



That Long Silence: A Woman's Journey to Self-Discovery and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT:

This paper deals with the story of a woman who faces scuffles in the society. The investigator has tried to aware the readers through this story of Shashi Deshpande who meticulously investigates the institution of marriage by giving instances from the lives of women belonging to the lower and middle class. Woman is expected to possess the qualities of endurance, submissiveness, faithfulness but not self assertion. According to her, a woman should not succumb to these roles completely and to some extent, woman herself is accountable for this and should struggle to achieve her own identity.

Key Words: Long silence, Journey, Conventional society, Empowerment, Transformation

Introduction:

That Long Silence is a novel written by Indian writer Shashi Deshpande. It was first published in 1988, and narrates the account of a scuffle of a woman to discover her own voice in a conventional Indian family. The main character, Jaya, has been depicted as a young wife and mother who undergoes a sort of suffocation because of the expectations from her role as a housewife. She starts speaking against the limitations put on her by her family as well as society, and this unleashes a sequence of events that will transform her life perpetually. That Long Silence is a dominant story about a voyage of a woman to discover herself and her empowerment. The journey of Jaya is not simple and easy, but it is eventually very enriching and rewarding. She comes across various challenges on the way, but every challenge tends to make her more powerful, stronger and self confident. Towards the end of the novel, Jaya has been changed into a sturdy and independent female who is prepared to face the world. This novel is a sort of motivation and encouragement to every woman who is encountering scuffles in her life.

Objectives:

To understand the transformation of perspective of woman from a traditional to a modern one

To understand the social restrains on all sections of women leading to their silence

That Long Silence as A Woman's Journey to Self Discovery and Empowerment

This story depicts the life of the main character Jaya who as a young girl has always been inquisitive, intelligent and energetic which is entirely different from the conventional society. Her grandmother always advises her to behave in a more sophisticated and cultured way by becoming skilled in cooking, cleaning and other kind of household jobs. She belongs to a conservative family where women are advised to learn to adapt and accommodate to settle down in their married life. They are not encouraged to pursue their interests and ambitions but Jaya wants something else from life.

After her marriage with well settled Mohan, a family friend, they initiate the new episode of their life together. Shortly Mohan is transferred to Bombay and the young couple shifts to the city of Bombay. They adapt comfortably to the environment of the new city and with the passage of time are blessed with two children, a son named Rahul and a daughter named Rati. In order to come out on the expectations of becoming a perfect wife and mother she represses her emotional and personal needs. The subduing of her sentiments and feelings, and her concern to retain the exterior lustrous, successively produce a burden on her mind. She becomes restless because of her fear of her failure to uphold the typecast model of a perfect woman.

Since the first day of her marriage, her husband Mohan fails to recognize her as Jaya (victorious). He gives her a new name 'Suhasini' which means "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman". With the change of name she feels as if her identity has been compromised and starts feeling bewildered. 'Suhasini' becomes symbolic of a perfectionist and meticulous housewife, meant only to care and look after her children and also manage the home well in an orderly way. There is hardly any kind of frank communication between husband and wife about their sexual life; it is taken as something immoral and sinful. Jaya always dreamt of love followed by physical relation in her marital life. But, their marriage resulted in a mechanical relationship and artificial

love. It was like a complete disaster. For Jaya "A husband is like a sheltering tree,"..... "Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, don't let it escape." Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her epoch making book entitled *The Second Sex* (1988): "It has been said that marriage diminishes man, which is often true, but almost always it annihilates women".

The whole life of Jaya is committed to her husband and her children and she discovers comfort and relief in taking their care. Nonetheless this happiness is short-lived since Mohan is found involved in the allegations of counterfeiting at his workplace. An official inquiry is ordered against him and his friend and main accused Agarwal. Mohan and Jaya both are guided to leave their palatial accommodation in Church gate, Bombay to a small and dingy flat in Dadar leaving behind their children with their relatives. In the meantime, Mohan is dismissed from his job leading to financial crisis; at this moment he is badly in need of comforting words and love from Jaya but she finds it difficult to share his misery and doesn't know how to comfort him. He is all the time looking for authentication from others and is very swift to anger when he realizes that he is not getting it. It results in a kind of tension in their relationship, since Jaya starts feeling that she can never really be herself around her husband. This leads to a strained relationship between them and they both become distant from each other.

Rashmi Gaur, "Negation alone can never lead a woman towards self hood. A wife's relation with her husband must take form within the totality of her life as a woman, only then it can lead to a harmonious experience."

One day Jaya meets her brother Ravi in the market who makes unfavourable comments on the state of her husband. When Mohan comes to know about it he further develops bitterness towards his wife. A sort of estrangement grows between them and ultimately Mohan leaves Jaya and house. Jaya gets disturbed by the spirits of the past, strenuous childhood recollections, smashed aspirations as a Writer, discontentment in the bringing up of her kids, etc.

Solitary and gloomy Jaya recognizes her accountability in not supporting her husband when he was badly in need of her support and motivation and instead leaving him stranded in his tested time and to further worsen the situation, her son Rahul runs away from the house. She is supported and consoled by her neighbours as well as friends but she realizes that it is hard to discover her lost peace. She comprehends the 'long silence' which had crawled between the two has shattered the trust and communication between them. Moreover, she acknowledges the extended silence inside her which she had been ignoring since her childhood. Things take a different turn when Mohan sends a telegram stating he is returning and moreover inquiry against him is over and now the office is ready to take him back. In the very beginning, she was silent in order to acknowledge the wishes and desires of her husband and to maintain the peace of her family. When due to allegations of corruption on Mohan, she is compelled to shift at Dadar flat in Bombay, again she silently accompanies him. "She, like Gandhari of Mahabharata, symbolically bandages her eyes and grows blind to his weakness. Like Sita, who followed her husband into exile, she follows Mohan into the concrete jungle – Bombay". But when he tries to defend himself, "It was for you and the children that I did this, I wanted you to have a good life. I wanted the children to have all those things I never had". It is for the first time in her entire married life that Jaya senses a powerful, queer feeling of anger at this unjustified allegation levelled by Mohan. The assertion additionally guides to further re-evaluation, self-inquisition of long seventeen years of her married life in the mind of Jaya. No doubt, she is still silent but now she makes use of this silence in the form of a weapon to rebel against the patriarchy. Now she inspects her existence with her husband Mohan and in this process she decides to transform in the future.

She comes to realize that by remaining only mother and wife and by ignoring her other aspect of herself, a writer, she will fail to survive as a complete woman. Ultimately she decides to carry on with her writing career and would stop looking at Mohan for an answer she desires. She realizes that in order to have true happiness in life she should stand up for herself.

Suman Ahuja, while reviewing the novel in *The Times of India*, observes that Jaya "caught in an emotional eddy, endeavors to become terms with her protean roles, while trying albeit in vain....an unfulfilled wife a disappointed mother and a failed writer". Jaya rejects the patriarchal notion of a unitary identity of self when she observes:

"But what was that 'myself'? Trying to find oneself.... able to exist without the other".

The novel concludes with her strong decision to speak, to shatter her long silence now. After going through a phase of isolation, doubt and scuffle, Jaya is transformed into a new woman who feels confirmed not to allow this sort of 'long silence' come between the couple and within herself. Now she has been able to discover an answer for the most evocative question "Who am I?" When she receives a telegram from Mohan from Delhi stating that all is well now, she heeds slightest significance to which reflects her realization of self discovery and empowerment. The end of the novel hints at her future life.

One day, there creeps up another argument, leading Jaya to ultimately break her silence and tell her husband that she already had endured enough. Now she is exhausted from walking on eggshells and posing to be someone which she is actually not. It is a sort of liberating instant for her, and ultimately she now realizes that she can truly be herself. From this juncture, Jaya starts speaking out more in her own life. She learns to convey her viewpoints more, and slowly and steadily she starts building up the confidence to pronounce herself. She understands that it is a process which is time consuming, but finally, she transform into a strong and confident woman and who vows not to allow this extended silence to come between herself and her husband and within herself. As to some extent she makes her long silence responsible for bringing a kind of distrust in her marriage also which made her incapable to understand the support needed by her husband at time of crisis.

Jaya appears as an individual having her own identity, towards the end of the story. She is successful in breaking her self-imposed jail house of mind and selects to survive in the family and at the same time is able to free herself from imprisoned slots assigned to her by the patriarchal society. The novel concludes with her resolution to break her silence forever.

Conclusion:

That Long Silence narrates the saga of a struggle of an Indian woman who tries to recognize her own voice in a conventional Indian family. She feels asphyxiated due to various limitations put on her by the society and also so many expectations from her of her role. Circumstances lead her to stand against these restrictions, which towards the end of the story bring a transformation in her life. In order to bring that transformation, she has to fight with so many prevalent issues in her life and towards the end comes victorious as she self discovers herself and attains empowerment. The title of the novel *That Long Silence* proposes that the era of silence and silently suffering of woman is now over and a new concept of modern woman is emerging.

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