CHAPTER IV

Eloquent Quiescence: That Long Silence

Love one another, but make not a bond of love.
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.
Fill each other’s cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not of the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music (Gibran, as qtd. in Adler and Rodman, Understanding Human Communication).

An individual’s life is defined by his valuable relationships which are indeed his true assets. However, it is also needed to be kept in mind that the withering or the thriving of relationships always involves more than one individual as a single individual can never control the entire relationship. Relationship problems are the most difficult of all kinds of problems owing to their subjectivity and the involvement of more than one person. Familial relationships involve a gamut of relationships, the base of which is the marital relationships and the other relationships are just the offshoots of it. That Long Silence exhibits Shashi Deshpande’s fascination towards the theme of relationships; how the relationships are perceived, nurtured and many a time taken for granted too. The novel reveals Deshpande’s interest in the familial and non-familial relationships and focuses predominantly on the marital relationships between the protagonist Jaya and her husband Mohan through the exploration of the mental landscape and the psyche of the protagonist Jaya, an educated middle-class urban Indian woman.

Despite being the recipient of a string of literary awards including the prestigious national Sahitya Academy Award in 1990 for That Long Silence, Deshpande prefers remaining silent and low profile but highlighting the relationship of silence between the protagonist and her husband. This relationship of silence is outlined through the author’s efforts to trace the passage of a woman struggling to come out of this silence and outgrow the image and the roles allotted to her by the
society. The novel explores the search of the protagonist Jaya who is caught in a maze of doubts and fears and strives to fulfill herself as a human being, along with being a daughter, a wife and a mother. The evolution of the protagonist Jaya and her interpersonal relationships fraught with friction at the sexual, emotional and intellectual level is the key-theme of That Long Silence. As in The Dark Holds No Terrors, in That Long Silence too, the author does not throw the blame for this friction and frustration in the marital relationships of the protagonists squarely on the male protagonists. Rather she works on the whole gamut of relationships very minutely and her dominant concern seems to be with the alienation of men and women, their dissatisfaction with the modern life resulting in the break-down of their relationship. Failure to establish valuable relationships is also due to the failure to outgrow the images and the roles allotted to male.

Before going into the complex dynamics of the relational quotient in That Long Silence, it is imperative to delineate in brief the story outline of this novel of Shashi Deshpande. That Long Silence is the story of Jaya, a woman who suppresses every aspect of her personality and fits herself into her role as a wife and a mother. The social psychologist Abraham Maslow throws light on women like Jaya, who are always afraid of articulating their likes and dislikes and calls them “low dominance women.” Maslow gives his views about such women in his article, “Dominance, Personality, and Social Behaviour”:

Low dominance women are very different. They ...usually do not dare to break rules, even when they (rarely) disapprove of them... Their morality and ethics are usually entirely conventional. That is, they do what they have been taught to do so by their parents, their teachers, or their religion. The dictum of authority is usually not questioned openly and they are more apt to approve of the status quo in every field of life, religion, economic, educational and political (Journal of Social Psychology 10).

The protagonist Jaya is a representative of traditional Indian family which fosters values like tolerance, adjustment, subservience, being silent and above all, considering marriage as the sole anchor of womanhood. Though being courageous
and questioning to every oddity before her marriage, she has to internalise the predefined socio-cultural system of Indian society. Jaya’s husband Mohan is an educated Indian man who despite his education and good job as an engineer, is a product of cultural conditioning in his childhood which makes it natural for him to expect Jaya to be tolerant, silent and self-sacrificing as was his own mother. The convent educated Jaya like the most other Indian women does not endeavour to maintain her individuality and is quite content playing her role as Mohan’s wife and the mother of two children Rahul and Rati. She effortlessly embraces her new roles of a dutiful wife and a caring mother like the mythical figures Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. Ungrudgingly; she adorns the mantle of the mythical figure Gandhari who bandaged her eyes and walked behind her husband, assuming that Mohan and she being husband and wife are like “two bullocks yoked together” (7) and a husband is like a “sheltering tree” (32). It is later that she recollects how she let Mohan take all family decisions and she herself internalised femininity by being complacent with her children and home:

Mohan had managed to get the job. I never asked him how he did it. 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 first class. And, there was enough for Mohan to send home to his father - for Sudha’s fees, Vasant’s clothes and Sudha’s marriage (61-62).

For a major part of her married life, Jaya forgot her own needs and happiness and engrossed herself in keeping her husband happy as she was taught and conditioned before her marriage to “Keep romance alive in a marriage. The quality of charm in a woman...”(96). Her diaries recorded trivial daily routine jobs like the dates when the servants did not come and the payments made to them. All such things life made her life monotonous and mechanical. The creative side of her personality never came on surface as most of the time her words remained unsaid. This mechanical life is disrupted when a crisis comes in the form of Mohan’s suspension and an
investigation case against him on being involved in embezzlement. Mohan takes the decision that they would leave their Church gate bungalow and move to Jaya’s humble Dadar flat for a few days till the enquiry in the office is over. Jaya’s opinion is never asked and is as ever taken for granted.

Like Sara, the protagonist in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Jaya also indulges in serious introspection at her parental house and is quite at ease with her neighbours and servants despite living in unclean surroundings. She realizes how she has suppressed her wishes and spent all these years in being a shadowy figure to Mohan. Grave contemplation makes her realize the reasons for their marriage going stale and instead of blaming Mohan for all her discontentment and dissatisfaction; she realizes that she is also a contributor to her subservience. Self-actualized Jaya is determined to redefine her relationship with her husband. This is in nut-shell the story of That Lone Silence.

That Long Silence may have the most hackneyed storyline told a million times – the story of a convent educated woman, bored and dissatisfied with social and familial norms, feeling trapped in the flux between tradition and modernity; but the novel stands out because of the novelist’s sparkling and sensitive narration and its life-like characterisation. The novel touches and moves every reader with its simple and real-life characters and the highs and lows of ordinary middle-class life but more than that it impresses them with its amazing complexity of the seemingly simple bonds. The heart and soul of the novel is undoubtedly Jaya, who wants to prove her worth as an individual capable of taking decisions and being considered a human-being with desires, longings and individuality. Like the other fiction of Deshpande, That Long Silence is also a woman-centred novel, which highlights the protagonist’s craving to open her lips and exhibit her heart torn-apart into two parts: one full of anguish, guilt and anger over her acceptance of double standards for men and women in Indian society and the other indecisive to be vocal or unvocal in expressing her marital dissatisfaction. It explores the tensions, pains and anguish of Jaya who is caught in the dilemma between traditions or conventions and modernity. Jaya’s silence is ultimately explicable in her writings which prove to be a means of achieving catharsis. Jaya’s silence makes her sacrifice at different stages of her life by being self-negating. Shakuntala Bharvani, in her article “Some Recent Trends in Modern
Indian Fiction: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* and Amitabh Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* substantiates the reasons behind the neurotic personality of Jaya:

She is representative of girls brought up in middle-class families in Post-Independent India, a time when most parents strove hard to provide their children with English education and exposure to Western modes of living and thinking. Parents inculcated in their girls a certain duality, sometimes quite unconsciously: On the one hand an impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated, and on the other, an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. The woman of today, therefore speaking in the language of Psychology, has a near-schizophrenic personality: one side staidly “accepts” while the other craves to “speak”, to think and express the life of the mind (Dhawan, *Indian Women Novelists* 149-50).

Deshpande has often expressed very explicitly in many of her interviews that clash between tradition and modernity is a theme of interest in most of her novels. Educated urban protagonists try to release themselves from the social constraints imposed on them, by fighting against them, as education ignites in them sparks of consciousness. The causes of their discontentment and frustration may be deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and patriarchal issues resulting in rhetoric of inequality between the sexes and the main characters like Jaya, being unable to defy the system; ultimately think of changing their ‘selves.’ Jaya too, though not contented with her marital life; fails to rebel against the patriarchal set-up. It is therefore clear that it is the psychological struggle within the mind of the protagonist which is of prime importance for Deshpande, than the social-milieu. At the same time; it is also true that an individual’s behaviour is rarely disconnected from the gamut of people surrounding them. Therefore the protagonists are seen as daughters, wives or mothers who have to operate within the patriarchal set-up.

Shashi Deshpande does not deny that social and cultural forces shape the environment within which basic psychological processes such as the psyche of an individual, his positive or negative emotional development, his capacity to
understand, care and respect others take place. But an analysis of That Long Silence reveals that the author’s main interest is in the psychological processes themselves rather than in their social setting, thereby actions taking place at the mental level are at the fore of this study. Consequently, like all social psychologists, Shashi Deshpande makes her characters central abstractions and focus of analysis. In That Long Silence, her concern throughout the novel is the psyche of Jaya and Mohan and the exploration and probing into the interior milieu of Jaya, gives Deshpande immense scope to explain disharmony in Jaya’s relational currents. The author believes that an individual is born into a family and is subject to the familial influences, but his biography is partly self-made and partly made by the validation of others. Therefore, though one finds a number of relationships in the novel, it is the marital relationship between Jaya and Mohan which remain the focal point in the novel. Deshpande’s protagonists find themselves ensnared by all sort of relationships—wanted and unwanted ones, and keep questioning their different selves like daughters, wives and mothers. They are never proud of their different roles as they feel the involuntary imposition of these roles crushes their individuality as a human being. They feel like birds in a cage but through self-realization realize the sanctity of their various roles; thereby getting peace and satisfaction in the stereotypes of the wife and the mother. The protagonist of the chosen novel is tired and discontented with the various roles entrusted upon her and feels that her personality is not the sum total of all these roles. A careful perusal of the novel makes it very clear that Jaya actually never wants to get rid of familial bonds, but she certainly wants herself to be considered a human being and not automation. She becomes a mouthpiece of the author’s philosophy of relationships as Shashi Deshpande has voiced her discontentment in many interviews and articles. To quote the author, “My writings come out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman.” (Deshpande, “Of Concerns, Of Anxieties,” Indian Literature, 108).

Like the protagonist Jaya, the author too felt discontentment with her role as a housewife taking care of her children and the routine household tasks. Loss of personal identity leads to the emergence of these concerns in Shashi Deshpande’s writings as there is some kind of parallelism between Deshpande’s life and that of her
protagonist Jaya. She is the kind of writer who immerses herself in her main characters and thinks of herself as merely the medium through which they speak. The following words of Deshpande reveal that her fiction emerged from her, “own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be woman in our society—there I was, happily married, two lovely sons, but I was feeling very incomplete, even dissatisfied. (Deshpande, “Of Concerns, Of Anxieties,” Indian Literature 108). She always writes in the first person but her characters’ viewpoints are not necessarily her own viewpoints. Although Deshpande carefully avoids her personal life when talking to the media, she considers writing having a therapeutic value. While she claims that she has amply revealed her personal side in interviews, but after reading her interviews carefully; one finds that these include more of Deshpande’s opinions than of her experiences. The writer C.K. Meena feels that though Deshpande exhibits an exterior of a happy and comfortable soul; “She was going through emotional pain, while she was busy creating works such as That Long Silence. If not for writing she could not have maintained her sanity, she [Deshpande] says, “Even in my worst moments I wrote. Writing is catharsis” (Meena, “Author Profile: Shashi Deshpande” www.businessworld.in).

Notwithstanding her dissatisfaction and a general feeling of something lacking in her married life, Shashi Deshpande evinces deep faith in the importance and value of continuing with relationships at any cost. This acute faith of author is demonstrated in the protagonist Jaya’s effort to survive and sustain regardless of conjugal incompatibility between the couple. Therefore, the novel ends with Jaya’s positive thoughts, “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. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible” (193).

Jaya tries to resolve her present crisis by delving deep into her past and thereby redefining her marital relationship and her identity as an individual. The fact that there is no linear progression of events in That Long Silence, as is the case with most of Deshpande’s other novels; makes this novel realistic but a jig-saw puzzle of past and present events. Past interferes into the present and present cannot dissociate itself from the past experiences as happens in real life too.
Patriarchy is a strange paradox which operates in two ways. It subjugates women by giving them a secondary status in the family and it also conditions and prepares them for their own subjugation. The second operation is more dangerous one which disables women in a subtle way so that they do not think of their rights and expectations. Even in educated urban families, patriarchy operates in a much understated way in setting up the family rules according to the suitability and convenience of the men. Patriarchy and cultural norms also operate in an implicit way when the rules do not operate to negotiate the unbiased man-woman relationship. There are no black and white rules in relationships but conditioning of the women has continued from one generation to another in one guise or the other. In a way, women are made to walk behind their husbands and are conditioned to do so in order to make their marriages work smoothly. Jaya and Mohan’s incompatible relationship is also a product of patriarchy operating at above two levels. For instance, Jaya never dared to tell Mohan a very simple thing that she likes watching advertisements which are flashed on the screen in a theatre, prior to any movie in the theatre hall, “There’s no need to hurry; Mohan often said when we were getting ready to go to a movie. ‘At the most we’ll miss the ads and who wants to see them anyway?’” (3). This instance though seems trivial; reveals the operation of patriarchy at the first level, where a man takes all decisions on his own and even controls the thought-process of the his wife. The second operation of patriarchy manifests in the following lines of the novel, where Jaya, conditioned to think as her husband thinks, never dares to raise her opinion:

I did, but I never dared to confess it to him. What if he too said, ‘What poor taste you have, Jaya’? Instead, I replied cravenly, ‘Yes, no need to hurry’, trying frantically, deviously, to get there on time. The kid with the endearing moustache of milk; the tender, smiling mother rubbing Vicks on her son’s chest; the even younger mother feeding her baby with Farex; the brother and sister running hand in hand to adoring, smiling parents and chocolates-I loved them all. Those cosy, smiling, happy families in their gleaming homes spelt sheer poetry to me. For me, they were the fairy tales in which people ‘live happily ever after’ (3).
The above confession of Jaya reveals her suppressed longings for the simple, trivial pleasures of life and her suppressed desires; which make her life a perfunctory loveless life. Jaya mocks at the hypocrisy of her relationships with Mohan, by truly analysing the type of relationship she has with Mohan, “Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off fits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel” (7). Mohan’s nature of staying aloof and indifferent towards her partner makes Jaya imagine both of them as “a pair of bullocks yoked together” (7). Suppressed longings and failure to give vent to her desires make Jaya see her relationship with Mohan like:

A pair of bullocks yoked together...a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman (8).

Failure to express her simple day to day likes and desires lead to frustrations and hallucinations in Jaya’s mind which despite years of submission and its realisation; is still ready to grant her acquiescence to all decisions of Mohan. Deshpande makes a repeated use of the metaphor ‘a pair of bullocks yoked together’ to reveal the dilemma of Jaya, “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).

Deshpande works from the premise of different cultural and societal roles assigned to male as well as female in Indian society, but places woman as the central entity and relegates peripheral position to man. That Long Silence too, revolves around the woman protagonist Jaya and gives glimpses of Mohan’s personality and his mind-set through the thought-process of Jaya. This is due to the fact that development, nurturance and sustenance of relationships thrive more on emotional and intuitive level than on intellectual level. The women are by and large considered as the gender gifted with more emotional quotient, the fact which makes Shashi Deshpande place Jaya at the pivotal point in That Long Silence. Scriptures like The Ramayana and The Mahabharata abound with examples of women endowed with
society. The novel explores the search of the protagonist Jaya who is caught in a maze of doubts and fears and strives to fulfil herself as a human being, along with being a daughter, a wife and a mother. The evolution of the protagonist Jaya and her interpersonal relationships fraught with friction at the sexual, emotional and intellectual level is the key-theme of That Long Silence. As in The Dark Holds No Terrors, in That Long Silence too, the author does not throw the blame for this friction and frustration in the marital relationships of the protagonists squarely on the male protagonists. Rather she works on the whole gamut of relationships very minutely and her dominant concern seems to be with the alienation of men and women, their dissatisfaction with the modern life resulting in the break-down of their relationship. Failure to establish valuable relationships is also due to the failure to outgrow the images and the roles allotted to male.

Before going into the complex dynamics of the relational quotient in That Long Silence, it is imperative to delineate in brief the story outline of this novel of Shashi Deshpande. That Long Silence is the story of Jaya, a woman who suppresses every aspect of her personality and fits herself into her role as a wife and a mother. The social psychologist Abraham Maslow throws light on women like Jaya, who are always afraid of articulating their likes and dislikes and calls them “low dominance women.” Maslow gives his views about such women in his article, “Dominance, Personality, and Social Behaviour”:

Low dominance women are very different. They ...usually do not dare to break rules, even when they (rarely) disapprove of them... Their morality and ethics are usually entirely conventional. That is, they do what they have been taught to do so by their parents, their teachers, or their religion. The dictum of authority is usually not questioned openly and they are more apt to approve of the status quo in every field of life, religion, economic, educational and political (Journal of Social Psychology 10).

The protagonist Jaya is a representative of traditional Indian family which fosters values like tolerance, adjustment, subservience, being silent and above all, considering marriage as the sole anchor of womanhood. Though being courageous
and questioning to every oddity before her marriage, she has to internalise the predefined socio-cultural system of Indian society. Jaya’s husband Mohan is an educated Indian man who despite his education and good job as an engineer, is a product of cultural conditioning in his childhood which makes it natural for him to expect Jaya to be tolerant, silent and self-sacrificing as was his own mother. The convent educated Jaya like the most other Indian women does not endeavour to maintain her individuality and is quite content playing her role as Mohan’s wife and the mother of two children Rahul and Rati. She effortlessly embraces her new roles of a dutiful wife and a caring mother like the mythical figures Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. Ungrudgingly; she adorns the mantle of the mythical figure Gandhari who bandaged her eyes and walked behind her husband, assuming that Mohan and she being husband and wife are like “two bullocks yoked together” (7) and a husband is like a “sheltering tree” (32). It is later that she recollects how she let Mohan take all family decisions and she herself internalised femininity by being complacent with her children and home:

Mohan had managed to get the job. I never asked him how he did it. 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 first class. And, there was enough for Mohan to send home to his father - for Sudha’s fees, Vasant’s clothes and Sudha’s marriage (61-62).

For a major part of her married life, Jaya forgot her own needs and happiness and engrossed herself in keeping her husband happy as she was taught and conditioned before her marriage to “Keep romance alive in a marriage. The quality of charm in a woman...”(96). Her diaries recorded trivial daily routine jobs like the dates when the servants did not come and the payments made to them. All such things life made her life monotonous and mechanical. The creative side of her personality never came on surface as most of the time her words remained unsaid. This mechanical life is disrupted when a crisis comes in the form of Mohan’s suspension and an
investigation case against him on being involved in embezzlement. Mohan takes the decision that they would leave their Church gate bungalow and move to Jaya’s humble Dadar flat for a few days till the enquiry in the office is over. Jaya’s opinion is never asked and is as ever taken for granted.

Like Saru, the protagonist in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Jaya also indulges in serious introspection at her parental house and is quite at ease with her neighbours and servants despite living in unclean surroundings. She realizes how she has suppressed her wishes and spent all these years in being a shadowy figure to Mohan. Grave contemplation makes her realize the reasons for their marriage going stale and instead of blaming Mohan for all her discontentment and dissatisfaction; she realizes that she is also a contributor to her subservience. Self-actualized Jaya is determined to redefine her relationship with her husband. This is in nut-shell the story of That Long Silence.

That Long Silence may have the most hackneyed storyline told a million times – the story of a convent educated woman, bored and dissatisfied with social and familial norms, feeling trapped in the flux between tradition and modernity; but the novel stands out because of the novelist’s sparkling and sensitive narration and its life-like characterisation. The novel touches and moves every reader with its simple and real-life characters and the highs and lows of ordinary middle-class life but more than that it impresses them with its amazing complexity of the seemingly simple bonds. The heart and soul of the novel is undoubtedly Jaya, who wants to prove her worth as an individual capable of taking decisions and being considered a human-being with desires, longings and individuality. Like the other fiction of Deshpande, That Long Silence is also a woman-centred novel, which highlights the protagonist’s craving to open her lips and exhibit her heart torn-apart into two parts: one full of anguish, guilt and anger over her acceptance of double standards for men and women in Indian society and the other indecisive to be vocal or unvocal in expressing her marital dissatisfaction. It explores the tensions, pains and anguish of Jaya who is caught in the dilemma between traditions or conventions and modernity. Jaya’s silence is ultimately explicable in her writings which prove to be a means of achieving catharsis. Jaya’s silence makes her sacrifice at different stages of her life by being self-negating. Shakuntala Bharvani, in her article “Some Recent Trends in Modern
Indian Fiction: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence, Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel and Amitabh Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines,” substantiates the reasons behind the neurotic personality of Jaya:

She is representative of girls brought up in middle-class families in Post-Independent India, a time when most parents strove hard to provide their children with English education and exposure to Western modes of living and thinking. Parents inculcated in their girls a certain duality, sometimes quite unconsciously: On the one hand an impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated, and on the other, an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. The woman of today, therefore speaking in the language of Psychology, has a near-schizophrenic personality: one side staidly “accepts” while the other craves to “speak”, to think and express the life of the mind (Dhawan, Indian Women Novelists 149-50).

Deshpande has often expressed very explicitly in many of her interviews that clash between tradition and modernity is a theme of interest in most of her novels. Educated urban protagonists try to release themselves from the social constraints imposed on them, by fighting against them, as education ignites in them sparks of consciousness. The causes of their discontentment and frustration may be deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and patriarchal issues resulting in rhetoric of inequality between the sexes and the main characters like Jaya, being unable to defy the system; ultimately think of changing their ‘selves.’ Jaya too, though not contented with her marital life; fails to rebel against the patriarchal set-up. It is therefore clear that it is the psychological struggle within the mind of the protagonist which is of prime importance for Deshpande, than the social-milieu. At the same time; it is also true that an individual’s behaviour is rarely disconnected from the gamut of people surrounding them. Therefore the protagonists are seen as daughters, wives or mothers who have to operate within the patriarchal set-up.

Shashi Deshpande does not deny that social and cultural forces shape the environment within which basic psychological processes such as the psyche of an individual, his positive or negative emotional development, his capacity to
understand, care and respect others take place. But an analysis of That Long Silence reveals that the author’s main interest is in the psychological processes themselves rather than in their social setting, thereby actions taking place at the mental level are at the fore of this study. Consequently, like all social psychologists, Shashi Deshpande makes her characters central abstractions and focus of analysis. In That Long Silence, her concern throughout the novel is the psyche of Jaya and Mohan and the exploration and probing into the interior milieu of Jaya, gives Deshpande immense scope to explain disharmony in Jaya’s relational currents. The author believes that an individual is born into a family and is subject to the familial influences, but his biography is partly self-made and partly made by the validation of others. Therefore, though one finds a number of relationships in the novel, it is the marital relationship between Jaya and Mohan which remain the focal point in the novel. Deshpande’s protagonists find themselves ensnared by all sort of relationships—wanted and unwanted ones, and keep questioning their different selves like daughters, wives and mothers. They are never proud of their different roles as they feel the involuntary imposition of these roles crushes their individuality as a human being. They feel like birds in a cage but through self-realization realize the sanctity of their various roles; thereby getting peace and satisfaction in the stereotypes of the wife and the mother. The protagonist of the chosen novel is tired and discontented with the various roles entrusted upon her and feels that her personality is not the sum total of all these roles. A careful perusal of the novel makes it very clear that Jaya actually never wants to get rid of familial bonds, but she certainly wants herself to be considered a human being and not automation. She becomes a mouthpiece of the author’s philosophy of relationships as Shashi Deshpande has voiced her discontentment in many interviews and articles. To quote the author, “My writings come out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman.” (Deshpande, “Of Concerns, Of Anxieties,” Indian Literature 108).

Like the protagonist Jaya, the author too felt discontentment with her role as a housewife taking care of her children and the routine household tasks. Loss of personal identity leads to the emergence of these concerns in Shashi Deshpande’s writings as there is some kind of parallelism between Deshpande’s life and that of her
protagonist Jaya. She is the kind of writer who immerses herself in her main characters and thinks of herself as merely the medium through which they speak. The following words of Deshpande reveal that her fiction emerged from her, “own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be woman in our society—there I was, happily married, two lovely sons, but I was feeling very incomplete, even dissatisfied. (Deshpande, “Of Concerns, Of Anxieties,” Indian Literature 108). She always writes in the first person but her characters’ viewpoints are not necessarily her own viewpoints. Although Deshpande carefully avoids her personal life when talking to the media, she considers writing having a therapeutic value. While she claims that she has amply revealed her personal side in interviews, but after reading her interviews carefully; one finds that these include more of Deshpande’s opinions than of her experiences. The writer C.K. Meena feels that though Deshpande exhibits an exterior of a happy and comfortable soul; “She was going through emotional pain, while she was busy creating works such as That Long Silence. If not for writing she could not have maintained her sanity, she [Deshpande] says, “Even in my worst moments I wrote. Writing is catharsis” (Meena, “Author Profile: Shashi Deshpande” www.businessworld.in).

Notwithstanding her dissatisfaction and a general feeling of something lacking in her married life, Shashi Deshpande evinces deep faith in the importance and value of continuing with relationships at any cost. This acute faith of author is demonstrated in the protagonist Jaya’s effort to survive and sustain regardless of conjugal incompatibility between the couple. Therefore, the novel ends with Jaya’s positive thoughts, “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. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible” (193).

Jaya tries to resolve her present crisis by delving deep into her past and thereby redefining her marital relationship and her identity as an individual. The fact that there is no linear progression of events in That Long Silence, as is the case with most of Deshpande’s other novels; makes this novel realistic but a jigsaw puzzle of past and present events. Past interferes into the present and present cannot dissociate itself from the past experiences as happens in real life too.
Patriarchy is a strange paradox which operates in two ways. It subjugates women by giving them a secondary status in the family and it also conditions and prepares them for their own subjugation. The second operation is more dangerous one which disables women in a subtle way so that they do not think of their rights and expectations. Even in educated urban families, patriarchy operates in a much understated way in setting up the family rules according to the suitability and convenience of the men. Patriarchy and cultural norms also operate in an implicit way when the rules do not operate to negotiate the unbiased man-woman relationship. There are no black and white rules in relationships but conditioning of the women has continued from one generation to another in one guise or the other. In a way, women are made to walk behind their husbands and are conditioned to do so in order to make their marriages work smoothly. Jaya and Mohan’s incompatible relationship is also a product of patriarchy operating at above two levels. For instance, Jaya never dared to tell Mohan a very simple thing that she likes watching advertisements which are flashed on the screen in a theatre, prior to any movie in the theatre hall, “There’s no need to hurry; Mohan often said when we were getting ready to go to a movie. ‘At the most we’ll miss the ads and who wants to see them anyway?’ (3). This instance though seems trivial; reveals the operation of patriarchy at the first level, where a man takes all decisions on his own and even controls the thought-process of the his wife. The second operation of patriarchy manifests in the following lines of the novel, where Jaya, conditioned to think as her husband thinks, never dares to raise her opinion:

I did, but I never dared to confess it to him. What if he too said, ‘What poor taste you have, Jaya!’? Instead, I replied cravenly, ‘Yes, no need to hurry’, trying frantically, deviously, to get there on time. The kid with the endearing moustache of milk; the tender, smiling mother rubbing Vicks on her son’s chest; the even younger mother feeding her baby with Farex; the brother and sister running hand in hand to adoring, smiling parents and chocolates-I loved them all. Those cosy, smiling, happy families in their gleaming homes spelt sheer poetry to me. For me, they were the fairy tales in which people ‘live happily ever after’ (3).
The above confession of Jaya reveals her suppressed longings for the simple, trivial pleasures of life and her suppressed desires; which make her life a perfunctory loveless life. Jaya mocks at the hypocrisy of her relationships with Mohan, by truly analysing the type of relationship she has with Mohan, “Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off fits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel” (7). Mohan’s nature of staying aloof and indifferent towards her partner makes Jaya imagine both of them as “a pair of bullocks yoked together” (7). Suppressed longings and failure to give vent to her desires make Jaya see her relationship with Mohan like:

A pair of bullocks yoked together...a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman (8).

Failure to express her simple day to day likes and desires lead to frustrations and hallucinations in Jaya’s mind which despite years of submission and its realisation; is still ready to grant her acquiescence to all decisions of Mohan. Deshpande makes a repeated use of the metaphor ‘a pair of bullocks yoked together’ to reveal the dilemma of Jaya, “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).

Deshpande works from the premise of different cultural and societal roles assigned to male as well as female in Indian society, but places woman as the central entity and relegates peripheral position to man. That Long Silence too, revolves around the woman protagonist Jaya and gives glimpses of Mohan’s personality and his mind-set through the thought-process of Jaya. This is due to the fact that development, nurturance and sustenance of relationships thrive more on emotional and intuitive level than on intellectual level. The women are by and large considered as the gender gifted with more emotional quotient, the fact which makes Shashi Deshpande place Jaya at the pivotal point in That Long Silence. Scriptures like The Ramayana and The Mahabharata abound with examples of women endowed with
more positive or negative emotional quotient than men. The powerful emotions like love, hate, anger, jealousy, impulsiveness, joy and pain are more prevalent in women than in men. Biological, cultural and psychological factors along with the societal expectations together create a net-work and Deshpande’s women characters behave like the representatives of Indian women who find themselves more and more involved in their families, confused and caught in the dilemma between assertion and confrontation, loneliness and boredom, self-pity and self-realization. Such conflicts between the two opposite extremes are prevalent among women all over the world and are certainly envisaged in the characterisation of the protagonist Jaya, due to her trust in family values and bonding.

The suppression of feelings of boredom with the routine life and an ongoing struggle to maintain silence for the sake of harmony in family life, make a person bitter, negative and a split-personality. But these pent-up feelings and emotions erupt with a fury at one point or the other in that person’s life. The very opening lines of the novel reveal the bursting of the volcanic fury when Jaya says:

To achieve anything, to become anything, you’ve got to be hard and ruthless. Yes, even if you want to be saint, if you want to love the whole world, you’ve got to stop loving individual human beings first. And if they love you, and they bleed them, not specially, well, so much the worse for them! There’s just no other way of being a saint. Or a painter. A writer (1).

These opening lines plainly show evidence of the frustrations of a housewife who has been culturally conditioned to seal her lips for maintaining peace in the family but feels restless and many a time seething with anger. The novels of Deshpande mostly begin at the critical point where the narration reveals the discontentment and dissatisfaction of the leading female character who wishes to re-define herself. Despite being rebellious to some extent, she surrenders her entire self to the conventional attitudes of her husband and thereby feeling unhappy. Shashi Deshpande raises a very valuable point that a woman should not be silent about her thoughts and aspirations rather she has to strike a balance between nurturing her personal-self and nurturing her various selves as a wife, daughter and a mother. This
is the reality of life and every individual in reality has multiple faces. It is the nurturance of one’s own self, which gives sustenance to the various other selves of a person. Deshpande’s different protagonists in different novels have similar multiple faces but different personal selves. Sara in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a determined and ambitious doctor but sensitive and feminine from the core of her heart in her expectations to love and to be loved. Similarly Jaya in *That Long Silence*, is “too hesitant, wavering, uncertain” (15) as a wife but is quite at “an ease in our relationship” with Kamat (153). At the same time, these protagonists have many amazing similarities like their capacity to think in a mature and responsible way after the catharsis, their capacity to indulge in self-realization and self-actualization and their capacity to take the initiative of breaking their silence with their male-counterparts.

In *That Long Silence*, as in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the author in general, follows the process-approach of writing instead of the product-approach. The process-approach of writing involves a focus on the process of building narration, the gradual evolution of the main character but in the product-approach what matters is the conclusion or what happens at the end. Deshpande’s main consideration is the conflicts of Jaya and the novel has a somewhat open-ending with the novelist hinting at the possibility of Jaya leading a normal and happy life with her husband and the children by breaking the ice with her husband. There are subtle hints at this possibility and the author finishes the novel with a suggestive note. The irony of the ending on these lines is that the author is well-aware of the dilemma of the Indian women who despite making advances in education and career, give family life a top priority and are “scared of breaking through that thin veneer of a happy family” (191). For instance, despite the purgation of her bitter feelings through writing piles of papers, Jaya believes, “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. The child, hands in pockets, has been with me through the years. She is with me still” (191). The author’s regard for family life and preservation of family values is really commendable. But at the same time, the author also believes that the women need not be submissive and silent, tolerating all sorts of oppression all the time; rather they
need to wake up and restore their own dignity by being assertive and self-confident of their rights to live with dignity and respect as better-halves.

Many fears that Jaya sustains within her, come from her own insecurities. The popular writer and relationship counsellor John Gray also feels that women feel insecure when they consider themselves unworthy to their spouses. Gray feels that patriarchal mind-set which is a product of conditioning over the years and has contributed a lot to the insecurities in women’s minds, needs to be exploded. Deshpande, like Gray, does not recommend the supremacy of women or men but through the conflicts in the relationship between Jaya and Mohan, she suggests that the women need to be treated with respect as a human being. Deshpande believes that in order to earn respect and consideration from others, women need to be a little assertive. Despite getting more and more educated and earning equal or even more than men; Indian women are generally not very assertive by temperament. John Gray elaborates upon the reasons as to why women find it more difficult to be assertive than men:

Setting limits [that is asserting] and receiving [in response to their needs] are very scary for a woman. [A woman] is commonly afraid of needing too much and then being rejected, judged, or abandoned. Rejection, judgement, and abandonment are most painful because deep inside her consciousness, she holds the incorrect belief that she is unworthy of receiving more. This belief was formed and reinforced in childhood, every time she had to suppress her feelings, needs or wishes (Gray, Men are from Mars. Women are from Venus 52-53).

Throughout her life, Jaya nurses many insecurities and negative thoughts in her mind. She perceives her father, brother and husband, infact the whole world, as hostile entities with imagined threats all around her leading to a state of mental paranoia. Imagined and irrational fears create a circle which certainly have place in the dissolution of her relationships. But the search for answers to all her ingrained and imagined fears direct her to see that right to happiness is one of the basic rights of every human being. Therefore Jaya, the protagonist, realizes that she too deserves happiness and the right to choose the way to her happiness by leading life as she
desires, as “in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices” (192). She understands that she has to make efforts to emerge as a human being by changing her perspective and getting rid of her fear of the future, fear of being inadequate, of time slipping by, fear of being alone, and fear of isolation from her children. Therefore, new Jaya is geared to face the challenges in her relationship with her husband and the novel ends with a positive note, “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. And if there is anything I know now, it is this: life has always to be made possible” (193).

The plot of That Long Silence sometimes looks like a vista encompassing a multitude of characters that emerge from Jaya’s past memories. These characters do not contribute much to the development of the story and often look like diversions and distractions to the main storyline of Jaya and Mohan. The novel begins with Jaya and Mohan and also ends with Jaya and Mohan, with different characters like Jaya’s brother Ravi, her mother ‘Ai’ and her paternal grandmother ‘Aji’ coming in between for a short while. The reader feels sometime that Deshpande’s style needs more trialling; and plot in her novels particularly the plot of That Long Silence would have been more compact if some of the peripheral characters were left out. However, these reflections cannot be accepted in totality as one also feels that the marital relationships of Jaya and Mohan cannot be studied in isolation. The relationship of the main characters with their respective parental families impinges upon their current relationships. Jaya’s relationship with her parents and siblings certainly contribute to the development of her psychology, mind-set and attitude towards Mohan and their children. For example, Vanitamami’s advice, “a husband is like a sheltering tree” (32) often haunts Jaya after her marriage and due to frustration in marital relationships; she makes a mockery of this advice:

After so many years, the words came back to me. A sheltering tree. Without the tree, you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. This followed logically. And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. This too followed, equally, logically. But in Saptagiri we had a creeper that was
watered and manured assiduously; yet it died - of too much water, of white ants in the manure that destroyed its roots. And so...?” (32).

Jaya’s grandmother rebukes Jaya for her inquisitive nature and warns her, “for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that?” (27). Therefore Jaya learns that conventions are not to be questioned and gradually, she also learns of the unspoken boundaries within which she was allowed to find her freedom. Again, Mohan’s conventional mind-set is a product of his parental family set-up. He had witnessed the cruelty and torturous treatment inflicted on his mother by her husband and had also seen her bearing all this in silence. But what is repulsive is that instead of seeing despair in his mother, he praises her mother as a strong woman, “she was tough. Women in those days were tough” (36) and expects the same kind of tolerance and silence from his wife Jaya. Deshpande’s analysis of the situations and circumstances in which Jaya grappled between tradition and modernity is laudable. Deshpande is quite resentful of the so-called liberation and freedom of women in the socio-cultural milieu of India. The currents of the life push her this way and that way and after the emotional upheavals, as it happens in most of Deshpande’s novels; That Long Silence also ends on a positive note of reconciliation with the protagonist gaining inner strength and discovering her true identity. Towards the end, Jaya learns to confront all the problems, compromise and develop a changed perception of life. The new way of perceiving herself and her relationship makes her redefine her strength and develop an altogether different perspective on inter-personal relationships. She recognizes that compromise does not mean annihilating one’s personality, but a realization that the personality characteristics of every individual are unique and therefore no individual is entirely good or bad. For that reason, instead of trying to change or reform the personality of the person at the other end, one must learn to tolerate the harsh realities of life.

Shashi Deshpande delineates the problems in marital relationships of Jaya and Mohan by delineating the minutest details of the thought-process of the protagonist Jaya and the delineation follows a structure which is almost identical to that of delineation of the life of protagonist Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors. Both the protagonists visit their parental houses and getting away from their busy lives, they indulge in an introspective study. In both the novels, the narration follows a flash-
back technique, inter-mingling the marital relationships between the protagonist and her husband with the relationship with their respective parents and siblings. The protagonists get time to review their failed relationships and after undergoing a lot of agony and desperation, they make an honest appraisal of their relationship with their respective spouses. In That Long Silence, Jaya realizes that their relationship was nothing more than performance of duties and obligations towards each other and therefore intriguing and lacking any gratification. In this respect, the famous psychologist Robert C. Carson makes a very important generalization in his book Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life. He believes that when a relationship does not meet the needs of one or both the partners; it is likely to be characterised by conflict, dissension and eventually dissolution. In both the novels, the protagonists failed to realize the needs of their partners, though they were mechanically performing their daily duties. Their dissatisfaction in relationships can be best understood by analysing various prerequisites of a healthy marital relationship.

The first and the foremost prerequisite for cementing relationships between a husband and a wife is the mutual love and care for each other which can be communicated obviously by deeds on the one hand and the time spent with each other on the other hand. Jaya and Mohan’s relationship is devoid of care and respect towards each other because both of them are wrapped up in their individual problems, thereby failing to make authentic connection that comes not merely from intellect but from the heart. Consequently, their daily conversation never goes beyond the essential trivialities. There are no loving words exchanged or passionate talk between the partners, which over the years make their marriage go stale and monotonous. Love is the most powerful and beautiful relationship which is reciprocated through words, actions and gestures. Surprisingly enough, the loving words, sweet complements or caring gestures are totally deficient in Deshpande’s novels. The following lines from the novel reveal the mechanical and monotonous life of Jaya and Mohan, and Jaya’s bitterness on not receiving love from her husband as well as at her incapacity to give love to her husband:

... I had to admit the truth to myself—that I had often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony. I remember now how
often I had sighed for a catastrophe, a disaster, no, not a personal one, but anything to shake us out of our dull grooves. (The eight-planet configuration, which they had said presaged a disaster, had roused my hopes once.) Why was it, I had often wondered, that wars always took place in other countries, tidal waves and earthquakes occurred in far-off, unknown places, that murder, adultery and heroism had their places in other people’s lives, never in ours? (4).

The most formative period of one’s life is the childhood. The author believes that the childhood experiences of Jaya and Mohan play a vital role in the development of their personalities. Healthy relations are the by-product of a wholesome personality which can interact with others warmly. The behaviour and inter-personal relationship between the protagonist and her better-half can be best understood by analysing their relationship with the other people related to them in their past and the present. In her childhood, Jaya was surrounded by a multitude of relations like Appa, Ai, Dada, Aji, Kakas, Kakis, Chandumama, Makarandmama and Vanitamami. Interaction with all these characters helped Jaya in one way or the other to feel loved and secure. But Mohan’s parents had no time or inclination to cater to the emotional needs of their children. Mohan’s mother was a pathetic creature and Mohan’s father never bothered to look after the well-being of their children. William Walsh stresses upon the importance of love and affection for the proper development of a child and to discover the sweetness of human relationships when he grows up. Walsh says:

The child’s consciousness, which is partial and successive, does not include a sense of the past or the future. It has to be discovered, and the provocation to learn it, is love. Affection is the seed of time. It is love-intensifying the delight in the present and correspondingly bringing discomfort in absence-which introduces an element of permanence into the child’s experience” (Walsh, The Uses Of Imagination 166).

Mohan being a victim of emotional deprivation and embarrassment due to his love-less childhood, failed to be a warm, dependable and understanding husband. The traumatic childhood experiences hamper his “full humaneness” as Abraham Maslow; the famous sociologist terms it (Maslow, Towards a Psychology of Being 6) and
results in failure to unlock the treasure of love and affection, companionship and pleasure. Mohan’s father was an impatient and cruel man who made Mohan’s mother a living corpse, and their children always felt resentful and humiliated on seeing their mother bearing all the mental torture. Consequently, Mohan never witnessed any emotional bonding between his parents and never learnt giving and receiving love in turns. The psychologist Karen Horney validates this point as she feels that when a fulfilling relationship is missed during childhood or even during adult life, it is very difficult to have a positive emotional interaction in any other relationship which one establishes later on, since the person always craves to “strengthen his inner position by being accepted, approved of, needed, wanted, liked, loved and appreciated” (Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth* 216).

Gratification of sexual needs also acts like a cement to strengthen the marital bond between husband and wife. A majority of Shashi Deshpande’s women characters are typically unable to directly express their sexual needs despite of their strong sexual urge. Patriarchy conditions them to be silent in every matter, including the expression of their sexual needs. Therefore after a few years of sexual intimacy, they become frigid and despairingly lonely after every sexual act, and the act becomes a silent and emotionless act. Jaya also had a monstrous sexual urge but had to hide this urge as her husband was a very conventional and conservative in such respects. Physical sensations of the body and sex were important for Jaya as a means of giving and receiving love. She reflected upon the sexual union as a manifestation of her relation with her husband and with her own self too. Sex also served as a defence mechanism to cover her own insecurities and feelings of guilt, as she indulges in retrospection of the early years of her marriage:

The strength of my feelings for him had both shamed and terrified me. I had never confessed my frantic emotions to him. It had seemed like a disease, a disability I had to hide from everyone, Often, to get out of all that emotional extravagance, I had rationalized: we’re all frightened of the dark, frightened of being alone. And so we cling to one another, saying...I love you, I want you, I need you. Often I had told myself: love is a myth, without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unendurable (97).
Sex and love generally fuse for women but love for them generally comes before sex. However, the equation becomes the other way round for men. The protagonist Jaya has an ambivalent relationship to her own sexual body. A longing to find companionship and understanding from her husband but failure to get any reassurance that she is loved by him; added to Jaya’s own lack of self-esteem, making her a pathetic, insecure and lonely creature after every sexual act. Jaya feels, “First there’s love, then there’s sex—that was how I had always imagined it to me. But after living with Mohan I had realized that it could so easily be the other way round” (95). Sex for Jaya was an emotionally loaded useful tool for garnering love. It was more of a psychological act reflecting her attitude towards herself and the need for approval and care from her husband rather than an expression of needs that were directly sexual. The following thoughts of Jaya clearly demonstrate her feelings of loneliness after the consummation of a sexual union:

But lying there, my body still warm and throbbing from the contact with his, it had come to me in one awful moment—that I was alone. The contact, the coming together, had been not only momentary, but wholly illusory as well. We had never come together; only our bodies had done that. I had begun to cry then, despairingly, silently, scared that I would wake Mohan up, trying desperately to calm myself (98).

For the most Indian women, a display of feelings of affection and of being wanted is an important psychological precondition for deriving satisfaction in physical union. Jaya remained sexually dissatisfied as she was always psychologically insatiable. She perceived sex as the physical and psychological fusion with Mohan but it was more of a calculated and mechanical act devoid of any passionate emotions. The following thoughts of Jaya reveal her disgust for sex since it becomes a boring and perfunctory act with no sensitivity, “His procedure had always been so unvaried, that I could almost stand back and watch the whole thing from a distance...the same positions, the same movements, the same time” (97).

If lips communicate, silence communicates; then touch too communicates in many mysterious ways yielding love, affection, warmth, consolation, care and most importantly ‘I am with you.’ Therefore, it is another prerequisite for building positive
relationships between the spouses. Touch is generally a much more important preoccupation for women who believe in qualitative emotional relationships. Touch also connotes many negative emotions like coldness, disinterestedness, aloofness and dislike. It’s a wonderful means of expressing tender feelings of love and care, which even the soothing words fail to express. Touching others and being touched by others is a powerful sensory perception yet it remains curiously invisible in Deshpande’s novels with interpersonal relationships as the major thematic concern. The couples in all her novels and so in *That Long Silence* hardly touch, caress and reciprocate tender feelings with each other. Touch for Jaya is only limited to the time of physical union. The sensitive mind of Jaya perceives even this very well. Jaya says, “Physical touching is for me a momentous thing. It was only Appa who hugged me as a child, and after him there was Mohan. We were husband and wife and he could hold me, touch me, and caress me. But it was never a casual or light-hearted thing for either of us (15).

The art of using well-drawn metaphors to make her vision concrete and concise speaks volumes about Deshpande’s creative vision, sensitivity and fertile imagination. Aristotle has also assigned high value to metaphors in any literary work when he says, “The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others, and it is also a sign of genius...” (Ingram, *Aristotle : On The Art Of Poetry* 78). Deshpande makes recurring use of a few metaphors in most of her fiction to explore the mind and mood-swings of her characters. The most frequently used metaphors in her fiction are the ‘silence’, and the ‘death.’ In an article, “The Hub of the Wheel: Some Recurring Metaphors in Shashi Deshpande’s Fiction,” A. N. Dwivedi has made a very appropriate analysis and interpretation of metaphors in Deshpande’s fiction. Dwivedi says:

> They tend to neatly summarise the fluctuating moods and the mysterious emotions of a sensitive woman through her protagonists. Though these metaphors are not too any in number, they put on the track the running wheel of her fictional world. They clearly reveal the inner workings of the protagonists’ minds and the emotional ripples (Dwivedi, *Critical Practice* 42).
Silence is an omnipotent motif in a majority of Deshpande’s fiction, but it connotes varied meanings in her different fiction. The title of the novel That Long Silence is also symbolic and the novel makes insistent use of silence metaphor. Though this metaphor has also been operative in the other novels like The Dark Holds No Terrors and The Binding Vine; it is only in That Long Silence that the author gives wide-ranging connotations of silence. It is an uncomfortable silence implying the death of communication. The novel is the story of Jaya, the main protagonist who desires to break the self-imposed silence and subsequently goes on a self-exploratory journey. The narrative is woven round the tight-lipped silence of Jaya who is a typical middle-class housewife with two children Rahul and Rati. Jaya thinks of every possible adjustment towards the smooth sailing of her marital life. In this sense, the silence of Jaya is the silence of a majority of middle-class Indian women who prefer to maintain domestic harmony by sealing their lips.

The novel also depicts the silence of Mohan’s mother and his sister Vimala who lived and died in ‘silence’ intact. In the description of the painful and tortured life of Mohan’s mother; silence connotes ‘strength’ from the male protagonist Mohan’s point of view. Whereas from the point of view of Jaya, it denotes ‘despair’, and ‘surrender’:

   If I found the story painful, I found his comment on it strange. ‘God,’ he said, after he told me this, ‘She was tough. Women in those days were tough.’ He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw 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).

Silence is a common thread weaving the destinies of Jaya, Mohan’s mother and his sister, despite all other differences in their lives and this fact has been well realized by Jaya as she says, “And Vimala? ‘Strange, how different I am from my mother’, she had said to me. Yet I can see something in common between them, something that links the destinies of the two...the silence in which they died (39).

Silence as a weapon is in sheer contradiction to silence signifying surrender. If the metaphor of silence signifies passivity, resignation and surrender in the case of
Mohan’s mother and his sister; the silence of Jaya does not always stand for an attempt at adjustment. Silence was an adjustment in the beginning which changes soon into resignation, but over the years silence becomes a weapon denoting no-care for her husband by being indifferent to his needs. Silence in the case of marital relationship between Jaya and Mohan means lack of communication, as their marriage tends to evolve into routines of living and relating, tied up with the realities of coping or the minutiae of tasks:

In fact, we had stopped speaking, except for the essentials of daily living. The fact of what he had done, of what lay before us, came between us, an awkward, silent third, making comfortable conversation impossible. That night, as we lay on the extreme edges of our bed, I knew he was awake too; but there was nothing I could say to him and so I lay in silence, listening to the harsh whirring of the fan above us (55).

The couple further drift apart when Mohan loses his job owing to corrupt practices and feels jealous of Jaya struggling to make a literary career. Paradoxically, the male and the female protagonists never try to erase their silence throughout the novel as they are always lost in their own world. It is an irony that both Jaya and Mohan are quite aware of this gnawing silence and still do nothing to erase it:

Each relationship evolves its own vocabulary. Ours had been that of the workaday world. The vocabulary of love, which I had thought would come to us naturally and inevitably, had passed us by; so too had the vocabulary of anger. No, it was I who had left that alone after the day when my first disastrous foray into verbalising emotions had almost ripped our marriage apart. Since then, we’d never gone beyond those first basic mudras (116).

Silence seeps deep down into the relationship between Jaya and Mohan. In the first few years of their married life, the difference in their temperament and family background leads to incompatibility, forcing Jaya to consciously remain silent for avoiding skirmishes. Over the years, it becomes an unconscious and habitual activity, not requiring any effort. It is only towards the end of the novel, when Jaya realizes
that communication is vital to maintain a strong marital relationship. Listening is more important in communication than speaking. There comes a realization in Jaya’s mind that she has never listened to her husband with an open mind, “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 (192). That Long Silence ends on a positive note, with the protagonist’s decision to take the initiative of nurturing their withering relationships. There is a new-found realisation that sitting and brooding over what has happened will not lead to restoration of peace. Relations cannot be taken for granted and she has to work towards earning happiness, joy and stability in their lives.

That Long Silence abounds with many other metaphors which all signify the fragility of relationship between Jaya and Mohan. One such metaphor is the husband as a “sheltering tree” as Vanitamami tells Jaya, “a husband is like a sheltering tree” (32). The phrase “sheltering tree” builds positive implications as a husband giving shelter, security and stability to his wife. In Jaya’s case, the total lack of emotional and psychological security makes her think again and again with bitterness and sarcasm about Vanitamami’s words “husband is like a sheltering tree.” The following words of Jaya exhibit her resentment and sullenness, “Without the tree, you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. This followed logically. And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. This too followed, equally logically (32).

Relations are rarely stable and certainly shift from one dimension to another. There is always a spectrum of stages in the development of relationships. This is a hard fact which can be best exemplified by taking the example of any couple married for some time. Though they are happily married and lead a happy married life; a time comes when there is a plateau in the growth of their marital bonding. Their love for each other may be the same, but over the time both will need some space in their intimacy. Since Mohan was suspended from his job and had almost all time free; he expected full attention and care from Jaya, which Jaya was not used to of giving. She longs for some time for her own self, “It was a relief to be alone. I’d always treasured my hours of solitude without Mohan and the children, Mohan’s constant presence since we came here, had become a burden to me (68).
John Gray gives a very practical insight to couples, who have a vital need for some space. Gray feels that clinging relationships are always burdensome. A wife and a husband should respect each other’s need for space. A man pulls away because he seeks realisation and fulfilment in his job along with his relationship. But a woman most of the time seeks total fulfilment through her relationship with her husband and children; thereby taking care of them as her sole occupation. John Gray gives some valuable tips to understand the psychology of men and women and their different reasons for needing space:

Most women are surprised to realise that although a man loves a woman, periodically he needs to pull away before he can get closer. Men instinctively feel this urge to pull away. It is not a decision or choice. It just happens. It is neither his fault nor her fault. It is a natural cycle. Women misinterpret a man’s pulling away because generally a woman pulls away for different reasons. She pulls away when she doesn’t trust him to understand her feelings, when she has been hurt and is afraid of being hurt again, or when he has done something wrong and disappointed her (Gray, *Men are from Mars. Women are from Venus* 92).

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya is a housewife struggling to make her career as a freelance writer. Her husband and her children are the basic source of fulfilment for her and she expects Mohan to understand even her unspoken words by reading her feelings. In fact, she expects him to take care of every aspect of her life and realizes that both of them should share their feelings with each other. But to her utter disappointment, Mohan does not understand her needs and often remains detached. The author makes a very relevant point that woman should try to find satisfaction in some other personal goals too, apart from taking care of their husband and their children. If Jaya had some other source of accomplishment; their marriage might not have gone stagnant. Healthy relationships may also become boring and stale over a period of time. But whenever the husband and the wife have some other pursuits of sustenance apart from expectations from each other; life becomes a refreshing treat for each other.
Jaya and Mohan’s relationships are frozen relationships where ‘silence’ acts like ice. There are no intimate and passionate details of love-making and even the physical union becomes silent, cold and mechanical, with the passage of time. There is only one reference to Mohan paying complement to Jaya, as she remembers, “As I was changing, he said, ‘I’m glad Jaya, you haven’t put on any weight. Most women get shapeless at your age. You’re still the way you were when we got married’” (85). Mohan’s words touched Jaya’s heart for a moment and ignited passion in her but she knew that this would be followed by “a silent, wordless love-making” (85).

Deshpande is very successful in bringing to the fore a fact that silence if not broken; becomes a matter of habit overtime, consequently leading to frigidity and coldness in sexual relationships. Jaya perceives her physical union with Mohan as an act devoid of any loving feelings, “God how terrible it was to know a man so well. I could time it, almost to the second, the whole process of our lovemaking, from the first devious wooing to the moment he turned away from me, offering me his hunched back (85).

Jaya’s silence is also a manifestation of her feelings of loneliness, isolation, rejection, depression, insecurity and anxiety. Along with all these feelings, the prolonged feelings of resentment and unworthiness become debilitating and prevent the affected protagonist from developing open relationships with her husband and their children. Mohan also experiences these negative feelings of abandonment, meaninglessness and depression on account of loss of his job. The need of the hour was that Jaya should have given her husband some solace and consolation but unfortunately she fails to see or understand how her partner is negatively impacted by the events of his life and therefore, their relationship further stagnates. Jaya never understood her role as a supporter of her husband in his good as well as bad times, though she performed all her duties in a mechanical way. Relationship writer and Counsellor Burt Goldman, authenticates Mohan’s need to be convinced that he is lovable despite the loss of his job:

An individual who fails at a relationship is a person who neglects the needs of the partner. So it would follow that the first step to successful relationship is to determine what needs the other person has. It is also vital to understand your own needs so that you can help the other

Both Jaya and Mohan fail to determine the needs of each other and never take time to make each other genuinely valued; to say a few kind words to each other and to show appreciation and care for each other. Failure to make each other feel important in his or her life creates a climate of distrust and misunderstandings which make their relationship dull and insipid. An advice of Mary Kay to all human beings who want to make sincere efforts to relate with others, “Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from their neck saying, ‘Make Me Feel Important.’ Never forget this message when working with people” (Kay, as qtd. in Jefferson, “Make Me Feel Important,” (earthlingcommunication.com).

Deshpande also feels that the emotional needs of human beings are always fulfilled with a few kind words said by the persons with whom they relate. Jaya’s dissatisfaction at her inability to fulfil her emotional needs reflects in the form of short stories written by her. This fact could not go beyond the notice of famous scholar Sarabjit K.Sandhu who has made a full-length study of Shashi Deshpande. Sandhu observes, “This unhappiness is reflected not only in her [Jaya’s] conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion (Sandhu 41). Jaya’s long silence with her husband is broken with her middle-aged and bulky neighbour Kamat. Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists generally prefer to find solace in the company of their male friends. They yearn for companionship, closeness and need to be heard and appreciated, but the insensitivity of their husbands drift them to their male friends. Jaya’s relations with Kamat begin with Jaya talking about her worries, thoughts, feelings and difficulties with him. Gradually, the relationship becomes intimate and a means to fulfil Jaya’s need for validation and reassurance. John Gray validates Jaya’s need to share her concerns with Kamat and says, “The number one way a man can succeed in fulfilling a woman’s primary love needs is through communication...By learning to listen to a woman’s feelings, a man can effectively shower a woman with care, understanding, respect, devotion, validation and reassurance (Gray 143).

Kamat lends his full attention to Jaya and is fully receptive and appreciative of Jaya’s emotional needs. In fact both Kamat and Jaya find trust, acceptance, approval
and encouragement in open communication with each other. The need to listen and relate is a common concern for both of them as Kamat is a lonely man staying all alone. Katherine Mansfield has written very beautiful and thought-provoking words in this respect, “Conversation is like a dear little baby that is brought in to be handed around. You must rock it, nurse it, keep it on the move if you want to keep it smiling (Mansfield, as qtd. in Bender, Secrets of Face to Face Communication 151).

Conversation forms a powerful connection between Kamat and Jaya, but their friendship is not a man-woman friendship. Jaya feels quite at an ease in their relationship as she could say anything to him. But gradually this friendship twists into Kamat’s interest in Jaya as a woman. Once he comments:

... ‘I like my women thin. All those bosomy, fat-hipped women...’ he had sketched generous curves in the air with a swift, skilful finger;‘...I’ve done for magazine covers and stories- they make me sick. I prefer clean, spare lines in a human being. You, for example.’ It was then that he had said to me, ‘your name is like your face’ (152).

Jaya however has no sexual feelings towards Kamat. She treats him as a friend. The kind of companionship she expected from Mohan, an urge to confide every worry and every trivial matter; is met by Kamat. She feels that, “With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself- Jaya. There had been ease in our relationship I had never known in any other. There had been nothing I could not say to him. And he too... (153). In a moment of loneliness, Kamat tries to come closer to Jaya. Their platonic relationship could have culminated into a sexual relationship between the two, if Kamat had not died all of a sudden. Kamat’s death creates a deep emotional void in Jaya’s life and later on sets her on to a path of self-realization. It provides her a chance to interrogate her past and work it towards solving her present problems.

Journey of the ‘self which runs as the sub-text of all the novels of Shashi Deshpande also needs a close scrutiny. Jaya in That Long Silence is in search of ‘self’ or in quest of identity. In fact, Jaya understands of ‘self’ lies in her relationship with Mohan. Throughout the novel, she tries to find emotional security and a sense of personal identity and the significance of her peculiar dilemma lie in the potential
conflict or tension between how she sees herself and how her husband sees her. Being unable to express her inner self, she feels cloistered and gets her claims for love validated by him. She expects to be identified by her better half in the same way as she identifies herself. Therefore, ‘self’ is indeed, a highly valued and the most crucial aspect of That Long Silence.

Like the protagonists of the other novels, Jaya also undergoes a process of introspection, when she is left all alone. She realises that throughout her life she had sought a meaning of her life from Mohan, and had been a wife, a mother and a housewife with “Mohan as her profession, her career and her means of livelihood” (75). ‘Jaya’ as named by her father symbolises ‘victory.’ Incongruously enough, she considers her yoked together as a bullock with Mohan. Jaya’s journey of the ‘self’ towards complete victory has been woven into the novel in a very subtle and delicate manner in different phases. The first phase of this journey is the complete negation of her personality as “Two bullocks yoked together...it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction” (11-12). The second phase is her refusal to have sexual union with Kamat despite being very friendly with him. Jaya withdraws from Kamat, who in his utter loneliness makes a feeble attempt to reach out to her. Jaya thinks, “I’m Mohan’s wife, I’d thought, I’m only Mohan’s wife, and I had run away (186). The next phase of her journey is her sudden awareness that “It was not Mohan but marriage that had made me circumspect” (187). These phases highlight the vitality of commitment in marriage for Indian women who despite being highly educated generally find it difficult to break their marriage and family. The psychologists Ronald B. Adler and George Rodman also believe in the urgency of dedication and loyalty for women in a marriage when they say:

Marriage is an enormous commitment, an unmasking of self, a relationship where rejection, is searing. Because of their investment in the relationship, because of their history of assessing themselves by others responses and because they really do perceive reality in interpersonal terms, they overwhelmingly define and evaluate identity and femininity within the context of this relationship (Adler and Rodman, Understanding Human Communication 211).
Women seek self-esteem and reassurance of love in marriage and Jaya also expected so. Paradoxically, her needs were never met by Mohan and it is Kamat who helped her in gaining self-esteem. However, being sacrosanct to marriage like a majority of Indian women, she does not encourage the sexual advances of Kamat. Jaya’s turmoil culminates in self-realisation through introspection, which makes her reformulate her earlier perceptions:

Two bullocks yoked together that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It’s wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I’ve always thought- there’s only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself, there are so many crossroads, so many choices (191-92).

Realisation that detachment from her husband and children would not give her peace and happiness makes Jaya take a stock of the things again and also think of many other possibilities of saving her marriage. It is an irony that the author does not divulge any transformation or self-realisation in Mohan, except for his telegram saying “All well, returning Friday morning” (189). Jaya accepts the ebb and flow of relationships. The responsibility of nurturing their conjugal relationship by opening up the communication channels with Mohan, to work on her own feelings by not running away from the problems, to sort out her own unresolved fears, to encourage her husband to give support to her, to give vent to her repressed feelings—all this is thrust upon the delicate shoulders of the protagonist Jaya. Deshpande’s conclusion of the novel coincides with John Gray’s philosophy of love in *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Gray says:

A relationship is like a garden. If it is to thrive it must be watered regularly. Special care must be given, taking into account the seasons as well as any unpredictable weather. New seeds must be sown and weeds must be pulled. Similarly, to keep the magic of love alive we must understand its seasons and nurture love’s special needs (283).

Jaya realises that she has to change her mind-set. For a long time, she has either stayed silent or expected Mohan to take initiative in solving their problems. But
once she starts looking deep inside herself; it becomes easier for her to analyse the beliefs she harbour, the values which have perpetuated the relational problem in its current form. An understanding comes that these beliefs are her real problem and she needs to be reflective without trying to control or change Mohan. Deshpande’s views echo the sentiments of Steve Pavlina who says:

I’ll actually go so far as to say that the purpose of human relationships may be resolving relationship problems. We’re forced to deal with our internal incongruities. And as we become more conscious on the inside, our relationships expand towards greater consciousness on the outside (Pavlina, “Understanding Family Relationship Problems” www.stevepavlina.com).

Deshpande’s philosophy of relationships is the philosophy of Jaya or of most Indian women. She gives prime importance to the establishment of loving and intimate relationships. She feels that gratification of relationship needs is crucial for a feeling of well-being. But she also makes a very pertinent point that the gratification for most of the traditional Indian women is in the fulfilment of their needs and validation from their husbands and children, but for the new woman who is educated and career-oriented, her career can also give her self-esteem and reassurance. Deshpande’s philosophy, in this respect, reverberates with the philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir which strongly propagates that women, “have to define, measure and explore their special domain (Beauvoir, The Second Sex 609). A woman’s feelings of being able to contribute to her family and at the same time nurture her own creativity, can give her self-actualisation. The author also feels that relations are a wonderful means of sustenance but women need to search their inner selves too. They need to tap their inner sources of happiness and fulfilment for which they need to come out as human beings irrespective of their gender. Before sorting out the tangles of relationships, they need to achieve independent sense of ‘selves’