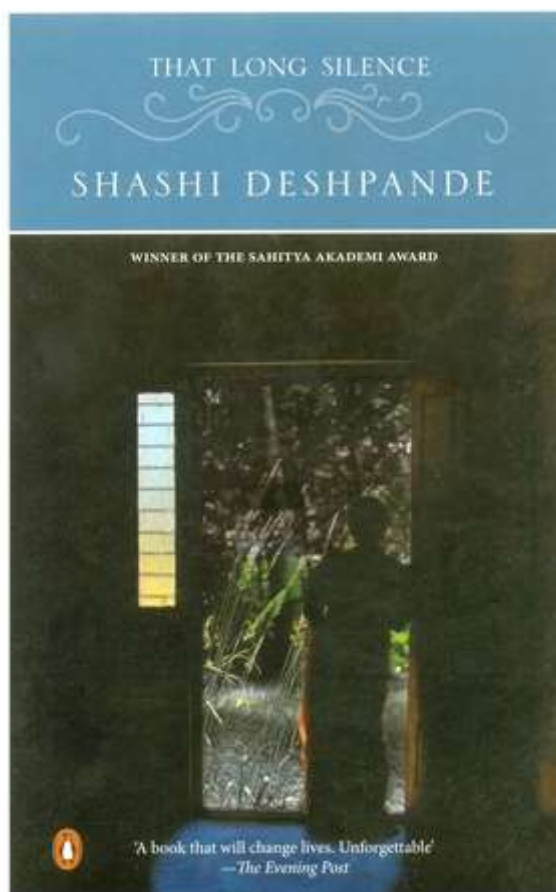


Breaking the Silence : Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

Kavita Parashar

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Abstract

Love and marriage are interrelated concepts of human relations. Love has many forms and one of its forms is seen in the relations of husband and wife. This relation has been the major concern of feminists all over the world. The most stable, pious and natural form of love, and its expression in daily life changes with time and space, from a permanent fountain to occasional drops. Even in this expression, a woman has no equal share and this results in dissatisfaction, subjugation and suffocation, which is well brought to the fore by Shashi Deshpande in *That Long Silence*.

A male partner not only changes a female's identity from a girl to a woman, but dominates her whole life to such an extent that she accepts herself as a part of his identity. She accepts everything silently, not because she is afraid of changing the society, but she fears changing herself, her relation, and her forced identity. She becomes so suppressed from within, that hardly she feels the need to change her predecided roles and assume her new identity. The roles, she imbibed with the help of her darling mother. Many times she feels herself tied with invisible chains, invisible chains but harder and stronger than visible

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ones. But sometime this suppression finds expression in any creative form, and becomes the source of inspiration and power to shake the hollow systems.

Introduction

The present paper is an attempt to reveal the hidden gaps of married life, which not only suppress one of the partners, but many times lead to total failure of relationships. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, is a manifesto of such predicament of its main protagonist, Jaya.

In Search of Identity and Meaning

Jaya, a father supported child and ambitious girl, tries to find the true meaning and identity of her life, in various roles assigned to her by familial and social codes. She starts her journey with her father's favourite name Jaya and passes through different phases of daily life with other identifications as Suhasini and Sita. She finds her role and life fit, only and only in Jaya, "Jaya, the Winner as papa wanted to make her". She had been brought up in a family, in which modernity of thoughts dominated traditions and drilled social taboos. Her father gave a blow to his family's expectations, by having a love affair with her mother, thus denying the comprising and adjusting ways of society. This helps Jaya to think herself different. Like all the girls in the society, she does not want to be shadow of her mother and typical domestic girls, who visit temples and smear sandal paste, in the hope of their prince charming and to prove themselves devoted and complete housewives. Her papa has made her different, indifferent to social taboos and familial rituals, as he often said-

"You are not like others, Jaya," Appa had said to me, pulling me out of the safe circle in which the other girls had stood... You are going to be different from others," Appa had assured me" (Deshpande 136).

Hostel is Better Than Home

After her father's death, Jaya feels alone, so much alone that she feels herself better in hostel, than her home. She feels herself completely detached from her mother and brother. She feels disgust for her mother, who has easily recovered herself from the shock of her father's death. Here her search for herself begins. Before marriage, she wants to be different in a society of commons and after marriage, common in the society of different ones. How to prove her presence, in a world of dominators, where every role is set for a woman, and even a little change is undigestible to the society, family and sometimes to herself also. She felt, as said by Simon de Beavoure:

"A woman is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (Nair 88)

Life Between Jaya and Mohan

Jaya is married to Mohan, an Engineer, not because he is the most suitable groom for her, and also not because, he is her choice, but because she is the most liked girl by Mohan. Moreover, her brother wants to relieve his responsibility, left on his shoulders by his dead father, the unfinished job of his father, and in finishing any job half-heartedly, it does not matter, whether the ways are correct or not. Jaya's convent education, helped her to be the choice of an Engineer. It is a matter of pride that a wife should be liked by her husband, and rejecting a good offer from her side, is considered an act of foolishness in our Indian society.

Jaya with her ambition to be different, does not react differently, because she has none to share her suppressed feelings. After marriage, she adores a new identity, a label to fulfill other's expectations. She puts on a new face, the face of Suhasini, to please everyone. Her name is changed from Jaya, a winner to Suhasini, 'Soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman', one who lovingly nurtured her family and who knew how to cope.'

Making Adjustment – Face and Heart

Jaya adjusts herself in a new environment, with the face of Suhasini and the heart of Jaya, as she is expected to be. A different girl becomes indifferent to herself, her new life and her future life. A self-introspection starts in the heart of her heart, a war is waged between body and mind, between Jaya and Suhasini.

In Mohan's house, she bears all responsibilities with full devotion and dedication, without late and hate. She finds herself in clearcut lines, with specified role in every situation. Clear and specified lines, regarding rights and responsibilities, work and reward and finally fault and punishment. Everything is the responsibility of the wife and nothing is attached to the husband. Every duty from cooking to cleaning, washing to waiting, making to serving, is only and only share of a wife's lot. Alfred Tennyson, in his poem "The Princess", echoed the universally prevailing attitude to women when he wrote:

"Man for the field and woman for the hearth. Man for the sword and for the needle she, Man with the head and woman with the heart; Man to command and woman to obey. All else confusion." (Mundra and Mundra, 29)

Burying a Part of Self in Married Life

Being Suhasini, she shares everything with Mohan, what a wife is expected to do, but being Jaya, she buries a part of self. She loves her husband so intensely that waiting for him becomes a part and parcel of her daily activities, when she says:

"Ever since I got married, I had done nothing but wait, waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come home, waiting for the milk, the servant, the lunch-carrier man" (Deshpande 30).

Caring for a Person Who Does Not Care for Her – Receding Fountain of Love

Jaya cares for a careless person, desires for him without caring for her own desires, the desires which her father imprinted on her innocent mind. She feels happy to lose her identity, to be a fraction of her husband's complete identity. Simple statements of in-laws, decide her mood, and she does not mind the pinchable pranks. Soon the fountain of love recedes and occasion droplets of emotions emerge, from here and there, to save the dying relationship.

Now Jaya suffers from emptiness among business and a vacuum develops, which she tries to fill. Only she tries to fill, because only she has the fear of hardcore societal codes, the set lines and the trauma, she will suffer, if she fails in married life. She has to save her identity, her status of being married. Mohan has no share in it, because, he has his own complete identity. It is only for Suhasini, to bear unbearable things, if she desires to see the horizon of her survival.

When Mohan is found indulged in some wrong practice in his office, she does not have enough courage to put a question mark on his affairs and issues. She is forced to live a life of exile, separated from home and children, with her husband, to save his false reputation.

When she finds some solace in her writing, to reveal her suppressed self, through the realistic stories of man-woman relationship, Mohan becomes critical and blames her for dishonouring the sacred vows of marriage, by presenting the gallery of their married life to the world. She thinks:

“I had known then that it had not mattered to Mohan that I had written a good story, a story about a couple, a man who could not reach out to his wife except her body. For Mohan it mattered that people might think that couple was us, that the man was him. To Mohan, I had been no writer, only an exhibitionist” (Deshpande 144).

Voluntary Subjugation

The little self, which she achieved and accumulated, the real part of her identity, her creative genius faces a blow, against her husband's strong decision and once again she becomes ready to subjugate herself. In order to make, the sacred vow of married life, strong and more visible, she stops writing real stories and tries her hand for imaginary ones. She adores a fictitious name 'Seeta', completely foreign to both, Jaya and Suhasini.

Love and hate are like blown air balloons, the harder you jerk, the higher it flung. Suhasini and Seeta, the shadows of Jaya, haunt her like a ghost. The fictitious stories and writer, both gain a high appreciation in the society, but the real one, the suppressed one steals her peace of mind. The more she tried to make, the more was wasted. She achieved appreciation as a woman writer, by dejecting the woman inside her. She created female characters, but ignored her own character in real life. She felt powerless, after giving powers to others. She allows others to trespass her, to make new ways and path for others, and she did it not because she liked it, but because she was taught to do so for her silent survival. As said by Simon de Beavoure:

“The woman has no value or identity by herself-she is defined in relation to the man. More precisely, she is defined as what man is not” (Nair 87).

Hidden Corner for Actual Desires

The actual desire takes a hidden corner, when other concerns dominate. Jaya, lost in the tussle of Suhasini and Seeta, finds herself tangled in a web of social and family codes, set for a woman by the dictates of the patriarchal society. She feels herself helpless, before the heap of expectations of her husband and his family. How nicely she is ready to wear another mask, a new face, only and only for the pleasure of Mohan but, even a single request for keeping Kusum, her relative, for some treatment, is not acceptable to Mohan.

Jaya's honesty and loyalty, her creative genius as well as her identity, really gets a blow, when her husband is found indulged in some wrong practice in his office, on the pretext of which he had to leave his job. Though the fear of social stigma forced them to move to another city, Dadar, Jaya leaves her heart in Mumbai. She keeps mum, but her silence forces Mohan to explain his fault. Once again, Mohan's ego is hurt due to Jaya's silence, the silence which was more noisy than the speech. Her husband did not confess his

fault, but blamed her and their children, because he slipped from the right track to give them more and more comforts.

Noisy Silence

Many things break when something new out of them is made. Jaya is not only broken inwardly, but feels suffocation, with the fumes and fire burning inside her. When the inside turmoil is intense, then outward situations hardly matter. What was done by Mohan, compelled Jaya to realise her self, to break her silence, the silence which subdued her identity, her real character and role in the married life. She came under the grab of self analysis, made herself ready to cope with the actual difference between deception and reality.

Drift in Relationship

A drift in Jaya's relationship with her husband ran parallel with her struggle with herself for coming out of the disguise of Seeta. Her self-analysis made her realise her own fault, for being silent through these years, for not giving some space to some questions regarding her husband's activities and behaviour. It is a general feeling among women that they see their fault in faults of their destiny makers.

Mohan is at fault, for neglecting Jaya and her emotions, feelings and her existence, for being involved in corrupt affairs, but Jaya finds her fault, for keeping silence, where she was not allowed to speak, for caring the person who was careless and finally for being common in the society of special ones. Her literary genius and her real self is suppressed to satisfy the ego of her loving husband, she becomes the other for the person, with whom she wanted to become one. She shared her self, with the self-centered person. She starts performing the role of Sita, the real Sita, who obeyed her husband Rama, without any question. After gone through deep analysis, she analysed:

“Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces” (Deshpande 1).

Role of Self

Self is one of the central concepts which haunt human existence in this temporal world. Man spends a lot of time pondering over the feelings, perceptions and real or imagined ideas about himself. Since childhood, man is nurtured with some ideas about the self. He develops some ideas of his own about his ownself, and many things in his environment, his awareness of certain objects around him, his familial and social interaction, leads to the basis of the experience with the self. The notion of self develops in a cultural context which has the element of continuity, keeps changing with the interaction of people and places, and when the gap between ideas and reality persists, the person may feel alienated, isolated and betrayed. Gulf between ideas and reality, material and spiritual, consciousness and unconsciousness divides the man into many selves which ultimately leave him fragmented and the victim of endless crises. Jaya is haunted by the ghosts of Suhasini and Sita, the ghosts, which haunt her more than terror, and make him more fearful than fear. She analyses and finds that “the ghost most fearful to confront is the ghost of one's own self.” (Deshpande 13)

Solitude Brings in Double Isolation

In the solitude of Dadar flat, she faces double isolation, isolation from Mohan and isolation from self. She experiences her real shadow, the shadow that was deep rooted before her roles as Suhasini and Sita. The daily routines of life appear lifeless and unattractive when one's own life has no meaning and significance. Only hope left for Jaya was her pen and paper, on the convass of which she made Suhasini and Sita dead, and made some light for Jaya to appear. When Jaya came to the fore, and false and bogus attempt to make dying relations alive, got a shock. Mohan misunderstood Jaya as Sita, but little of Sita was left in Jaya. The more Jaya tried to solve the web of their hollow relationship, the less successful she became.

Alienation

In her attempts, the misunderstanding between the two made them alienated, not only from each other, but from their own selves also. Jaya was pained to feel:

“Each relationship evolves its own vocabulary. Ours had been that of the workday world. The vocabulary of love, which I had thought would come to us naturally and inevitably, had passed us by; so too had the vocabulary of anger” (Deshpande 116).

Feeble Defence and Fierce Onslaught

It was Mohan's anger for his lost prestige and reputation that Suhasini tolerated and Seeta accepted whole-heartedly and now it was the turn of Jaya, the writer to bear silently, which a wife is supposed to do. The angry outburst of Mohan, his frustration in his life, his hostility which though Jaya shared to some extent, with her silent response, but made her husband upset to a great extent. His accusations, high betrayal and his misunderstanding for Jaya, made him feel alone even in the company of his wife. Jaya's feeble defence had no chance before his fierce onslaught. Though he pretended to make Jaya free with her own ways, but in reality, he was unable to digest even a few words by her. Jaya feels desperate because she has changed herself, to fulfill the desires of her husband, her children, and finally to keep herself within the boundaries set for a woman. A convent educated girl, with her own dreams and desires, desired nothing, but the love and care, basic instincts of human beings, and in return she gets total despair and shattered existence. Jaya feels helpless before the towering decisions of her husband but hardly utters any word. She has only her ideas and feelings, she thinks:

“I've done everything you wanted me to” (Deshpande 120).

Answering Neighbours

Even when Jaya felt perturbed due to his behaviour, she preferred to maintain silence, even when she tried to keep the environment cool, her husband left the house, without disclosing this to her, to take revenge upon his silent wife. This added fuel to her unfortunate life. Now she was exposed to the neighbour's curiosity. It did matter never to the neighbours, whether they were living or surviving, but disappearance of Mohan mattered a lot. Jaya repented, for taking a bold decision, to break silence that had crept silently between her and her husband and crippled seventeen years of her married life. Still she accumulates her hope for Mohan's return. It is human nature to make speculations and assumptions, in all situations and occasions. She is less disturbed with her husband's departure, but more with his son Rahul's message that he had left the company. Jaya, the winner became Jaya, the loser. She lost her senses, then neighbours came to cure and console her. In such a moment of grief, she

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had to face her neighbours' queries regarding Mohan's return. In the lonely moments of grief, she starts finding fault with herself, and confesses time and again:

"I've have failed him. He expected something from me, from his wife, and I've failed him. All these years I thought I was Mohan's wife; now he tells me I was never that, not really" (Deshpande 185).

The Role and Sacrifice of Wife

It is a generally prevalent thinking in our society that whether man is happy or sad in marital relations, all credit goes to his wife. It does not occur to anyone to find out whether she is happy or not, because she has to feel satisfied at every cost, and in every situation. As Mohan has left, Jaya is under the grab of suspicion. Mukta, her neighbour suspects that Jaya's friendship with Kamat may be the reason behind the scene. Mohan has the right to put finger on her character, but she has no such share on her part. Jaya feels herself failed in all the roles, and the worst performance in the role of wife, which she played with all her energy and concern. Kamat's death made her realise the futility of human existence. She questions:

"The loneliness of a man facing his death- is there anything like it in this world? His pain filled this room and we could both of us feel it, Mukta and I" (Deshpande 186).

Reality and Imagination

In human life reality, fancy and imagination work side by side. Reality is hard surface, harder than stones. As stones have sometimes pores to let water pass through it, same is the case of reality, it gives a chance to the flow of imagination for the best survival of human beings. Human being is destined to experience the changing states of consciousness and varying levels of awareness of his own self each day. Jaya, always in search of her identity, feels disturbed to such an extent that she introspects herself, for the real root of the problem. When Rahul returns in Dadar for his ailing mother, she feels a little comfort.

Mohan's telegram with the message 'All well', fills a sense of joy in her lonely heart. She expected normal behaviour in abnormal situations, and abnormal in the normal ones. She realises a drastic change in her attitude, when she found herself swinging between what she desired, and what she achieved. Now onwards, she will not allow the silence to cripple her life. She decides:

"But it is no longer possible for me. If I have to plug that 'hole in the heart' I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us" (Deshpande 192).

Man is a product of his environment and all his dreams and desires, reflect the shades of this, time and again. Generally a woman is expected to be the silent bearer of all the natural and man-made sufferings. She is laden with all responsibilities and duties, and finds herself in invisible fences of familial and social codes. Mohan's accusations made Jaya realise the hard reality about herself. She has to acknowledge to that her role as Mohan's wife has been a passive one. She decides to come out of her cosy corner that she had so long preferred to reality. Ultimately she finds solace and complete meaning of her life as an individual in her writing.

Shashi Deshpande's Approach to Man-woman Relationship

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Shashi Deshpande's approach to man-woman relationship, displays well her strong sense of reality. Instead of portraying the attractive love story of married life, she shows the hard realities of life, in the life of a well educated girl with literary sensibilities, and the effect of difference in her ideals and reality. But no one can degrade us, until we allow others to do so. Once we realise the power within us, then the whole world appears powerless. Jaya, by self introspection, decides to give voice to her different roles in her life. She becomes the real Jaya, the winner when she conquers her own fears and fences, to bring the hidden self to the front.

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