

# FEMINISTIC STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S “THAT LONG SILENCE”

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## ABSTRACT

Shashi Deshpande, a prominent novelist in the contemporary Indian literature in English, depicts realistically and psychology the innermost feelings of the women's self and craving for self dignity in the society where they live-in .she has expressed the ambivalent attitude of contemporary independent minded Indian women through Jaya. She makes a move of her women character from self-abnegation to self-realization. Their experiences compel them to struggle for their self-emancipation. Jaya is tolerant, submissive and taciturn, but the admixture of brilliance and creativity introduces complexity in her character by providing her an individual identity. This paper aims to investigate the transformation of Jaya from the state of silence to self-realization, which sounds highly feministic in approach.

**Key words:** Abnegation, Patriarchy, Subordination, Marital disharmony.

Jaya, an upper middle class house wife in Bombay, with two teenage children, is forced to take stock of her life when her husband is suspected of fraud, and they move into a small flat in a down town locality. Shashi Deshpande shows up the hollowness of much of modern Indian life-the convenient, arranged marriage, with the upwardly mobile husband and the children studying in “good” schools. The repetitiveness and the boredom of a woman's life come through forcefully. She shows how the silence imposed on women is partly of their own making, though society and tradition have a hand. Thus Shashi Deshpande's heroines are not passive or static, nor do they remain clinging veins, depending parasitically upon their husbands. Jaya is no different. Hers is a painful, uphill struggle to become more and more independent and strong, to fall back upon her own inner resources.

Jaya understands that she also contributed to her victimization. Others cannot be blamed all the time. Neither for total extinction of the ego, nor complete conformity can bring her realization of her true identity. Jaya has fathomed the darkness of her and has learnt to articulate her predicament. When she learns the news that all ends up well in the office of Mohan, and Rahul also comes back, she is again in danger of falling entrapped in the prison-house of marriage. She breaks her silence and refuses to be led by same stereotypic

pattern of life. Now she will continue as a writer and would not look up at the face of Mohan for an answer he wants.

Jaya's convent education and her vision of women, liberated from male-chauvinism, flare up her sense of anger against these real causes of her frustration. But the traditional role model archetypes of Sita and Gandhari, which form the other part of her psyche, force her to cling to Mohan, a traditionalist. The mounting pressure of revolt saps her energy like a canker in a bud and turns upon herself. In the moment of crisis when Mohan is in danger of being caught and defamed for some malpractices in his office, he being traditionalist expects Jaya to share his anxiety. But Jaya reacts to the situation differently. She finds that Mohan has lost interest in her. The storm in the office seems to disturb their peaceful family life. And now in her old ancestral house at Dadar she analyses her "self" and her relation with Mohan.

She has given up writing for the newspaper column "Seeta", which means symbolically giving up her traditional role-model of wife. Mohan persuades her to continue writing for the column but not she inwardly refuses to be Mohan's Wife, but all that she revolts is in silence. The difference in their outlook fails them to understand each other and the lack of communication damages their relationship, Jaya suffers silently when Mohan angrily leaves the house. She feels deserted in utter loneliness and darkness around her. Silence fails to be the protective shield and there is a close contact with the death. Jaya escapes suicide but goes hysteric. Out of her anguish, her long suppressed anger, she goes out of her house and in an unconscious state walks aimlessly in the streets of Bombay. But her hysteria as defence mechanism fails and ends in futility.

All her defence mechanisms broken and she comes face to face with her "demon" fear. Now is her terrible loneliness she realizes and understands what Kamat, her friend cum lover said to her that "Pursuit of happiness is meaningless" and loneliness is the essential condition of human existence.

"But we can always hope. Without that life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible" (193).

These are the brave words of Jaya showing self realization in right earnest. Jaya is going through great emotional turmoil and suffering, though outwardly she tries hard to become a nice housewife. In the process of hiding her true self and to adjust with her insensitive husband, she gets reduced to a puppet. At the close of the novel when she is unable to suppress her emotions anymore, she becomes neurotic. This prolonged suppression creates devastating effects on the personality of the individual. Adjustment and

compromise are, no doubt, the signs of her maturity but every compromise shatters her individuality into pieces. The title itself is symbolic that long silence implies the necessity to break the silence, to revolt and to establish their self-identity.

Shashi Deshpande's Women protagonist Jaya revolts against cramped, wrinkled traditions and values of the ancestors. She feels the necessity to have a place to stand and strive to attain the ideal of freedom and completeness. There is the quest for the self that is feminine-self. This is nothing but the search for identity. Jaya had fathomed the darkness of herself and has learnt to articulate her predicament with feminine sensibility throughout her life. The words from Bhagavad-Gita, (the final words of Lord Krishna to Arjuna): "Yathechhasi tatha kur" (do as you desire) appeal to her after she gains knowledge. She comes to realize that life can always be made possible. The earlier impulsive Jaya becomes a mature feministic woman.

Let me conclude this paper with this heartfelt poem of mine titled

***'Dignity'***

*Be yourself with contend  
Better not to pretend,  
Build a great self esteem  
Perfect planning executes dream.  
Striving towards liberation  
Seeking real recognition  
Start your day from where you stand  
Striking the suffocating old tabooed brand  
Start within,  
Speak within,  
Stretch thy wings of perseverance  
Swift would be your endurance  
Sure success makes its entrance,  
For those who dares and does  
Creating a dignified vow  
Certainly will win anyhow.*

**- Dr.C.SUGANTHY**

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