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**Research Article****Emerging New Women of Shashi Deshpande: A Study of Dark Holds No Terrors****Dr. Naresh Sharma**

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**ABSTRACT**

*By and by, the women started resisting patriarchy and the concept of new women came on the frontline. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande emerged out new women in their own way and this article thrives light on the strong characters of Shashi Deshpande*

**Key words:**

Ladder, Feminism, Deshpand

Shashi Deshpande contrasts the life of Saru with the lives of her two school friends – Sunita and Nalu. Sunita leaves no stone unturned to prove herself a happily married woman. She keeps on talking and proving that her husband is an integral part of her life, but in vain. On the contrary, her friend Nalu questions her as to why she let her husband change her name from Sunita to Anju: “Do you have to surrender so easily”? (117). Nalu dislikes Sunita’s constant references to her husband and hates her for her submissive attitude of satisfying every whim and fancy of her husband. She tells her categorically: *Well, I refuse to call you Anju or Gitanjali or whatever. To me you are Sunita and will always be Sunita*” (118).

On the other hand Nalu is a spinster and a teacher and lives with her brother and family. Saru remembers that during the college days Nalu was quite dynamic and full of enthusiasm. But now she had become peevish and bitter. Which Saru feels was not the byproduct of her spinsterhood. Saru honestly feels that it would be wrong to say that Nalu, “is bitter because she never married, never bore a child. But that would be as stupid as calling me fulfilled because I got married and I have borne two children” (121). Shashi Deshpande compares the lives of Saru, Sunita and Nalu and shows that a wife, a mother and a spinster had their own individual sorrows and it is almost impossible to conclude as to who is happier or more fulfilled. Ironically, the married women are reported to be dissatisfied with their marriage, the unmarried ones are reported to have their own sufferings and problems. Betty Friedan observes: *Strangely a number of psychiatrists stated that, in their experience unmarried women patient were happier than married ones.*

Circumstances mature Saru and instead of crying she takes a practical view of the circumstances. She is neither the typical western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. She is a new woman. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a very clever, educated, judicious and tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage.

Saru does not seek support from any quarter which intensifies her sufferings. Hence, she has to fend herself from all oppositions and oppressions. Her life is a journey from self-alienation to self-identification. It is also from negation to self-assertion and from frustration to confidence, the real fore of a new woman. Finally she says:

*My life is my own. Somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because, I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of.* (220)

She is not her own refuge and will never blame others. She has to face her husband fearlessly. The fear of darkness or some unknown fear which haunted her mind for quite a long time now gets dissipated and resolves to face her life. Deshpande makes it categorically clear that the life of a woman is her own and she must develop the thinking that she is an individual not a dependent but a being capable of crossing patriarchal thresholds and with standing trials of life alone. The modern woman is a

new woman, more than a mere mother or sister or daughter. In this modern world, she has a multi-faceted personality capable of playing any role with a strong mind and a will power. She is not an appendage of man and not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation. This new woman passes through a process of transformation which signifies a change from bondage to freedom and self-assertion. Sarita is a self-willed person and her inflated ego aggravates her problems. Besides she has innate love for power over others. She cannot bottleneck her whims and fancies even if she has to face the consequences and every move of her life is towards the realization of her goal. Her love for power is the undercurrent of her life which can be identified with her relationship with every character in the novel. In the beginning she feels that her mother is a rival in the game of power. The mother seemed an authority and posed a threat to her individuality and self-will. Similarly she views her husband as a byproduct of patriarchy and finally he was destroyed by female domination.

Sarita's economic freedom and education ushered into her life a new set of values. They are based on money power and social status. The wholesomeness in life for Sarita is possible only if integration takes place. In simple words she has to accept her children, her husband and her duties of a mother and wife. Escapism is not a permanent solution. Sarita realizes that she has to dispel the inner darkness of her mind and she succeeds in doing it. Finally she decides to face the situation. She can go to any extent to grind her own axe. When things go out of her control, she realizes her folly and failure. She wants to set things at any cost to her advantage. She becomes desperate to attain that end seeks her father's help and she regains her inner strength the moment she realizes that she is the master of her own destiny.

As a new woman, she has learnt to strike the iron when it is hot. When realization dawns upon her she becomes aware of her secluded life style and realizes that she has to speak. She goes to Baba who gives a patient and sympathetic hearing to her problems. She comes to a conclusion that marriage does not bring happiness. She is able to see the reality and understands that she has to face and understands further that she has to face the 'ultimate reality'. The moment she understands her predicament, she is on her course to gain her identity as an individual. She wants to march ahead to attain success under all circumstances and by encountering the problems as well:

*As she successfully grappled with her nothingness, a strange thing happened to her. She was overcome by a queer sensation of if everything was unreal. Her own body felt in substantial. There was a feeling of weightlessness that made her almost euphoric. Even her fears faded into insubstantial ghosts. And with this sense of unreality came the thought [...] none of this matter, not really. (219)*

There came a stage when Sarita laments that her independence got through neglect and reaction which resulted in love marriage and all other subsequent events are all rather her own making. This realization gives her a sense of fulfillment:

*It is my life. It's my life. Four words forming a sentence. Go on saying them and they become meaningless, a jumble of sound, a collection of letters. And yet, they would not leave her alone. She went back to bed. The words giving on and on in her mind. It was maddening. She tried to turn her thought to other things, to go back to that childhood fantasy of hers. The friend would never fail her. But it was no use. That friend had deserted her too. There are only these words instead. We are alone. We have to be alone. (208)*

Sarita regained her confidence and realizes that she is no longer a skelton in the cupboard and not even a scarecrow. She is an independent human being throbbing with life and reawakened individually, the reality which an individual has to face in order to overcome setbacks and set things right. She felt a queer sensation that everything was unreal. When the dawn of this realization rises, difficulties become opportunities and this realization leads to mental equilibrium. All endeavours of Sarita were now directed towards the only objective to live. In this way, Shashi Deshpande comes out of the veil of woman and presents a fair picture of a woman's life who encounters problems, because of her marriage – against her parents' wishes and her husband who is possessed by male ego, a strong thread of patriarchy. The novel is basically a woman's voice – the voice of a new woman.

Very powerfully, the novel brings out the psychological problem of a career woman and the novelist means that a woman should assert herself so that she can overcome or thrash the suppressing forces. The idea behind the novel is Saru's realization that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere, puts an end to her problems and she emerges out as a strong woman ready to fight with the army of patriarchy. She gets a new vigour which makes her achieve wholeness and overcome her identity crisis and eventually finds her place as a married woman. She expands her emotional and intellectual terrains and finds a way out. She learns that she has to keep on fighting this battle alone and reorganize her life in a way that she would deem right. It is accepted and considered by readers and critics that the fiction of Shashi Deshpande is a step ahead in the development of the female character.

In the beginning of the novel, Sarita is sent on a journey which brings her back to her parental home. She hopes to find an appropriate answer to the fundamental question regarding her existence in the house of her widower father. This displacement is to give her adequate emotional room to think and to act as her mind would be completely cut off from normal routine and mind would be free to roam about space and time.

In the novel, Sarita is presented as a woman with tremendous possibilities of movement which matches her desire for new places. She has gained control over her life and has also combined career and marriage successfully. This free movement of Sarita is achieved by the dreams that almost 'possesses' her mind. It is her initial determination to study medicine that 'expands her room' from being the dependent female child to becoming an independent career woman and it is her adolescent dream of being chosen by a superior male, that induces her to marry a young artist much against the wishes of her parents.

With the passage of time, Sarita's dreams which focus on the provision of a middle class existence for her family drive her to further her career. The lust for contentment of material space enables Saru to move in places untrodden and untraveled by fictional heroines and ultimately alters her status from being Manu's wife to that of major breadwinner of her family.

This status of working wife enables her to challenge the basic needs contained in the concept, 'a room of one's own' and further adds a new dimension to female mobility. When her relations with Manu get strained, she feels trapped in her marriage. And finally her dream of finding individual freedom brings her to her father's place. In the beginning of the novel, Sarita was woman but at the end she becomes a new woman. Her movement describes a circle. Although Sarita eventually returns to her original position, she is richer in experience and in harmony with herself and probably with others too. She seems to have clarified

and sorted out a number of issues regarding her immediate present. As promised in the title of the novel, the return to her father has encouraged her to shed her fears and to “*find as if in an illusion that she has to believe in herself and in her capacity to go on*”. (83)

Candidly speaking, it is in this pragmatic acceptance of her identity as a married woman that Sarita is ahead of her counterparts and thus a New Woman. She realizes at the same time that she cannot acquire individual freedom by fleeing from her present state or by rejecting her obligations or by leaving her family, but by acquiring a new mobility in her place as a married woman.

The question as to why the novelist does not permit her protagonist to succeed openly can only be answered in terms of her social and psychological conditioning. It may also be because of the marginality of current women's writing in India that betrays a certain incapacity and unwillingness to break through the traditions of mainstream writing, or it may be the wish to project a socially authentic picture of a woman that allows the breach of the framework of ideal womanhood only on an imaginative and verbal level: the female protagonist is allowed to think and to claim her freedom but not to put her wish into action. It may also be the thought that the ‘picture of heroic failure’ may be more appealing to the readers than the author's commitment to absolute defiance and freedom.

The plot is resolved by Sarita's readiness to substitute an illusion for the real appearance. Everything falls into place and the novel ends without defining Sarita's next move. Whatever her next move may be, she is now in a position, because of her newly gathered will-power and energy, to resolve matters with Manu. When she requests Manu to wait, it sounds like a prelude to confrontation. Sarita, whose dire need to confide in somebody stands in marked contrast to her ability to talk, has finally found the courage to challenge her husband. In all these respects, Sarita is a new woman who has the courage to resist patriarchy.

Shashi Deshpande's novel, which dramatizes one-possible man-woman relationship, questions some of the fundamental issues in the power structure and role division of the Hindu family. Manohar's difficulty in accepting Sarita's success as a doctor and her current status as breadwinner arises from the identification with his traditional role of protector which he fears is irrevocably damaged. Sarita, unconsciously contributes to her husband's misgivings by accepting traditional role divisions but allows him at the same time to exert his time-honoured power over her life.

The way in which her conflict is designed and structurally implemented reveals the author's reservations as to the traditional status of men in a society subject to profound change, such as modern India. Under these premises, Sarita can be considered as a fictional projection. Even if weakened by her sense of guilt, she is well equipped to express her difficulties and her power. If her inner monologues can be read as a subsequent attitude towards a patriarchal distribution of critical reflection on patriarchy; she can be taken for an advocate of consciousness-raising new female writing.

Through the manner in which she projects the issue of suffering in her protagonist, Shashi Deshpande stresses the socially and culturally binding norms that still disproportionally affect the lives of women and also the intrinsic capacity of women to confront them with will-power and confidence without being completely overwhelmed. One of the devices used to achieve this aim is the unusual placement of this character in the middle of patriarchal social structure. The sudden tilting of the power distribution in Sarita's marriage and the resulting ambiguity with regard to Sarita's newly obtained patriarchal status are elaborated in the text. Sarita's self-made image of new woman is in her absolute control and she executes her plans meticulously.

In the novel, it is felt that not only the protagonist is in need of a listener within the text, but even the author seems to be in search of a specific audience. The self-imposed state of silence can also be a patriarchal dictate that the authorial voice in Saru elucidates the fact that talking about certain issues is a taboo. Sarita's silence can be seen as rooted in her standpoint between patriarchal acceptance of her predicament and her feminine aspirations to question it. Sarita does not create ripples in the boat of family rather provides oars to the family boat. She does not forget the value system, tolerates everything and also makes adjustments. She handles all situations very tactfully and behaves very intelligently and emerges as a new woman.

On the other hand Shashi Deshpande's “That Long Silence” ( ) is an expression of the imposed silence of the modern Indian housewife. Over the past few decades, a number of women writers in different languages tried their hand at expressing this long-silence that had turned women into non-entities they confined only in providing psychological depths to their women protagonists. They succeeded only in creating unreal sentimental romances. The female protagonists of these women writers fall a prey to the patriarchal cage and are shown fluttering inside the cage. But Shashi Deshpande's success lies in her representation of real life experience. She candidly depicts the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for identity and she finally emerges out as a free and a new woman. About “That Long Silence”, Deshpande says:

*And then I wrote That Long Silence almost entirely a women's novel nevertheless, a book about the silencing of one-half of humanity. A lifetime of introspection went into his novel, the one closest to me personally; the thinking and ideas in this are closest to my own.*

Obviously, Jaya represents half the humanity. The credibility of the novel lies in the fact that Jaya is a convent-educated English speaking lady with a penchant in literature. The novel portrays the conflict raging between the narrator's split-self for the writer and the housewife.

Jaya, the protagonist dominates and steals the show from the very beginning of the novel. It opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan moving back into the old Dadar flat in Bombay from their well-furnished and palatial house. The husband of Jaya is caught up in financial malpractices and an inquiry against him is setup. Mohan feels relaxed to find that the children, Rahul and Rati, are away on a long tour with their family friends and expects Jaya to stand by him through this dark night, but in vain. Jaya, being a new woman does not hesitate in calling a spade a spade and categorically refuses to comply with his request. Resistance begins from here. The small old Dadar flat gives her an opportunity for introspection and she goes into deep contemplation of her past and her childhood. Her crises enables her to give a serious thought on her individuality. Adela King opines: *Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.*

For seventeen years, she makes several compromises and tries to make her marriage as success. At every step, she suppresses her feelings by thinking that it is more important to be a good wife than being a good writer. In her passion and desire to perform the successful role of a loyal wife and a caring mother, she locks her desires that lead to self-actualization and fulfillment. Jaya not only shows back to her writing career but puts her association with her one-time neighbour, Kamat, in cold

bed. She started realizing that marriage had swallowed all her desires and aspirations. Her career as a successful writer is jeopardized right in the early years of her marriage. One of her short story bags a prestigious prize for her and also got published in a reputed magazine. She is on the verge of getting great recognition as a creative writer of repute, but Mohan expresses his great dissent and displeasure at a particular story written by her. The story is about a man who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body. Being a guilty conscience, Mohan speculates and suspects that if the man portrayed in the story is not he himself, and is apprehensive lest people should take him for the patsy in the story. Jaya thinks: *Looking at his stricken face. I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that* (144).

But the urge of writing within her goads her on to keep on writing. Alternatively, she begins to write under a pseudonym, but her stories could not find niche at any of the platform and out rightly rejected from all corners. Her close concerning neighbor Kamat works out the reasons behind the repeated rejections of her stories and explains that the cause of rejections was her lack of emotions in them and she had suppressed her anger and frustration. She deliberately, suppresses her feelings, frustration and anger for the fear of creating a crack in the walls of her marriage. She had learnt to control her anger, as Mohan considered this trait in a woman as “unwomanly” (83). She plainly tells Kamat plainly: *Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman* (147)?

All this Kamat warns her against indulging in self-pity as it can awfully prove destructive to her. He admonishes her: *Beware of this ‘women are the victims’ theory of yours. It will drag you down into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. Take yourself seriously, women. Don’t skulk behind a false name* (148).

Consequently, she gets inspired and begins to write light humorous stories on the travails of a middle-class housewife in a column entitled ‘Sita’. This attempt of Jaya is highly commended and applauded by readers and moreover, interestingly getting a nod of approval from Mohan as well. Jaya says:

*Seta had been the means through which I had shut the door firmly on all these women who had invaded my being, screaming for attention; Women I had known I could not write about, because they might, it was just passible, resembles Mohan’s mother or aunt or may mother or aunt* (149).

Jaya had already started feeling suffocated in the patriarchal boundaries and her tireless efforts are the living testimony of her becoming a new woman. Under any circumstances, she does not want to endanger her marriage and denies her writings the reflections of her individuality or self to play the role model of a typical Indian middle-class woman. Being a very close friend, Kamat saves her from falling into any quagmire of life. He knows her literary talent and admonishes her for writing such low level stuff: *“I can never imagine you writing this”* (149). In this connection Adela King aptly observes: *In Jaya’s stories they lived happily ever after although she knows the falsity of the view of life.*

Her affiliation with Kamat, a widower living above her flat adds another dimension to Jaya’s personality. He also stands by Jaya through thick and thin and treats her as his equal and always comes forward to offer constructive criticism on her writings. At times, he receives the mails of Jaya at his address to help her avoid any confrontation with her husband as he disapproves her writings. He comes close to her as he is lonely and Jay too needs an emotional support from some corner obviously, both have their mutual interests. Unlike other males he is not averse to cooking and other domestic works expected to be performed by women only. She feels absolutely safe and comfortable in his company and her life becomes an open secret to him. He warns her against plunging in the well of self-pity and asks her to pursue her literary career by giving expression to her inner self.

Her fascination towards Kamat crosses all limits and their relation leads to physical attraction. His behavior is sometime father-like and at other times lover-like. Their relationship uninhibited and they share many moments of happiness together. He also starts giving personal remarks about her physical appearance. Like Saru in “The Dark Holds No Terrors”, Jaya can also go to any extent to grind her own axe. Kamat says: *I prefer clean, spare lines in a human being. You, for example – your name is like your face* (152).

On one particular emotional moment, she even comes very close to surrendering herself as she finds herself in his arms as he tries to console her because she remembers her father’s death. Being alone with him in the apartment, she had safe opportunity to go for physical indulgence with him but controls herself for fear of putting her married life in danger. Once again she does not show much concern towards his death and remains passive spectator as she never wanted to endanger her marriage. These incidents act as the living proof of the fact that it is very difficult to overcome the stumbling blocks of patriarchy where the boys of a woman is suffused. Jaya tries to find her way out by circumventing these blocks but not by breaking them.

There are innumerable reasons which suppress her individuality. In her zeal to play out the role of a devoted wife and also a caring mother, she sacrifices herself. She does not even protest the change of her name from Jaya to Suhagini after her marriage just to keep Mohan happy and never wanted to hurt his ego. Her dress and her appearance are a living testimony of her complete and unconditional submission to Mohan’s liking, like a self-sacrificing Indian woman. Notwithstanding, her education she completely and systematically suppresses her free will, *“the importance and necessity of stable marriage and family-family as security, as a source of emotional strength”*. But the same is denied to her. The crisis at Mohan’s office begins to affect the family affairs at home very badly. She realized that Mohan has become indifferent to her. At the Dadar flat, she gets a sufficient time to ponder over her relations with Mohan and also to analyze and recognize her suppressed “self”. She apprehends that something may happen to Mohan as her emotional crisis touches a very dangerous end. She feels that life would be impossible without Mohan:

*The thought of living without him had twisted my insides; his death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. If he had been a little late coming home, I had been sure he was dead. By the time, he returned, I had in my imagination shaped my life to a desolate widowhood* (96-97).

Jaya’s predicament is the off-shoot of her split psyche. She epitomizes the urban, middle class woman who is well-educated and has had exposure to liberal western ideas. Her upbringing demands the suppression of the self so the marriage can survive. Unable to liberate herself from the traditional code of conduct, her inner voice remained buried under the debris of traditions and finally even in her writings. Her pent-up feelings make her neurotic. The ethics and morals of her aunts keep ringing in her ears which become the cause of her undoing. For instance, Vanita Mami counsels her just before her marriage:

*Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies* (32).

Although Jaya does not take the counsels of Vanita Mami very seriously but those counsels leave an indelible impression upon her mind. But, when she is at the crossroads of choosing between her family and husband arises, she chooses the former.

When the things are moving smoothly, the relation between Jaya and her husband are cordial. But at the time of crisis, the things are otherwise. In normal circumstances, Jaya remains faithful, committed, devoted and self-effacing like Sita, Savitri and Gandhari. She behaves like a shadow of her husband. But when there is crisis, she refuses to back her husband. She becomes absolutely practical and feels ashamed of the incident. Mohan tries to save his skin by saying: *"It was for you and the children I did this"* (9).

Mohan is busy in weaving the web of his own life and expects her to be with him unconditionally through the mazy paths of his life. In this connection, Indira Bhatt observes: *Mohan wants to use his wife as buffer, an opiate to soften the impact of forces he has set into motion against himself.*

She feels absolutely uprooted and lost as she is taken for granted by Mohan. Mohan takes her as a puppet. She feels like a kite whose twine is in the hands of Mohan. She realizes that she is being brutalized by him. It hurts her awfully to think that she is a non-empty in his eyes. In a more disgusting incident when her paternal uncle Ramu kaka shows her the family tree wherein even boys of the family find mention but her name is missing. She questions this patriarchal family tree at which he says: *How can you be here? You don't belong to this family. You have no place here*(143-143).

She feels bewildered and shocked to find no mention of her mother, her aunts and even Ajji who kept the family together and also responsible for the cohesiveness of the family. She had started realizing the dominance of patriarchy which demands that she should assert herself otherwise her existence would be at stake. She is full of anger and desperation over such gross gender discrimination.

Shashi Deshpande seems to be very realistic in the sense that she suggests marriages are not based on love but convenience. Jaya is comfortable and content to play the role of a caring wife as long as the economic and social conditions are fine. She happily and willingly plays the role model of Gandhari.

*If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband could be called an ideal wife. I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools that I could have the things we needed-decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, travelling class* (61-62).

But unlike Sita, she fails to accompany her husband into exile. The days of their marriage were over followed by a dark night. But she cannot be said to be wholly responsibility as Mohan too has his own share of responsibility. He wants to use Jaya as a cushion in this crisis. There is complete transmogrification in Jaya after her marriage with Mohan. The counsels of her aunt and the advice of her father – never to hurt and annoy Mohan – have made her weak and bear things without opposition. Soon after their marriage, Mohan lapsed into silence after some verbal skirmishes with her. Likewise, she also begins to use silence stratagem to avoid any confrontation in their married life. The silence was forced and acted merely as a camouflage for her seething anger inside. She had been lulled into silence till Mohan was a 'sheltering tree'. With his safe job and career, everything in the family, including children were safe. But a sudden inquiry against him puts the entire family under dark clouds of insecurity. She starts expecting a ray of hope from any corner and expects somebody to console her that everything will be all right. On the contrary, Mohan accuses Jaya and says: *Do you think, I haven't seen how changed you are since we came here, since I told about my situation.* (12)

At this Jaya does not show any reaction and rather laughs hysterically and can't help it. She herself doesn't know the reason. Mohan is so annoyed that he leaves the house in a huff as if he would never come back. She is left absolutely alone and things got worse when she gets the news that Rahul has disappeared while holidaying. She feels awfully shattered and lost and finds herself in a total swirl. The train of their family was derailed from the track. She feels surrounded by darkness from all corners. There was no ray of hope and she remains in a traumatic state for many days. But finally everything turns out well as Rahul is back and she also receives a telegram from Mohan that everything is well. Misfortunes open the box of courage and strength. By and by, she comes to terms with herself. During this period of misfortunes, she articulates her long silence – her hidden thoughts, her fears, her doubts and all that she had suppressed during her seventeen years of marriage. While penning down her experiences, she undergoes a sort of catharsis. She takes a pledge not to be passive and silent. In a very decent manner, a new woman from Jaya has emerged out. She decides to break the silence and all barriers. She says: *The panic has gone, I am Mohan's wife. I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible* (191).

The canvas of Shashi Deshpande abounds in women characters as victims of patriarchy. Even the mother of Mohan and his sister Vimla fall prey to this monster of patriarchy. His mother made his both ends meet by cooking in wedding feasts Mohan's father was a drunkard and would frequently beat her up. On one fine occasion, Mohan narrates to Jaya a poignant incident when his father returned home late one night and found that chutney had not been served to him along with rice. At this small incident, his father flung the plate away and walked off without caring for any of the emotions of his wife. Mohan says: *God, she was tough, women in these days were tough* (36).

But Jaya thinks otherwise. She writes: *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* (36).

Jaya also comes to know through Vimla about the tragic death of Mohan's mother. Vimla's own death is also tragic as she had developed ovarian tumour and bleeds herself to death in silence. She never tells about her problem even to her mother-in-law, as she knew it would be in vain and will go to deaf ears.

Kusum, the mad cousin of Jaya is a deserted wife. Jaya keeps her at home despite the objections from her mother and brothers. After her slight discovery, her brother takes her away home. Finally, she commits suicide a day before her husband is supposed to take her back home. Jaya's help-maid also has the same story of her oppression. Her husband, a drunkard who frequently beats her. She does not react and protest when her husband brings another woman because she thinks that she has failed

him by not producing a child and so he had every right to remarry so that he could become a father. She willingly and happily brings up their son after her husband and his mistress are dead. Obviously, the walls of patriarchy are very high and strong and the women remain inside them as willing prisoners.

The son also replicates his father. When he grows up, he too becomes a dead drunkard who also follows the footprints of his father and begins to beat his wife. But Jeeja always admonishes his wife whenever she happens to abuse him: *Stop that, don't forget, he keeps the Kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman about that?* (53)

Further, there is Jaya's grandmother Ajji who, after she is widowed, keeps herself confined to a room. Jaya's Vanita Mami too is yet another case. She is barren and desperately wants a child. She keeps fasts and also performs *pujas* and every possible ritual to be blessed with a child, but all in vain.

In this way, Shashi Deshpande has very successfully woven the tragic tales of Jaya's relations and the novel speaks volumes of patriarchy which has resulted to convert women into non-entities. The novel is certainly about patriarchy and the subjugation of women in society. It is for women, about women and by a woman and moreover about gross gender discrimination and inequality prevalent in society, but even then the novelist is opposed to being branded a feminist writer. She may not conform to the conventional concept of feminism, but she does have her own feminist ideas. She says:

*The women in my books are people who come to realize what it is to be a woman in the process own lives and the situation they face not through books and theories. I think feminism is an entirely personalized perception. It is when you start questioning preconceived notion about your roles.*

It is often debated between critics and readers whether or not "That Long Silence" is a feminist novel. Shashi Deshpande is against the labeling of her novels as feminists. She clearly says:

*Any women who writes fiction shows the world as it looks to her protagonist; if the protagonist is a woman, she shows the world as it looks to a woman – to apply the tag of feminist is one way. I have realized, of dismissing the serious concerns of the novel by labeling them, by calling the work propagandist.*

The protagonist in the novel has raised her voice against the straitjacketed role models of wife and mother and rebels against the suppression of the age-old patriarchal set up. Thus, the novel is a feminist critique as Toril Moi says: *It seeks to expose, not perpetuate patriarchy practices.*

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