

# Feminist Perspectives in Shashideshpande's That Long Silence

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**Abstract:** This paper presents an overview on feminist perspectives in Shashideshpande's that long silence.

**Keywords:** Sufficing, pertinacity, plunge.

## 1. Introduction

Shashi Deshpande is renowned novelist of Indian writing in English. She has credited of writing well known novels, namely; *The Dark holds no terrors*; *Roots and Shadows*; and *That Long Silence*. Her first novel *The Dark Holds and no Terrors* was translated into German and Russian languages. *That long silence* (1998) was her fifth novel which was recognized with 'Sahitya Akademi Award' in 1990. Her works primarily deals with the problem of women in the present social context. Deshpande's quest for identity and freedom has become dominate themes in literature. She unfolds the problems very positive way. According to her, woman has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decisions, to be independent and to take charge of her destiny.

*That long silence* is one of the unique works of Sashi Deshpande which signifies the pathetic condition of Indian woman. It is a reflection of suffering of an Indian woman in the dogmatic social milieu that is family. It also reflects how woman suffers deeply and end-up in life silently bearing molestations of male. The sacrifice made by women counterpart is hardly noticed by the male dominated society. The writer wants such women who suffer to break their silence in the wake of feminist movement. The novel illustrates the image of women in the middle-class family and the way she is sandwiched between the tradition and modernity.

The title of the novel depicts the intention of the novelist in order to reveal the female psyche during the quest of Jaya, the protagonist, for self. She is the protagonist of *That Long Silence* who is an intelligent woman with graduation in English, a writer and columnist had a bright career. Unfortunately, none of these attributes would provide her a respectable positive in the eyes of her husband Mohan, who has socialization in a typical tradition environment. He perceived his wife on par with Seeta, Savitri and Draupadi. His mother and sister Vimala were very much submissive to father. The decisions relating to familial and financial matters were taken by the male members of the family. So he wanted his wife to be submissive like them as a

homemaker.

In a male-dominated society, a woman has no space to be independent. She is dependent on men either on father, husband or son. They are hardly given freedom and independence. Slavery to man makes them suffer from dual roles of child bearing and domestic chores. She has no freedom regarding the selection of her life partner and marriage. Marriage becomes their destiny and Jaya thinks; as we grew into young women, we realize it was not love, but marriage that was the destiny waiting for us. And so, with young man, there was the excitement of thinking will this man be by husband? It had been our parents who had taken vague desires of our sand translated them into hard facts. It was like the game we had played as children on our buttons tinker, tailor, soldiers, and sailor.

Jaya's parents and Vanitha Mami go on hammering onto to her that 'husband is like a sheltering tree'. Women should be dependent on the male member of the family in order to be safe and protected. In other words, a woman is undermined ignoring the fact that she is equal to men in all the spheres of life. Her abilities and strengths are undermined. However, she is inferior to men in patriarchal society. This is rightly period out by Deshpande as;

*A sheltering tree.*

*Without the tree you are dangerously*

*Unprotected and vulnerable.*

*This Followed logically;*

*And so you have keep the tree alive and flourishing*

*Even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. (TLS:32)*

The author vividly depicts the image of marriage institution and familial relations in India. Husband and wife hardly openly about their sexual life it is treated as sinful and immoral. Jaya had dream about her marital life that she would love her husband first and then sex. A mechanical relationship and artificial lover were the consequence of her marriage. It was a total failure. She had lost interest and tried off with the acts of sex. Unfortunately, with Mohan she had only sex but not love either before or after marriage. Other sex words, she hardly enjoyed marital relationship with her husband. She had no freedom to express or share her desire with Mohan. Her feelings of love and sex are suppressed as she says;

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*In any case, whatever my  
Feelings had been then, I had  
Never spoken of them to him. in fact, we  
Had never  
Spoken of sex at all. It had been as if  
The experience was Erased each time after it happen, it  
Never existed in words.  
The only words between us had been in question,  
'Did I hurt you?' and my answer  
'No'. (TLS: 95)*

Jaya was introduced to her neighbour Kamat who motivated her to think and act independently about her writing by appreciating and admiring. He inspires and cheers her to get serious, to be real and true to herself. This made her regain her self-confidence which had been lost. He further makes her to speak frankly about sex. What she could not speak with Mohan, was able to speak to Kamat. It makes her realize her 'self'. In this way, Kamat enables her to break 'long silence'. Jaya now resolves so assert her individuality by breaking 'that long silence', putting down on paper that in her entire seventeen years of silence she had suppressed her desires.

The companionship of Kamat made Jaya get her identity. However, she was not strong enough to challenge the traditional value system of the society. Though she had lost faith in her husband, she wanted to adjust with her present setup. She was of the opinion that no change comes suddenly, it takes a long time. Human happiness consists in harmonizing the opposites of life. The husband-wife relationship needs to be built on the values of democracy and socialism. In other words, rebelliousness is not the solution of the problems of life.

Through the protagonist conscious-raising voice, struggling to assert her femininity, Shashi Deshpande gets to the root as existence and given vent to a kind of female subjectivity which refuses to reconcile and identify herself with a patriarchal and male-dominated society. Throughout her female protagonist she seems to convey the message that marital polarization

curtails human potential and individual happiness.

It is suffice to state that courage and not escapism is what woman of today requires. She should have the courage to uphold what is right for her and adhere to it with firm determination and tenacity. A headlong plunge into the social milieu with pertinacity can alone bring harmony and fulfilment in her life.

At the end of a novel Jaya's husband loses his confidence, his position as an engineer. In the urban and global society, her husband comes the victim of corruption. During the seventh year of their marriage Mohan never asks her opinion on any matter but when an inquiry has been set up against him, he holds Jaya's hand asks her to support the family through her career as a writer. But Jaya remains silent kind of protest against her long silence, which makes her strong at the end of the novel. Feminist movement has a great deal in this regard. The feminist writing of Indian literature probe into the pathetic situation of women in the male dominated society in general and in the institution of family in particular. In order to establish social harmony, the harmony in the family needs to be established. There has to be an end to discrimination on women based on the gender. No gender is superior in this world. Gender equality has a bearing on attaining gender development in order to have peace, harmony and love in the family relationship.

## 2. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview on feminist perspectives in Shashideshpande's that long silence.

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