

## Matrimonial Rupture and Reconciliation in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Violence in all fashions against women is a habit of social and domestic life from time immemorial. In a society dictated by Patriarchy, women have become the victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation. Women continue to be the appendix of male and treated a possession, not a person. They continue to be the margin and relegated to the inferior position in the domestic and social structure. Women stand stripped of all their rights and privileges. Problem of women starts at womb and ends at tomb. Women writings are primarily committed to challenge the practice of gender inequality, a factor contributing to global distress. Women writing is a literature of resistance, because it resists exploitation of women with the objective of achieving human equality. Writing by woman is not merely a writing, but an act. It is a weapon to destroy the evil of gender injustice. Women are brutally silenced in history. Women writing is committed to rewrite history of the women who have been denied history, ultimately to create society gender-free.

Shashi Deshpande has achieved a definite space in Indian women writings with her promising novels which sincerely document the unspeakable horrors of women and how they are struggling to liberate themselves from the fetters of patriarchy. Deshpande has keen concern for the tragic and deplorable life of women. S.P. Swain rightly observes, “The novels of Shashi Deshpande are a realistic portrayal of the Indian middle-class educated women. Deshpande successfully presents these women as they are engaged in the complex and difficult social and psychological problem of defining authentic self” (39).

Deshpande in her novels portrays the humiliations faced by the protagonist who puts her life to liberate herself from her autocratic husband to have autonomous life. A woman marries a man with a dream of having her own space in the ‘new life’ where she can have her own ambitions and aspirations honoured. But the new life deserts her of all the dreams, thanks to insensitive attitude and nature of the husband. In India, the predicament of a woman is even more deplorable. She is spiraled in the cage of being woman-wife-mother. Clara Nubile rightly observes woman in India, “A woman cannot exist outside the boundaries of married life and motherhood, otherwise she is perceived as useless and unworthy according to traditional Indian views... Indian woman do not appear to have their independent role in society...” (Clara 12).

A woman feels herself betrayed in the married life where love has no place. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel *That Long Silence* is educated, intellectual and modern. She is married to a man whose nature is in conflict with hers, hence the marital disharmony. Consequently suppressions, oppressions, frustrations, anxieties, and agony fill Jaya. There is no life in the marital relationship between Jaya and her husband. Initially she challenges the attitude, belief system and supremacy of her husband to establish a woman’s due rights and dignity. But inspite of her being educated and influenced by western thought all her struggles fail to secure her a reasonable space in the family and end up only with the compromise to save her marriage.

The relationship that Mohan prefers with Jaya is built on expectations that she is well versed in English communication and can make “an educated cultured wife” (*Long Silence* 92) and salvage his social ladder up. Family harmony is naturally remitted as the relationship is built on expectations, not spontaneous. Relationship between man and woman should be built on the principle of virgin love and expectation-free to make the family blissful.

Further, Jaya's definition of married life is more metaphysical and mature whereas Mohan has taken married life for granted. He is more physical than emotional, rational than metaphysical. Jaya is more emotionally and metaphysically alive. She prefers that she and her husband would build up physical intimacy gradually but her husband does not share this belief. The relationship between husband and wife can be soulful only when it is governed by mutual understanding, mutual respect, mutual cooperation and mutual sharing, otherwise formation of family is not possible. Such a soulful relationship is the oil of meaningful life.

The marital disharmony makes Jaya turn her anger towards her mother and grandmother for not schooling her to be articulative of her dreams and needs in life, "... ferociously satirize their mothers and grandmothers who had not taught them to articulate their desires and needs" (*Long Silence* 40). Jaya's life is not for herself even to a little. She has to align herself sacrificing everything of her to meet the tastes and expectations of her husband, "Cut your hair up to here, his hand lightly brushing my shoulder" (*Long Silence* 96). She has completely engaged her life only to keep Mohan pleased, hence no natural relationship.

Jaya makes up herself exercising superhuman patience to her husband's cruelty, and misconduct. She questions the traditional home-confined role of a woman to be an alien to the rest of the world. She feels all her talents made dumb. A writer in her gets articulated in a story published in a magazine. But the patriarchy in her husband Mohan gets articulated to resist her writing career and suppress her imagination not to have wings. Her artistic self, pregnant with the creative impulses can open an avenue to ventilate her emotional ruptures to make herself unburdened. Kamini Dinesh rightly observes, "The act of unburdening herself (Jaya) through self-expression becomes for her a creative process to come to terms with herself..." (88). One can understand the emotional upheaval when Jaya says, "Now am I writing a story of a callous, insensitive husband and a sensitive suffering wife" (*Long Silence* 35). It is a grave tragedy beyond description for Jaya when she has the pain of her creative acumen mercilessly silenced by her husband, "I had known then that it hadn't mattered to Mohan that I had written a good story, a story about a couple, a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body" (*Long Silence* 144). Jaya and her husband are guided by the forced relationship and stand detached "All this certainly doesn't show a natural and harmonious relationship between the two when we see that one is unable to express his or her real feelings to the other" (*Sandhu* 14). Their relationship is not organic and it is emotionally dry. Mohan upholds the traditional compulsions on women terming it as the code of conduct for married women "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her" (*Long Silence* 83). The title *That Long Silence* speaks the role of silence in a woman's life in relation to her family. In the patriarchal context silence is the most common means of survival for woman. Cunningham rightly observes the mind of Shashi Deshpande, "You learn a lot of tricks to get by in a relationship. Silence is one of them... you never find a wife criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage the relationship" (6).

Jaya continues to live with her husband as a traditional wife subservient to him. Even seventeen years of her marriage has not helped her achieve a space in her family "Differences with her husband, frustrations in their seventeen year-old-marriage, disappointment in her two teenage children, the claustrophobia of her childhood – all begin to surface (*Nair* 4). She feels the married life of long years only a rehearsal to live as wife and husband. They do not make life but a living, sporting illusion of happiness. Jaya describes her marriage as "A pair of bullocks yoked together" (*Long Silence* 8). In her marriage of seventeen years, she feels unhomed in her home and deserted and psychologically ruptured as her husband, being emotionally sterile cannot understand her feelings.

Jaya's life with Mohan is more loaded with regrets, aggravation, frustration, depression, feeling of insecurity and disappointments, not a ray of hope for personal freedom and happiness. The family climate is so hostile that she is highly dispirited in spite of being an educated and modern thinker. Loneliness horns and torments her. The deplorable destiny of a woman also is depicted in the story of Mohan's father who is a tyrant. Mohan's mother had her testing time in the hands of her husband but survived by exercising endurance and silence, hence termed as an ideal wife.

Jaya's life is closely punctuated with wait, a symbol of slavery. Man does not know what waiting is:

But for woman the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until you husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws home. Wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since she got married, she had done 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, and waiting for milk, the servant the lunch carrier man. (*Long Silence* 30)

Wait makes her life a weight. She embraces waiting as she does not want to remote peace and happiness from her home. Despite her sacrifice, Jaya's married life with Mohan is dictated by "Matrimonial Silences" (*Long Silence* 12). Life will be saltless if there is a vacuum of lifeful communication and potential understanding between the life partners. However, Jaya commits herself only to honoring her roles as wife and mother with the sole objective of not annoying Mohan and severing the marriage. Whenever the context provokes conflict with her husband, she throws herself in silence which, for her, is the easiest way out, "I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender" (*Long Silence* 36). Her silence carries a purpose and for her, silence is the lubricant for the smooth running of the machinery of the family. Jaya strikes a balance between preferring to be a modern woman with absolute freedom and accepting the oppression of life in the name of marriage. However she resists the blind submission of traditional role and prefers woman to break the long silence.

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