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**THE CONFLICTS OF THE RELATIONAL SELF OF JAYA IN SHASHI  
DESHPANDE'S 'THAT LONG SILENCE'**

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**Abstract**

Shashi Deshpande's 'That Long Silence' depicts how patriarchy has designed feminine sense of self grounded in a belief that men's needs take preference over women's needs. Stereotypical values associated with ideal womanhood hinder women from prioritizing individual autonomy over care and relationality. The protagonist of the novel, Jaya, struggles with her quest for identity since she couldn't readily conform to the accepted notions of womanhood. This paper is an attempt at projecting the dilemma of Jaya who struggles to find her subjectivity in the meaningful interactions in her familial relationships while sabotaging her own dreams and desire for individual growth.

**Keywords:** Relational self, Subjectivity, Patriarchy, Identity, Indian writing

Shashi Deshpande is an award winning Indian English author who got the coveted Sahitya Academy award for her third novel 'That Long Silence'. Deshpande's women protagonists are trapped between modernity and tradition and they undergo severe mental trauma in their quest for identity. Jaya, the protagonist of 'That Long Silence', is the

representative of the modern educated Indian middle class woman whom Deshpande craftily moulds to depict the inner conflicts of a woman. The novel opens with Jaya and Mohan moving to a new neighborhood, Dadar, as he become involved in a financial debauchery and wanted to remain low key. This short exile made her retrospect on her 17 year long marriage in which she had lost almost all of her individuality. The retrospection made her realize that her identity has diminished itself to become Mohan's wife and Rahul and Rathi's mother.

Jaya faces a conflict between chasing her own inner desires and confirming to the accepted notion of ideal womanhood. Jaya had been brought up as an equal to her brothers by her father; she was educated and provided with every other thing that was provided to her brothers. Later with her father's death, her life turned upside down when her brother married off her to dislodge his duties at the earliest. Mohan, who was looking for a convent educated wife, saw in Jaya a perfect wife and the marriage was more of a decision concerning the male members of her family and Mohan. Along with being displaced from her familiar surroundings Jaya lost her name, a significant aspect of her identity with her marriage. The name, Jaya, given by her

father means victory but Mohan chose to call her Suhasini which means the one with the placid beautiful smile. Thus begins the long journey of a modern Indian middle class woman who compromises her identity to conform to the patriarchal social norms.

Deshpande distinctly illustrates the strong influence of conditioning in the promulgation of the patriarchal establishment. For instance in the novel we see, Vanitha mami advising Jaya that her husband is a sheltering tree and she ought to keep the tree alive even if it means to water it with lies and deceit. Her grandmother, Ajji, once tells her that she would not make a good wife since she asks too many questions. So it is all being preconditioned in her mind that she ought to cherish her husband as her identity and existence depends wholly on his well being. She realizes that it is not just her plight alone but it has been the same with Mohan's mother and sister as well. More precisely she learned that it is the fate of every Indian woman. She has also learned that women ought not to question anything however unjust and conflicting it might seem. She says "I had learned it at last, no questions, no retorts, only silence" (Deshpande 143).

The novel shatters the myth of the perfect family that television advertisements entices us with and portrays a broken and more realistic family. Jaya slowly wakes to the realization that she has achieved nothing in her life and that she has neither been a perfect wife nor a perfect mother. Jaya has systematically snipped off every part of

her individuality that does not fit with her image as Mohan's wife. She has changed every aspect of herself to please Mohan and her children. In order to comply with Mohan's concept of a modern wife, she amends her appearance by cutting her hair and wearing dark glasses. Thus she transforms herself from the ambitious educated and talented individual to a smiling motherly succumbing wife. Jaya doesn't blame Mohan for her plight because she discerns that he is as much conditioned by the patriarchal apparatus as much as her. Mohan has told her about his mother who has silently accepted all the tantrums and brunt of his father's anger. He believes that his mother's silence was her strength; on the contrary, Jaya realizes that it is her helplessness that had made her silent. Mohan's sister who had ovarian tumor also undergoes suffering and silence and dies at last hushing her distress in a life of despair. Jaya often feels that she cannot cope anymore but she fears jeopardizing her family and hurting Mohan. She is also in a struggle to project a happy family image to the world outside.

The idea that Jaya had of love was toppled upside down after her marriage. She had always had the idea that sex or physical intimacy followed love in a relationship but after being married she learned it could even be the other way round. Even after marriage she found him a stranger and physical intimacy with him was a grotesque act for her. Later she accepts love is only a myth without which sex with the same person becomes unbearable. Jaya feels that there is a deep chasm between a man and a woman. "They are separated forever, never more

than at the moment of total physical togetherness” (Deshpande 98.). She observes that a marriage can be compared to two bullocks yoked together. She summarizes her marriage and relationship with Mohan thus “a pair of bullocks yoked together ... a clever phrase but can it substitute for the reality? A man and woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat preserved like the one caught and preserved for posterity for the advertising visuals but the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man ... women” (Deshpande 8).

The image of bullocks yoked together suggests that the two of them are tied together by the bond of marriage and they have to share the burden between them. Any one of the bullock trying to go away will only lead to mutual pain, so they find it better to go in the same direction. The use of this image sheds up any romantic ideas hallowing marriage and conjugal bliss. Jaya summarizes her seventeen years of marriage, “ever since I got married I had nothing but wait, waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come home, waiting for the milk, the servant and the lunch carrier man.” (Deshpande 52). It is as if she is no longer living for herself but mechanically doing duties for her husband and children, she learns to be content playing the role of a perfect mother and wife. Jaya hoodwinks herself saying that she, like Gandhari, is an ideal wife. “If Gandhari who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife

too. I bandaged my eyes tightly and did not want to know anything”. She made herself believe that all that she cared about was smooth functioning of her family. Until her crisis came, she was able to deceive herself into thinking that her life is perfect but when Mohan was caught in a financial corruption and they had to move into a flat in Dadar Jaya wakes from her disillusionment.

She questions Mohan about his involvement in the corruption to which he curtly replies he had done all of it for her and the family. At that point she finds it unbearable to live without questioning anything anymore and begins questioning her own passivity. “Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically shares her husbands’ travails... what have I to do with these mythical women, I can’t fool myself” (Deshpande 11). The basic sense feminine sense of self is connected to the world and is very reliant upon relations and interactions with others. Seeking of self in others often lead to a need to display altruistic qualities of “unselfishness, goodness, generosity, humility, saintliness, mobility, sympathy” that might earn her recognition from others (Horney 1950 222). However this tendency might be a pathway to “self effacement and living according to other’s expectations” (Westkott 8).

All the hoodwinking and deception could not stand firm at the moment of difficulty in Jaya’s life. She refuses to share any blame for the corruption that her husband did as she could not find any justice in his argument about doing it for

her and the wellbeing of her family. She feels lost as she understood that Mohan takes her for granted and this disruption in the normal flow of her life gave her the courage to ruminate about herself and what she wants from life. Jaya's creative talent was lying dormant within her for long. She wrote a short story once which bagged a price and got published in a magazine. Her writing career was about to get all acclaim and attention but Mohan expressed his displeasure in the content of her story. The story was about a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body. He becomes anxious whether his friends would take him to the man in the story. She thinks, "looking at his stricken face I had been convinced that I had done him wrong and I stopped writing after that." (Deshpande 144). Even then she could not resist writing for long and even Mohan encouraged her to write something that would not resemble their personal life. Jaya then chooses to write under a pseudonym but that doesn't work since her stories were getting rejected one after the other.

Kamat, her neighbor, who has some mentionable literary sensibility analyses her works and tells her they lack strong emotions. She had suppressed all her anger and frustration and she was not letting it out through her art. She knew that expressing her anger and inner turmoil in her works would only lead to jeopardizing her relationship with Mohan. Mohan considers anger to be unwomanly and so Jaya tells Kamat that women cannot afford to be angry and asks him if he has ever heard of any angry young woman. Kamat then warns her against indulging in self

pity and asks her to shed off her victimized woman attitude. Later she begins writing a humorous column named Sita for which she receives encouragement from readers and her husband as well. Sita was a humorous column on the travails of an Indian middle class woman and this proved to be an escape for Jaya who would otherwise end up writing about women who resembled her mother, aunt or mother in law. Jaya could in no possible way identify with Sita, it was a masquerade for Jaya and a way of smothering her inner conscience. She says "it was like someone masquerading as myself or as if I was masquerading as the woman who wrote that column" (Deshpande 67).

The young ambitious Jaya had turned into somebody who did not even dare to explore her creativity and her talents had got lost in the tangles of family life. Her father had taught her to dream and was so sure that she would achieve something significant in her life. After her marriage she unlearned to dream and did not have ambitions for herself. Like every other housewife in a patriarchal set up she learned to depend on her husband for everything. Her creativity, her essential self was shriveled by a marriage. In the Indian context marriage and child bearing are the two important aspects of the woman's life. Her identity and self are built around the other members of her family. The relationship between Jaya and Mohan is a failure and the representative of the failure of modern arranged marriages in India. The displeasure of living with a person who does not love the other as he or she expects is a problem with the contemporary arranged marriages

of educated middle class. The lack of love in her marriage draws Jaya towards Kamat, a middle aged widower with good literary sensibility with whom Jaya develops compatibility. Though not rich or socially significant like Mohan, Kamat treats Jaya as an equal and Jaya is at total ease in his company. In the seclusion of his apartment, they had many opportunities for developing physical intimacy but Jaya did not dare to do so as she did not want to put her marriage at risk. It is for the same reason that she feigns detachment towards his death even when it came as a great blow to her

Jaya realization that Mohan doesn't care about her emotions and she is almost a non entity in his eyes wounds her deeply. She had learnt as a child from Ramu Kaka that women were insignificant when he showed her the family tree which only had the names of the male members of the family. The disappointed little Jaya had questioned Ramu Kaka about the absence of women members in the family tree. Ramu Kaka had then told her that women do not belong to the family pointing to the idea that women exist only in relation to their husbands and children. Jaya couldn't imagine a life without Mohan, the mere thought of his death made her all panicky. "The feeling of living without him twisted my insides; his death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of him dying made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks" (Deshpande 96). Her quest for her subjectivity in relation needs others to need her as a way of bolstering her self

esteem and affirming her worth.(Horney 2014,p112)

Deshpande was right when she described her novel as "a book about the silencing of one half of the humanity" (Prasad 58) and it is a tale of how the idealized image of woman could prove t a hindrance for a woman's individual growth and positive sense of self. Often the quest for self in one's relations ends up in one compromising individual accomplishment and autonomy. "The idealized empathetic self is not only a strategic persona that seeks protective gratitude and admiring confirmation from others; it is also an inexorable inner critic that condemns actual behavior for failing to live up to the proud 'shoulds' comprising the ideal" (Horney1950 p111-112).Deshpande's Jaya is torn between her need to achieve the feminine relational ideal and her "desires for individual self-fulfillment that violate the relational ideal" (Westkott 8).

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