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FROM OBJECT TO SUBJECT: NEGOTIATING REPRESENTATION AND SELF-REPRESENTATION IN *THAT LONG SILENCE* BY SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Abstract

That Long Silence occupies a unique place in the Indian Literature in English as it articulates a form of female realization and assertion against male domination. This paper is a narrative analysis of the Sara's mobility in Jaya as 'object' of social and marital representation to subjecting herself in voicing self. Through Feminist Theory, Subaltern Studies and Narrative Theory the researcher analyses silence, marriage and narrative voice as ways of controlling the woman. The reading suggests that for Deshpande, silence is not simply oppressively imposed on women but a place from which self-representation will emerge. By reflecting on herself and her story, Jaya begins to orient herself in the world and experience some sense of agency. The paper maintains that sitting here, in a very public space raises self–representation as an obligatory situation for female subjectivity and agency in Indian literature.

Keywords

Silence, Feminism, Subaltern Studies, Narrative Voice, Indian English Literature, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Who represents who remains problematic in literary study, including minority positions as women occupy. Women as seen in and interpreted from the centrist-patriarchal perspective feature prominently in Indian literature. These were the values that clothed female characters with quiet, silence and submissiveness and self-sacrifice life in this paradigm is meaningful only through men. And these portrayals do women a grave disservice, reducing their often-complex inner lives and leaving them with no independent voice. The thoughts and feelings of these women about other women, the antagonism at their aspirations and frustrations are all too tangible and remain unsung; they do not write what is said of them they remain given names Scratched lightly in the crust.

The novel questions tradition distortion. Turning the spotlight away from peer pressure and society, buildings blocks in Jaya's life are revised, replaced by thoughts and ideas. Jaya is a woman who is used to the silence she has been forced into by family, and society's neglect in general as we soon realize at the onset of the novel. She stifles her anger and artistic impulses as well as private beliefs in the interest of conjugal harmony and household stability. This silence is not just about her person, however; it is also the silencing of a socializing that tells women they are supposed to grin and bear it, shift themselves, vanish.

But the pressure of these expectations makes Jaya more and more imperfect over the course of the story. Through dwelling upon her memories buried within herself, she reaches out to the past, souls and emotional wounds. Writing is a fundamental way that she starts to know herself. By telling, she is transformed from a social puppet into the speaker of her own words. This transformation signifies a move from being written upon to writing, from Jaya acquiescing in the meanings overlaid on her to demanding the right of self-retrieval.

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This case is made with Feminist Theory to describe the silencing of women's voices as a result of patriarchal structuring. What Subaltern Studies then go on to tell us is that women like Jaya have no voice which cannot be ignored or misinterpreted. Narrative Theory also supports an interpretation of the novel's reflexive and fractured form in relation to Jaya's struggle for voice and coherence. Collectively, these theoretical positions prove *That Long Silence* is not just a personal narrative but an incisive comment on the structures silencing women. The novel eventually confirms that taking back one's voice will restore agency and selfhood.

Theoretical Framework:

Initially, feminist literary theory's importance to this play resides in the critiques of patriarchal society which silence and exclude women. Simone de Beauvoir's comment provides a useful way of interpreting Jaya's learned silence: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" (de Beauvoir, 301).

Indian feminist critics like Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have stressed that women's writing in India is more a negotiation than a rebellion. Deshpande does not show feminism as a loud protest in *That Long Silence*, rather it's something inside you that is an awakening and self-awareness.

Subaltern Studies Stresses voices that are not allowed to be heard in power dominated societies. the very question of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: "Can the subaltern speak? is also relevant to Jaya's silence" (Spivak, 287).

Even as an educated middle-class woman, Jaya's gender makes her a subordinate in marriage and society. Her silence speaks to the oppression she has internalized, not her lack of thought. The novel examines the way that subaltern status works even when they appear privileged.

Narrative theory focuses on the voice, perspective, and storytelling as formulation of identity. Gerard Genette's concept of focalization helps to articulate that the first-person narrative focalizes Jaya's consciousness. Telling her story gives Jaya the power to reframe her experience. I become an author of myself through narrative self-representation" (Smith, 32).

Representation of Women as Objects in Patriarchal Society:

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* presents scathing criticism of the patriarchal structures which relegate women to entities demarcated by societally constructed roles. Jaya's character is mostly limited to being a wife and mother, devoid of much distinctive individuality or expression. Sooner than later in her marriage she figures out that, not only is it expected, silence is also rewarded. It is all part of the plan to raise women who have learned not to make a fuss and not to demand an explanation, as she writes, "A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated" (Deshpande, 147).

This statement is an example of how the patriarchal rhetoric delegitimizes female feelings and silences as a virtue.

Marriage in this story serves as an institution which upholds men. Mohan's dreams and anxieties dictate Jaya's behavior, and she has no choice but to stifle her opinions for the sake of family peace. She says she deliberately does not argue because it undermines her husband's masculinity. The first-person narrator, Jaya makes a thoughtful remark, "I had learnt at last – silence was the only weapon" (Deshpande, 145).

But this silence does not make her powerful, it makes her a background dormant figure that exists only so long as she can comfort the protagonist and not be herself.

Jaya the writer serves as a perfect example of Jaya the object. For as long as she has creative leanings, writing is something that comes second to taking care of her home. The success of Mohan discomfits her and prevents her from taking authorship seriously. Consequently, Jaya has

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internalised that her primary responsibility is to uphold the honour and dignity of her husband. This process of reducing a woman to be useful for someone and this for another, instead of being an independent human entity in her own right, shows how patriarchy makes women into objects that must serve and give up things. In this way, Deshpande reveals the subtle yet omnipresent ways in which women are defined, restricted and motivated within a patriarchal world.

Silence as a Mechanism of Control:

In That Long Silence, Shashi Deshpande portrays silence as a potent agent in the hands of patriarchal society that is used to control the conduct and feelings of women. For Jaya, silence is as much a social norm as it is a crafty strategy of survival in matrimony. She thinks that silence helps keep the peace at home and avoids conflict. In time, the silence squelches her identity and disengages her from her true self. Silence, Deshpande shows us, is not the default female nature but learned practice — as a function of fear and conditioning.

Inside her, Jaya has the script of what a "good" woman is supposed to accept without complaint or denial. And, she admits, to avoid struggle to have peace, even if it costs me emotionally. On reflecting on her marriage, she confesses, "I knew it finally, no questions, no answers; only silence" (Deshpande, 79).

The confession brings with it recognition that silence becomes a discipline of oppression against women; we are to be recipients of male power. Feminist critics see this silence as a way of camouflaging violence to the structure of oppression by idealising docility.

From a subaltern perspective, Jaya's silence is the result of internal dominance and not that of lack of thought. She has a voice, but social mores prevent her from uttering it. Her emotions are repressed – she is gathering it all inside of her and this creates emotional integration. For Deshpande, the situation is intellectually shattering. Jaya's silence does not shield her identity — it obliterates it. She feels invisible, to herself as well, and she knows it is silence that has made her so.

That long silence, too, weaponizes it as an instrument of control very effectively. Patriarchy is for women who show up. Charting the cost of silence, Deshpande pushes back against unarticulated narratives of submission and paves the way for Jaya to start a journey towards representation.

Crisis and Introspection: The Turning Point:

The crisis in *That Long Silence* is also the basic substance of Jaya's psychology and sensibility. But Mohan's public humiliation on the job and their subsequent relocation to a cramped rental cleaves physical and emotional distances between husband and wife. The forced separation disrupts the household's lull, forcing Jaya to face her repressed emotions. Outside of the social whirl and free from the burden of so many divorce Machiavellians she starts to take a good long look at herself.

Memory emerges as an operative trope in this moment of reflection. It is examined that Jaya can see how she has herself been silenced. She ruminates, "I had felt that silence would save me" (Deshpande, 144).

This awakening reveals that silence is a self-preservation plan, but not one that eventually brings equanimity of some stripe, it brings emotional exclusion.

That perception of self is also conditioned and determined by language, using the reflexive forms as well to reconstruct how identity is malleable within a narrative-theoretical context. The storytelling is in first-person, which helps Jaya reconcile with and retell her past. In hindsight, she realizes that as a mute wife she became the object of others' desires and expectations. When she says she is guilty. She admits, "I had trained myself not to speak" (Deshpande, 146).

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This insight could be a first step towards getting lost in something other than unconscious submission.

Thus, the crisis is not foreclosure but transformation. And it heralds the beginning of Jaya's journey from object to subject. Not its fatality but its voluntariness is the condition for her coming to voice and subjecthood. This self-image is built on reflection.

Self-Representation through Writing and Narration:

Silence in *That Long Silence* is a means of introspection and self-examination. What happens is that Jaya's life descends into an emotional and moral hell after her husband Mohan hits a rough patch. This break in herself shocks her into retreat of body and mind, and forces her to confront the silence that has governed all those years. The crisis acts a mirror, casting Jaya to re-assess her life, marriage and identity. Writing and voice are posed as primary modes through which repressed passion is articulated, and sexual assertion obtained.

The protagonist Jaya, fights against the rule by the male dominated society. And as a wife she has gotten used to keeping silent for the sake of peace — only this robbed her of herself. Storytelling is how she gives voice to her feelings of anger, fear and desire — and regret that happily married Sarah's life would in all appearances have felt inexplicably lacking. A realization she even comes to accept herself when she says, "I had learnt it at last: silence is not always golden" (Deshpande, 193).

It is as if the act of writing has given her a space in which to speak without fear, to think about her own complicity standing silent.

To tell this story is to write through the feminist writing provides authorial space for women to express their experiences and thoughts that cannot be contained within patriarchal discourse. Jaya is not a defiant type in the dramatic sense. That is not to say that she is rejecting marriage or family, rather that she is seeking for herself a way of defining herself within the framework they provide. Her opposition is internal, meditative, ethical. In speaking, she is recasting her identity as a wife and an individual.

To convey one's own representation, therefore, becomes an ethical responsibility. Jaya understands that silence is a decision and that it must be broken if self-respect is to be maintained. That last decision appears hopeful, not conclusive; she is going to progress consciously and with voice. The novel finishes by staying true to its beginnings, that narration allow women to transition from objecthood to subjectivity, and silence into self-expression.

Narrative Voice and Female Subjectivity:

Jaya is not a speechless recipient whose obedience with patriarchal prescription has moulded her. The narrative voice immerses readers into events through Jaya's head alone compatible with Gérard Genette's internal focalization, in which perception and all forms of memory and judgment are confined within the narrator. The novel's narrative style renders it an intimate psychological space, and one that prioritizes female subjectivity.

Jaya is thrown into turmoil by the professional fall of her husband Mohan, and has to introspect. She emerges I mean removal makes her surface from decades of service, voiceless and modest. She confesses about her life, "I had learnt it at last, no questions, no retorts, only silence" (Deshpande, 149).

This means silence as a patriarchal instrument, to silence women's voices and tell them submission is virtuous.

By telling her story, Jaya is seizing power. It is a method of self-definition and resistance, through storytelling. It's really flipping the script on those stories that are so male-centric in

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which women end up being sidelined in their interior life. Deshpande too does not treat female experience with contempt, by respecting the value of thought over action, reflection over rebellion. Jaya's voice is not an insurgent to overturn social structures radically; instead, it puts them in another sort of crisis, an ethical and psychological plaint.

It is in the narration that Jaya moves from object to subject. "For her to voice it, even if she is wavering on it, that is empowering. The novel remarks that female subjectivity starts with the courage to voice one's story, even if, as Jaya says, "that long silence" (Deshpande 193).

Negotiating Feminism in the Indian Context:

Shashi Deshpande portrays feminism in *That Long Silence* as a very gradual method of negotiation, rather than that of overt revolt. Jaya's feminist awakening is not spurred by an emphatic rejection of social norms, but by a quiet crisis that demands introspection and leaves little room for timidity. As Jaya's marriage descends to emotional disrepair, she gets the kind of distance she needs to look back at her life, on her silence, and on being complicit in perpetrating patriarchal dharma. Then, the crisis is reinterpreted as a starting point for self-awareness, not for liberation.

Deshpande positions Jaya firmly in Indian society, where custom, marriage and family structure play a substantial role in defining the identity of women. Jaya does not reject these establishments entirely but chooses to question her participation in them. It is this somewhat accidental feminism that her recognition of her silence as a vow binds, since she realizes that "I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts, only silence" (Deshpande, 147). And that silence, once misunderstood as a virtue, now feels like self-erasure.

What we can trace in Jaya's arc is this vein of an Indian feminist thought that emphasizes ways of living over ideological caricatures. Her awakening to the truth does not fix everything, but by not solving it outright, she opens the door a crack for change. If anything, the book does not allow liberation to feel too much like a somebody I used to know. Rather, self-presentation is the struggle itself. Jaya, in her monologue looks like arguing that it is also a necessary but a challenging speaking out "To speak, to break the silence that was the real challenge" (Deshpande, 192).

Accordingly, *That Long Silence* models feminism as consciousness rising on the terms of recognition and saying. That Jaya finally begins to speak is not an ending, but a beginning.

Conclusion:

To conclude, *That Long Silence* is a sensitive analysis of the representation and self-representation of Indian literature. Through the journey of Jaya, Deshpande has unveiled the insidious workings of patriarchy and showcased the liberating potential of narrative voice. I argue that if Feminist Theory, Subaltern Studies, and Narrative Theory are combined or intersected from these angles, they show how silence constrains as well as provokes. The novel insists that it is necessary to become oneself. In breaking her silence, Jaya chooses to move from object-hood to subject. Accordingly, Deshpande adds significant layers to feminist dialogue by highlighting reflection, voice, and ethics as the process of empowerment.

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