

## Shashi Deshpande as a Feminist Writer with Special Reference to *That Long Silence*

**Praveen Rai**

Assistant Professor,  
H&M, FET, Manav Rachna International University  
&

**Dr. Sujata**

Assistant Professor,  
H&M, FET, Manav Rachna International University

Shashi Deshpande presents a sensitive portrayal of Indian Womanhood treading the labyrinthine paths of human mind with a rare gift for sharp psychological insights into the subtleties of the human female, supported with rich evocative, unassuming and pretentious style. She delicately delineates the swings of mood, the seesaw moments of joy and despair, the fragments of feelings perceived and suppressed, heart-wringing anguish of the narrator protagonist Jaya, a housewife and a failed writer. Her unequivocal feminist stand has got her a distinctive place in the contemporary Indian English fiction. Her themes are based on lives and problems of women only. Her novels are in themselves the schools of psyche of those people whose capacity for rational thought vanishes on being victimized to traumatic experience 'That Long Silence', (1988) is a novel of woman and her life Shashi Deshpande confesses that "only a woman could read my books - they are written from the inside, as it were." (1) Her novels are autobiographical in nature depicting her own experiences of the educated middle class Indian women's predicament and they tend to be gender specific. Her work concentrates on the status of the women in the traditional bound, male-dominated middle class society of the contemporary India.

The novelist, carefully analyses the situations and circumstances in which a sensitive woman lives grappled between the powerful currents of tradition and patriarchy, of terror and suppression. These women are inescapably subjected to continuous physical torture and sexual assaults in the society. Her identity, personality is totally crushed, her voice is hushed up and her very instinct of self-assertion gets capitulated. Thus leading her to total confusion and tormentation and along with loss of self identity and self prestige "Generally, a woman's identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother It means virtually a woman doesn't have an identity of her own", says Indira Kulkshreshtha. (3)

Shashi Deshpande writes her female protagonist in search for 'self' or to rediscover her identity. Self-discovery is by all means an adult act. With the crisis developing in the novel culminates in reaching 'resolution'. Further this 'resolution' means achievement of freedom to think and decide for oneself. The only goal of Jaya is liberation from her womanhood. Her womanly self is suffocating and struggle for freedom. The family becomes a cage where her 'wild self' is trapped and it is unnaturally with all security reared, Shashi Deshpande in all her novels raises her strong voice of protest against the male-dominated Indian society and against man-made rules and

conventions. There is a numeral instances bringing home to the reader the cruelty of men perpetrated on women.

The novel is a first person narrative, one story is unfolded by Jaya – symbolizing victory, but in reality, in actual life situation, she has to lead on a traditional, passive, obedient wife's role. Right from her childhood days, she has been told stories about Sita, Savitri and Draupadi, depicting the sharing of their husband's travails and their silent sufferings. Jaya refuses these role models because they have lost all relevance in Modern period Sita, Savitri and Draupadi; the legendary women followed their husbands willingly, but Jaya followed her husband 'Mohan' because of compulsion. "there is a frank brutal realization of this evil necessity in her conjugal life"(P.27) (4).

Jaya, the protagonist, is a sufferer right from her childhood days, which continues even today. Her grand mother has continuously chided her for her inquisitive nature and further cautioned her saying that "for everything's question for everything a retort what husband can be comfortable with that?" (5). She is further cautioned and conditioned towards the comforts of her future life partner that "a husband is like a sheltering tree" (P.137) (6) and that "the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (P.138). (7) Some often repeated maxims for the 'would be wives' reveal how women are viewed in the society controlled by men and the traditional women of the family. The winning of a husband, his longevity and the propagation of his lineage through a male child are the goals of the women.

The feministic approach of the novel is that, is basically a domestic novel, and the novel strives in peace making between the pained, sensitive wife and the egoistic and self-centered husband. Lack of Communication between them is the real culprit. And the moment Jaya decides to communicate with her husband, the gloomy silence is broken. Deshpande's feminism is not aggressive and tempestuous as the western writer. The Anglo-American exponents of feminism like Showalter, Gilberts, Gubar and Cheri Register, also opine that woman's consciousness is much different from that of mans, and so woman writers ought to be studied by their own standards and ought not be relegated to a secondary position. The French and Anglo American feminists together channelize their energy toward exposing the sexist modes of male authors and patriarchal practices in society and assigning an honourable place to the literary works of women writers," (8).

Indian feminists do not adopt so stiff an attitude towards the males as their western counter parts do. They are equally culture oriented and gender-oriented, Susie in her article says,

"An Indian feminist, is of the view that women's writing in India needs resurrection and that it should be examined in a proper perspective and in a relevant literary tradition". (9)

The Indian feminist movement came up in the form of a pointed protest against certain social customs, like Purdah system, Child marriage, Dowry, Polygamy and Sati. (the practice of women getting burnt alive on her husband's pyre). The spirit of activism in the Indian feminists seeks equal right and status for women. It aims at the redressal of their grievance and sufferings. It is not bothered with problems like lesbianism or single motherhood as its western counterparts, because such things have really no scope in our society.

Shashi Deshpande, as a feminist writer concentrates on the tortures and sufferings of middle-class Indian, Women who are educated, sensitive and are conscious of their

legal, social and conjugal rights. Deshpande highlights the household conflict between wife and husband operating at the emotional, intellectual and sexual levels. The novelist being fully aware of the patriarchal set-up of Indian society does not plead for any kind of confrontation or militancy between Man and women, between husband and wife. As it is often said and practiced that “Silence, tolerance, sufferance is golden” and though the novel is in the feminist framework, the novelist does not cross the limits of Indian, socio—cultural reality.

“The metaphor of silence under which the novel is organized helps to impose a quietude and discipline; the inner dynamics of a self cut off from human communication. That Long Silence is not an intrusion into the world of silence but a silent communion with the oppressed self-straining for articulation, for a voice. (10)

The concept of new women is a mere attitudinal transformation stifling and oppressive system of sex roles giving her way to undistorted gender equality. Actually, a new woman is a feminist who is in search for the means to overcome oppression, develop her powers and abilities for personal fulfillment and self-actualization.

In conclusion, it is observed that, the exigencies of life presented themselves in the form of traumatic events to Jaya, presents the predicament of human state. The novel, compares the condition of those women who failed to voice and break their silence (like Kusum and Vimala) and finally Jaya thought of breaking her silence. The novel very authentically states that, though at the outset that the patriarchal set up is responsible for women condition in the Indian society, is half truth, for this responsibility also lies with the victims who refuses to raise a voice and achieve the goal. The novel, in a way is like a ‘Multiple patchwork quilt of different elements- facts that fictionalize and fiction that actualized. It is a patchwork, a collective memories presented by myths and rituals, with a wide range of characters, situations, similar view—points, contrasting out looks, all emotions, debated on life and art. The novel being a woman’s version of her sense of world, it tries to accommodate/place others view points, and are oriented towards overall design of a woman’s narration as a multiple patchwork quilt “is basically a woman’s art”. A women’s narration is not claimed to be complete because she admits that man has his own understanding of the situation. Though her narrative is partial yet it is authentic. The novel moves from the nervous climax to the very reality of realities, it is an exploration of selfhood as a mere form of expression.

In every sense, the novel is of immense relevance’s to us in the present -- day socio - cultural contact.

### Works Cited:

- 1: Vanamala Vishwanath interview with Shashi Deshpande, ‘A woman’s world.... All the way!’, ‘literature Alive’ 1:3(1987), 9.
- 3: Indira Kulkshreshtha, “That Long Silence” Chapter 4 “Women in the novel of Shashi Deshpande”, a Study
- 4: Deshpande Shashi, *That Long Silence*: Penguin Books 1988- P.27.
- 5: Deshpande Shashi, *That Long Silence*: Penguin Books 1988- P.11-12.
6. Deshpande Shashi, *That Long Silence*: Penguin Books 1988- P.137.
7. Deshpande Shashi, *That Long Silence*: Penguin Books 1988- P.138.
8. Writing the Females, *Academy Awarded Novels in English*. Mithilesh.K.Pandey, A.N.Dwivedi’s Shashi Deshpande’s- ‘That long silence’ (88) A feminist Reading P.14

9. Deshpande Shashi, *That Long Silence*: Penguin Books 1988- P.169.
10. Articulation of the Feminine voice: Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*