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## Imagery in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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### **Abstract:**

Shashi Deshpande, a well renowned name in Indian literature in English. She has won 1990 Sahitya Academi Award for her novel *That Long Silence*. She has penned a dozen of novels and still pursuing her career as a writer by writing in various other forms like essay writing and Children books. She has also got Padma Shree Award in 2009. Her novel *That Long Silence* written in 1988 still after the two decades has remained one of the acclaimed works and read with great enthusiasm. In this novel the silence of the half population of the earth is questioned in the sense that what is it that makes them remain silent and why? The main protagonist of the novel, Jaya analyzes in her inner being about the happenings going on in world and those also that happens with her. Though she also remains silent but her inner voice never let her remain at rest or idle. The struggle to live life within her keeps going in her. She views each and every thing in a different and interesting manner. Various images strikes in her mind when she speculates at varying objects. Thus imagery used by Deshpande uncovers the hidden voice of Jaya and her intellect in one or the other way.

**Keywords: Silence, question, struggle, image, intellect, inner voice.**

Imagery is a tactics to create an image by the usage of language. Imagery, “is an author's use of vivid and descriptive language to add depth to his or her work. It appeals to human senses to deepen the reader's understanding of the work. Powerful forms of imagery engage all of the senses and use metaphors to express ideas and concepts” (*Wikipedia*). Thus in more exact detailing we can say that it is an author's use of descriptive language which creates a mental image in reader's brain. Thus an image travels from one brain to another through language. C. D. Lewis has defined an image as “...a picture made out of words...imagery is at the core of the poem and that a poem may itself be an image composed of a multiplicity of images” (qtd. in Ravichandaran 160). Images give a new blending of idea and its meaning, thus the image should be relevant to the theme or the idea recurrent in the work. Lewis further elaborates his idea, “Whether in verse, then, or in prose, the principle that organizes the images is a concord between image and theme, the images lighting the way for the theme and helping it reveal it, step by step, to the writer, the theme as it thus grows up controlling more and more deployment of the images” (qtd. in Ravichandaran 160). The language used to conceptualize images is usually found figurative. Usage of similes and metaphors in the language help words to present the concrete images.

Images can be of various types. They can be distinguished according to their usage and appeal to particular senses. J. A. Cuddon has described them as:

Many images (but by no means all) are conveyed by figurative language, as in metaphor, simile, synecdoche, onomatopoeia and metonymy. An image may be visual (pertaining to the eye), Olfactory (smell), Tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste), Abstract (in which case it will appeal to what may be described as the intellect) and kinaesthetic (pertaining to the sense of movement and bodily effort). (*Dictionary of literary Terms* 413)

Shashi Deshpande is a renowned Indian writer who writes in English. She has won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 for her famous novel *That long Silence*. Her novels include *The Dark Holds no Terror* (1980), *If I Die Today* (1982), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *A Matter of Time* (1996) and so on. Her novel *That Long Silence* is the story of Jaya who all her life remained silent and at every stage tried to break through it and express herself. From her childhood she is forced to remain silent and remain submissive first to her father later to her husband. Deshpande used bounty of images to express the inner conflicts and thinking process of Jaya. She time and again tries to express herself. She contemplates; rationalize various situations in her life. The images used by Deshpande can be distinguished in various types but in this paper I have described them in three types on the basis of convenience. These are animate imagery, inanimate imagery and cultural imagery. In animate imagery the images of all living organisms are included. Jaya relates the idea of marriage to, “A pair of bullocks yoked together” (Deshpande 8). This is very apt and impressing image and can be interpreted in various manners. It may be interpreted that Jaya considers that they are forcefully attached to each other not by their own wish. They are imposed on each other in such a manner that they even can't separate from each other, because that would cause them pain. Thus Jaya is keeping up with the circumstances because going in different directions would be painful. She ponders over these thoughts because her husband Mohan doesn't understand his wife's emotions. When she deliberates, “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” (Deshpande 8). The emotional gap between Jaya and Mohan has led her to think like this about their relationship. She is forced not to convey her emotions to him because she is denied of any speech. Next image is that of a yawning cat. Vanitamami calls out her pet cat but the cat ignores her. Here jaya equates herself with the as an ignoring being when Vanitamami suggested her phrase “a husband is like a sheltering tree” (Deshpande 32). She has suggested her to keep it nurturing. At that time she has ignored her but now she reasons that without this tree she wouldn't be safe enough.

The image of sheltering tree has changed its meanings to her. The tree is necessary for their life thus it should be nurtured carefully. She has reasoned that even over nurturing or over watering may prove fatal to it. She meditates that if we nurture a relationship with all deceits and lies then it would end very soon. She thinks it as being Jaya not Suhashini, the name Mohan

preferred instead of Jaya because Suhasini stand for, “a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman” (Deshpande 15-16). But Jaya stood for a bolder woman who is capable of victory. Imagery of death is portrayed though the image of lemmings drives. There is misconception that they commit mass suicide. They jump from mountain when they migrate from one place to another. But they die because of their migratory behavior as when they try to cross any water body and the flow of water swept them and thus they die. As it is explained:

Driven by strong biological urges, some species of lemmings may migrate in large groups when population density becomes too great. Lemmings can swim and may choose to cross a body of water in search of a new habitat. In such cases, many may drown if the body of water is so wide as to stretch their physical capability to the limit. This fact, combined with the unexplained fluctuations in the population of Norwegian lemmings, gave rise to the misconception. (qtd. in *Wikipedia*)

Deshpande has given reference to lemmings, “A peaceful and colourful death. And I had thought of the lemmings then. Wrongly perhaps, for I’m not too sure that the lemmings commit suicide. Maybe it isn’t the death wish that drives them into the depths of the sea to die, but a kind of a mass altruism, unconscious of course, carried to the extreme”(Deshpande 10). Jaya focuses on the death wishes of various people but she finds Kusum’s the most horrendous. Thus the imagery is enforced through the image of Lemmings. Imagery of death runs throughout the novel and Jaya analyzes that how death can affect others’ life.

Through the story of Sparrow and Crow Deshpande has created an image of a priggish sparrow that chooses her home her kids over crow. The soft and weak looking sparrow eventually kills the strong crow. Sparrow builds her nest and in it laid her eggs her babies came out of it. One day it rains heavily and a crow comes asking her help and she burns it. It shows the cruel part of her personality which changed eventually with the consequences. Nilima a girl from neighbourhood is related to the image of “a crow in a family of fair- skinned swans” (Deshpande 62). Her complexion is dark but the whole family’s complexion is a bit fair one. Her grandmother wanted a boy at her place and thus always cursed her. Her undesirability causes her a disastrous condition of unacceptability in her family, so she has become an odd one out.

In inanimate imagery the study of nonliving images would be done. Shashi Deshpande has tried to depict the condition of surroundings where Jaya lives with her family. First image is that of Garbage. It reads as, “A trail of garbage on the soiled cement stairs, cigarette butts, scraps of paper, bits of vegetable peel. And red stains – squirts of paan-stained spit – on the wall, macabrely brightening up the dinginess” (Deshpande 7). Through this sordid image two types of imagery that can be implied here one is visual and another is olfactory connected to smell. Similar image is also shown when Nayana, a pregnant woman from Jaya’s neighbourhood carries from her flat downstairs. Next image of inanimate things comes when Jaya visits her parental home and especially to the sitting room. She compares the setting of furniture and other decorative things to the setting of things in a museum. The outside sitting room is compared to



museum which never changes during the course of time. In a museum historical objects are arranged. No emotional feelings are attached to the objects of museum. Their value lies with their belongingness to some historical place as a memory of some era. No personal attachments are related to them. Here the living room is neglected from a long time thus has become very much like a museum. Imagery of fading paper flower in that room portrays the fading away of emotions from life.

The image of skating on a very thin ice of life is related to the fears of leading a happy life. As when anyone skates on a very thin layer of ice that person has to remain very conscious of not breaking it through or putting his foot on the cracked ice, as it may cause a dangerous wound on his body. Similarly daily may seem easy to the onlookers but to maintain the daily routines is a really difficult task which is working everything on time without forgetting anything and doing them on time. Jaya is afraid of misfortunes, in the meaning of imagery a crack that would break the whole surface, but she is also curious to live her life completely and fully. In life we have to be very careful. The imagery is very precious but meaningful, "...Rupa and I skated, hastily and fearfully, over the thin ice of our daily routine life. We didn't probe deeper; we didn't even want to."(Deshpande 47-8). Imagery of concrete jungle of buildings in Bombay is shown through an afraid and fearsome Jaya who has recently come from her village to this big city and finds the huge buildings all alike. The washed clothes flapped in the balconies give them a very monotonous look. The ugly walls of buildings don't affect their residents.

The cultural imagery includes the folks, the rituals, traditions and fasting and feasting habits, mythical figures taken from various holy or mythical books. Myth of tulsi plant is depicted as it is worshipped by the married women to protect their husbands from untimely deaths. As a pure plant or the plant deity it is worshipped so that women may avoid widowhood for themselves. Another myth is attacked on is the myth of getting Moksha by performing all the after death ceremonies perfectly. Moksha which is said to be a freedom from the circle of life and death, which is as natural a thing that happens with every species on earth it is not humans specific. Here the deeds done by a human being in his life is not a matter of concern rather the well paid funeral, how idiotic is that in itself. Various mythical characters like Cassandra are also used, who was first given the boon to listen the future but later cursed by Apollo that her prophecies would not be believed. She is referred as an image of tragedy. Various other figures are also used like Dasarath for the portrayal of retribution that has to pay back his sin of killing Sharavan by giving away his son twelve years of exile, whom he had loved more than his own life.

Thus Shashi Deshpande has effectively used imagery in her novel. Through depicting various images she has tried to sketch the hidden ideas of Jaya's mind. These images rendered the psychological aspects of her life. Jaya's outlook on life and its complexities are delineated through these images. Her very psyche speaks through these images. Whenever she finds herself in a difficult situation she relate that incident to some another image which she has seen somewhere in her life. The language used in a specific way has attributed the reader with a golden chance to have an enthralled and enlightened reading of the text. Though the very

complications are enhanced by the figurative language used by Deshpande, but it has also made the very persuasion comprehensible. The images like Lemmings' Drive; Two bullocks yoked together; Yawning or ignoring cat specially the beast imagery was demanding and needed a background study to understand it but overall the language and imagery used remained astounding and simply brilliant. Use of mythical figures from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and some from Greek mythologies characterized the concentration of mind of the author.

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