



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed English Journal

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND LITERARY THEORIES (IJELLT)

ISSN: 3107-6505

Vol.:1: Issue: 7: 2025.

(International Peer Reviewed and refereed English Journal)

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BREAKING BOUNDARIES OF SILENCE: A COMPREHENSIVE FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF SASHI DESPANDE'S THAT LONG SILENCE

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Abstract: That Long Silence by Shashi Deshpande is a deep feminist study of how women have been suppressed by the patriarchal Indian culture and the painful path on the way to recognition and independence. In the character of Jaya, the novel brings out clearly the role of silence as an instrument of oppression and a symptom of internalized constraint towards complex and mostly painful effects on the identity of women. The application of the descriptive techniques of introspection used by Deshpande challenges conventional literary stillness concerning women and identity as the literature encourages the audience to explore the psychological and emotional subtext of female experience. It can be seen through the comparisons with the feminist personalities such as Kamala Das and Alice Walker that the concepts of breaking silence can be carried out through a variety of methods, which can be poetic outburst or introspection narrative addressing the diversity of feminist voices and approaches. More to the point, the work by Deshpande emphasizes that resistance does not have to be explicit, the internal conversations and the bravery to go against established roles are effective when it comes to feminist resistance. That Long Silence is still an important feminist text that asks women to question their cultural, familial, and personal silences, restraint and reclaim their voice. It insists once again that is not just a political requirement to break silence, but also a very personal and transformational process that is essential to compare the fulfilment of female subjectivity and freedom.

Keywords: Patriarchal, Personal Silence, Inner Voice, Identity

Several issues that the middle-class Indian women went through due to being torn apart between the conservative expectations and the need to possess individuality are deeply stimulated in 'That Long Silence' (1988). Shashi Deshpande uses the character of Jaya to navigate the process of personal, social, and family conflicts silencing women in both generations. The silence is as the actual as well as figurative shield--a means of oppression and an illness of patriarchy. The new by Deshpande comes as a fundamental feminist fiction that does not respect simplistic depiction of women as subordinate, but brings into consideration the inner struggles, the slow awakening and small-scale rebellions that define the struggle by women to have their voice and freedom.

The title 'That Long Silence' itself alludes to the silent and formed silence that Jaya sustained her whole life and which symbolizes the existence of many women. In the novel, it begins with Jaya thinking of the life of emptiness and stillness which permeates her existence:

"I have not spoken a long time, in fact, I actually do not recall, what it was like to talk at all, to speak" (Deshpande, p. 15)

This image of evocation describes the self-destruction when the voices of women are constantly overlooked. Silence in this case is several-dimensional. On the one hand, it is the mirror of social standards which do not allow women to express themselves openly, especially on the problematic issues such as dissatisfaction, ambition, or anger. On the contrary, it shows the inner struggle of Jaya her tacit collaboration in herself, an attitude that was formed through fear and decades of upbringing.

This silence echoes the dichotomy of the public/private of the feminist approach wherein the experience of women especially pain and oppression are kept hidden and not discussed publicly as it cannot be verified. The voice of the subaltern is generally silenced or, at the worst, overridden by mainstream narratives as feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak agrees. The silence of Jaya is a very tragic instance of such phenomenon.

At the very beginning of the novel, Jaya thinks about the discomfort that was hidden in her marriage: "I did not rebel, did not complain; I did not assert myself. I accommodated" (p. 37). This is not only an exerted accommodation but also an internally constructed accommodation, which demonstrates the fact of how silence may be an enforced as well as a self-inflicted accommodation.

According to bold depth on her part, Deshpande examines how the issues of gender roles situates women concerning their identities in both society and family. Jaya plays all the traditional roles of the wife, mother and daughter-in-law with the invisible bonds of expectation. 'She observes that she had a shell; the character I became did not exist beyond that union' (p. 52) which was a common feminist argument directed at marriage as a place where the identity of females is frequently doffed away.

This is a speaking of Simone de Beauvoir when the author discussed 'The Second Sex' that women were historically defined as the Other and were absorbed within male-dominated identities. The problem of self-definition is a main feminist theme of Jaya, the conflict between her inner wishes and the roles that she is forced to fulfil.

Another way that women are expected to minimize the demands of their voice at the expense of the needs of other people is also revealed in the novel. Jaya does not refute the emotional labour she works silently: "I listened, not to my benefit, but so that the home should rest in peace" (p. 41). This unspoken labour involves feminist ideas of the invisible and free labour (unpaid one) that women have a comparatively greater share in.

The silence of Jaya, at the same time, is an expression of the survival technique in the patriarchal environment where any opposition to it threatens to disrupt the social landscape or even be ostracized. However, her story shows that she is becoming less satisfied and more questioning of these positions: "Was I a woman without a self? You, a woman who had grown up as one who did not rely on her independent identity?" (p. 63).

The style of narrative used by Deshpande is one of the key elements of the feminist echo of the novel. Stream of consciousness and time travel give Deshpande the ability to provide readers with an individual view of the thoughts and feelings of Jaya and her memories.

This plot device repossesses the interiority of the female which is negated or stereo-typed in literary works dominated by male viewpoints. The disjointed introspections of Jaya are an example of an opposition to linear, externally imposed stories, an expression of a non-linear and contradictory nature of the reality that women live in.

Speaking of reality, when Jaya recalls her childhood education about quietness, she says that even at that time she had known the rule: 'a woman had to be quiet, to smile' (p. 21). This informative experience gives the elements of the cultural conditioning of the subsequent silence.

Additionally, though it is not expressed loudly, there are instances of rebellious moments that are revealed through minor yet effective actions of thought and feeling. As Jaya accepts that she is so angry her anger is accumulating, she thinks, What am I revolting against? The silence — yes. Yet not my own involvement in it either, but my own complicity in it as well, and this is to show that feminist awakening is often self-focussed (it draws on emotional work to deal with this carrion.)

Such an exploration of inner strife does confirm with feminist literary traditions evident in the works of Virginia Woolf including 'To the Lighthouse' and Mrs. Dalloway wherein the inner world of the female consciousness is unscrupulously mapped out. Deshpande modifies the technique by applying it to an Indian socio-cultural setting and by giving feminist narrative styles a voice that has never been heard before.

Although criticism of tradition clearly comes out in the novel, women are also known to have intricate attachments towards tradition. The way Jaya's wants to be free and at the same time be loyal to the family symbolizes the hybrid realities that women have to live, especially through the post-colonial world. The fact that she is married to a man is also a mild reminder of male domination: "The presence of my husband was some kind of silent pressure that reminded me of where I am supposed to stay" (p. 45). However, the fact that Jaya chose not to see anyone during her breakup even temporarily suggests that she needs to affirm herself: "Maybe this protracted silence should be ended after all" (p. 168).

Treatment given by Deshpande acknowledges that feminist issues in India have to compromise on both culture pride and individual rights. This is echoed in the arguments of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Bell Hooks, who also place the issue of inter-sectionality and cultural specificity of the feminist theory in favour of not forcing feminist patterns created in the West upon various cultures.

Jaya is not a heroic feminist figure but an ordinary woman who deals with contradictions and this is important because emancipation does not always happen immediately, it is localized. The novel therefore acts out as a medium of transition towards old values and feminism.

The fact that she often explicitly employed feminist voices in Indian literature makes Kamala Das a very strong point of reference in this investigation. Similar to Deshpande, Das directly addresses female oppression, only by her poetry and prose, she had been more explicit and confessional. Famously, Das begins the introduction of his piece with the words: "I am sinner, I am saint". The chaste to be betraying the beloved one. Her outspokenness on the subject of sexuality and defiance is quite opposite to that of Deshpande who is more gradual and thoughtful.

This variation depicts the magnitude of feminist expression in Indian writing. Even though Das breaks silence with brutal candor, the subtle story of Deshpande helps to lay emphasis on the daily hardships that sometimes go unnoticed under the rubbish adherence.

Another comparison can be made on a global scale in Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple'. The characters in the stories by Walker are liberated, as they narrate their stories in form of letters thereby, regaining voice and identity. The role of Jaya's interior monologue is similar but situated in another cultural environment in which dissent through voice is indeed complex and indirectly punished by society.

Both authors claim that the act of telling stories is a feminist resistance. A unique aspect of this is that its interiority presented by Deshpande helps show the silent revolutions going on in the minds of women.

The novel by Deshpande provides deeper understanding of the psychological price of silence on a woman. The sense of invisibility is elaborated in the monologue Jaya delivers to herself which is an indication of the effect of silence on the development of confidence and lastly, fragmentation. "Who was I? Not wife, not mother, not anything but silent shadow" (p.78) is a manifestation of this loss of identity, which implies the significance of narrative in restoring identity. The process of speaking out her mind is a breaking through therapy.

There are also incidences of hope and reclamation in the novel. Jaya comes up with a conclusion that silence does not necessarily mean peace. Salvador Dali, 'The Silence that is rest, The Silence that is despair' (p. 169). This difference foreshadows the feminist concept that silence disruption can not only open the eyes to pain but to empowerment, which portends revolutionary possibilities.

'That Long Silence' challenges the readers to rethink the concept of silence because it is a social and political construct that entraps women. It shows the overt and non-overt means of how patriarchal power cuts off the female agency and emotional costs in doing so.

The reveal of the interior world in Jaya makes social denial visible and culminates to a feminist discussion of rights and identity and expression. Her depiction focusses on the multiplicity and richness of how women react to oppression, silence and accommodation, as well as careful uprisings and expressiveness. What is important about the novel is that it demonstrates that feminist resistance does not always have to be loud and revolutionary; it can be present in the pauses, in the inner struggle, and in the gradual and slow process of Unspeaking.

'That Long Silence' by Shashi Deshpande is a deep feminist study of how women have been suppressed by the patriarchal Indian culture and the painful path on the way to recognition and independence. In the character of Jaya, the novel brings out clearly the role of silence as an instrument of oppression and a symptom of internalized constraint towards complex and mostly painful effects on the identity of women. The application of the descriptive techniques of introspection used by Deshpande challenges conventional literary stillness concerning women and identity as the literature encourages the audience to explore the psychological and emotional subtext of female experience.

It can be seen through the comparisons with the feminist personalities such as Kamala Das and Alice Walker that the concepts of breaking silence can be carried out through a variety of methods, which can be poetic outburst or introspection narrative addressing the diversity of feminist voices and approaches. More to the point, the work by Deshpande emphasizes that resistance does not have to be explicit, the internal conversations and the bravery to go against established roles are effective when it comes to feminist resistance.

'That Long Silence' is still an important feminist text that asks women to question their cultural, familial, and personal silences, restraint and reclaim their voice. It insists once again that is not just a political requirement to break silence, but also a very personal and transformational process that is essential to compare the fulfilment of female subjectivity and freedom.

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