

## **Chapter 3**

### **Alienation in '*That Long Silence*'**

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The quests for identity and freedom have become some of the most important themes of the modern novel. From time to time Indian women novelists in English have discussed the problems of women and their quest for identity. Indian women writers are conscious of the marginal status of women in society where the power of decision making is in the hands of men. In our country marriage does not necessarily base upon love. A loveless married life results into total failure. Marriage is considered an important social institution where two lives of opposite sexes unite in love. But as is the common picture of middle-class Indian society husband expects everything from wife and never understands what his wife wants or shows any feeling or compassion towards his wife. Shashi Deshpande (b. 1938) is one of the prominent authors in Indian writing in English. Her writing is a clear picture of her rootedness in middle class Indian society. Shashi Deshpande, like many other women novelists centres her novels round the marriages of women protagonists and her place in the family which serves as a reflection of Indian women in the society. A close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals her views on the role of Indian women and their struggle to find their own self, their frustration and their alienation. She has so far published seven novels. They are: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), *If I Die Today* (1982), *Roots and Shadows* (1983), *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), *That Long Silence* (1988), *The Binding Vine* (1992), and *A Matter of Time* (1996). Her novel *Roots and Shadows* has won a prize for the best

Indian novel of 1982-83. She is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1990) for her novel *That Long Silence*.

*That Long Silence* is a narrative of the protagonist Jaya, a middle class, middle aged Bombay housewife. Shashi Deshpande aims at portraying Indian women's sense of frustration and their alienation. Her characters are torn by the conflict between tradition and modernity. This alienation is caused by their problems of marital adjustment and their quest for identity. Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice. Marriage is an important for both men and women. But women do not enjoy the same freedom as men do. It is often used as a weapon in the hands of patriarchy to pressurize women. Meaningless husband- wife relationships are one of the absurdities of Indian life. It is often seen that only women try to foster their relationships and no effort is made by men to preserve and foster their relationship. It is women who have to bear all sufferings and still try to maintain the matrimony with silence. Shashi Deshpande's women seek some kind of safety in marriage. Women opt for marriage because not only it is imposed by the family but they also take it as an alternative to the bondage forced by society on a spinster. Soon they realize that they are not free anymore. New responsibilities bring with them, new bondages with which they have to adjust for the rest of their lives. Caught in the conflict between traditional role of wife and a quest for identity, they suffer from the feeling of loneliness and are left empty.

All her novels deal with feminine consciousness. As many critics of Shashi Deshpande have revealed, her women narrators transcend their gender in order to explore the male psyche. Whether Shashi Deshpande is a feminist or not, is a contentious issue because she herself resent her works being labelled as feminist fiction. A novel is by and large an author's private

vision and purely subjective. Similarly *That Long silence* presents Shashi Deshpande's personal views on marital disharmony. It is true that in Jaya's silence any Indian woman may find her own silence.

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande depicts two different pictures of Indian women-the lower strata of women, engaged in domestic chores to earn their living and educated middle class women having some kind of financial independence.

**Jaya:**

The main focus is on Jaya who is the narrator-protagonist of this novel. Jaya, the protagonist of this novel is an intelligent woman with good academic qualification and a career of a writer. But none of her qualities gave her a respectable position in the eyes of Mohan, her husband. In spite of the delicate swings of mood, joy and despair, the anguish of the narrator protagonist Jaya, a housewife and a failed writer she is always at the silent level. Jaya is pro-modern whereas her husband Mohan is a traditionalist who has laid his roots firmly in customs. They fail to understand each other due to these differences in outlook and attitude. Mohan has a traditional view about a role of woman in family. To him, a woman caring more for her family than her career, taking care of household is an ideal woman. But to Jaya marriage seems to be life inside the cage. This conflict of being both oneself and fitting a traditional role as a "good daughter", "good mother" "good wife" creates a space between them. The silence between husband and wife intensifies after their hiding out in their Dadar flat. Mohan is involved in a case of corruption at work. An enquiry is set up against him and he is advised to hide himself till the case is over. Therefore, they are hiding out in a small suburban flat in Dadar. At This point of waiting and

anxiety she gets a time and opportunity to reflect on her life. She also reflects upon her value in Mohan's life and her roles as a woman, daughter-in-law, sister, wife, mother, friend and writer as well. She has also sent Rahul and Rati, her children for outings. As she is away from the trap of family life, she suffers from isolation. Her marital life appears to her a meaningless exercise of being together. Her frustration is visible through her words.

*"We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us."* (Deshpande, 1989: 185)

They keep a psychological distance between them rather than to speak out their issues. Because of lack of communication, Jaya becomes a silent victim. Though she wants to break the silence she does not find words to answer his questions. She says pathetically,

*"I racked my brains trying to think an answer"*

(Deshpande, 1989: 31)

Jaya questions about herself and her relationship with her husband, Mohan. This forced retreat into the past gives her a chance to contemplate over her relationships. As Jaya goes deep down in the past memories, she realises that she has lost her self. In many ways Mohan has killed her inner urge to create her own identity and he has altered her space and her relationships. She realises that Mohan has limited her sensitivity. Shashi Deshpande here shows us the hollowness of much of modern Indian life. Jaya, instead of facing a traumatic situation seeks shelter in neurosis and avoids responsibility. It initiates self-discovery. The result of her aloofness in this adverse situation of family is that their marital life grows shaky. Jaya experiences a psychological tumult. Alike other middle-class girls Jaya tries to take good care of her husband try to mould herself to suit the

requirements of her husband. Mohan had clearly defined views about what a wife should be. He had wanted his wife to be 'Suhasini' and not 'Jaya'. Jaya tries to fit herself into the image of Suhasini. At her father's home Jaya had never restrained herself and she would often laugh loudly, but in front of Mohan she never dared to laugh. Jaya, a bold and fearless person tries to behave like Suhasini- an incompetent woman needing male support all the time. What really makes her pity on herself that she did things, which she would otherwise be ashamed of doing.

This heart-wringing silence of Jaya really disturbs the reader. The question of her identity haunts her so obsessively that she fails to find her 'self'. Her feminine dilemma is expressed in her vacillating state of mind. She is determined to break the 'Long Silence'. Despite her marriage to Mohan and subsequently becoming a mother of two children, she is alone. Her husband can not understand her feelings as a result of which she is torn from within. Here Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the plight of middle-class educated women. An educated modern woman finds it difficult to comply with every wish of her husband. Most of the Indian women resemble Jaya's character. 'Adjustment' is the word round which many women's lives and career revolve. Sometimes a middle-path is followed to make a way out of this crisis. Ramukaka tells Jaya,

*"Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you."* (Deshpande, 1989:138)

Jaya rejects the image of traditional women like Sita, Savitri and Draupadi but as a silent victim, prefers her traditional role. She says,

*"No, what have I to do with these mythical women? I can't fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together... it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different*

*directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?"* (Deshpande, 1989: 11-12)

Shashi Deshpande uses apt imagery to describe Indian marriage institution. Jaya realizes that her frustration, alienation while she analyzes her married life. She realizes that though women are suppressed, they are indispensable for running a family.

Jaya's marriage is an arranged one. Like other Indian marriages there is no communication between couple. Her marital life becomes meaningless, a life of routine despite material comforts. She remains a passive, silent partner during their seventeen years of married life. After their marriage she finds it difficult to be mute and dumb. Quite new to the norms of married life she raises her voice against Mohan. Mohan tells Jaya,

*"My mother never raised her voice against my father however badly he behaved to her"* (Deshpande, 1989: 83)

She soon learns to reconcile with Mohan's stubborn silence. She learns to withdraw herself in contemplation about her childhood. At the beginning of *That Long Silence*, Jaya gives us some facts about her unhappy childhood. She talks of her father but never mentions her mother. She thinks back to the time when her father was alive. The time she spent with her father was considered as a happy era by her. Her mother, who is often superstitious, ignores her and concentrates on her sons. A woman having sons only would go to heaven as was the superstition that time. That may have had influence on Jaya's mother. But those memories of her being treated as inferior to her brothers wounds Jaya.

Jaya silently accepts the practice of giving a new name to the newly wedded bride. Jaya is given the name Suhasini by Mohan. But she remains Jaya in stead of using her name Suhasini. Jaya which means 'Victory' is

closer to her personality that Suhasini which means 'a soft smiling, placid, motherly woman'. It is a manifestation of her resistance to conform to the traditional role of a woman. However her sticking to her maiden name Jaya remains a victory only in name. She fails to create her own identity and in a way fails to attain victory. Both names symbolise the traits of her personality former is closer to her rebellious nature and latter to her submissive nature. As a child she has learnt that a husband is like a sheltering tree, a protection for a woman.

Similarly there is absence of communication between her ego and her self when she finds the absence of her place in the family tree sketched by Ramukaka, her maternal uncle. When Ramukaka was asked by her about her place he instantaneously says with irritation,

*"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."* (Deshpande, 1989: 143)

She felt insecure in childhood because she secretly enjoyed the songs of Rafi and Lata instead of developing taste for classical music of Paluskar and Faiyaz Khan. This psychological insecurity of being rootless haunts her even after marrying Mohan because marriage can't give a convent educated girl like her a kind of emotional support. The novelist presents a conflict between earlier self of Suhasini who considers marriage as a great fortress of happiness and the disillusioned wife Jaya. Her quest for freedom and completeness turns into disillusionment and frustration. All the female figures including from Indian myth and her own family (Jaya, her mother, her grandmother, Mohan's mother, her maid Jeeja, her cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbour Mukta) present the picture of victims of patriarchal system. These women's silence is a result of the failure of communication



between individual men and women. There is no denial of women's secondary status. Her mother-in-law who silently suffers in despair and died of a botched abortion, her sister-in-law who died of an untreated tumour, Kusum who threw herself into a well; all are victims of this secondary status. Even female characters from Indian myth- Gandhari in Mahabharata who blindfolded her eyes because her husband was blind, Sita, Savitri, Draupadi who followed their husband's path and female characters in Sanskrit drama who had to speak in the vernacular Prakrit present the same structure.

In order to get rid of this frustration Jaya takes 'writing' as her career. But social obstacles like the restrictions imposed by her husband, her editor's expectations, Kamat who prevents her from her true writing put her in shackles again. When Jaya writes a true story, her husband protests:

*"Jaya how could you, how could you have done it?... they will all 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 a man, they will think I am this man..."* (Deshpande, 1989: 143-144)

So Jaya stops writing. To her writing is an escape. It is a form of self-expression. Restricting her liberation means denying her place. She again fails to find her "inner place". This element of disillusionment and disgust, trying to be ideal Hindu wife in spite of bearing many burdens weaken her. Mohan, under his pressure and humiliation caused by hiding out, accuses Jaya for her changed behaviour in the days of adversity. He never realises that even Jaya needed to be loved herself.

Jaya's sexual life gives her no satisfaction. The silent wordless lovemaking is beyond her endurance. Sex with Mohan has become

mechanical, without any affection. Mohan's indifferent attitude towards her desire fills her with the sense of loneliness and disillusion.

*"But, lying there my body still warm and throbbing from the contact with his, it had come to me in one awful moment- that I was alone. The contact, the coming together, had been not only momentary, but wholly illusory as well. We had never come together, only our bodies had done that. I had begun to cry then, despairingly, silently, scared that I would wake Mohan up, trying desperately, to calm myself."* (Deshpande, 1989: 98)

Their physical relationship always ends up with Mohan's question whether he has hurt her. This sense of nothingness and of mechanisation shatters her and she questions her own identity. And she finds no answers to her questions. She explains it in words like:

*"A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated"* (Deshpande, 1989: 147)

As a married lady she has become dependent on Mohan and this she considers derogatory. Mohan has crushed not only the woman in Jaya but also the writer. Jaya recalls their relationship as husband and wife:

*"First there's love, then there's sex- that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I had realised that it could so easily be the other way round."* (Deshpande, 1989: 95)

Jaya has shaped herself according to Mohan's wishes. She has given up her job, aborted their third baby, she has even stopped writing when Mohan accuses her of not caring about the children. She learns that she has to maintain her silence to save their marriage. She is unable to communicate her anxieties. Day by day Mohan becomes incommunicable, unapproachable and indifferent towards Jaya. As Sangeeta Das puts it:

“In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande discusses the mute supplication of Jaya not only to her husband Mohan but her continuous obeisance to her father then to her elder brother and finally the most to her husband. Jaya’s life is a living example of a middle-class educated woman of today’s society who compromises at all the stages of her life in order to secure her position in the family.” (Das, 2007: 107)

It also frustrates and pains her that her son is affected by her mental state. Rahul never could have an easy communication with his parents though he is comfortable with his uncle Vasant. This makes Jaya restless. Mohan fails to understand her needs and when he accuses her of her changed behaviour. He feels cheated by her silence, the inability to communicate. She giggles fiercely out of the agony of being misunderstood. When Mohan leaves home without telling Jaya about his whereabouts she is puzzled. He accused her of being careless when there was the fear of his losing his job. His absence shatters her existence. She is afraid that Mohan will not return to her. Jaya in her panicky situation wanders in the streets of Mumbai. The very feeling of disintegration of her family unnerves her. She realises that life is to be made possible and it is to be lived fully in relationship with others. She understands that life can’t be lived in vacuum. She decides to change and not to look for clues in Mohan’s face. She decides to break her silence. Here Jaya realizes that they both need each other. Jaya instead of raising her voice becomes a silent isolated woman.

Adding to her despair, Jaya gets the news that her son Rahul has suddenly disappeared. He had been vacating with their family friends. She lives in traumatic state. Everything comes to a happy state when she receives a telegram from Mohan that ‘All is well’. Jaya feels that she can have her identity only if she has her family with her. She realises that life is a two

way process. Jaya feels that women must assert themselves and they must be resilient to take up the old roles assertively and not silently. She realizes that escapism is not the ultimate solution to the problems instead women should try to voice their silence. As C. Anna Latha Devi puts it:

“The relationship between spouses thrives only when it is a partnership between them. Once the superiority-inferiority equation enters into it, the rift sets in. fear and apprehensions replace trust and confidence obstructing the path to genuine understanding between them. The psychological block between them leads to lack of communication and there is plaintive silence.” (C. Anna Latha Devi, 2004:157)

Not only Jaya but also other minor characters are victims of patriarchy and their own silence.

### **Kusum:**

Jaya is always paired with Kusum, her mad cousin in her parental home in Ambegaon. Jaya defines herself as not Kusum. The only difference between them that Kusum was insane while Jaya can understand her sufferings and resent over it. While Kusum can only hope that someday her husband could take her to home again. She commits suicide a day before her husband is supposed to take her home. In a letter informing Jaya of the death, her mother writes:

*“But it was a good thing in a way. She was of no use to anyone after she went crazy, nobody needed her.”* (Deshpande, 1989: 22)

It shows gross inequalities between two sexes. A woman is no longer of use if she can't look after her family or act in accordance with the needs to her husband. But a man always takes the higher position in family no matter what he is. Dilip, Kusums's brother is idolised in spite of his failure in

matriculation examination. His failure is made positive qualification. Her mother boasts, “*Our Dilip is a non-matric*” (Deshpande, 1989: 95) Kusum on the other hand is considered as an extra burden on family.

### **Mohan’s mother:**

Mohan’s mother was a professional cook who earned money cooking for wedding feasts. Mohan’s father used to beat her. He would come late, usually after drinking but he expected Vimala to serve him steaming hot rice from a vessel which had not been touched by anyone else. Mohan’s mother eats after him as the Hindu custom. One evening he flung the plate against the wall and walked out of the house because there was no chutney to eat along with rice. Mohan’s mother sent him to the neighbour’s house to borrow chillies, prepared chutney and fresh rice and waited near fireside until his father returned at midnight. Mohan exclaims “God, she was tough. Women in those days were tough.” Mohan describes women tough who in spite of being treated very cruelly by their husbands suffer in silence. Jaya comments:

*“He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fires, 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 the only weapon. Silence and surrender.”* (Deshpande, 1989: 36)

### **Vimala:**

Mohan’s sister Vimala too is a victim of ovarian tumour, bleeds her to death in silence rather than inform her mother-in-law about it. She realises that it would be of no use. The failure of communication was common thing in spite of joint families. Women often feel helpless in the families of in-

laws where they have no say in any important family matters. Her mother-in-law's response to her illness is an example of how women were victims of patriarchal system:

*"God knows what's wrong with her. She's been lying there on her bed 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 have never had any children are like that."*

(Deshpande, 1989: 39)

Woman is treated hopeless and useless if she can't conceive children. As if a woman's life is complete if she has a son and if she dies with her husband yet living. Mohan's mother was considered as blessed woman in this sense.

**Jeeja:**

Jaya's maid servant is another example of the victims of society. She is beaten up almost everyday by her good for nothing drunken husband. She earns money and provides him liquor. She has no complaints against him even when he takes up another woman. She justifies this by saying:

*"How could I blame him for marrying again when I couldn't give him any children?"* (Deshpande, 1989: 52)

She willingly brings up their son, Rajaram after the death of her husband and his mistress. She does not allow Tara to even abuse her husband though he batters her. She says:

*"Stop that, don't forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that?"*

(Deshpande, 1989: 53)

*That Long Silence* is a story of individual tragedies of several women around Jaya. Men are also victims of their tragedy and certainly they are not portrayed as villains in the novel. What Shashi Deshpande has tried to focus is on individual men and women and their utter isolation be it imposed by society, rituals, customs or self-imposed as in case of Jaya and her mother-in-law. There are other women also like Vanita Mami or Mukta who can not help but self-torture themselves in the form of fasts. The purpose of fast is avoidance of widowhood or the hope of being blessed with a child. The condition of women from lower strata is really sad. The girl starts earning and supporting family at very early age. Jeeja's grand-daughter Tara starts earning at a tender age and continues working all her life. She is married off at the age which her parents thought suitable for her. They do not care to know much about the boy. The only difference that marriage brings in her life is that now she has her own children to take care of instead of her brothers and sisters. Now she herself becomes the target of her husband's ill-tempered beating instead of watching her mother being beaten by her father. Though from different social backgrounds, they have one thing in common. Women in this novel, no matter to which class they belong, they prefer to get married and maintain their marriage, for failure in marriage is considered to be a woman's greatest failure. The plight of Jeeja, the house-maid and her grand daughter Tara reveals their poverty stricken lives. As Parvati Bhatnagar says:

“The attitude of women from lower strata is robust and practical. Realising that men are men, women leave them to their drinking and wife-beating. For them there is nothing wrong or shameful in husbands beating their lives, in fact it is considered to be their privilege since husbands for them are a symbol of social prestige. They take upon their shoulders the

entire responsibility of raising their children; many times doling out money to them to indulge in their spoilt habits.....They take pride in the fact that their husbands are alive... Women feel miserable when they lose their husbands. By losing husbands they also lose social prestige.”

(Bhatnagar, 2002: 137)

**Mohan:**

Apart from Shashi Deshpande’s prominence to feminine sensibility, it doesn’t seem that she tries to dehumanize her male characters. Although she raises a question on patriarchal cultural pattern of Indian society, she does not hold a radical feminist stance. Shashi Deshpande’s heroines have revolting urge in mind; still they can not reject their Indian cultural roots. Her heroine Jaya does not reject her family and home but tries to establish her own identity in the midst of these chores. In this sense her male characters are different. In Shashi Deshpande’s novels women’s silence is a result of failure of communication between individual men and women, rather than of the flawed structures of social arrangement. (Rajan, 2004: 83-83) Therefore it would be unjust to generalize and hold male characters for the silence of her female protagonists.

If we look at the Indian society of 1950-1970 and post 1980, we notice a great difference in the male psyche. Earlier i.e. before 1970 men were not so careerist in true sense and there was a scope for every male heir to run the family business. Globalization was an unknown concept to common middle class. Moreover, women were ignorant about the feminist theories predominant in the Western world. Though there was discontent in the minds of women about their secondary status in society, they were not allowed to express their opinions or feelings. Most women were satisfied in



their 'Sati-Savitri' role imposed on them by the male dominated society for their convenience and in doing housework, rearing children etc. But after 1980 everyone gradually became aware of their status and identity in the society. Similarly women, confronted with feminist theories became conscious of their own self. Social conformity has as always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man. That is why Jaya chooses to be silent in spite of her urge to revolt. In middle class Marathi Brahmin family, as described in Shashi Deshpande's novels it was difficult in the 80s for men to get education and establish their own identity in the society. Educated women like Jaya were in confusion whether to continue their traditional role or revolt against the tradition that puts them in shackles. Both men and women were in dilemma about their roles. Men were worried about their jobs and running the family because they were still considered as "the sheltering tree". So they had to support their family. In Shashi Deshpande's novels there are examples where male characters have got their education through many hardships, depending on the benevolence of other Brahmins for resources. Mohan is a true representative of this period. He is typically a salaried man; he knows no other life except the life centred on office work and family. He is ambitious, fond of prestige and fame in society, cares for money and material comforts. He is a materialist and wants to support family single handed. In this task he could not get enough financial support from his family. In a way he tries to be a perfect Indian man who considers himself as the sole breadwinner and the head of the family. *That Long Silence* presents a familial world of Mohan, a husband through the narrative of Jaya, his wife. Mohan had a deep impact on his mind of his parents. He has a hatred for his father who ill-treated his mother. The society represented by Mohan's father and mother had a clear cut divisions of roles. Men have

their anxieties as women do. And they try to exert their authority over women in the same way women try to exert their authority over other women in the family. In spite of his dislike for the behaviour of his father Mohan attitude is not different. He takes Jaya for granted and it hurts her. He wants Jaya to think alike him and induces her not to write something which would endanger their marriage. But when he is caught in an act of malpractice he actually urges her to write something to earn money. But Jaya understands that it is nothing else but an 'illusion of happiness' and she becomes indifferent in her attitude towards him. Mohan is happy and takes pride in the fact that he is a writer's husband but gets infuriated when he reads one of her stories. He always wanted a wife who is educated and fluent in English. Mohan has married Jaya not out of love but she resembled his dream girl who talks fluently in English. He proudly says:

*"You Know, Jaya, the first day I met you at your Kamukaku's house, you were talking to brother Dinkar and some how you sounded so much like that girl. I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you."* (Deshpande, 1989: 90)

When he saw Jaya he liked her in spite of her dark complexion because she was talking in English fluently and was intelligent, but after marriage he never allows her to be herself and do what she wants. This diabolic nature of his makes Jaya angry. She has every reason to be bitter with him. He has suppressed every facet of her personality. Man's greed for money and materialistic things is seen in the character of Mohan. He resorts to illegal and unfair means of getting extra perks to lead a comfortable life and is suspended from the job. In order to escape from enquiry he decides to stay in Jaya's flat at Dadar. He expects his wife to share his anxiety, doubts and unhappiness. But Jaya, being so indifferent fails to understand him. In a

moment of clash with Jaya, he leaves the home without informing her about his whereabouts. He very clearly avoids stating the fact that his actions are a part of his ambition.

The very reasons of his becoming materialist can be traced back in his childhood which was traumatic for him. His childhood was poverty-stricken and like many other middle class Brahmin boys he had to depend on a rich old man who offered charity for his studies. As a result of this humiliation and experience he had become more greedy and ambitious. His father had also played a vital role in the development of his psyche. His father had been very cruel, dictatorial and tyrannical with his mother. She tolerated everything in silence and so Mohan had in his mind the definite image of wife thus:

*“His image of a wife has been created by the submissive woman that he has seen in his family in his growing years.”*

(Deshpande, 1989: 83)

Mohan has seen strength in his mother who suffered silently the tortures of her husband. Here silence comes with altogether different connotation. For Jaya it represents suffering, despair, miserability and helplessness and through silence she wants to protest against tradition. But Mohan sees strength in his mother's suffering. Therefore in spite of his hatred for his father, he actually behaves in the same way.

Rahul, Jaya's son who has been vacating with the family friend Ashok and Rupa, runs away. Jaya finds the very edifice of her existence crumbling. Mohan leaves her accusing her of not being supportive at the time of crisis. Jaya is not even seen to know the details of the trouble at her husband's workplace. When Mohan asks her to shift to Dadar's flat, she agrees to do so

without even asking the details. As Pashupati Jha and Nagendra Kumar puts it:

“The most critical moment comes when Mohan tells her that she is his wife of success alone and not of failure. She begins to laugh without control at his allegation. It is too much for Mohan that some one should laugh derisively at his failure and he abruptly leaves home before Jaya could give her explanation.” (Jha, Pashupati and Kumar, Nagendra., 2004: 155)

There is a complex and confused attitude towards the ‘self’ and also in Mohan’s relation to Jaya. His unjust anger and enraged remarks are examples of his frustration. Mohan crushes both the woman and the writer in Jaya in his frustration. He fails to protect and support his family. Like the protagonist of 1980s he actually sees a threat in Jaya that she may overpower him and proves to be more successful. He is a man who does not love the woman the way she expects him to do. That is why Shashi Deshpande prefers the image ‘a pair of bullocks’ to describe a married couple. Mohan wanted her to be like Gandhari, who blindfolded herself to become blind like her husband. The only thing to be noted here is the materialist attitude of Mohan. He is shown as running after the money because he thinks that only money can bring happiness in his family. Obviously the writer fails at her attempt to understand the complexities of the male mind and the contemporary social scenario in which these characters live. Nowhere Shashi Deshpande has shown the undercurrents of Mohan’s mind and his tensions. As V.T. Girdhari remarks-

“Male for all women writer is just an easy target who suffers the assaults of the novelist on one hand and the female character on the other.”

(Girdhari, 2002: 85)

Shashi Deshpande gives a sudden turn. Mohan sends a telegram informing her that all is well and he will be back soon. Their son Rahul is also found out and it seems that all the confusion is sorted out. But he tries to analyse himself and reality as well. There is a definite change in his behaviour after self-realisation. He adjusts himself to live in Dadar flat which he has hated for not being comfortable and in good location. This change is a defining change and it is described by Jaya:

*“And for that moment he had his old air of authority and confidence. Then the old self vanished, leaving behind a sad, bewildered man.”*

(Deshpande, 1989:8)

### **Kamat:**

Kamat, a widower is Jaya's neighbour in Dadar. Jaya's attachment to him can not be labelled as an extra marital affair. With Kamat she comes into herself. In *That Long Silence* also Jaya has a fruitful relationship with Mr. Kamat. He appears in the novel as a shadowy figure. He is an advertiser and lives alone above the apartment at Dadar. He has no reservation against doing unmanly things like cooking. He does not feel awkward while cooking himself, because he has no reservations like doing things that are considered as women's responsibilities. But because of Jaya's ingrained inhibitions, she feels awkward when she sees him cooking. In his presence Jaya sheds her crippling silence she imposed on herself. She feels confident and comfortable in his company. Consequently she confides in him things she would never dare mention to Mohan. She gets from Kamat the best of her father's concern and reassurance for her. Jaya leaves him at the time when he is dying. The most striking quality of Mr. Kamat is that he sees her as an equal. He is altogether different from Mohan. While Mohan discourages

Jaya from writing Mr. Kamat introduces her with her lost 'self'. Jaya sheds her restraints in Kamat's presence who gives her reassurance and comfort in a fatherly way. He advises Jaya to be honest to self and realise her own faults. He tells her:

*"Spare me your complexes. And you're a fool if you think I was joking. I'm warning you- beware of this "women are the victims" theory of yours.....Take yourself seriously, woman. Don't skulk behind a false name. And work- work if you want others to take you seriously"* (Deshpande, 1989: 148)

When Jaya feels sad about her father's death, she finds solace in Kamat's company. At that moment she wants to respond to him with her body but she immediately restrains herself so that she can safeguard her married life. In a way she shares an intimate relation with him, she responds to his touch, kiss and embrace. He makes her understand that it is a part of life. He says,

*"The relation of man to woman is so natural of one person to another."* (Deshpande, 1989: 153)

Her failed writing and her close association with Kamat are two examples of Jaya's inability to seek her own identity. Mr. Kamat makes her aware of her emotional as well as physical needs and asks her to break her silence and speak freely. These two different characters with different mindsets put before us the novelist's views on masculinity. When Kamat makes her aware of her faults and warns her against blaming others for her failure, he actually is asking reader not to be biased against anyone. In spite of his support and encouragement, Jaya leaves him dying because of social fear. Mr. Kamat dies of heart attack and though she witnesses it, does nothing and leaves him alone to die. Her association with Kamat is meaningful but to save her

family, she becomes indifferent towards him also. Jaya carries this guilt within her all the time.

Jaya's negative approach and her habit of analyzing every situation cause havoc in her personal life. Shashi Deshpande here highlights the plight of the so-called educated women who indulge in egotistical feelings and are still bound firmly by the shackles of tradition and convention. When scandal is over Jaya says that we don't change overnight. But we can always hope. Jaya is a modern woman rooted in tradition whereas Mohan is a traditionalist rooted in customs. Shashi Deshpande upholds marriage as the social infrastructure of a healthy society. What is painful is the egotistical feelings of Jaya and Mohan and not the institution of marriage. Jaya refuses to make the scapegoat for her failures. She realises her weaknesses lies within her. Mohan's coming back and Rahul's return help in the process of normalising Jaya. In spite of rejecting the traditional role models, Jaya decides to reconcile. In her analysis of the situation she blames her failure on her own limitations:

*"With whom shall I be angry? With myself, of course."*

(Deshpande, 1989: 192)

It is not a quest to construct superiority; on the contrary it is a quest to construct identity through difference. It's about human being trying to place himself or herself within relationships, people, and ideas. Jaya has had the privilege of an outstanding supportive father, who has inculcated in her a positive belief in herself. He named her Jaya- 'Jaya for victory'. Shashi Deshpande avoids the feminist fondness for freedom which results in disaster. P.D.Nimsarkar rightly puts it:

"Deshpande is concerned with people, the women and their relationship with others, like husbands, parents, children, and sons and

daughters. She has faithfully tried to construct womanhood in the contemporary context, society and the world.” (Nimsarkar 2008: 114)

Shashi Deshpande stresses that liberty is not total freedom. An individual can not behave as he likes; he should keep in his mind his duties and responsibilities towards society. She has dealt with the problems not only of middle class women but middle class men also. It is the inner conflict and search for identity of Jaya as well as Mohan. Instead of pessimistic note we find Jaya articulating Shashi Deshpande’s feelings thus:

*“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.”* (Deshpande, 1989: 193)

In Indian context, it is unrealistic view that views men all the time are at the oppressing side and women at the oppressed side of the patriarchy. Everyone is seen struggling to find his or her own self in the society. Characters are exposed to some crisis, isolate them from the surrounding. There is also a belief that speech can not communicate anything or everything. There is silence which is imposed on them but sometimes it signifies a state of unpreparedness for their sufferings. Silence is taken as a refuge to escape from problems, to remain ‘as you are’. As Anupam Nagar puts it:

“The advancement from maintaining absolute silence (Mounam) to the breaking of the silence speaks of a transition that Jaya has accomplished. The connotation of *silence* in the novel could possibly be categorised under the following heads: (i) Suppression and Security (Jaya: Mohan), (ii) Loss of Identity (Suhasini: Mohan: Jaya), (iii) Death and Realisation (Jaya: Kamat), (iv) Social Milieu (Jaya).” (Nagar, 2001:38)

Hungry for love and affection all characters look for a companion within the limitations drawn by the society. And a consequent result of the



rift between self and companionship is that of isolation. All the characters (Jaya, Mohan, Kamat, and Rahul) find it unable to break the silence which is the barrier to create a harmonious relation with others and suffer from psychological alienation. Ordinary world seems to be a place of dreaded routine and boredom and people find it difficult to give vent to their feelings. This is a common picture in 20<sup>th</sup> century world which causes psychological and spiritual alienation. They are left alone not only physically but also mentally. Jaya finds momentary solace in the company of Kamat but that too proves illusory because she has to embrace life's limitations. It is not only her own silence that Shashi Deshpande highlights but it is the silence of each and every character in the novel. Veena Sheshadri rightly comments on this point:

“The novel is not only about Jaya's efforts to obliterate the silence that is suffocating her. It is also about the despair and resignation of women like Mohan's mother; Jaya's servant; Jaya's mentally disturbed cousin Kusum. It also deals with Mohan's silence which is the silence of a man who speaks but can find no one to listen to him.” (Sheshadri, 1988: 94)

Shashi Deshpande has explored emotional estrangement and temperamental incompatibility in man-woman relationship. In *That Long Silence* women's sense of suffocation and alienation, their mute miseries and helplessness, inner conflicts and trauma of disliked existence is made live through characters like Jaya and other women. Alienation in this novel is a result of female subordination like socially restrictive patterns of behaviour, sexual subordination, rejection of her self through socio-economic privileges, and lack of emotional and intellectual life. These aspects marginalise women and set them apart from the society. Feelings of

detachment from self and a sense of disorientation are expressive of alienation. As G. Lakshmi Narasaiah remarks:

“The book is replete with existential watchwords such as ‘absurdity’, ‘nothingness’, ‘emptiness’, ‘death’, ‘frustration’, ‘lonely’, ‘loneliness’, ‘anxiety’, and ‘silence’.” (Narasaiah, 1999: 136)

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