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## **Patriarchal Hegemony and Marital Anguish in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence***

**Dr. P. Rajini**

Assistant Professor of English,  
Periyar University Constituent College of Arts and Science,  
Idappadi, Tamil Nadu, India.

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### **Abstract:**

Shashi Deshpande, the most renowned Indian novelist powerfully evokes in her fiction the so called patriarchal domination particularly experienced by the south Indian women. She clearly portrays the travails and tribulations, worries and frustrations, troubles and torments. Deshpande is best known for creating traditional women characters. Her protagonists are sufferers of gross gender discrimination. In fact Indian women have been communally and sensitively repressed for centuries. These women are sexually colonized and physically dominated against the patriarchal set-up. Shashi Deshpande through her novels provides a separate opening to bring out the dilemmas of these subjugated women. She has created a space for the women to express and to stand themselves on their own.

**Keywords: Gender, Domination, Frustration, Dilemma.**

Patriarchal discrimination is a more complicated phenomenon for the women in Indian Society. Though this has been widely discussed in conferences, panel discussions, seminars etc, the discrimination still persists across the nation. Despite the prejudice, a few women struggle to overcome these difficulties. These women want to establish themselves in all the areas which were considered as male's cartel. In the present century it is clear that many women achieve themselves in various fields like Literature, Art, Politics, Science and Technology. These changes have aroused only when some of the feminist writers started bringing out the hidden struggles of the affected women. Still there are many women who are under pressure. The discrimination is not completely eradicated in Indian society.

Shashi Deshpande, one of the most influential women writers, portrayed the violence experienced differently by different status of women in her fiction. She voices for women and believes women are also human beings like men. She represents herself for the cause that the struggling women must be focused to emerge from their clutches. She enumerates the inner conflicts of her women and depicts the reality of their lives. Deshpande in *That Long Silence* provides another way for the subjugated women. She tried to paint a new version for the humiliated and repressed women who are restrained and found success in it. This particular novel has won the renowned Sahitya Academy award for her.

Deshpande has protested against the male domain in different shades of exploitations of women. In the novel *That Long Silence* she has used 'Silence' as the symbol – the patriarchal symbol. The novel also explores the saga of man's superiority and the myth of woman being an embodiment of all virtues. The Indian society proves to be male oriented society which deems that being eloquent and loud are not the traits of Indian woman. Ultimately the woman restrains herself to be silent and bears everything which in turn subdues herself from existence. Deshpande through her novel *That Long Silence* brings out the protagonist to move away from the clutches of patriarchy – the real existence. The protagonist Jaya is portrayed as a writer having entered into the present traditional role of a woman – wife and mother has concealed her existential self.

Expressive women characters are in fact difficult to produce because they are bound to survive in the culture of silence. Deshpande has managed to defeat this difficulty by providing her protagonist with rich creative talent. Vimala Rama Rao in *A Well – Articulated Silence, Review of That Long Silence* (1992) talks of Jaya as “Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English fiction who possesses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is an achievement” (77).

The novel portrays the disagreement in the mind of the storyteller between the writer and the housewife. Jaya controls to suppress her feelings for seventeen years, thinking that it is more important to be a good wife than a good writer. Jaya, as an Indian housewife, stoically maintains silence throughout her life in the face of sensitive sufferings that constantly threatened to destroy it. She perhaps would have remained in the shadow of her husband, Mohan, for the rest of her life, if it had not been for the jerk received to the carefully constructed structure of her family. Jaya is married to Mohan and has lived with him at different places. Jaya's aunt Vanitamami advised that she should be a good wife and follow what the husband says as “Remember, Jaya, ‘she had said, ‘a husband is like a sheltering tree” (TLS 32). The context reveals that the expectation and advises given by the parents are only to the girl children to be married and not to the boy who has to shoulder the entire responsibility of the family. Such common inequalities exist in the Indian family system.

Depressed of a personal identity, accepting a meek submission and along these the neglected rights, the Indian society deprives a girl child of property rights too which Shashi Deshpande brilliantly discusses in *That Long Silence*. After getting married, when Jaya makes a visit to her parental house Ramukaka, Jaya's paternal uncle sketches the family tree wherein Jaya's name remains to be excluded. Overwhelmed by her dearth in the family tree when she questions, the uncle retorts vehemently and utters that she does not belong to this family as she is married and she does not possess a place anymore, which reveals the conventional norms of

sacrificing a girl child to another family. The patriarchal domination by the uncle pin points this view,

Look, Jaya, this is our branch. This is our grandfather - your great grandfather - and here's father, and then us - Laxman, Vasu and me. And here are the boys - Shridhar, Jannu, Dinakar, Ravi . . .' 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 have no place here. (143)

It is an old age custom and belief that the sons continue the family lineage whereas the daughters are deprived of the position in the family tree as they get married away to another house hold. The sons are given the preference to execute the religious roles and also render the position of the head of the family wherein they have to both defend and exercise the family power along with the father and usurp the total power in the absence of the father whereas the daughters are considered to be defended and protected and at times excluded in terms of property rights.

The seventeen years of marital life prove that the portrayal of Jaya the protagonist reveals that for Indian women, marriage and motherhood are compulsory. It is the implementation of these two roles that might earn wholesome fulfillment and happiness. Jaya is caught in this dilemma and through silence she suffers and gradually rises up to revolt. S. in *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande: A study*, asserts that "Going through a Prasanna Sree process of introspection, self analysis and self realization, she emerges as a confident individual(83). The marital relationship of Jaya and her husband Mohan focuses on psychological, emotional and social assertion of being a wife in the patriarchal culture. In contrary Jaya leads a happy home with her well earning husband and two children Rati and Raghul and with material comforts. She at times feels fed up with the monotony and fixed pattern of her life:

The illusion of happiness – yes, I had to let it go. Perhaps the truth is that I was not then remote enough from the scene I was fantasising about to sustain the illusion. Perhaps – who knows? – after some years time may play a disappearing trick with the ugliness and the bickering, leaving only an idyllic picture behind. But then, at the moment, I had to admit the truth to myself – that I had often found family life unendurable. (4)

In her effort to revitalize her true self, she finds herself as a discontented wife, a disappointed mother and failed writer. Jaya is a mother of two children. The role of a wife and mother for Jaya was to stay at home, look after the children, and to have no contact whatsoever with the world outside. In the initial years of her married life she was very happy in looking after her family. She admired the family during a meal time. All the four were seated like a glossy coloured advertising visual. "We smiled, we laughed; I, the mother served them with love and

care'; Mohan, the head of the family, smiled indulgently, and the children were lively and playful" (4). She enjoyed her love with her family only at the initial stage. Jaya does not expect her children to follow the hard and fast rules in the family. She always maintained silence when her husband chided the children. Mohan always wanted his son and daughter to be punctual and regular in their duties. Rahul kept silent whenever Mohan questioned him. Jaya softened her son's hostility by saying "After all, every son must fight his father to prove himself, every daughter her mother" (9). Mohan retorted, "The boy is spoilt. I never behaved that way to my father! Mohan always had very clear ideas about himself. He wants to be a dutiful father and husband" (9).

Jaya's father had encouraged her in her studies and had brought her up very boldly. To the contrary, Jaya was set to be passive; submissive after her marriage. The only result of her married life was the two children Rahul and Rati. For all these years she had successfully managed to suppress her emotions which she considers more important for a good Indian wife. Jaya herself fixes the role of a wife to be as,

It was when I first visited his home that I had discovered how sharply defined a woman's role was. They had been a revelation to me, the women in his family, so definite about their roles, so indifferent to everything else. I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before, and I had been entranced by it. (83)

As a loyal wife and caring mother, Jaya not only hated her real self but was also made to accept the change of her name from Jaya to Suhasini which the husband feels would gain him more happiness. She recalls, "my name isn't 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'" (TLS 15). The original identity in the name given by parents right from the girl child's birth gets demolished when she enters into a husband's house get depicted here. This meek submission and acceptance leads to further submissions only to satisfy the husband's desires rather than her happiness. For example, Jaya is asked to intake a different type of a dress, hair style and artificially create a modern appearance which remains to be proofs of the wife's submission to husband's likings.

The original name Jaya identifies itself as victory which was given to her by her father and the name Suhasini acquired after marriage given by husband that refers to a 'soft smiling placid.' The former symbolises victory earnestly given by her father and later submission given by her husband. A woman should be more than a housewife. They can neither decide nor articulate themselves adequately. They can neither love nor hate but have to be comfortable with 'the gift of silence' that marriage has given them. Marriage enchains and subdues a woman. To become an ideal wife and mother Jaya learns to suppress her own needs and acts according to her husband's wishes.

With the newly acquired name ‘Suhashini’ given to Jaya at the time of marriage begins to give shape to Jaya’s behaviour and becomes the contrast of Jaya, the rebel. Jaya willingly accepts her new identity of Mohan’s wife in the new name ‘Suhashini’ and tries to become and remain a “smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped” (16). As Suhasini, she becomes the embodiment of a happy woman who according to the standards of the traditional society perceives self-centredness and prudence. As Eva Figs, in *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in society* (1986) says,

Dominance is ... the keynote in an analysis of the man-woman relationship where the male attributes are ones associated with mental thought and positive activity, whilst the woman is regarded as essentially passive, her role to be the respectable of male sexual drive for the subsequent reproduction of the species. (125)

A crisis is sparked off by her husband Mohan’s connection in business misconduct. There are charges of corruption against her husband and he is forced to face an enquiry. He believes to be consoled to some extent that the children Rahul and Rati are away on an excursion with their family friends. He takes it for granted that his wife will go along with him in concealing the matter. This incident becomes a great sociological disparity for Jaya and feels a strange emotion of anger in the unjustified accusation by Mohan that he has taken bribe for her and her children; “I did it for you, for you and the children” (TLS 9). Jaya follows her husband to Dadar flat. The subaltern Jaya evokes, “A pair of bullocks yoked together... that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here” (7). Shashi Deshpande uses beautiful representation to describe Jaya’s married life:

A pair of bullocks yoked together ... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and 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. (8)

He was silent for some days after the marriage. Jaya had also learnt to be silent. She was submissive with Mohan by mourning herself. Mohan’s observation about married woman was that the women should not voice against men. Mohan says that his mother never voiced against her husband. Jaya recalls, “My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her,” he said me once” (83). This statement of Mohan explains that no women should voice against their husband on any account. There is an example, when she realises the strength of the statement. She tells herself, “*I must not laugh, I must not laugh . . .* even in the midst of my rising hysteria, a warning bell sounded loud and clear. I had to control myself, I had to cork in this laughter” (122). However she laughed frantically when Mohan involved in an illegal corruption which results in his discharge from job. This laugh again puts her in an awkward and distressed situation. Jaya experiences the tortures of loneliness and long silence when her frantic laughter makes her husband desert her. Jaya felt very hard to accustom herself

into this traditional mode of life. She had refined herself to be a very calm motherly woman. The nature of supremacy and authority is represented through Mohan. Jaya nurtured shame because she could not respond and admire the classical music of Paluskar and Faiyaz Khan as her father desired. "Yes, it had to be furtive, for my father, whose own tastes in music had been austere classical, had despised my addiction to what he called 'that disgusting mush'. He had tried his best to wean me from the habit, to make me love Paulskar and Faiyaz Khan instead of Rafi and Lata; but he had failed". (3)

Jaya's husband disliked Jaya's interest in Paulskar and Faiyaz Khan, the classical singers. Mohan replied, "What a poor taste you have, Jaya?" (3). Subash Chandra in "Silent No More: A study of *That Long Silence*" avows that, "As a child, Jaya, the narrator, nurtured shame because she could not, in spite of her father's exhortations and admonitions, respond to and admire the classical music" (148). Jaya's grandmother, Ajji has constantly chided her for her questioning nature and further cautioned her saying that "I feel sorry for your husband, Jaya, whoever he is, 'Look at you - for everything question for every a retort what husband can be comfortable with that?" (27). Both the father and the husband seem to force woman to adhere to their tastes. While Jaya liked the musicians as her father wished, she is criticized by the husband Mohan for that taste. The woman is not permitted to think and act on her own individuality. Jaya even gave up her creative writing as Mohan disapproved of the stories because it was a story of a couple, where the husband could not reach her wife except through her body. In spite of being a short story writer in the early years of her married life wherein she bagged the first prize and her story being published in the magazine, she could only gain displeasure from her husband Mohan for that particular story which gained her recognition from the society. The guilt in the husband makes him to suspect the character portrayed in the story to be himself. When Jaya rejoiced that her story had won the first prize, "Oh God, Mohan, I've won a prize, it's the story I sent for the contest, it's got a prize..." (143). Mohan instead of congratulating feels depressed and utters,

'Jaya' he had said dully, 'how could you how could you have done it? How could I have done what? 'They will know now, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us, they will think I am this kind of man, they will think I *am* this man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write things, how will you face people after this?' (144)

To this concern Jaya as a archetypal Indian wife intakes the guilt of her husband and also sympathizes with his plight and laments "Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced. I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that" (144). Unable to satisfy her desire to continue as a writer Jaya hides her identity and begins to write in a pseudonym 'Seeta.' Unfortunately this new identity does not fetch her recognition and her stories get rejected one by one. Her neighbour Kamat informs her that the story she had written later lacked strong emotions and he also identifies in Jaya that she has suppressed her anger and frustration for which Jaya replies that as it might create a rift in her marital relationships he had suppressed all her

emotions. The anger according to Mohan has been turned ‘unwomanly’ “He had looked at me as if my emotions had made me ugly, as if I’d got bloated with them. Later, when I knew him better, I realized that to him anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’” (83).

As a typical submissive Indian middle class house wife, Jaya shifts her thought to write comical pieces in a column entitled ‘Seeta.’ For these pieces she gets a numerous encouraging responses both from the readers and also a nod of approval from Mohan. Jaya did not speak anything and she was shunted at this and remembered the importance of Vanitamami, her parental aunt’s words reflecting “husband is a sheltering tree” (32). She also replied her Ajji as, “Ajji should be pleased with me. I had learnt it at last – no questions, no retorts. Only silence” (143).

Due to the societal pressures, she recalls that she had learnt Sanskrit with outrage for women characters were not allowed to speak Sanskrit instead they had to use Prakrit. Prakrit has been defined as original, natural, artless, normal, ordinary vernacular language in contrast to the literary and religious standard of Sanskrit. The rigid rule in earlier days does not allow women to learn Sanskrit dramas instead they had to go for Prakrit as the language was easy. She realizes now that she had been speaking Prakrit all along. She decides to listen and speak Sanskrit and resolves to “plug that hole in the heart,” (192) in order to erase the silence. She recollects “– a language that had sounded to my ears like a baby’s lisp” (192). Jaya is empowered by her intellectual competence. She decides herself that, “I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us” (192).

Woman is made to consider that this secondary position is not forced on automatically by natural ‘feminine’ kind but rather by strong environmental forces of social conduct and education that have been under the control of men. In other words, she is nobody without a man and hence is allowed and assumes only a consigned, subjugated or a subordinate position in the predominant phallogocentric society, a society which is dominated or unduly controlled by men, which is called patriarchy. It is clear that the woman has been consistently marginalised and systematically exploited, resulting in the repression of her emotional, psychological, political, intellectual, social and economic freedom. By focusing on the marital relationship which has gradually declined in ethical values, Shashi Deshpande seeks to expose the existing tradition by which a woman is trained to play a subservient role in the family. Her novels exhibit the dominant patriarchal tradition and the immeasurable struggle which the emerging Indian women have to undergo in being a part of it.

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