jaya follows Mohan to Dadar flat, her marriage is based on compromise rather than on affection and understanding. She compares her marriage as:-

Two bullocks yoked together... it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful and what animal would voluntarily choose pain? (That Long p12).

The duties of a woman are taught at an early age and the wife has to dutifully to follow the customs. Mohan exercises his power over the family. Moreover, Jaya recalls Vanitamani's opinion: “Remember, Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree....Without



the tree, you're Dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. This followed logically. And so, you Have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies." (That Long p 32) Male-dominated society in India basically does not allow a career-oriented woman. In the patriarchal society her own self' is seemed to be crushed in the orthodox society. The entire ghost who bothered Jaya when she entered her old flat in Dadar ceased to appear the moment she penned down each and every experience. Two nights all alone in her flat, she thinks, rethinks and writes everything in detail of her experiences, seventeen years of her silence is broken. She represented a traditional woman since long but her rebel had no say, she is subdued for years finally she brings out her real self. It is about the women who are the victims in patriarchal society. Vanitamami, Kusum, Mohan's mother and Jaya herself. Out this Kusum escapes in madness, and Jaya through isolation becomes aware of her own -self.

The reference to Indian mythology indicates the extent to which patriarchy is deep-rooted in the culture of the society. A woman is allotted a set role and she has to live in it and fulfill her duties. Mohan feels proud in telling Jaya, "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved." (That Longp83). When she asks Mohan to cook, because of morning sickness due to pregnancy, he angrily replies, 'You want me to cook?' (That Long81) "I never thought my wife could say such things to me." Mohan expects his wife to work, and

treats her as she is meant to serve her duty, "You're my wife... he had kept repeating. (That Long 82) Jaya remembers the bed-time tale of the crow and the sparrow, where the male crow was thrown out by the female sparrow. She deliberately has not narrated this story to her son as she becomes a traditional mother when she thinks for her `SON` and thinks of her daughter to whom she will not teach the lesson of rebel.

" It occurs to me now that perhaps I did a wiser thing than I knew in rejecting this story as a bed-time tale for Rahul. Imagine what it could do to a little boy, this story in which the victim, the crow, is a male, and the victorious sparrow a female." (That Longp17)

She was named 'Jaya' by her father which means 'victory'. Her father has brought her up as an 'individual'. Mohan has given her name 'Suhasini' which means a soft smiling, placid, motherly woman (That Long.16).Her identity is lost in her husband's name the day she enters matrimony. In her maid Jeeja's opinion there is a warning "Don't forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that" (That Long p 53) Mohan's mother silently bears the insult inflicted upon her.

Love is idealized as for Jaya the concept of love means, as she thinks "I suppose we would have called love, something we saw in movies between Raj Kapoor and Nargis, Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr. It means handsome young man saying 'I love you'." (That Long 91). All her assumptions fail she is disillusioned, her concept of pure innocent love is gone when she faces realities in her life. Outside marriage Jaya develops a relationship with Mr.



Kamat, who is a symbol of the liberal masculine. With Kamat, Jaya recognizes her true self and her interests. She can nurture her art under him. She recalls Kamat telling her, “Take yourself seriously, woman.” (That Long 99). As Kamat treats her like another human being she views her relation as “It had been a revelation to me that two people, a man and a woman, could talk this way: with

this man, I had not been a woman. I had been “why didn’t you use that anger in just myself. (That Long.p153). Jaya, once a regular contributor to the Seeta ,a woman’s column in a magazine, hesitates to take up writing again. After a long period, Kamat points out what was wrong in her story, “I’ll tell you what’s really wrong with your story. It’s too restrained. Spew put your anger in your writing, women spew it out. Why are you holding it in?” (That Long p194). Kamat’s death is a serious personal loss to her.

Because of Her failure in her life she loses her confidence, she contemplates “I’ve failed him (Mohan). He expected something from me, from his wife, and I’ve failed him” (That Long p185). Her incapability to deal with her son Rahul’s complexities make her say: “A mother... I had been unfit to be trusted with the entire responsibility of another human being” (That Long p178)

Women in the family were not important. We come across certain incident where Jaya asks her uncle about the family tree and that her name was not there, she was answered as she belongs to her husband’s family. But she wonders her *Kaki* and *Ai* are married in the same family their name is not included. “I don’t belong to this family, what about Kaki and Ai? They married into this family, didn’t they, why are they not here? And what about Ajji, who single handedly kept the family together, why isn’t she here?” (That Long 143). The novel doesn’t blame Men it is viewed as Man, Woman and their relationships.

Jaya gathers up her courage and she decides to break her long silence to restore peace and happiness. She decides “to plug that hole in the heart... I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to ease that long silence between us” (That Long p.192). The alienation from the meaningless and stale contemporary life in the urban setting, it is a pervasive source of creativity in the novel.

Deshpande gives us the picture of the deteriorating society through an incident when Jaya goes out of the house and walks aimlessly in the streets of Bombay. She finds two males teasing the narcotic-smoking well-to-do girls at the bus stop and it forces her to think about her children, and herself. She learns that her security is with her husband Mohan only. Jaya rejects to be the woman of the traditional Indian society such as Sita, Draupadi, or Savitri. She wanted to be a woman of importance having her own voice. Shashi Deshpande’s success lies in her representation of real life experience. She realistically depicts the inner conflict of Jaya and her quest for self identity. She re-enters life with the realization of self. The fear is gone “I am not afraid anymore. The panic has gone I am Mohan’s wife, I had thought,



and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife .Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible.(That Long p191). The novel ends with the final words of Lord Krishna's long sermon to Arjuna, "I have given you knowledge now you make the choice. The choice is yours". Jaya is enlightened. "With whom shall I be angry? With myself of course?"(That Long p.192).

#### References :

1. Deshpande.Shashi *Come Up and Be Dead*, New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1983.( Further references of the text are shown in parenthesis abbreviated as Come up)
2. Suman Ahuja, *Review in The Times of India* (8th October 1989), p.2.
3. Deshpande.Shashi *That long Silence* rpt. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989. pp 192 (Further references of the text are shown in parenthesis abbreviated as That Long)