



## THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND FREEDOM IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S "THAT LONG SILENCE"

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### ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande ranks high in the list of top Indian authors. She is the most popular Indian Woman writer in English. It is a fact that woman is mistreated and vanquished by the male community everywhere. She has been the subordinate monopolization and has to conform to male standards. In most of her novels, Shashi Deshpande has focused on the suppression of women in Indian society. She draws our attention to women's exploitation, discrimination and commodification. She fairly rejects the system where there is no revolt of the women against the society and its norms which underrate women. Shashi Deshpande has dealt with 'women-issues', of how they are being treated and what the women actually want.

Shashi Deshpande has made a significant contribution to the contemporary Indian writing in English. She has, in a number of ways, not only surpassed the male counterparts but also maintained a high standard of literary writing applauded not only by Indians but overseas readers as well. Not only did she experiment with the form of the novel to carry the burden of her peculiar experiences but also succeeded in making the genre a viable medium to cry out her agonies. It became a potent means in their hands to analyze, interrogate, and highlight the current problems in their society.

Key Words: Freedom, Identity, Quest, Domination and Suppression

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Shashi Deshpande's works concentrate more on the status of the women in the traditional bound, male-dominated middle class society of the contemporary India. Her heroines are sensitive, intelligent and career-oriented. Study of her novels reveals how poignantly, she expresses the frustration and disappointments of women who experience social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. Shashi Deshpande started her writing career all of a sudden. In her own terms: "There was really nothing. It was very strange. May

be it was there waiting inside and suddenly at one moment, it came out. Until then, I was looking around to see what I could do. I was very unhappy not doing anything, just looking after the home and children. It was perhaps a kind of claustrophobic existence. I could feel something building up in me and that caused the outburst. Otherwise, it would have perhaps led to a breakdown." ("Denying the otherness" II) 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. *That Long Silence* is a saga of suppressed women prisoned in the room of silence. It is Jaya's journey in search of one's true self who confronts the gender oriented traditional speculation.

Being influenced by western feminist writers, the post independence Indian women writers, have engaged themselves in devising verbal strategies for rejecting 'male cold' literary conventions historically accepted as 'standards'. Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent contemporary women writers in Indian writing in English. She has created ripples in the society of male domination by taking women as women seriously in her novels. She takes us inside the consciousness of her women characters to present their plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions.

Jaya, the protagonist in *That Long Silence*, is exactly the opposite of the free-thinking creature with discretion. She is ragged between love and hate, liking and disliking for her own husband and life situations. As the title of the novel indicates, Jaya for very long in her past life tried to play the role of traditional woman, the embodiment of broadmindedness, suffering and courage. However her courage deserts her and she becomes the new, self-centered, self-assertive, rebellious woman - all these being marks of modern feminist awakening. But the desertion of the traditional submissive role and adoption of the new role do not leave the psyche of Jaya unstinted and intact. She faces great emotional turmoil. Her situation is summarized as, "A dumb submission... a mute bondage of personality, and unconditional devotion, a life long slavery, a brute and savage killing of identity and never ending series of mental, emotional and physical sacrifices are in the lot of a woman." (Apter 1993: 71).

Jaya is allowed to retrospect her own silence and indulge in her own egotistical feelings. The smoldering fire of suppressed feelings, the maintenance of self control, the pursuit of mechanical role of mother and wife, the need to cater to the physical and emotional needs of husband and children must remain suspended for a while, or be forgotten and her real feminine soul,

her pent up sufferings and feelings must find an outlet.

The element of tiredness and disgust, the bearing of many types of burdens while playing the role of ideal wife, the discard of her selfhood and identity as a writer and subordinating everything to the wifely role accumulate and tell upon her nerves and weaken her emotional equipoise, effort fully maintained all along. But Mohan, under the pressure of his suspension and social complications arising from it, and nervous irritations caused by humiliation, and the need of hiding facts from family and friends accuses Jaya of changed behavior in days of adversity. "He accused me of not caring about the children, of isolating myself from him and his concerns, even of some obscure revengeful feelings that were driving me to act this way" (24). He does not even understand how the kind of writing she is doing is betrayal of her, of what she has wanted to write. At the moment of this crisis of their married life, Jaya and Mohan are total strangers to each other, a silence pervades over their relationship. The pressure of irony and bitterness, the agony of being misunderstood, overtake her and she giggles fiercely on Mohan's accusations, "I had to control myself. I had to cork in this laughter. But it was too late" (26). When silence fails as a protective cover, hysteria becomes the only shield. After this dramatic exchange Mohan walks out of her and leaves the house. His, this act forces Jaya to realize that what lies between them is not silence. If it is, it is not speechlessness; it is a loaded silence. Silence, in this novel comes to suggest not the absence of communication, but the failure of signs to signify. Mohan does not understand Jaya, or any woman, because their sign system does not carry any value for him. Women avail themselves of language, they register their voices send forth the signs into circulation that remain udecoded within the normative male institution of communication." The women reside within a language the users of which do not understand their language. Women inhabit a discursive space which is constituted by patriarchal language and which renders women's articulations insignificant". (Menon 1993: 30) It is thus that Mohan cannot comprehend 'all women' as within the patriarchal linguistic structures that form

him, what women 'say' remains un-signified, as it were.

The spirit of questioning and non-confining to codes has been presented in Jaya's character right from her childhood. Her father loved the classical music of Polushkar and Fiayaz and recommended it to Jaya, but she was fond of the lilting music of Rafi and Lata and listened to their songs. Her rebellion of her own father speaks of her temperamental nature.

Shashi Deshpande has made the revelation of Jaya's real nature the very core of the novel. Jaya is in conscious pursuit of self-knowledge. Thus, various discordant notes meet and unite in her complex nature. She is a model of patience, endurance, devotion, integrity, rebellion, defiance and disobedience at the same time. She is, all along, pursuing the idea of a separate female identity. She finds it difficult to put together the different discordant facts of her personality. Thus, the young bride Suhasini, is at logger heads with the mature and seasoned Jaya who is both restrictive and destructive. The tradition-bound docile woman in Jaya is irreconcilable with the modernist individuality seeking Jaya. The loyal, loving Jaya - the devoted wife of Mohan is irreconcilable with the epicurean Jaya, relishing a momentary embrace with Kamat. So, the novelist has imparted a complex identity to Jaya, focusing at the same time on the altruistic aspects of womanhood.

For seventeen long years of her life, Jaya allowed her family to possess her body and soul. She didn't think anything apart from that, thus she was a dedicated bourgeois woman. All had their lives, but she gave up hers, she could neither express herself nor achieve anything. Jaya was leading a life without any purpose. Absurd is the word used by the modern existentialist writers to denote the meaningless living of man. The conclusion is verification of the relevance of the arguments, throwing light on how silence strengthens men in maintains high position and weakens women. Women indulge in silence; get tied their tongue with the fear of loss. It is a psychological abuse. Sartre rightly says, "Man first of all exists, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards. A man as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because he is nothing. He will not be anything until later and

then he will be what he makes himself. Man is not what he conceives to be, but he is what he wills and makes of himself." Jaya had an illusion of happiness. She accepts that she should let that illusion go. "I had to admit the truth to myself-that I had often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony." (4) Jaya on her way to introspection is aware of the essentials of the critical analysis and self-detachment. Jaya always expected a change she had sighed for a catastrophe, a disaster that could pull her out of dull routine. Her self-analysis revealed her own flaws and she gradually prepared herself for facing the reality. Silence is seen as an image of subjugation, alienation, absurdity of Jaya's existence for one instance.

Middle class girls get good education and caring atmosphere in family, but they are also conditioned to mould themselves to suit the requirements of their future life partner. From early girlhood, a girl is conditioned in a certain way by the society so that she can be a good wife in future. She is taught to merge her identity in that of her husband. In childhood, Jaya used to be of witty and inquisitive nature which made her grandmother say, "Look at you - for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that" (p. 27)? Jaya is thus conditioned towards the comforts of her future life-partner. At the time of Jaya's marriage, Ramukaka tells her that the happiness of her husband and home depends on her. Dada advised her to be good to Mohan. And Vanitamami tells her about the importance of being with a husband: "Remember, Jaya ... a husband is like a sheltering tree .... Without the tree, you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable" (p. 32). These words keep on echoing in the ears of Jaya and she realizes that since a husband is like "a sheltering tree," he must be nourished and nurtured adequately even if the wife has to suffer to give it nourishment. After her marriage, Jaya, who used to consider herself independent and intelligent, shapes herself to suit her husband's model of a wife. She gets transformed into "stereotype of a woman: nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support" (p. 76). Apparently

she has all the material comforts and is almost satisfied. But she has to compromise and suppress many aspects of her individuality for this. In order to become an ideal wife and mother, she devotes herself to the comforts of her husband and to the maintenance of the house. In this process, she feels that she has no identity, no status of her own. When the editor of a magazine asks her to give them her bio-data, she feels that she has nothing meaningful in her life. She thinks of only irrelevant facts: "I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third one live" (p. 2) In fact, Jaya keeps on changing herself according to her husband's likes and dislikes. As a result of this, her individuality gets annihilated. Now whatever she practices or whatever she follows is dictated by only one consideration and that is, what her husband will think of it. In order to please her husband, she even transforms her appearance. She gets her hair cut and wears dark glasses. After marriage, Mohan renames Jaya as Suhasini. The name „Jaya“ means „Victory“ and „Suhasini“ means "a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped" (pp. 15-16). Slowly and painfully, she learns what is expected of her. She learns how sharply defined a woman's role is. A wife should not be angry with her husband because that undoes his position of authority. She knows very well that to survive within marriage, one has to learn many tricks, and silence is one of these tricks. Therefore, she silences her emotions as well as her physical desires.

A woman is often given no right to express her physical desires. She has to submit to the desires of her husband. Jaya also follows the same tradition which results in frustration in her marital life. She pines for emotional communication between her and her husband. But she finds in her relationship with Mohan nothing except emptiness and the suppressed silence as she tells Mukta: "... nothing between me and Mohan either. We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us" (p. 185). She realizes that despite seventeen years of married life, they have not become one, only their bodies occasionally meet, not their souls. Jaya, like Indu of *Roots and Shadows*, subdues her

independent spirit to the expectations of her husband. She describes her relationship with Mohan as a mechanical and forced relationship: "A pair of bullocks yoked together .... A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman" (p. 8). But this image of the animals performing their duties mechanically undermines the husband-wife relationship. Marriage is expected to bring joy, glory and fulfilment to both man and woman. But in most cases, as we see in the novel, marriage fails to give the promised happiness to the individuals, especially to the woman. According to Indian tradition, a wife is expected to stay at home, look after the babies and keep out the rest of the world. She is expected to have the qualities prescribed in Indian tradition : Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi, Rupeeha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitrii, Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayanetu Rambha, Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni. (Like a slave while serving; a minister while counseling; Goddess Lakshmi in her looks; the earth in forbearance; a mother while feeding; as wife like Rambha, the celestial prostitute; these six are the true characteristics of an ideal wife.)<sup>10</sup> But Jaya resents the role assigned to a wife in our country. To Jaya, married life becomes unbearable and monotonous. She gets frustrated and says: "Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony" (p. 4). Marriage stifles the growth and right to free expression of a wife. A woman's role and contribution to the society is defined in terms of her role as a wife, daughter, sister or mother. Commenting on her married life, Jaya says that waiting is a part of her existence: "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. Yes, ever since I got married, I had done nothing but wait" (p. 30). Because of the emptiness in her marriage, Jaya is drawn towards Kamat, a middle-aged intellectual. He treats Jaya as an equal and Jaya gives expression to her real self in Kamat's company. But there is no

physical relation between the two. In society, a married woman can not be seen as a friend of another. The friendship between Jaya and Kamat suffers due to this reason. People, including her friends and neighbours like Mukta, do not approve their relationship. One day when Jaya finds Kamat lying dead on the floor, she silently leaves the place because of the fear of social disgrace.

Moreover, Jaya has to stifle her creative urges to save her career as a wife. Mohan objects to her creative writing because he finds that her themes reflected the autobiographical details. In order to avoid conflict in her marriage, Jaya gives up creative writing. Then she starts writing middles in newspapers which cause no trouble to her husband, which do not hurt him as Jaya says: "I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared – scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage"(p. 144). Mohan is a traditionalist who wants Jaya to conform to his expectations. He wishes his wife to be modern and educated, but also expects her to have traditional qualities like submissiveness and flexibility. Sarabjit Sandhu remarks: "Mohan is a traditionalist rooted in customs. To him, a woman sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come and eat hot food is the real „strength“ of a woman."<sup>11</sup> As a husband, Mohan never tries to understand his wife, her emotions and her psychological needs. On the other hand, Jaya annihilates the creative aspect of her personality to keep Mohan happy. She devotes herself to the care and fulfilment of her husband's and her children's needs. Thus, obedience and loyalty, which are considered to be the virtues of Hindu womanhood, degenerates into silent bearing of oppression. A woman is even expected not to be angry or revolting as stated in the novel: "A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There's ... no room for despair, either. There is only order and routine" (pp. 147-148). Marriage not only hinders Jaya's intellectual growth, but also undermines her sense of self. Mohan gives meaning to her existence. Her status as a wife, as mother, as a housewife owes itself to Mohan. She is aware that Mohan is her profession, her career and her means of livelihood.

But this also denies her place as an individual. This realization that she has no existence as Jaya but only as a complement of Mohan becomes more acute when Dr. S.K. Vyas, her brother's classmate, invites her to his house with Mohan: "And drop in some time—with your husband, of course. „With your husband, of course“ – what did he mean by that? Was it impossible for me to relate to the world without Mohan? A husband is like a sheltering tree ... Vanitamami, did you, without knowing it, speak the most profound truth I'm destined to heart in my life" (p. 167)? A woman is subordinated in a number of ways and this results in disharmony between the two sexes. A husband denies his wife the right of her individuality. He wants her to see the world around her only in the way he would like her to see. He expects complete devotion, complete allegiance to his vision of life from his wife. This is what Mohan wants from Jaya when he is charged with corrupt activities. He seeks emotional support from Jaya. Having failed to get any sympathy from Jaya, Mohan leaves the house. This proves to be a traumatic experience for Jaya. Like any other traditional Indian wife, Jaya can not bear Mohan's absence. Even the thought of his death horrifies her: "The thought of living without him had twisted my insides. His death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks" (pp. 96-97).

After Mohan's departure, she feels that she is secure only with Mohan and has no face to show, no identity without him. It awakens her to her real place in life. Under these frustrating circumstances, Jaya gets terribly disturbed and starts questioning her. She rethinks over her marital relationship. She realizes that she is not only Mohan's wife, rather she is an individual having her own distinct identity as she states: "I'm not afraid any more. 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 kind of a fragmentation is not possible" (p. 191). She hopes to be on equal terms with Mohan, and at the same time, accepts the established norms and values. Now Jaya comes to know that the reason of her depressing condition is not the society alone, but she has to take the

responsibility of her own state and work according to it. The idea of marriage as “two bullocks yoked together” is rejected by her. Understanding that life can not be lived in vacuum, she no longer looks at Mohan and herself as two bullocks, rather as two individual with independent minds. She realizes that meaningful co-existence can be achieved only through understanding and compassion, not through domination, subjugation or rejection. Sarala Parker beautifully sums up the idea when she says: “The important insight that Shashi Deshpande imparts to us through Jaya is that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their victimization instead of putting the blame on everybody except themselves.”<sup>12</sup> Jaya makes her choice by refusing to become a victim of trends and is determined to break her long silence which has plagued her family since long. But there are other women who, like Jaya, belong to the middle class, but unlike her, suffer silently without protest taking the suffering to be their fate. The figures of Vanitamami, Kusum, Mukta, Mohan’s Mother and Mohan’s sister, Vimala can be quoted as examples. Vanitamami, “who had never known what it was to choose” (p. 45), represents another facet of the traditionally suppressed woman. After her marriage, her life was ruled by her mother-in-law. As a daughter-in-law, her role has remained submissive and she is allowed no participation in decision making. The interest she takes in Kusum is the only protest she can register successfully. Kusum is also a victim figure. Passive surrender and insecurity which have been her lot in her mother’s home, pursue her in the new family after marriage. Kusum becomes insane as she has internalized all her anger. She becomes a burden on her family. Finally, she commits suicide. Mukta, Jaya’s neighbour, works under financial compulsions. She is a widow caring for her old mother-in-law and teenaged daughter, Neelima. She is independent and capable of holding against strange situations, yet she is unable to overcome superstitions. But she wants her daughter to be free from them. She has accepted ill-treatment at the hands of her husband, as she could not have a son. In is the height of irony that if a woman fails to

give a male inheritor to her husband, all the blame is put on her.

Women are the victims of generations of conditioning in which a woman is unchangeably suppressed. The husband is traditionally given the role of mentor and guide. To serve one’s husband is considered to serve God. The slightest sign of independence on her part is not acceptable to him. Mohan’s father, for example, is shown as dominant and authoritative figure embodying the patriarchal attitudes. He wants fresh food to be served when he returns home. Mohan’s mother’s failure to provide fresh chutney late one night drives him to wild fury. He picks up the plate and throws it. Mohan’s mother picks up the plate, cleans the wall and sends her son next door to borrow some chillies. Patiently, she prepares fresh chutney, lights the fire, cooks the meal again and sits down to wait which is an important part of a woman’s life, not of man’s. Talking about women being treated cruelly by their husbands, Mohan says that this tolerance of violence is the strength of women. But Jaya thinks differently as she says: “He saw strength in the muted rebellion inside her and provides a sound logical basis for her contemptuous laughter as described earlier.

Jaya wanted to confront security, she accepted Mohan as a sheltering tree that is why she did not bother to know if he was following shortcut ways for earning money. Ever since her marriage she had been content to follow the footsteps of the mythological role model of Sita, which authorities tend to sacrifice at one instance and she tries to compare herself with Gandhari: “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. I don’t want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay; that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have the things we needed – decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, travelling I class.” (144). In orthodox Indian marriages, it is not enough for the husband to be approved and admired; he wants immediate unquestioned obedience to his commands. Women are trained to follow her husband mutely. This is clearly witnessed in the case of Mohan’s mother. As

narrated by Mohan to Jaya "I can see a picture of extraordinary clarity and vividness-the woman (Mohan's mother) crouching in front of the dying fire sitting blank and motionless, the huddles bundles of sleeping children (Mohan, his brothers and sisters) on the floor, the utter silence, the loud knock at the door ... They had all had their food, except her. Though she always waited for him, their father, however late, he was (and he never gave her any indication of when he would be back) she had asserted herself in this that she would not make the children wait for him. She gave them their dinner, even the older ones and then she cooked rice for him again, for he would not, he made it clear to her, what he called food as, "your children's disgusting leaving," He wanted his rice fresh and hot, from a vessel that was untouched. She had just finished cooking this second cooking and was waiting, hoping, perhaps that he would not be too late, for it wouldn't do to allow and as for lighting the fire again, that was unthinkable" (P.15-16). At last, when he came in, he went straight to the bathroom to wash. By the time he returned, she had his plate ready. Hanging his shirt on a peg on the wall, he Sat down, drank a glass of water, poured some water into his palm to sprinkle ritually around his plate and then he paused, "Why is there no fresh chutney today?" he asked, not looking at her. She mumbled something, the next second, he picked up his heavy brass plate and threw it, not at her, but deliberately on the wall, which it hit with a dull clang. He wore his shirt and went out of the house. This is silently watched by the children, the mother silently picks up the plate, cleaned the floor and the wall of all the spattered food, and wiped it, she once again cooked rice and prepared fresh chutney, and sits down to wait, when her children, who had awoken up by the clanging sound of the plate, finally drift off to sleep again, "She was still sitting there in front of the fire, silent, motionless" (36). Mohan's reaction after his narration is quite revealing. "God... She was tough. Women in those days were tough" (36). But Jaya sees a 'wounded woman'. Mohan is so insensitive that as a son, being witness to his father's harassment is not condemning his father, but raising his mother as a virtuous woman. Mohan's sister Vimala too dies in silence rather than informing her

mother-in-law about her problem, victim of ovarian tumour. If Vimala would have expressed herself it would have been in vain, that could be confirmed by her mother-in-law's response towards her ill health. "God knows what's wrong with her, she has been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her away if you want to. I never heard of women going to hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don't have heavy periods. What a fuss. But these women who have never had any children are like that." (89). At last, she killed herself. Silence, in a way becomes a symbol of high endurance on the part of a person who is silent. "Her Aiji along with silence had taught her to "wait" the waiting game"(30) For a man waiting brings in restlessness but for woman the game of waiting starts quite early in her childhood "wait until you get married, wait until your husband comes, wait until you go to your in law's home, wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I got married, I had done nothing but wait" (30) Women are blamed unfeminine and unnatural if they break the rules of patriarchy so they are forced to cling to be termed feminine.

Shashi Deshpande provides perfect examples of victimized women in a patriarchal system. Jeeja, Jaya's maidservant supports her good for nothing husband by all means. She does not protest him for getting her co-wife, in turn, she justifies it by saying, "God didn't give us any children. That was his misfortune as well as mine. How could I blame him for marrying again? When I couldn't give him any children? After the death of her husband and his mistress, she willingly brings up their son, Rajaram and looks after his wife Tara. Jaya does not allow even Tara to abuse or curse her husband. She says, "Stop that don't forget he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that? (53)". Then there is Kusum who is an adopted girl by the childless Vanitamami. In a letter informing Jaya of Kusum's death, her mother writes: "But it was a good thing in a way. She was of no use to anyone after she went crazy, nobody needed her." After reading the letter Jaya tears it furiously. Kusum's madness and the way she committed suicide by jumping into the dry well depicts her insecurity as she failed in one of her goals, a male

child – the winning of man’s heart, his long life and the propagation of his lineage through a male child are the goals of the traditional married woman. Mukta is Jaya’s immediate neighbour at her Dadar’s flat who tortures herself by fasting, ‘If it wasn’t her ‘Saturday’ it was her ‘Monday’ or her ‘Thursday’. Jaya’s reaction towards her piety: “Mukta had more days of fasts than days on which she could eat a normal meal. Her self-mortification and reproach seemed to be the most positive thing about her. And yet her piety – surely it was that which prompted those fasts – seemed meaningless, since she had already forfeited the purpose of it, the purpose of all Hindu woman fasts – the avoidance of widowhood”. Even Jaya’s Vanitamami falls into this category of performing numerous *Pujas* and fasts in the hope of getting a child. “But she had gone on with her fasts, her ritual circumambulations of the Tulsi Plant of the Peepal tree, even when their aim had gone beyond her reach, when her uterus had shrivelled and her ovaries atrophied.” (67).

Jaya, in this novel realizes how her voice is muted with respect to articulating her experiences. In her retrospection, she is alive to the restrictions on her self expression. Her narrative, which forms the novel *That Long Silence*, written in secrecy, is a breaking of the silence imposed on her because it is a violation of the gendered modes of self expression. The novel reveals the limits on the women's ability to participate in a free circulation of ideas and employ 'fiction' as a mode of self-expression. Mohan takes strong exception to Jaya’s story published in a magazine where it had won a prize because he feels the story will be constructed as real (by their acquaintances), and they would see him in a poor light. He says, “They will all know, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us... How could you write these things?” (12) Interestingly, Mohan offers a paradoxical reading of the story here. In feeling hurt, he seems to find the story realistic and hence feels reviled in public; yet, he insists that he is not the man in the story though others would mistake it to be so. This acts as a force containing Jaya's free expression, and she turns to writing 'womanly' pieces in women's magazines, gaining popularity. This regulated and conformist mode of

writing is appreciated by Mohan. In this entire episode, the determining factor is not Mohan's individual preferences or attitudes. It is the patriarchal 'role' that drives Mohan into such a position. In the novel, this is indicative of how the patriarchal order silences the modes of self expression of women and interferes in women's cultural self-representation.

The force of Deshpande's indictment of women's lines lies in the way she is able to universalize their silence, chiefly by drawing similarities among Jaya and a variety of other female figures, including characters from Indian history and myth; and among three generations of women in her family (Jaya, her mother, her grandmother); among different classes of women (Jaya, her maid Jeeja); among different kinds of women of the same class and generation (Jaya, her cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbor Mukta). (Rajan 1993: 83)

Towards the end of her reflective narrative Jaya remembers how in Sanskrit drama, women characters spoke not in Sanskrit but in Prakrit. With this, she also comes to the realization that her reading of her own subjectivity had been wrong. All along in the narrative, Jaya has been afflicted by the silence imposed on her. Her perception of herself as silenced subject is now revised. She realizes that what had been imposed on her is not silence, but a 'different language' : 'I have been speaking Prakrit myself (22). If, she has all along felt herself unheard, it is not due to 'silence', not due to muted subjectivity. It is because the patriarchal institution of communication, the 'normative' discourse, is at variance with her speech which is conducted in a 'different language'. In that sense with this realization she comes to see her reflective narrative of her subjectivity as conducted in the patriarchal discourse. If she has been speaking in Prakrit and has been rendered silent it implies that her language is 'unheard', made not only incomprehensible but also 'unsounded' by the male discourse. Now, if she herself viewed her life as silenced, 'I will have to erase the silence between us' (23), it is so because she too had not recognized the nature of her language.

The whole novel is a preparation for that articulation which will break her long silence after



realization of this fact. The reader is given sufficient hint that she is going to break her passivity. Having realized her position, Jaya would not accept the earlier image of a pair of bullocks yoked together, signaling a loveless couple. She comes to realize that life can always be made possible. The novelist tries to establish that is not only the patriarchal set up which is responsible for silencing the women. The responsibility also lies within the victim to refuse, to raise a voice and to break that silence. The novel traces the growth of the protagonist from a state of weakness, feeling of failure to that of relaxation. She accomplishes this through self-assessment and self-criticism.

Finally Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian wife which has turned her into a non-entity. Shashi Deshpande says about *That Long Silence* ".....and then I wrote *That Long Silence* almost entirely a woman's novel nevertheless, a book about the silencing of the one half of the humanity" Prasad 2005: 58).

#### Works cited

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