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## Research Article

## Breaking the Silence

Dr. Naresh Sharma

Associate Professor (English), GC Nagrota Bagwan, Himachal Pradesh, India.

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

## ABSTRACT

## Corresponding Author:

Dr Naresh Sharma

*This article is actually an education to those who pose their capacity for national thought after being subjected to traumatic experiences. It is also about the storm which blows after a long silence.*

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That Long Silence is basically an education in the psyche of people who lose their capacity for rational thought on being subjected to traumatic experiences. When Jaya was required to face the ordeal of her life, she seeks shelter in neurosis which evades her responsibility as an adult individual for her without her being aware of it, her sufferings reap a rich harvest of self-discovery in her which leads in the last analysis of her fresh perception of life. At the end of ordeal, she emerges as a new woman with certain willingness to compromise with the misfortune and problems of life while earlier she had a lack of accommodation and expansiveness. She is satisfied with all aspects of marriage for which she had to make certain sacrifices also.

The skill of stream of consciousness has been very effectively and skillfully used by Deshpande to reveal the psychic being of Jaya, of what she is rather than what she does. In this process of dramatizing her consciousness and her essential nature gets verbalized and lends itself for examination. Consequently, the character of Jaya as it emerges at the end of this interesting exercise is a person divested of all self-deceptions, falsifies and artificialities that she has all along been living with. She considerably sobers herself on making certain key discoveries about herself. While earlier, she contemplated suicide, she now dismisses it as being silly. Mohan's telegram from Delhi, informing her that everything is fine and a changed Rahul's return do help her in this process. But now such things seem to be of marginal importance to her. She has already emerged out as a very strong woman and more importantly – a New Woman. The picture of the emotionally, physically and socially secure world of which these people have been seemingly permanent members has vanished from her imagination forever. The Mohan's wife image is no more relevant for her as she tells fearlessly and openly in her role of a new woman:

*I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone, I'm 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).*

She is able to cross the patriarchal threshold which paved the way for him to emerge as a new woman. Her new perception of life, implied here, is that the members of her family, herself included, are independent individuals with distinct identities – a view which imposes no responsibilities and their loss or separation entails no insecurity and emotional trauma. Jaya knows that in material terms things will continue to be as they always have been. She will remain the wife of Mohan and mother of Rahul and Rati and when required, will "bite on" her "pain" but now self-consciously so, of her own accord. She has seen for herself that outside the family fold a woman is subjected to the unbearable harshness and cruelty of society. She, therefore does not want to compromise with the realities of life. Citing the authority of the Gita she resolves to be the master of her choice which she hopes will enable her to be on equal terms with Mohan and "to erase the silence" (192) between them. She has indubitably gained the moral courage and necessary resourcefulness required for the purpose. Yet she has to make life possible in the present and therefore put up with the realities of life with an awareness of the advantages of accepting the established values. That alone, it seems to her, promises a medium of spiritual and emotional fulfillment in this world.

Finally it may be observed that the compulsions of life presented themselves in the form of traumatic events to Jaya. Her psyche has not been well-equipped to meet them. As a result, the flood gates of anxiety have been suddenly opened and at this psychological moment irrationality qualified her response to the situation. However, the experiences of Jaya enable her to muster

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up enough inner strength to stage a return to normalcy. The experience has provided her with an ideal occasion for introspection and thus making important discoveries about herself and redefining her relation with the world.

Deshpande has used the metaphor of silence which has many connotations and moreover the novel has been organized under this metaphor which helps to impose a quietude and discipline: the inner dynamics of a self-cut off from human communication. That long silence is not an admission into the world of silence rather an invisible and silent communion with the oppressed self-straining for articulation, for a voice.

Silence manifests in Jaya's discontent which is more personal and deeply sexual. Her romantic longing of adolescence is transformed into rigid rules and rituals by tradition. Jaya and Mohan hardly spoke to each other of love and sex. Love-making for them was a silent and inarticulate affair: *God, how terrible it was to know a man so well. I could time it almost to the second, from the first devious wooing to the moment he turned away from me, offering me his hunched back* (85).

Jaya feels that all doors of constructive activities were closed for her and she felt self-alienated. Jaya's creative urge and artistic zeal frees her from her cramped and dubbed domestic and societal roles. It releases her from emotional turmoil. Consequently, she takes a firm pledge to break that long silence by putting down on paper all that she had suppressed in her seventeen years silence – that long silence which had reduced herself to fragments.

Towards the end of the novel, Jaya acknowledges her writing as a kind of fiction and quotes Defoe's description of fiction as a kind of "lying" which may make "a great hope in the heart". Hence she decides to plug that hole' as said earlier by speaking and listening and erasing the silence between her and Mohan. It is this erasing of the silence that symbolizes the assertion of her feminine voice, a voice with hope and promise, a voice that articulates her thoughts. The novel does not depict Jaya's life as a dismal and hopeless struggle. It suggests "hope" and "change" for the better: *We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that life would be impossible* (193).

Obviously, a new beginning of Jaya which may be termed as the beginning of a new woman who succeeds in crossing the walls erected by patriarchy. She is a modern, educated and enlightened woman in search of the fulfillment of the self. She questions the traditional pattern, resents it, but finds her own interpretation of it for surviving marriage: *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?* (12)

In this way, the novels of Shashi Deshpande are exploration of truths in relationship of married women. In this process the depths of human mind are explored during which she comes across many dark and unexpected corners. The long pregnancy of Jaya's silence is delivered to an awareness of identifying herself at the end. Saru led her life being invisible and as an alien in the family. Later she ventures on the journey of self-realization and is repeatedly haunted by the question "who am I"? Jaya explores a new woman within herself.

Jaya in her introspection tries to come to terms with a series of truth about her in the silence of Dadar flat and begins to erase the long silence which had engulfed her since childhood. She tries to define her identity and selfhood. Jaya, who is set free from her routines, is puzzled and frightened in Dadar flat. There is gradual change in her thoughts and she is in a state of psychic turmoil: *Looking through these diaries, I realized was like going backwards. As I burrowed through the facts, what I found was the woman who had once lived here Mohan's wife, Rahul and Rati's mother. Not myself. But, what was that 'myself'?* (69)

In this connection Indira Kulshreshtha says: *Generally, a woman's identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as daughter, a wife and a mother. It means virtually a woman doesn't have any identity of her own.*

Jaya honestly admits that she did not disclose her true feelings in the pages of the diaries: *Its essential core had been left out. The agonized cries, 'I can't cope, I can't manage, I can't go on – had been neatly smothered* (49). This was her first encounter with herself.

Jaya's father was a great source of inspiration for her and his motivating words always brought her out of darkness as she always paid heed to his words. She had not liking for her mother whereas her father always pampered her. Even she was named Jaya by her father who often repeated: "Jaya for victory". The life of Jaya gets totally shattered after the death of her father. Willy-nilly, she graduates and gets married to Mohan immediately to fulfill the desire of her uncle. Jaya kept on dancing to the tunes of her father, when he was alive and after getting married she became a puppet in the hands of her husband. She willingly plays the role of a typical housewife. She does everything to please her husband and never wanted any strain in their relationship. But she felt absolutely disgusted over Mohan's definition of love: *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 realized that it could be easily be the other way out* (95).

Her married life was a dreary affair and with Mohan it is mostly "a silent, wordless love making" (85). She was totally romantic and Mohan's physical encounters raped her romanticism. Her emotions cut a sorry figure to arouse any emotional link between them. She says, *"I could sleep with him too without desire"* (97). Jaya described her relationship with Mohan in following words: *Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel* (7).

In the beginning, Jaya blindfolded herself and resembled a dumb driven cattle, and when given a chance to think about herself, says, *"To know what you want ..... I have been denied that. Even now I do not know what I want"* (25). Jaya had nurtured an illusion of happiness and accepts that she should let that illusion go. She says: *I have often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony.* (4)

Being a new woman in her own sense, Jaya is aware of the essentials of the critical analysis and self-detachment. She says: *Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real 'you' never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.* (1)

Jaya always expected a miracle to happen and expects for a catastrophe, a disaster that could pull her out of dull routine. She expresses her exile painfully like this:

*The truth was that we had both lost the props of our lives. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy. The woman who has shopped, and cleaned organized and cared for her home and her family with such passion ..... where had she gone? We seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies and after we had dealt with them we faced*

*blankness. The nothingness of what had seemed a busy and full life was frightening.* (24)

Questioning is obviously an integral part of growth and also the very first step to resistance. Jaya starts questioning which becomes a starting point of her resistance. Both Jaya and Moahan are hit by the same lightning and they have their individual ways of reaction. Mohan becomes restless and unsettled, showing back to his routine work and enmeshed in a dilemma of dark future. Even Jaya feels uprooted with Mohan facing an enquiry because she had imbibed the idea in her mind that her husband was a sheltering tree. Her introspection became a sieve of her own flaws and she gradually starts making plans for facing the truth.

The crises of Jaya send her in a burning cauldron of self-analysis. In the solitude of the Dadar flat where she was absolutely free from her daily routine, she found that *"the ghost most fearful to confront is the ghost of one's ownself"*. Jaya feels that she was plucked out from all corners and rejects 'Suhasini'. She equates Suhasini to the sparrow in the story of the crow and the sparrow. Jaya says:

*I have a feeling that even if little boys can forget this story, little girls never will. They will store this story in their sob-consciousness, their unconscious or whatever and eventually they will become that damnably, insufferable priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their babies... and to hell with the rest of the world. Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world and you're safe.* (17)

This realization of Jaya is a big milestone for self-recognition and sufficient enough in the way of becoming a new woman in this process. Jaya mum's the word when Mohan bursts out and tries to analyze her silence in this way:

*The job I wanted to take, the baby I wanted to adopt, the anti-price movement I wanted to take part in. but even as I listed these to myself, it came to me that perhaps it had nothing to do with Mohan, the fact that I had done these things myself, that I had left them alone. Perhaps I had not really cared enough about these things myself. Instead I said and my choice sounded sullen even to me, 'I have done everything you wanted me to'. And now, I thought, I must add: 'I have sacrificed my life for you and the children. But real bitterness clawed its way through this self-mockery and I was conscious of having been chained to his dream.* (120)

Detached from her family, Jaya was able to question her inner self to get appropriate answers. All she experiences is agony and bewilderment. Her sense of confusion and turmoil rages in her with brutal force. Her self-analysis reveals her the real fact that she lacked courage and of making acumen right choice. She realizes:

*The truth is that it was Mohan who has clear idea of what he wanted; the kind of life he wanted to lead, the kind of home he would live in, and I went along with him. But I cannot blame Mohan, for even if he had asked me what do you want? – I would have found it hard to give him a reply.* (9)

When she is lost in this deep and meaningful thinking, Maitreyee comes to her mind who had rejected her philosopher husband Yajnavalkya's offer of half of his property. She asked him: *Will this property give me immortality?* 'No' he said and she immediately rejected the property. *To know what you want I have been denied that.* (25)

Jaya confesses that if Mohan is a sinner, then she too has to accept herself as one. Hence, she also realizes that she has to make a choice of her own to assert her individuality. After all, Maitreyee made a choice of her own. Shri Krishan told Arjuna that he himself would have to make his choice. *Yatheechasi tatha kurr – 'Do as you desire'*.

The ultimate choice of Jaya is to erase the silence. She gives vent to her pent up feelings and emerges as a new woman:

*If I have to plug that 'hole in the heart', I will have to speak, to listen; I will have to erase the silence between us. While studying Sanskrit drama, I'd learnt with a sense of outrage that its rigid rules did not permit women characters to speak Sanskrit. They had to use prakrit, a language that had sounded to my ears like a baby's lisp. The anger I had felt then comes back to me when I realized what I have been doing all these years. I have been speaking Prakrit myself.* (192-93)

Finally, Jaya realizes that she is a lone actor and has to fight the battle of her life single handedly. She keeps on struggling alone with the trauma and emerges victorious.

All female characters in "That Long Silence", Jaya, Jeeja, Mukta, Vanita mami, Vimla and her mother's story depict the plight of Indian women in this patriarchal society. These amply prove the plight of the women where there prescribed norms of society and are encoded persuasively in the female consciousness to instill orthodoxy in them. Mirra Kumarys states:

*The source of inconsistency lay with society itself and not with the individual women analyzed in her study. According to her, the remedy for the solution is not in individual therapy but rather in social reconstruction. The fault is with the actively cruel social environment, not with her.*

Jaya always looked at Mohan and herself as two bullocks yoked together but now she rejects that image and says: *I have always thought – there is only one life, no chance of reprieve, no second changes. But in this life itself there are so many cross roads, so many choices.* (192)

Finally, Jaya is ready to face the reality and with her new outlook and changed attitude she is optimistic in her views and says that life has always to be made possible. In this connection Clare Boothe Luce rightly says: *Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed. If I fail, no one will say, 'She doesn't have what it takes'. They will say, 'Women don't have what it takes'.*

At the end, it is very clear that the protagonist is ready to compromise with her life but not like dumb-driven cattle rather in the form and capacities of a new woman. It also seems that the heroines of Shashi Deshpande are very well aware of the strength given to woman in a traditional marriage and they refuse to come out of that frame. But at the same time they are unhappy and confused about their roles and the expectations placed upon them by a patriarchal society. Since the evolution of Indian Society, men have taken the responsibility of Indian women in terms of social security, economic, security, protection of women from criminals by sacrificing their own self, whereas the Indian women have only taken the role of *"abala nari"*. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Indian women are no more *"abala nari"* or *"forced to wear only Sari"*, they are as equal to men in every respect including refusal to wear Sari.

Jaya is reminded of lemmings, which rush down to the sea and drown themselves. She feels that marriage is a sea of sufferings for women where they drown themselves in pain. According to Deshpande, there is no escape from being caught in the *International Journal of Social Sciences Arts & Humanities*

quagmire of relations. In an interview, she said to Vanamala Vishwanatha: "It's necessary for a woman to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree with is the idealizations of motherhood, the false and sentimental notes that accompany it". Jaya is hopeful after many years of bitter conflict and with glimpses of hope Jaya has positive signs in her life. Jaya, who is a typical Indian woman, rejects to come out of the dogmas of married life but what is more important is that now she is ready to face the challenges living with her demanding husband. She accepts her flaws and comes out of depression. In this way, the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande achieve victory not only as a woman but also as human beings. Finally Jaya realizes her power as Roseanne Barr says: *The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it.*

To sum up, the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande resist and question the roles assigned to them as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers and refuse to be the objects of patriarchal system. They feel suffocated in male-defined codes of life and emerge out as New Women to face the challenges of life and Jaya is no exception in this case. But female characters in the novels of writers like Manju Kapur not only understand their plight but are ready to revolt and fight for their rights also.

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