

**Impact
Factor
3.025**

ISSN 2349-638x

Refereed And Indexed Journal

**AAYUSHI
INTERNATIONAL
INTERDISCIPLINARY
RESEARCH JOURNAL
(AIIRJ)**

UGC Approved Monthly Journal

VOL-IV

ISSUE-VIII

Aug.

2017

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Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* :A Journey From Miseries to Self-Knowledge

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Indian novels in English have been enriched by several highly talented novelists like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De and Shashi Deshpande. Shashi Deshpande who has seven novels and four children's books at her name portrays realistic picture of middle class women. Her novels are the predicament of their conflict. Prasad Amarnath (2001:14) states:

"Almost all the literary ventures of Shashi Deshpande revolve round the pathetic and heart rendering condition of women in a male dominated society." The present paper depicts the miseries of Jaya, the protagonist in *That Long Silence*, and her journey towards self-knowledge.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* published in 1983, the novel has received Sahitya Academy Award in 1991. It is translated into French and Dutch. The protagonist of the novel Jaya is surrounded by numerous problems i.e., differences with her husband, frustration in her seventeen-year-old marriage, disappointment in her two teenage children, and extreme fear of her childhood. Those problems encircle become the cause of her miseries. It is through Jaya, Shashi Deshpande focuses on women's sufferings. She represents tortures suffered by women and pain of coming to self-knowledge. Deshpande's women are women, who search in the dark for the light of self-identity and tries to break the long silence. In the course of her journey of the past, Jaya finds nothing but mental torture. She undergoes at the hands of her husband. When she searches for the self she finds:

"The usual picture the real you never emerges. Look for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces." (Deshpande 1989:45).

Jaya is recognised by two names Jaya and Suhasini. It is due to the traditional bindings she has two names. It is not her own it changes according to her husband's wishes. She explores:

"Though he wrote my name, it had been Suhasini not Jaya. And if I disowned the name, he had never failed to say reproachfully 'I choose that name for you'... And Appa would say "I named you Jaya' he said Jaya for victory." (15).

Jaya is even taught that she has to carry the tradition and inherit it in her children. She has been told that a husband is like a sheltering tree. And her husband Mohan has a very clear ideas about himself. He thinks himself as a dutiful son, dutiful father, husband and brother. There is no way out for Jaya. She helplessly surrenders to her husband's wishes, his likes and dislikes. She realizes, though marriage is a wonderful institution, it is the most complex of all human relations. He feels that any writing by his wife about man-woman relationship will spoil their married life. And to Jaya 'silence' should become the matter of communication. Although they have the fear of society, they are obliged to compromise their attitudes in life. There is no conversation in between them. She is frustrated and the unhappiness reflects on her social life. Her habit of analysing creates havoc in her life. And Jaya has to pursue what Mohan pursues. When Mohan involves in the charge of corruption, he wishes her to get involved with it. She is to obey, serve and suffer.

Gradually Jaya's life becomes a game of waiting. She thinks life as very hard. She thinks for every woman life is a game of waiting. She thanks:

"But for women the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws' home. Wait until you have kids." (30) Jaya assumes it should not become waiting fearfully for a disaster.

Jaya is aware of her talent. She knows if she wishes, she could show her ability. But she remains silent. It reveals that the traditional role of woman still poses primary influence on the newly acquired one. She has been taught and imposed that she should follow the footsteps of her husband. She should think of his happiness. "Remember, Jaya the happiness of your home and husband entirely depends upon you. Ramakaku had said in his pompous head-of-family member.... Be good to Mohan, Jaya "Dada had advised me when I was leaving Ambegoan after our wedding" (137-38). But in seeking for Mohan's happiness Jaya loses her own. She becomes so restless, that she hardly gets some pleasant moments of life. She faces dual kind of struggle: the outer, with Mohan and the inner within herself. She thinks life without Mohan would be barren. She recollects how her mother's look after her father's death. It was a big blank without identity. She becomes a victim of dependency syndrome.

Jaya thinks Kamat as her good friend, but she conceals her friendship with Kamat from Mohan. Unlike Mohan, Kamat is encouraging, inspiring and motivating. It is with Kamat Jaya discovers that a man and woman can be friends at ease.

When Jaya looks back into her past, she blames her father, who has inherited certain traditional notions in her. He again and again tells her about the high prospects of her future, but the reality is she faces failure. She sees herself as a failed daughter, wife, mother and writer. When she tries to discover her identity a question appears before her mind's eye 'who am I?' She thinks she has done nothing in her life. Jaya gets depressed when she gets the news of Rahul's missing from the tour. She is totally exhausted. But a phone call from Rahul calms down the situation. But when she discovers Rahul prefers his grandmother's house than hers, she gets disappointed. As if her life becomes a game of shadow and light, she sees more a shadow. But the situation changes again. She gets telegram from Mohan assuring her that all is well. He informs that the corruption case against has been settled. Jaya goes back home again. With the 'all well' news from Mohan she thinks she is slipping into the grooves of her marital life again. But there is a change in Jaya's attitude. By breaking that long long silence she has given a way to her sufferings and her sufferings become outlet to her writings. She knows it is through writing she can discover her identity. She can give expression to her story. The breaking of silence gives voice to her predicament, where Jaya finds herself lost in silence. But her sufferings make her to assert her identity.

Here, Shashi Deshpande portrays a woman who is made silent by the social and traditional norms and by the dominance of her husband. The domination is so strong that it compels Jaya to remain silent at every step she likes to take, at every flight she wants to take. At last Jaya asserts her identity by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms. In the course of her miseries Jaya undergoes number of mental trials. Even she compares herself with Gandhari, wife of Dhritrashtra who covers her eyes to become blind as her husband. With it she realizes that she herself causes her sufferings.

"If Gandhari.... could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly I did not want to know anything." (61).

Jaya, who is a well educated woman thinks deeply and tries to overcome the situation. She returns back to her lost self confidence and is ready to face the challenges of life.

“The panic has gone. I’m 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 the fragmentation is not possible.” (169).

Shashi Deshpande tries to prove that breaking of the silence compels Jaya to open the shell of her miseries and to emerge with self-confidence. In an interview with Gita Vishwanathan, Shashi Deshpande asserts that she has no models with her and she does not want to emulate any one. She further claims that a writer writes not out of herself but out of the society she is living in as well. People are both complex and complicated but if the writer writes with the social reform, simple picture comes out. Deshpande (Deshpande 2005:98) comments:

“When I wrote *That Long Silence*, I had no intention of writing a feminist tract, though the book has now got the tag of being a feminist novel. I was telling the story of Jaya, a woman who found herself questioning her life, her beliefs, her relationships with other-in all of which her gender played a big role.”

Throughout the text Jaya undergoes the miseries that cause her to search her own identity. At first she finds no way out and adopts silence as a means to get herself going with the situation. But it is that long silence which becomes the means of communication and means to seek self-identity.

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