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Caught in the Labyrinth of Realization and Restriction: A Study of the Major Women Characters in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract:

Women have maintained silence as a strategy of survival in Indian society since times immemorial. Women's silence has been held responsible for their subaltern existence. But silence, at times, strengthens their inner 'I' in voicing their need. This research paper examines how Shashi Deshpande realistically portrays the condition of women of Indian society through the character of Jaya, the protagonist and other women characters in her novel, *That Long Silence*. It also shows that these women realize that the silence that they have maintained since their childhood and the way they withstood the whirlwind of their suppression, have relegated them in the cage of restriction that they are anticipated to comply with. This research paper undertakes to bring forth how Deshpande has empowered these women by vandalizing the shackles of their passivity and by expunging their long 'silence'.

Keywords: Women, Silence, Tradition, Patriarchy, Empowerment

Shashi Deshpande writes about women of Indian society. She has various awards to her credit for bringing out the various facets of the society in her texts which focus on how women, from each and every strata of the Indian society, are caught between realisation and restriction. Deshpande's Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel *That Long Silence*, published in 1988, brings into being the conflict between modernity and tradition, silence and protest, liberty and restraint through the narration and action of the protagonist, Jaya and other women characters. From times immemorial, women's silence, rooted in their selves, has made men comfortable. Men have interpreted women's silence as dependency, powerlessness, frailty, inability, inaction, defenselessness, failure, weakness, subjugation and so on. This paper will analyse how, Shashi Deshpande, has portrayed women's silence in *That Long Silence*, how women are caught between restriction and realisation, and how Deshpande has tried to empower Jaya by making her realise that for subsistence and sustenance, it is

necessary to break this silence that she has maintained since childhood.

Jaya is the representative of all middle class women of Indian society who have suffered in silence. The story of her life resembles the lives of Indian women who spend their entire lives to maintain their identity as daughter, sister, wife, and mother, compromising their desires, preferences and their own space. The novel begins with Jaya's seventeen-year-old marriage falling apart when her husband Mohan lost his job after being caught involved in business malpractice and corruption. To keep up her husbands' reputation, Jaya leaves her Churchgate house and sends her children Rahul and Rati to stay with her family friend. Introducing herself, her relationship with Mohan and her present situation, Jaya explains:

Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel.... A pair of bullocks yoked together... that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here.... It is here that my vision fails. I cannot distance myself from us and what happened to us, however much I would like to do so. A pair of bullocks yoked together...a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? 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. (*That Long Silence* 7-8)

Presently living in Makrandmama's Dadar flat, Jaya's real self is disrupted in the whirlwind of frustration troubled by the reminiscences of her past. "Each incident, a mini story, a fiction in itself, imparts an unexplored vision to the narrative. The dejections and disappointments of unrequited selfhood, the illusions and pinning of love and the yearnings for companionship make up the stream of Jaya's consciousness" (Swain 65). Jaya begins her story:

I'm writing of us. Of Mohan and me. And I know this – you can never be the heroine of your own story. Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.... The mirror is always treacherous; it shows you only what you want to see. And, perhaps, others too see in your face only what they want to see. Yet the fascination of seeing yourself in the mirror, of knowing how you look to others, never palls. (*That Long Silence* 1-2)

The metaphorical transparency of mirror can be explained. If a woman looks at herself in the mirror of culture derived from the male experiences and constructed by the patriarchy, it reflects a culture that indicates the inferiority of women; it brings out the truth of a culture that has set restrictions on women and that has formed the inner consciousness of women; it

shows how a woman is not born but made following the male codes of conduct thus marking the female as sexually commodified and somewhat like a product of robotics, always ready to take men's order and serve and satisfy men. Deshpande's concept of women's self is projected here when Jaya deliberately remarks that "self-revelation is a cruel process" because "the real 'you' never emerges", since a woman's self is culturally constructed and her identity is defined by a dominant patriarchal culture. Sheila Rowbotham in her book, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973) states that: "The prevailing social order stands as a great and resplendent hall of mirror (before her). It owns and occupies the world as it is and the world as it is seen and heard" (27).

Jaya, who every time stands in front of social and cultural mirror, is reminded of her identity as a woman, a minimal cultural category, a weak biological construct thrown at the periphery and considered not intellectual enough to express herself, and not possessing ability of writing her life. The four pillars holding our present culture, as Susan Friedman points out: "MAN", "WHITE", "CHRISTIAN" and "HETEROSEXUAL" (38) (capitalization in the original text) are the manufacturers of the cultural mirror and the emblem of glory, prominence and power. The typical customs and patterns of our society constitute the "great cultural hall of mirrors" contaminated with notions and views of masculinity where the privilege of a man prevails over a woman and her suppressed identity, because a man looking at the mirror can be well oblivious of his caste, creed, colour and sex but a woman cannot. Jaya, like other Indian middle class women, feels melancholy and downcast when she looks at it and is reminded that she is marginalized. Every time she looks at it, she experiences a sense of dejection and inferiority set by the community of men. Her despondent self with a heavy heart finds no place to outpour her despair. Yet she strives to seek space for herself. At this juncture, it is remarkable to note what Shari Benstock comments, summing up Kathleen Woodward's arguments in the essay, "Simone de Beauvoir: Aging and its Discontents": "Women's writings often proceed from anxiety rather than desire and are written under the sign of melancholia rather than mourning" (8). In other words, Susan Stanford Friedman puts it: "Writing the 'self' shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech" (41).

Jaya, the protagonist of the novel *That Long Silence*, is caught between realization and restriction. She tries to strike a balance between her role as a wife, mother, daughter and sister through her disjunctive, fragmented, episodic flash-back and flash-forward narration of the text, but her failure as a writer begins to surface as the story unfolds. The trials and tribulations of her family seem to project a picture that bears a resemblance to the middle class families of Indian society. Her respect and recognition as a wife and mother recline in jeopardy and the dream of a happy family residing together in their home appear to be in question: Where had that glossy coloured picture of a happy family vanished? (*That Long*

Silence 172)

Talking about her marriage, Jaya remembers Vanitamami's suggestion just before her wedding: "Remember, Jaya,' she had said, 'a husband is like a sheltering tree" (*That Long Silence* 32). She also added: "if your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it; take up a hobby instead – cats, may be, or your sister's children" (*That Long Silence* 31). Jaya carefully examines that after all these years of staying together as a husband and a wife, these words of Vanitamami reverberated in her ears. She ponders that a woman's self cannot stand alone in front of the cultural mirror and she definitely needs a patriarchal shoulder to support herself. Being caught in the puzzle of realization and restriction, Jaya contemplates her relationship with Mohan, the relation between a wife and a husband – a husband who is considered:

A sheltering tree. Without the tree you are dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. These followed logically. And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. This too followed, equally logically. But in Saptagiri we had a creeper that was watered and manured assiduously; yet it died – of too much water, of white ants in the manure that destroyed its roots. And so...? The truth was that I did not know what to say, how to react. But he saw it otherwise.... He was wrong. So many things can be lost, abandoned or misplaced – but the habit of caring is very hard to get rid of. Which was why I listened to him so patiently as he talked. (*That Long Silence* 32)

Thus, Jaya gradually became adept in her role as a wife developing the habit of maintaining silence in presence of her husband. To her, marriage is the name of change – change in habit, change in role, change in responsibility, change in identity and even change of name in case of wife but not of husband. She writes: 'Actually, my name isn't Jaya at all. Not now, I mean. It's Suhasini'. Where did that come from? 'Marriage. It's the name Mohan gave me when we got married" (*That Long Silence* 15). Jaya's father Appa has given this name 'Jaya' to her which means 'victorious'. But it sounds so dominating to Mohan. And an unwritten law in the husband-wife relationship is that a woman cannot dominate. Therefore, it occurred to Mohan that the name 'Suhasini' seemed apt for a woman who is going to enter the orbit of marriage and who is expected to be submissive. Jaya remembers her duty as a wife: "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, you're safe. That poor idiotic woman Suhasini believed in this. I know better now. I know that safety is always unattainable. You're never safe" (*That Long Silence* 17). Jaya developed her skills as a mother looking after her children. She recollects: "Once, trying to soften Rahul's hostility, trying to generalize to make it a non-issue, she had said, "After all, every son must fight his father to prove himself, every daughter her mother"" (*That Long Silence* 9).

But now in Dadar flat, it seemed to Jaya that time has suddenly stopped. There has been a break in her daily work as a wife and as a mother:

The truth was that we had both lost the props of our lives. Deprived of his routine, his files, his telephone, his appointments, he seemed to be to be no one at all; certainly not that man, my husband, around whose needs and desires my own life revolved. There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing for me to do, nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy. The woman who had shopped and cooked, cleaned, organised and cared for her home and her family with such passion... where had she gone? We seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies and after we had dealt with them we faced blankness. The nothingness of what had seemed a busy and full life was frightening.... And yet I had curious sense of freedom. There was nothing to be cleaned, nothing to be arranged or rearranged, put back in its place, tidied. I was free, after years, of all those monsters that had ruled my life, gadgets that had to be kept in order, the glass ware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curios that had to be kept spotless and dust-free, and those clothes, God, all those never-ending piles of clothing that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again...how much time I had spent dusting and polishing them, how punctilious I have been about it... (*That Long Silence* 25)

She realises that her waiting game that began in her childhood is over now with Mohan losing his job. She remembers:

‘I must do something. This waiting is getting me down’.... 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 nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come home, waiting for the milk, the servant, the lunch-carrier man...and above and beyond this, there had been for me that other waiting... waiting fearfully for disaster, for a catastrophe. I always had this feeling – that if I’ve escaped it today, it’s still there round the corner waiting for me; the locked door, the empty house, the messenger of doom bringing news of death. With Mohan’s confession, I was actually relieved. Here it was at last – my disaster. No more waiting, no more apprehension, no more fears. (*That Long Silence* 30)

In the novel there are other women characters who struggle for survival, whose unparalleled patience and endurance show that they too are caught between realisation and

restriction. Women realise and understand, but men rationalise and tend to find logic in every situation. Rabindranath Tagore comments in his autobiographical novel *The Home and the World* that: "Men can only think...women have a way of understanding without thinking. Woman was created out of God's own fancy. Man, He had to hammer into shape" (43). Deshpande's most suppressed woman character in the novel, Kusum, is crushed under the load of subjugation being a woman. She could not defend herself for being not much literate and consequently suffers from insanity. This is realistic in the sense that many Indian women who do not get education have to endure patriarchal whims in silence and therefore they die like Kusum in silence.

Kusum, Vanitamami's niece, was subsumed along the lines of gender discrimination right from her birth. It was as if Dilip, her brother, was born with golden spoon in mouth, for he was a man. Dilip was always given preference in the family despite the fact that he failed in his matriculation examination thrice. But he amassed fortune by corrupt practices. People in the family felt proud of him not only because he was wealthy, but also because he was a man. Jaya recalls, "Yes, Dilip was born for success. From the very beginning he was ready to do anything that helped him to get on. His motto was, in his own execrable English, 'whose father's what goes!' Whereas Kusum carried the aura of defeat about her from her birth" (*That Long Silence* 23).

In India, the period of post-departure of British, mark the beginning of a pattern of thinking among the Indians that exhibits knowledge of English as the parameter of measuring superiority. Following this discriminating trend, Vanitamami once asked Jaya: "Why don't you teach our Kusum some English, Jaya, her English is very weak" (*That Long Silence* 21). Kusum was looked down upon in the family – because of her superficial knowledge in English, because she could not give birth to a son and because her husband did not have a good earning. Jaya remembers, Vanitamami's question: "Why don't you ask your husband to get our Kusum's husband a better job? Why don't you take our Kusum to a lady doctor, poor thing, she has three daughters, at least let the fourth be a son. Why don't you take Kusum to Bombay and show her to a good doctor? She's behaving funnily..." (*That Long Silence* 21).

Caught in the maze of restriction, Jaya being a woman could realise the suffering that Kusum was going through. In this context it is important to note that all women, despite of race, class, culture and even education, suffer under the fangs of patriarchal subjugation. Their stories are same which bear the hallmark of oppression, suppression, repression and depression. This brings forth the concept of 'shared identity' among them. Susan Stanford Friedman comments that "instead of seeing themselves as solely unique, women often explore their sense of shared identity with other women, an aspect of identification that exists in tension with a sense of their own uniqueness" (*That Long Silence* 44). So did Jaya with

Kusum. Jaya confesses that:

As a child I had disliked Kusum, a dislike that was later tempered to an indifferent contempt. Even at the last when she seemed so pitiful, with her mind disoriented, she had managed to irritate me and yet I had resisted when Mohan had tried to stop me from helping her. For the first time in years, I had really fought him.... “Look, Jaya, I’m not being unreasonable. Have I ever come in the way of helping any of your people? I’ve always allowed you to do what you want. But this woman is not just sick, she’s mentally sick. Is it wise to have her at home? Think of the children...” (*That Long Silence* 19)

Despite Mohan’s resistance, Jaya took Kusum with her in her home. She nursed her with care and necessary compassion Kusum deserved at that moment, while Mohan, Jaya’s mother – Ai, Jaya’s brothers – Dada and Ravi, all of them tried to put a stop in Jaya’s firm determination in empathizing and curing Kusum. Jaya was surprised to see their inhuman actions:

Such different persons, my husband, my mother, my two brothers...it had amused me to see how alike they were in their objections. ‘Why do you get involved? They said. And ‘think of the children’. As if Kusum was a raving maniac, out to destroy my children, instead of being a poor, frightened, defeated woman, whose urge for destruction had been turned inwards. (*That Long Silence* 20)

Once, Kusum went to stay with her in-laws for few days. The day before she was about to come back with her husband, Kusum threw herself into a well and died. She did not die of drowning into the water of the well but she died out of bent neck because there was no water in the well. Jaya remembers, “‘I have some bad news for you,’ Ai had written to me. ‘Your aunt keeps moaning and crying, but it was a good thing in a way. She was of no use to anyone after she went crazy, nobody needed her’” (*That Long Silence* 22). But now Jaya ponders that perhaps it was her fate that she would pass away in silence. Being born of “a father who cared for nothing but smoking and movies, who never worked a day in his life; a mother whose world centered round her youngest, the baby on her lap, while the rest of her kids ran around in wild abandon, unkempt, dirty, unfed...what chance did Kusum have with parents like that? (*That Long Silence* 22). But somewhere Jaya feels at home when she thinks that “...with Kusum’s madness I became aware of my own blessed sanity. Thank God, Kusum, you’re nuts, I had thought; because you’re that, I know I’m balanced, normal and sane (*That Long Silence* 24).

Another woman caught in the shackles of restriction is Jaya’s paternal grandmother, *ajji*, who lived in Saptagiri. *Ajji* being a widow had shaved her head following Indian tradition of widowhood, and “had denuded herself of all those things that make up a woman’s

life. She had no possessions, absolutely none, apart from the two saris she wore” (*That Long Silence* 26). There was no furniture in her room except the large bed without mattress on which Jaya’s grandfather used to sleep. “There were also two chairs in her room, large wooden chairs with arms...Aiji herself sat on the bare ground and slept on a straw mat at night. The bed was a memorial to grandfather and the chairs meant for any male who, wearing trousers could not sit comfortable on the ground” (*That Long Silence* 26). It seems to Jaya that *ajji* accepted the traditional restriction. When *ajji* became mother, she too longed for a son who would support her and her family in future. But her most beloved son, Jaya’s father – Appa did not hold her hand in need as Jaya remembers: “And yet Appa, her youngest, her best - loved son, left her and went away after he married Ai. They blamed Ai for it, they called Appa cruel, but I understood why he had to get away” (*That Long Silence* 29). Jaya was close to her father. She recollects:

One morning, soon after Appa’s death, I woke up and remembered that he was dead. And I had a sense of loss that was not vague but specific. I thought of that place where he should at the moment, his bed. And with a picture of his absence from the bed, there was a terrifying sense of emptiness in me. I felt then that I had not known till that moment what death, what his death really meant. Blankness. Nothingness. (*That Long Silence* 66)

After Appa died, *ajji* gave up even her single meal, became skinny and died within six months. The effect of her father’s death on her *ajji* was unbearable. “But Ai? How can she sit there so coolly packing up as if she doesn’t care that Appa is dead, as if going to Ambegaon will make it better? (*That Long Silence* 137) But her mother, Ai, learned to live without his father, “who, when her marriage was over, had gone back to her home in Ambegaon as if her twenty years with Appa in Saptagiri had been only an interlude” (138). Little Jaya seeing Ai as a widow could perceive the difference between marriage and widowhood, as she recollects:

Ai looking earnestly into the mirror, applying her *kumkum* with the tip of her ring finger, gently spreading the red powder, making the circle larger and larger, and finally a large, perfect red circle shining in the middle of her forehead – that was marriage. And then the blankness, the empty space – how large Ai’s forehead was, how white and bony – that was widowhood. A clean, definite line between the two. But for me? (*That Long Silence* 139)

Jaya’s empty heart longing for her father’s love is evident when she said: “No more sitting on his cycle before him... Appa cycling three miles into town to see *ajji* and three miles back home to Ai again, cycling between the two women, up and down the undulating roads, his heart pumping furiously. Yes, that’s right, they were responsible for his death, those two women. Ai and *ajji*” (*That Long Silence* 136-137).

Though wedged in the whirlwind of restriction, Jaya had seen how two of her grandmothers exercised supremacy and exerted control in her family. She remembers: “My two *ajjis*, two entirely different women, had been alike in the power they had wielded over their families. Looking back, it seems to me that their children lived their lives reacting against them; lives that had turned out to be, ultimately, a battlefield of dead hopes and ambitions” (*That Long Silence* 82). Citing one such revolting relationship between Vanitamami and her grandmother, other-*ajji*, Jaya, brings into discussion, how childless women are discriminated, maltreated in family and stigmatized as ‘barren’ in Indian society. Vanitamami – Jaya’s maternal aunt, a ‘barren’ woman in the novel, had no voice in her family after her marriage to Chandumama. “Since the day she got married she like the rest of Ai’s family, was dominated and ruled by that ghoul, her mother-in-law, my other-*ajji*. Even Vanitamami’s saris were chosen for her by the old woman. Later, there was Ai, who went back to her old home after Appa’s death; there still is Ai” (*That Long Silence* 45). However, the ‘two weak females’ (*That Long Silence* 45), childless Vanitamami whose “uterus, having failed in its life-bearing purpose, was finally carrying death” (*That Long Silence* 106) and frail and feeble Kusum, were alike – “both of them born failures, born losers” (*That Long Silence* 45). Once Ravi made fun of Vanitamami describing how she refused to remove her uterus even after doctor suggested it suspecting of cancer. Jaya became:

...furious. What did he (Ravi) know? What did he understand of women? Was it the Greeks who had said that a woman is her womb? I had laughed when I had read that. But can any woman deny the link? Those painful spasms in the middle of each cycle, those massive driving-on-to-madness contracting pains of childbirth – could any woman endure them if not for the fact that they were reminders of that link? (*That Long Silence* 107)

After other-*ajji*’s death, Vanitamami had suddenly changed and had become belligerent, confrontational, and argumentative. Her cantankerous attitude was surprising, and, it seemed “that pent-up rage escaping. And Ai seemed unable to cope with the metamorphosed Vanitamami. Her twenty-year domination in her brother’s home was being questioned, and she was losing the battle. She was now desperately looking out for a place she could retreat to...” (*That Long Silence* 104).

At this moment, Dada and Ravi somehow tried to escape from their duties as sons. They expected that Jaya would come forward to take Ai’s responsibility thereafter. Jaya wonders: “...am I going to provide that refuge? Why can’t it be you? Why does it have to be me? The hint fell most heavily on me, and from the corner I had been pushed into I wanted to cry out: *Why does it have to be me?*” (*That Long Silence* 104) Jaya pours out her anger:

It frightened me the way Ai clung to me these days.... She had become childishly possessive.... It seemed to me such a waste, all that emotion I no

longer needed, no longer wanted, poured on to me. When I had passionately wanted her love, she had ignored me and concentrated on her sons.... When I got married, she had been unperturbed, there had been not even a pretence of tears when I had left home. (*That Long Silence* 105-106)

There is another reason for Jaya's resentment in the text. Her mother could not live up to her expectation of her unwritten right and privilege over mother's jewellery. Ai was given jewellery of her ancestors, particularly pearls, by Jaya's maternal grandmother, other-*ajji*, as a mark of legacy, as a mark of family tradition. Ai adhered to the pearls even after she became a widow but stopped wearing it. Ai believed that Jaya being the only granddaughter of other-*ajji* would naturally get those hoard of jewellery because Chandumama had no children. But when other-*ajji* died, Jaya was not in Ambegaon. Ai came to know that other-*ajji* had given all the amassed jewels to Chandumama, and had left nothing for her. Chandumama was her son after all. The only thing that *ajji* had given to Ai was "the pearl bracelets and the one string of pearls – these had been Ai's only legacy" (*That Long Silence* 112). Ai often wanted them to give to Jaya as they were "the least valuable of her jewels" (*That Long Silence* 112). But the conflict subsided when Jaya found that her mother has given those pearls to Asha when it should have passed to Jaya's daughter, Rati, as a legacy.

Jaya goes to search the reason behind this. Thinking of her past, she discusses the relationship between Ai and her daughter-in-law, Asha. She openly remarks that Ai was enthusiastic in Asha's beauty, charm and because of her father's money. Ai never cared for Asha's behaviour and individuality. Ai and Vanitamami embraced and cuddled her like a baby doll in her wedding day. "They had hung over her as she sat decked in silks and jewels" (*That Long Silence* 111). Jaya too loved Asha, not for her jewellery, but for her inherent good qualities. But the day she saw Asha wearing those pearls, Jaya was resentful. For Jaya thinks that Rati is Ai's own granddaughter, whereas Asha is her daughter-in-law who has come from another family. Jaya explains:

I was angry, not so much for myself, as for Rati. I didn't want those pearls, I had never hankered after jewellery myself; and even if I had, the association of these with other-*ajji* would have spoilt them for me. But surely Rati, as a granddaughter, had a better right to them than Asha who was, after all, only a daughter-in-law?... The justification 'not for me, for my children' could not change the meaning of those words 'avarice' and 'greed'. Peel off the excuses and the avarice remained. (*That Long Silence* 112-113)

In Indian society, there is a pattern of thinking that women no longer belong to their own family after marriage. On the other hand, at times, it becomes difficult for an Indian family to accept their daughter-in-law as part of their own family; this creates estrangement

and self-detachment on the part of Indian women under the treatment of an intruder in the family of their in-laws. So where lies their abode – not residence, domicile, or habitat – but a ‘home’ of her own? These Indian women, caught in the labyrinth of realization and restriction, wonder: ‘Which world is my world? Where do I belong?’ Deshpande has been a keen observer of the conviction of the people of Indian society. She has deliberately picked up this issue that has percolated in the minds of the Indians from generation to generation and has opened it up before her readers to critically analyse and act upon it. Asha might have come from another family, but after her marriage, she has become part of Ai’s family. Therefore, Ai is sensible in giving her jewellery to Asha. But according to Jaya, this act of Ai is equated with an act where justice is denied, since Jaya is her daughter, whereas Asha is her daughter-in-law. Caught in the turbulence of realization, Jaya ponders an incident when Ramukaka has made her understand that Jaya is a part of Mohan’s family after her marriage to Mohan:

Once Ramukaka “had shown me a family tree he had prepared.... ‘Look, Jaya, this is our branch. This is our grandfather – your great grandfather – and here’s father, and then us....’

‘But Ramukaka’, I’d exclaimed, ‘I’m not here!’

‘You!’ He had looked up, irritated by the interruption, impatient at my stupidity. ‘How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family! You’re married, you’re now part of Mohan’s family. You have no place here’.... And I had swallowed my questions – the questions I’d wanted to ask Ramukaka...but hadn’t dared, for no one ever questioned Ramukaka, the head of the family.”

...I’d wanted to ask Ramukaka, if I don’t belong to this family, what about the Kakis and Ai? They married into this family, didn’t they, why are they not here? And what about *ajji*, who single-handedly kept the family together, why isn’t she here?

But I had said nothing – neither to Ramukaka, nor to Mohan. *Ajji* should be pleased with me. I had learnt it at last – no questions, no retorts. Only silence.

(*That Long Silence* 143)

Jaya’s silent resentment continued even after her marriage. Through matrimonial silences and suppressed feelings, Jaya, established a space of her own, but her real ‘self’ is torn apart between the chasms of the flexible norms of modernity and strict and rigid values of tradition. She had snubbed her silence at the beginning, but after frequent disdainful fights between the couple, Mohan retorted: “How could you? I never thought my wife could say such things to me. You’re my wife...” he had kept repeating” (*That Long Silence* 82). Later Jaya realized that “to him anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’” (*That Long Silence* 83). She states that: “A first love, a first affair, a first baby, a first quarrel – I suppose they are all unforgettable

landmarks but few first quarrels could have been as earth-shaking as ours was. In that I learnt so much, I shed so much of my ignorance, my naivety... (*That Long Silence* 81). Jaya realizes that "each relationship evolves its own vocabulary. Ours had been that of the workaday world. The vocabulary of love, which I had thought would come to us naturally and inevitably, had passed us by; so too had the vocabulary of anger" (*That Long Silence* 116).

Mohan reciprocated in one such situation that: "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her" (*That Long Silence* 83) and therefore he expected the same from Jaya. To carefully avoid her 'unwomanly' mistakes Jaya skulked back in the shell of silence and "the words remained unsaid" (*That Long Silence* 78) because she "knew his mood was best met with silence" (*That Long Silence* 78). Jaya reiterates:

Terrified of his disapproval, I had learnt other things too, though much more slowly, less painfully. I had found out all the things I could and I couldn't do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly. It was when I first visited his home that I had discovered how sharply defined a woman's role was.... Looking at those women, I had begun to think with contempt of Ai's slapdash ways, and of how she could not even hem properly. It was all her fault, I had thought; she had prepared me for none of the duties of women's life. (*That Long Silence* 83)

Caught in the web of restriction and realization, Jaya who heavily failed to assert her 'self' longs for freedom in retrospect. To her it occurred that so-called institution of marriage had been a major hindrance towards the growth and development of her real 'self' as she puts in: "I had failed then, failed at what I had been trying to achieve since we got married" (*That Long Silence* 97) and "...it was not Mohan but marriage that had made me circumspect" (*That Long Silence* 186). It is remarkable to note at this context that while Shashi Deshpande holds marriage responsible for Jaya's regression, Leila Seth, another Indian woman writer of great repute, states in her autobiography that marriage is "about finding someone who helps you become the best person you can be" (*On Balance* 454). She unfolds honestly: "I suppose I had potential but no confidence; I flowered after marriage. But many women wither after marriage, exhausted by cruelty, dismissiveness or the daily grind" (*On Balance* 465). In the novel, withering of the real self of Jaya has given birth to her three different 'selves' displaying the three different phases of her life: "Suhasini", "Jaya" and "Seeta"- the pseudonym that she takes to write and expose the plight of the middle class Indian women, who are hovering to search for their effaced identity as each self is like the many selves "waiting to be discovered...each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other" (*That Long Silence* 69).

Jaya remembers another moment of embarrassment when she slinked into silence. Once, after

her marriage, her relatives and in-laws had all laughed at her remark when she innocently and rightfully questioned "...why can't the boys do it (cooking)? Jaanu, or Shridhar? Why does it have to be me and Veena?" (*That Long Silence* 81). In the early days of their marriage, owing to the first months of her pregnancy, when the smell of oil and spices was nauseating to her, Jaya requested Mohan "Why don't you do the cooking today?" (*That Long Silence* 81). Mohan, as he grew up in Saptagiri, learning that "cooking, clearing up had been exclusively female operations" (*That Long Silence* 81), smiled and exclaimed: "You want me to cook?" (*That Long Silence* 81). Jaya realizes that Mohan's male chauvinistic attitude is natural to his upbringing; he is so different from Jaya's neighbour, Kamat, who once asked Jaya:

'Never seen a man cooking?You look surprised. I learnt it out of necessity.... Unnatural? Certainly not. It's very natural for a man who loves eating.... Have you noticed how the women make the man totally dependent and helpless in practical, everyday living by doing everything for them? And how the men relate to the women only by making a declaration of their helplessness? "Mother, I'm hungry"...that sort of thing.... I don't want to concede to any woman power over me....' (*That Long Silence* 152)

Mohan's smirk, so different from Kamat's assertiveness and the loud laughter of all those women and girls in *ajji's* house made Jaya sneak back to the comfortable refuge of silence. Swain observes: "The metaphor of silence for her is a retreat, a defense mechanism which helps her to express herself more comprehensively and artistically" (67). Jaya "...was conscious of having been chained to his (Mohan's) dream..." (*That Long Silence* 120) but she realizes that silence can shield her sovereignty, since "...escape was not possible" (*That Long Silence* 128) for her. Since a woman's 'self' is plural, associative and relative, she deliberately assumes the existence of her 'self' in terms of others related to her. Her happiness lies in the happiness of others; whereas she suffers in silence all alone, sacrifices her desires and wishes only to make others happy. Once Ramukaka advised, "Remember, Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (*That Long Silence* 138).

Women suffering in silence being mistreated, assaulted and often battered at the brutal hands of their husbands is what Mohan had seen in his family and therefore he believed that "women in those days were tough" (*That Long Silence* 36). Talking about his mother Avva, Mohan remembers how she awaited, night after night starving herself, for the return of his father though he never hinted of when he would come back. Avva herself would never pick up a morsel of grain but would never let her children await and go hungry for their father. He remembers:

They had all had their food, except her.... She gave them their dinner...and then she cooked rice for him again, for.... He wanted his rice fresh and hot, from a vessel that was untouched. He came in...sat down, drank a glass of water...and

then paused. 'Why there is no fresh *chutney* today?' he asked, not looking at her. She mumbled something. The next moment he picked up his heavy brass plate and threw it, not at her, but deliberately at the wall, which it hit with a dull clang. He stood up, and ... walked out of the house. (*That Long Silence* 35)

To Mohan, women's agony in silence is the measure of her strength, as Jaya puts it: "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was only the weapon. Silence and surrender. I'm a woman and I can understand her better; he's a man and he can't" (*That Long Silence* 36-37).

Mohan is numbed while Jaya's musings continues as Mohan's sister, Vimla's words reverberates in her ear: "how different I am from my mother? Five years married now – I performed my fifth *Manglaa-Gouri* puja this year – and I have no children. While Avva ... almost all my childhood I remember her pregnant. She didn't want that last child, she'd lost four or five babies by then, and she was desperate...". After Prema's marriage, the responsibility of the house fell on Vimla's shoulder owing to Avva's repeated pregnancy and Mohan's father – Anna's continual discouragement to Vimla to attend school: "Don't go to school then, who's asking you to go?" (*That Long Silence* 37) as he had put a stop to Prema's schooling when Sudha was born. Realizing the circumstances, Vimla, another woman character in the novel takes refuge in the shelter of silence. At this point of time, Jaya cogitates what Vimla once compared, "'Strange how different I am from my mother'" (*That Long Silence* 38). Yet, Jaya very skillfully pointed out "something in common between them, something that links the destinies of the two...the silence in which they died" (*That Long Silence* 39). Jaya dredged up Vimla's ending when she was bed ridden, severely suffering from heavy bleeding, while her mother-in-law, being a woman herself hardly paid heed to her recurrent illness. The only reason behind this was that Vimla was barren and could not bear a child. Jaya contemplates how Vimla's mother-in-law reacted in those days:

God knows what's wrong with her. She's 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've never had children are like that. (*That Long Silence* 39)

Jaya recalls how the doctor's suspicion came to be true for Vimla, when it turned out to be an ovarian tumour with metastases in her lungs, when it was too late for surgery, when Vimla dropped into coma, when she died after a week, silently like her mother.

Shashi Deshpande has picked up women characters from the lower strata of the society

too, who, in the course of development of the plot of the novel, are caught in the maze of restriction and realization. Nayana, a woman who sweeps in the street of Jaya's house, suffers in silence with the problem of her husband's longing for a male child in the house. This problem, very common though unfeeling, improvident and imprudent, still persists in all the layers of the society. Nayana had four children – two girls survived and two boys died soon after their birth. Thereafter, she yearned for a boy and therefore, once, placing her soft hands over her puffy abdomen carrying her baby, Nayana told Jaya that "this time, behnji...this time it is going to be a boy" (*That Long Silence* 27). Jaya was astonished towards her desire for a male child while she kept on cursing the men of her family as spendthrifts, of little worth, often waste hard earned money and addicted to alcohol. Nayana sharply replied to her: "why give birth to a girl, behnji, who'll only suffer because of men all her life? ... No, no, behnji, better to have a son" (*That Long Silence* 28), otherwise she contritely reported that "he (her husband) says he'll throw me out if I have another daughter" (*That Long Silence* 28). Nayana realizes that she has no role in deciding whether it will be a boy or a girl at her childbirth. But she is crushed under the load of patriarchal despotic attitude of her husband and finds difficult to save herself from the snare of his tyranny.

Another character, Jeeja, who had put her head in a noose, very much like Nayana, once rushed to Jaya seeking her help for her son Rajaram, a drunkard who was stabbed all over in his body by other fellow drunkards for money and left him to die on a footpath, was hospitalized the night before. On enquiry, Jeeja, who works at the house of Jaya, a domestic help, uttered:

Sion Hospital, *tai*. If you speak to the doctor there, they will look after him better, they will give him special care. Otherwise no one cares, no one is bothered about poor patients, they won't even tell us anything if we ask them. They bark at us as if we are dogs.... We don't need money, we can always borrow some. But you just talk to the doctor, *tai*, he will remember you, he will listen to you. Saheb is a big officer, you are his wife... (*That Long Silence* 160-161)

Tara, Rajaram's wife was not restraint and she was vexed at her husband's misdemeanors. In loathsome tone she articulated cursing her ill fate, "so many drunkards die...but this won't. He'll torture us all to death instead" (*That Long Silence* 53). Caught in the maze of realization and realization, Jeeja, who being a mother herself, is reluctant to open up and own up her son's offences. She hard-heartedly lashed at Tara: "Stop that! Don't forget, he keeps the *kumkum* on your forehead. What is a woman without that?" (*That Long Silence* 53). Deshpande did not stop here in bringing patriarchal domination into discussion even among the women of lower class of the society. Manda, Jeeja's eldest granddaughter, once revealed to Jaya, that Rajaram, her father, beats up Tara, her mother if she denies to give him money; and if Tara gives money to her husband not willfully but under Rajaram's despotism, she is

reproached by Jeeja. Manda suffered in silence and this everyday suffering of her mother had a deleterious effect on her psyche, as she expressed:

.... Where was it I had read an account of how baby girls were done to death a century or so back? They were, I had read in horror, buried alive, crushed to death in the room they were born in; and immediately after that, a fire was lit on the spot – to purify the place, they said. Perhaps it was to ensure death. (*That Long Silence* 53)

Jaya helped Jeeja in need. She feels that her own psychological state is no way better than Jeeja's. As already discussed in this paper, women's self is relative – they share a bond among them in need, they help each other when required, so did Jaya to Jeeja and vice versa, since both of them are women caught in the labyrinth of realization and restriction, devoid of class distinction. Jaya rightfully remarks:

All those happy women with husbands in good jobs, men who didn't drink and beat their wives, those fortunate women whose kitchen shelves gleamed with brass and stainless steel vessels – they were of no use to me. It was Jeeja and her like I needed; it was these women who saved me from the hell of drudgery. Any little freedom I had depended on them. (*That Long Silence* 52)

Longing for a male child is also visible in the middle class women like Mukta, Jaya's neighbour. Her husband, Arun, fell from a running train and died while Mukta was carrying her baby in her womb. People in her family consoled her with the thought that in absence of her husband, a son is expected to be born who would in future support her family. Jaya remembers: "...when Arun died they had tried to comfort her with the thought of the child who would be born; a son, possibly, who would be both her solace and her support. Instead there was Nilima, proud of her birth" (*That Long Silence* 64). Mukta's early widowhood and her grief over her loss led her to self-mortification. She kept on continuing her fasts: "If it wasn't 'her Saturday, it was her Monday,' or 'her Thursday'. Mukta had more days of fasts than days on which she could eat a normal meal" (*That Long Silence* 67). Once Mukta kept fast for *Hartalika* and made *shira* for Nilima, who wanted to eat it. But Mukta's mother-in-law, Mai, got fired and replied: "The girl should be fasting today, not eating sweets," she said. Mukta smiled (*That Long Silence* 133). Like all Hindu women, Mukta's fasts, reminded Jaya of Vanitamami: "...Vanitamami had begun the discipline when there had still been the hope in her of having children...it had been a kind of flaunting in Ai's face of her auspicious wifehood, as opposed to Ai's inauspicious widowhood" (*That Long Silence* 67-68). Longing for a male child has another facet also. In Indian society girls generally do not cremate dead bodies. This is stigmatized as a male task. This is evident from the conversation of Nilima and Jaya in the text: "...Today it was Satish and Mai – Mai's been after Satish to marry some girl, and today he said, "No thank you, I'm going abroad". And Mai gave such a screech. "Our son dead, the other running away, and not even a grandson;

who'll cremate us when we're dead?" Isn't that funny? Just imagine worrying about who'll cremate you. So I said, "Don't worry, Mai," I said, "I'll cremate you properly". And she turned on me. Grrr..." (*That Long Silence* 183).

This paper concludes with Jaya's realization that her attachment to Kamat was beneficial since he made her understand that Jaya can release the pressure of her living through her writing. What Mohan could not do, Kamat did for Jaya. Jaya confesses about her relationship with Mohan: "We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us." (*That Long Silence* 185). On the other hand, Jaya deliberately did not attend Kamat when he was dying, when he needed her presence by his side mostly. Talking of Kamat, Mukta told Jaya:

He was frightened of dying, Jaya, he was afraid of being alone. And you left him alone. You could have been with him, you could have stayed by his side, but you didn't, you just walked away; he could have been lying there for days, he could have just rotted there if he hadn't given me the keys, if I hadn't gone there that day. He was a very lonely man, Jaya, didn't you ever think of that? He was terribly lonely, specially after his son went away. (*That Long Silence* 186)

But Kamat's attachment and longing for Jaya has another interpretation. Jaya answered Mukta, but with a strong realization therein:

...He tried to reach out to me in his loneliness and it had frightened me. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, I'm only Mohan's wife, and I had run away.... Mohan didn't know...he knew nothing... I never told him...No...it was not because of Mohan...I suddenly realised – it was not Mohan but marriage that had made me circumspect. (*That Long Silence* 186)

The women characters in the text are caught between restriction and realization, but they cannot write like Jaya to release the trauma of their life, nor do they have companion like Kamat. This is evident when Jaya pondered at the end of her story:

Why had I done that? Why had I suppressed that desperate woman? ... What have I achieved by this writing? The thought occurs to me again as I look at the neat pile of papers. Well, I've achieved this. 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.... (*That Long Silence* 191)

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