CHAPTER-V

THAT LONG SILENCE

*That Long Silence* has picked up the theme of women’s subjugation and silence very emphatically. The novel takes ahead the issues of female subjugation which the earlier novel *Roots and Shadows* deals with. Though no doubt Indu in *Roots and Shadows* suffers certain problems which issue forth from the institution of marriage as, “marriage is the institution which affects women most in many cultures”¹ but still Jaya in the present novel *That Long Silence* faces the same issues more poignantly. Moreover here in the novel the writer wants to convey that it is not only the patriarchal system wholly which is sole responsible for the worsening condition of women but even women share the responsibility. If women allow men to subjugate them only then they are doing it. Women suffer everything without protesting which has caused their subjugation.

*That Long Silence* continues with the issues of women subjugation arising from marriage in an extended way. Due to its stylistic and thematic concerns, *That Long Silence* won the most prestigious Sahitya Academy award for Shashi Deshpande in 1989. Shashi Deshpande has vigorously tried to paint the humiliating and stifling environment where women feel themselves fettered. She has protested against the several types of exploitations of women. In the present novel, silence has been used as a metaphor. Silence is a patriarchal symbol. A girl is socialised to be silent as being eloquent and loud are not the traits that society deems fit for them. Consequently they keep on being silent and bear everything with this weapon but gradually this very silence eats away the very vitals of their existence.

Jaya is a writer and she makes it quite clear in the beginning of the novel that she is writing a story but it is not the story of someone else’s but rather it is her own story where she herself is the heroine and her husband the hero. But writing her story where she is her own heroine is not an easy task. Generally a writer hides many of the factors which perhaps are not for the world to be known. So presenting an objective amount of one’s personality is always a convoluted process. She says: “Self revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different faces show you ten different faces.”² (*TLS* 1) Despite of it she resolves to write a factual account of their story by maintaining a right distance.
That Long Silence is about a couple Jaya and Mohan. Jaya finds her routine life so monotonous that she craves for a catastrophe something that would provide her a relief from the hum drum of boring life; something that would shake them out of their slumber and take them to the path of excitement and adventure. She often thinks about some war between the countries or some other happening to occur. She reflects:

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. (TLS 4)

Though she never wants a personal disaster but it is what befalls them. Mohan works as an engineer in the purchase section of the company and one day is caught taking bribe. Mohan has been prompted to accept commission under the influence of Mr. Aggarwal for the better life of his wife and children. He thus is implicated in the business fraud and he has to go on hiding as some investigation regarding the shenanigans that Mohan is charged with are going on. For hibernating, he takes refuge in Jaya’s humble Dadar flat which is located on the outskirts of Bombay and leaves his posh Churchgate bungalow. The time for both Jaya and Mohan hang heavy as they do not have anything to keep them occupied. Jaya during this time falls into reflection; lost into reviewing her own past which unfolds the plot of the novel before the readers. She reflects on the last seventeen years which she has spent with her husband in marriage as well as her very family life before marriage. Even her very personal life issues which are quite confidential are taken into review which provides the present novel a touch of quite confessional mode. The novel has been narrated in flashback technique. There is an ample use of dreams in the novel through which Shashi Deshpande has successfully put forward Jaya’s mental situation. Y.S Sunita Reddy observes, “The narrative with its slow unknotted memories and unravelling of the soul reads like an interior monologue quite similar to the stream of conscious technique employed by the like of Virginia Woolf.”

The journey that Jaya undergoes is quite the same like many of other heroines of Shashi Deshpande. Sarita in The Dark Holds No Terrors reflects about her relationship with her husband Manohar, or Manu as he is called, and Indu in Roots and Shadows reviews her relationship not with her husband only but with her parents and other relatives. Similarly Jaya in
the present novel scans her life with her husband Mohan and like Sarita and Indu comes as a
winner as she is better possessed of her life’s motives and of her own silence whereby she
subdued everything of her likes and dislikes. Jaya’s introspection and self-analysis commence
after moving to Dadar flat as in the case with Sarita and Indu whose introspection is occasioned
by death of Sarita’s mother and Indu’s Grandfather’s aunt Akka. Jaya after her self-appraisal is
quite a winner as she has understood her different roles as a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law,
mother and a writer. She has better understood how she has been living though she did not raise
a voice of protest then but eventually small episodes of silence have been accumulating in the
dam of her patience and after seventeen years’ silence there is ample of it not to offer any room
for more episodes of silence. Thus she knows she has to break the silence in the end. Her very
silence in terms of her subjugating her desires and wishes clamour for articulation. Though she
compromises in the end to her situation but the desire to break her silence is not lost. In this
context S. Prasanna Sree observes: “Going through a process of introspection, self analysis and
self-realisation, she emerges as a confident individual, fully in control of herself, significantly
more hopeful and able to accept life...”

Thus Jaya moves from a sphere of silence, enters into a phase of balance of powers of sexes.
This is her real conquest and liberation. Jaya moves from being a person who can never think of
herself beyond as a wife and mother to a person who confidently asserts herself. She finds
herself lost when a magazine tells her to provide them with her bio-data. She finds it really very
difficult to supply one as, “And I have found myself agonising over what I could write. What
there was in my life that meant something.” (TLS 2) Thus despite her best efforts she cannot
write more than, “I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have
two children and I did not let the third live.” (TLS 2) But in the end she is able to liberate herself
from the stifling and choking imbalance of power. She wins in the end. She gets possessed of
new and better understanding. She knows that she has to break her silence which however does
not mean that she raises a voice of revolt though she seems to raise a voice against Mohan but in
a more subtle way she comes to know she has to share a life of mutual responsibility and live as
partners not as just a puppet in his hands. In this context Sumitra Kukreti observes: “The
realisation that she can have her own way- yathaecchasi tatha kuru- gives a new confidence to
Jaya. This is her emancipation.”
Jaya from the very infancy of her life has gradually ingrained shame in her personality. She could never enjoy the music of Faiyaz Khan and Paluskar. Because of her inability to relish their music, she was reprimanded by her father that she does not have good taste. The same shame that she instilled in herself became a part and parcel of her very personality. Even after marriage she keeps on liking the advertisement. Whenever they have to go for movie, she used to hurry as she does not want to miss advertisements as these ads, “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.” (TLS 3) But she could never openly assert her individualistic feelings as she feared she would again have the same response from Mohan which her father used to give. The shame that she imbibed turned her in a very nervous and non confident person. Jaya is a victim of gender discrimination in the novel. In this context Subhash Chandra in his essay “Silent No More: A study of That Long Silence” points out:

The novel begins with gender discrimination, valorizing the male categories. As a child, Jaya, the narrator, nurtured shame because she could not, in spite of her father’s exhortations and admonitions, respond to and admire the classical music. She enjoyed, though furtively, Rafi and Lata, whose songs were played by Radio Ceylon. The shame continued in her adult life, after her marriage, because she secretly enjoyed the snug, maternal and affection-laden ads preceding the movies, which her husband, Mohan, dismissed as worthless. ………….But why the emotionalism of woman to be rated down? Why is it innately worthless? 

“Marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism” is what Simon de Beauvoir believes in. Very true in the Indian context where man has always thought himself as the god who yields insurmountable power on woman. Once a woman is married, she loses everything. She does not just leave her house for the new relationships rather her suffering gets mounting as she has to subordinate her desires, wills and everything else to the dictates of her new relatives which comprise of her husband and in-laws. The life of a woman is miserable in marriage. Shashi Deshpande has shown mostly the problems of women who face problems due to married life. Her brand of feminism mostly focuses on the issues of unsuccessful marriages. Be it any novel - The Darks Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, A Matter of Time, Binding Vine or Moving On - the female protagonists are basically victims of loveless marriages where they have to spend
their life based on compromise and silence; continuously subjugating their voice. Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Sumi in *A Matter of Time* and Urmi and Mira in *The Binding Vine* are the victims in married life who suffer the arrows of pain.

In her introspection she finds herself emerging as an individual. But her first step towards being assertive comes when she refuses to give key of the flat to Mohan when they happen to visit Dadar flat for hideout. Jaya opens it herself and as she says: “He continues to stand there for a moment, the hand held out. It now looks like a supplicatory gesture.” (*TLS* 8) Her earlier self whom she has depicted in some of her diaries seem quite absurd to her. For the first time she starts believing that her true self has been nicely blotted out as it would not have suited to the marital citadel which she so securely had guarded. The pages carry half truths as, “Its essential core had been left out. The agonized cries—‘I can’t cope, I can’t manage, I can’t go on—had been neatly smothered.” (*TLS* 69) The picture that the diary presents before her is that of a mother of her children Rahul and Rati and as a wife who has been working day after day for keeping her family intact. She feels, “Looking through these diaries, I realised, was like going backwards. As I burrowed through the facts, what I found was the woman who had once lived here. Mohan’s wife, Rahul’s and Rati’s mother. Not myself.” (*TLS* 69)

She has, as a very devoted student, abided by the lessons of wisdom which a woman’s magazine presents. She says: “They had been my Bible, and I poured over the wisdom contained in them. Don’t let yourself go. How to keep your husband in love with you. Keep romance alive in a marriage. The quality of charm in a woman.” (*TLS* 96) Jaya after visiting her in-laws’ gets impressed by observing the pattern of their house. She comments: “They had been a revelation to me, the women in his family. So definite about their roles, so well trained in their duties. I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before.” (*TLS* 83) Hence she inwardly starts adopting the same pattern of their life. She starts moulding and shaping her own self to the lines of women in his family.

Mohan wants from Jaya complete obedience and unquestioning care. He cannot like the idea of Jaya avoiding him and his children. Mohan is a traditional man who has seen his father being quite dominating and abusing his mother time and again. He is an ordinary man who like all men attends his father’s death ceremonies and also bears the expenditure. It is quite normal then that he would like the other Indian men demand complete solidarity from his wife. Consequently
Jaya too provides him love and affection. Like a traditional lady she too picks up the threads of house holding and tries to connect them and strives hard to be an ideal wife as per the norms of the society but the same has been quite tiring for her. Each time she tries to subjugate her desire and individuality a cry she listens but she has to adopt a silent look as nothing has happened.

The Indian sage and philosopher of the ancient times, Manu gives no freedom to women as he says, “In her childhood (a girl) should be under the will of her father, in (her) youth, of (her) husband; her husband being dead, of her sons; a woman should never enjoy her own will.”

The condition of women thus is very deplorable. Manu’s edicts have so conditioned the Indian society that it has become out and out patriarchal since the times of Manu. Consequently men have thought themselves the supreme head who can exercise any power on women. Women are thought to be as mere objects having no intrinsic value of their own; they can be sold like commodities in the market. Women have been rendered identity less. Shashi Deshpande is a feminist author par excellence. Shashi Deshpande has articulated this stifling milieu which Manu has created; in which woman has been caged. In all walks of life woman has learnt to live with silence. Being a silent spectator, a passive bystander in this male dominated world, she is caged in her own house as: “She shuts behind her the doors of her new home; when she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland; the forests were hers. Now she is confined to restricted space…”

Not to talk about Indian culture rather Christianity too believes woman is inferior to man. In Christianity it is generally a belief that Eve who is considered to be the first woman ever born, was created after Adam to give him good company. First there was no idea in God’s mind to create woman. God only thought of creating man Adam but later found that he would find it very tough to spend time so in order to keep him occupied, thus God created Eve. The Book of Tobias affirms this view: “Thou madest Adam of the slime of the earth, and gavest him Eve for a helper.”

Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence is a realistic depiction of women’s oppression. About the novel Shashi Deshpande says: “And then I wrote That Long Silence almost entirely a woman’s novel nevertheless, a book about the silencing of one-half of humanity. A lifetime of introspection went into this novel, the one closest to me personally; the thinking and ideas in this are closest to my own.”

Jaya is a middle class house wife. She had high potential of becoming a good writer though that dream came crashing with Mohan’s interruption but nevertheless she
becomes a successful columnist in a woman’s magazine. She was before marriage a confident and self assertive girl who was named Jaya as her father’s notions and encouragement always worked in her favour and she became very self independent. Her father wanted to see her going to Oxford and winning huge prizes for the literary genius that she had. But as luck would have it, she became a nervous, nagging lady pettifogging about every minute detail of her house hold regarding the servants and the children’s school. She gradually accepted her own fate as she got instilled with false notions of security. She kept believing that the family tree is what she must nourish as without her children and husband she has no identity of her own thus as she believed she lived. She let go any emotion, any desire, any wish of her which posed even a slight threat to her family.

Shashi Deshpande is a committed writer who has successfully articulated long silence of women which craves for self expression. The women have been silenced as they have been so socialised as in the case of Jaya who has been instructed, “a husband is like a sheltering tree…. without the tree, you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable.” (TLS 32) Jaya is scolded by her grandmother for being quite inquisitive by nature as she believes that a girl who asks so many questions can never live with peace with her husband as husbands never tolerate so many questions. More over women thus being so socialised, are afraid of breaking their silence due to the cultural and social restrictions. Thus they are left with no other option than to submit and yield with silence. The repression of this articulation has been painful for women. The title of the novel is an apt phrase that highlights the very thematic concern for women. More over the epigraph used by Shashi Deshpande is from the speech of Elizabeth Robins which is again quite suitable to hint at the writer’s genuine concern with the condition of women. The epigraph says, “If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy – the weight of that long silence of one half of the world.” This epigraph clearly shows that Shashi Deshpande wants to give vent to the suffocating silence of women. Shashi Deshpande is aware of the socio-cultural set up of India where man has always subordinated woman.

The novel commences with the couple shifting to Dadar flat in Bombay. It is the same place where they had lived after getting married. The reason for their shifting here for some days is that Mohan has been implicated in some malpractice in business and an inquiry is being carried out.
So he has come over to Dadar so that he may go underground for some days. During this time Jaya feels a bit relieved of her own hectic and boring hum drum of life and falls into retrospection. She takes into account introspective appraisal of her own life. She deeply thinks about her life for the first time and comes to have better understanding of her life and her protean roles as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, daughter-in-law, friend, mistress and writer of genteel ‘feminine’ newspaper pieces. Adele King in her book review says: “Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.”

Retrospection leads the readers know that Jaya has lived in utter silence all seventeen years after her marriage to Mohan. Jaya has given herself fully to her marriage; husband and children. She never raised a voice of protest but only once. It was her first chance of outburst with Mohan soon after their marriage. But nonetheless she has to make the reconciliatory move after days of Mohan’s silence. Mohan was quite angry with her for he has never seen women bursting out with anger and passion. It is societal norm that women have to be silent. They cannot raise their voice against their oppressors. Consequently Mohan told her then: “My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her.” (TLS 83) Her marriage life is nothing but a life of compromise and commitment. It has no roots into love and understanding. It is what Simon de Beauvoir says, “a gilded mediocrity lacking ambition and passion, aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose.”

Jaya’s father thought of her as in bold terms and tried to have high hopes on her. He named her as ‘Jaya’- a Hindi language word that means victory. The name itself symbolises that her father had high opinion of her as a daughter. She got from father the best care and affection that any daughter craves for. He used to proudly say Jaya means victory and he believed in some corner of heart a victory for her; that she would scale heights unprecedented and make them proud. But to her bad luck, she was later renamed as ‘Suhasini’-a word that means, “a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family.” (TLS 16) Suhasini is a woman who coped with every solution to safeguard her family and whose sole intention in her life is to be good and serve her family by all means. When addressed by Kamat as Jaya she emphatically announces that her name is not Jaya rather Suhasini: “It’s the name Mohan gave me when we got
married.” (TLS 15) Sarabjit Sandhu observes in his essay on That Long Silence: “Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. The former symbolizes revolt and the latter submission.”

A woman does not have an identity of her own. “Generally, a woman’s identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother. It means virtually a woman does not have an identity of her own”15, how truly says Indira Kulkshreshtha. The question regarding her identity always haunts her but the answer is evasive. In Bombay following her husband Mohan’s dictates she starts wearing huge dark glasses, gets her eyebrow shaped and hair cut short in order to attain an aura of the wife of an executive. In the process she becomes dwarfed and annihilated as an individual but it all goes unnoticed even by her. She is helpless to find her own identity as she finds herself as an utter stranger, a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motives of her actions seemed impossible. Tapan Basu says, “Jaya who ha input, a life time in surrender of her will to social mores and customs that had relegated women to a second class status.”

In such a stifling domestic ambience and patriarchal set-up, she finds her female identity effaced. Jaya comes to know the truth that a woman’s identity is not traceable as a woman down the ages has been identified in terms of her relation with the male. Ten different mirrors bring before her ten different faces but the actual face, her identity is missing. In childhood she is identified in terms of her relation with her father, in youth after marriage in terms of her relation with her husband and if she is a widow as the mother. “A wife, obedient to her husband, renowned, light footed, eloquent in speech, sympathetic to the patients, attains to happiness when she lives peacefully with her husband, and nicely cooks the food efficacious, and grown through rain, conducive to our physical growth, brought daily in use, and relished by our ancestors.”17 The true identity of woman is completely neglected. On a visit to her posh church gate home she sees her divided self clearly:

And now nothing seemed to connect me to this place, nothing bridged the chasm between this place, nothing bridged the chasm between this prowling woman and the woman who had lived here. I was conscious of a faint chagrin at her disappearance. Wasn’t it I who had painfully laboriously created her? Perhaps, for
that very reason, she could not evade me entirely traditional concept of docile wives, and silent woman. (TLS 168)

Like the traditions ideal women Sita and Gandhari who blindly followed their husbands, she also walked on to the tредed path. Although she was earlier averse to the notions of ideal wife and was not agree to what Vanitamami used to say, “A husband is like a sheltering tree.” (TLS 138) But after marriage she has underwent transmutation; she transformed from being a very independent woman to being a very docile woman for whom nothing really mattered but her family and married life. Jaya thus observes:

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 don’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, fridges, a gas connection, travelling I class. (TLS 144)

Shashi Deshpande has used the story of the sparrow and the crow to highlight her very situation. Jaya like the sparrow has well guarded her own marital citadel and never allowed any outer influence or disruption to shatter her married life. The wise sparrow has built a house of wax and the foolish crow of dung. On a rainy night the crow’s house collapses forcing her to seek shelter at the sparrow’s house. The sparrow is so possessive of and attached to her home that she keeps the crow waiting out in the rain for a considerable period of time. She allows the crow in only when she is thoroughly drenched and then guides her to the hot pan to warm her. The foolish crow hops onto it and gets burnt to death. Jaya’s married life has been lived almost on the same lines as the sparrow’s. She has built an edifice of security around her husband and children believing it to be a burrow into which she can crawl, reptile like, and feel safe. Attending to the needs of the husband and tending and caring for the children become her full – time occupation. She states in unequivocal terms that Mohan is her profession, career and means of livelihood. According to Dr Kavya the story can be read as a story of power structure as well, “The story of the crow and sparrow becomes an ironical symbol of Jaya’s life wherein the weak and the sensitive can be treated with cruel carelessness by the more successful ones.”18

She has so much loved him that the thought of living without him is so scary for her. Sometimes she has a hunch that there is an impending danger to Mohan’s life. She gets scared as Mohan is
the one who provides her complete security although she has been living under the pseudo sense of security which she does not realise earlier. She notices her hunch as:

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

Jaya does not only shun her individuality rather she sacrificed everything for her husband including her very creative impulse. Jaya could have a very promising vocation as a writer. As Vimala Rao observes:

Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English Fiction who poses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is an achievement.¹⁹

She has written short stories which won for her some awards. Had she been encouraged to do the kind of writing she wanted to, she would have been wonderful and a very successful writer. But again one of her stories is criticised by Mohan as he finds some autobiographical tones into that and feels that society would come to know that the man in the story represents him. He says: “They will all know now, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us, they will think I am this kind of man, they will think I am this man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write these things […].” (TLS 143-144) She however feels that she has related her experience only after transmuting it into something entirely different. But she has been, “scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage.” (TLS 144) So in spite of her best judgment, she gives up writing fiction, “Looking at his stricken face, I had been concerned. I had done him wrong. And I stopped writing after that.” (TLS 144) After that she starts writing for women’s magazines under the pseudonym ‘Seeta’ again an intrinsic feeling of being an ideal wife impelled her to choose the name of ‘Seeta’; a woman with unbounded energy who worked for her husband’s well being. But she does not feel comfortable writing as a columnist as she writes like Indu of Roots and
Shadows things which her publisher wants her to write. She writes the things which she herself does not comply with. She puts her anger in these words:

That column, yes, it had made me known. My profile silhouetted in stark black that accompanied each article frightened me each time I saw it. It was like seeing someone masquerading as myself, or as if I was masquerading as the woman who wrote that column. (*TLS* 119)

She has immense capability and fertility to be a writer of grave and serious issues which fiction writing demands. But she suppresses her desires as it is something which can endanger her very married life. Consequently she has to pretend that she is quite fine writing for the woman’s magazines some columns which are appreciated by all except her own self. She believes a marriage is a deception and opines that one has to, “keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies.” (*TLS* 32) She believes if Mohan had been yelling at her at that time, probably she would also have retorted back. In that situation she would not have given up writing as a fictional writer. She muses:

Perhaps, if Mohan had been angry, if he had shouted and raged at me, if he had forbidden me to write, perhaps I would have fought him and gone on. But he had only shown me his hurt. And I had not been able to counter that. I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared-scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage. (*TLS* 144)

Jaya’s predicament is the predicament of many women who are educated. These women like Jaya are sandwiched between the forces of modernity and traditions. They cannot be entirely traditional like Vanitamami and Kusum who bear the problems with stoic silence and eventually move into the well of death. Even these women cannot be fully modern protesting against the patriarchal bonds. They are the new women who are of 1970’s and 80’s and it is the time which is of transition when the feminist ideas have swept India. These women have seen the traditional values which so clung to their families. But they are also witnessing modern times. Being educated they known well the changing which are taking place in the world and as such they find it hard to keep themselves satisfied with the platitudes of woman’s fulfilment being in a silent
wife leading the role of a wife, daughter-in-law and mother. These women reject these ideal which have been idealised in order to subjugate them. Jaya like Sumi in *A Matter of Time* finds no meaning in being a wife wearing Kumkum but silently dragging the chariot of married life.

In such a stifling environment where she has been trapped to live not outside the confines of her family life, there comes a ray of hope. The advent of Kamat whom she meets is an advertiser and lives alone above the apartment of the Kulkarnies at Dadar, Bombay. Unlike the other men he has no reservations against doing unmanly things like cooking. He is sympathetic and conducts himself with ease and grace in the company of women. Of all the qualities that endeared him to Jaya, she particularly notes his treatment of her as an equal. While every man she meets puts on a different face and a false smile, making his condescension all too palpable. But with Kamat she is her own self. “It had been a revelation to me that two people, a man and a woman, could talk this way. With this man, I had not been a woman. I had been just myself – Jaya. (TLS 153)

It is in his presence that she becomes uninhabited and sheds the crippling silence she imposed on herself as a part of erasing every sign of her identity. She gets from Kamat the best of her father’s concern for her – reassurance and comfort – and the best of attention that she would like to have from Mohan. He can chide her like her father when she is in the wrong, “I’m warning you – beware of this ‘women are victims’ theory of yours. It will drag you down into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. Take yourself seriously, woman. Don’t skulk behind a false name.’” (TLS 148) He can encourage her like an elder brother: “spew out your anger in your writing, woman, spew it out.” (TLS 147) And he can pay beautiful compliments like a lover: “Your name is like your face.”(TLS 14)

Consequently she confides in him things she would never dare mention to Mohan. It is to Kamat that she turns for solace when one of her stories which she wrote pseudonymously is rejected by many editors. He informs her how to bring freshness in her stories. He tells her of all the required techniques to mould the stories in the right way. He reviews her works as a genuine critic. Kamat like Naren of *Roots and Shadows* motivates the protagonist. In Kamat one can see Naren’s traits clearly. Naren peps up Indu and spurs her to move on in life as a writer. Similarly Kamat kicks her to forward her writing career in the right track. She involuntarily finds herself in the comforting embrace of Kamat when she feels particularly sad about her father Appa’s death. For a split second she is unable to distinguish between him and Appa. Her body responds to his
gentle look. She recounts the experience: “There had been nothing but an overwhelming urge to respond to him with my body, the equally overwhelming certainty of my mind that I could not do so. Later, there had been confusion.” (TLS 157)

But she instantaneously rejects the instinctual urge – it is not in the interest of safeguarding her marital bliss. At home that night, however, she deliberately arouses desire in Mohan and makes fierce love to him in an apparent displacement. She reasons that in her case and in the case of many other married women, marital life is dictated by treachery, deceit and betrayal. Yet the pretence has to be maintained. Perhaps it is the same realization which makes her behave callously on the death of Kamat. “That night, while having dinner, I had thought, someone I know is dead. I saw him dead. And I had been detached from that woman who had seen him, remote from that experience.” (TLS 157) Her writing and Kamat are not all that she has given up for the safety of her marital citadel. She has systematically insulated and alienated herself from everything and everybody that posed the remotest threat to the peace of her home.

The novel is a study of silence not in the case of Jaya-Mohan relationship only but rather it extends to many other women who are victims in the patriarchal society. Jaya’s maid servant Jeeja is the epitome of the oppressed Indian women. Her husband gives her brutal beatings. She has to shoulder the responsibility of the family by earning the livelihood. Her husband takes a major share of earning and spends it all in satisfying himself with liquor as he is a boozy and remains always drunk. She even brings up the children of other woman whom her husband married. But still she does not protest, never raises her voice in anger but does everything silently as women are destined to do it only. Jeeja’s main purpose was to go on living life and she believed in "Enduring was part of it” (TLS 51) that is why ”she endured all that she had to.”(TLS 51) Jeeja’s endurance startles Jaya and she thinks “what had surprised me then, what still surprised me, was that there seemed to be no anger behind her silence.(TLS 51)

Jeeja’s daughter-in-law Tara’s husband Rajaram is the copy of her father and beats his wife black and blue and remains intoxicated with liquor only. Jeeja scolds Tara whenever she abuses her husband “Stop that, don’t forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that?” (TLS 53) Mohan’s sister Vimala too suffers in silence. She remains silent regarding her disease and does not spill the beans regarding her disease to her in-laws and is bled to death. The doctor is startled to know that she suffered in silence without opening her mouth.
But Vimala knew that her in-laws would not have got her treated even if she had told them about her disease. So she chooses to die. Another victim of male oppression is a lady beaten by her husband in the building of Dadar flat.

Even Mohan’s mother and his sister Vimala are victims of gender discrimination. Mohan’s father was a boozey so Mohan’s mother had to fend for herself and her family. She earned her bread by cooking for wedding feasts. In spite of all this labour she was beaten like a beast by her husband. Mohan’s mother always kept on waiting for his father to come at night. She served dinner to all of his children and made them sleep. When her husband came she cooked fresh rice for him as he was hateful of taking the food she cooked for the children. After washing himself he sat for taking his meal. Noticing that Chutney (sauce) was not served, he flung the plate on the wall and moved out.

"God, she was tough, women in those days were tough" (TLS 36) is Mohan’s remark. Though Mohan finds toughness in her mother Jaya has different notions. She finds not toughness as the prime trait in her mother rather she finds her as a victim and she suffered with a silent heart. “I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender.” (TLS 36) Jaya’s cousin Kusum is a deserted wife. She suffers some mental problem. Jaya keeps Kusum in her Dadar flat though all her relatives dissuade her in doing so as they believe she may create some problems for them as she is not mentally sound. Kusum’s brother takes her away when she recovers a bit but she dies by committing suicide one day before when her husband is supposed to take her back. Vanitamami observes many fasts and rituals as she could not bear a child and is threatened by her husband to get married to another woman again.

Women’s fate is degraded one. The parents prefer boys to be born not the girls. The preference for boys is very much ingrained in the Indian people’s psyche. One of the reasons is that according to tradition only boys are entitled to give ‘agni’ (Fire) to the pyre of parents not the girls. Not only the father who is representative of male dominance even the mother who herself is a victim of male dominated set up wants boys to be born to her. As Sarabjit Sandhu opines:

The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one-after all, he is a male child and therefore one who will propagate the family lineage. In
another sense, also, the male child is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give agni to his dead parents. The soul of the dead parents would otherwise wander in ferment.\(^\text{20}\)

Nayana in the novel craves for the birth of a male child as she has two daughters. Though Nayana curses her husband, brother and even her father as all of them are good for nothing fellows just frittering away their time and are hedonists. Herself a victim of patriarchal values it is very ironic that she yearns for a male child. The reason being she tells Jaya as:

Why give birth to a girl, *behnji*, who’ll only suffer because of man all her life? Look at me! My mother loved me very much, she wanted so much for me……….a house with electricity and water, shining brass vessels, a silver waist chain, silver anklets…… and what have I got? No, no *behnji*, better to have a son. And here she was again, saying confidently, This time it will be a son. He… “She gave a contemptuous shrug with the pronoun… “He says he’ll throw me out if I have another daughter.” (TLS 28)

Deshpande has talked about the essential question of female foeticide in the novel. The preference for a male child is so much engrossed in the society that men victimise women for not having a son. Shashi Deshpande raises certain issues which the world in itself is grappling with. In India alone many cases of female foeticide are reported every year despite the best efforts by the government we have not been able to put a full stop to the menace. Dalvir Singh Gahlawat opines:

The important question, what fault of a woman is, if she gives birth to a female baby by obeying the law of nature, is a matter of contemplation. She is so submissive that she cannot disregard the nature. It is man who gauntlet the law of nature by aborting the female child in the lust of getting a son next time. Woman does all this with the connivance of man. It is crime against Nature/God to abort the female child as she is supposed to be a mother or creator of the SHRISHTI who is just like a God. In so called liberal Indian society gender determinative tests are frequently practised and till now Indians are accountable and accused of killing more female foetus in terms of number than the number of soldiers died in any of the World Wars.\(^\text{21}\)
Jaya’s aborting her third child without Mohan telling about it speaks of her lack of confidence and freedom. Mohan’s temperament in love making appals her. Like a typical stereotyped Indian man who wants his wife for physical gratification only without caring a fig about her true inner feelings, he behaves callously. Their intimacy generally ends in sex. The act of sex which does not stir their feelings but it is just a physical touch. She is so much known to his behaviour that she can almost predict what he would say after every act of sex. She observes that, “First there’s love, then there’s sex, that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan, I had realized that it could so easily be the other way round.” (TLS 95)

Even in the matter of sex it is the women who are sufferers. Jaya never says “yes” when her husband asks whether he has hurt her after sex. She has to endure everything: “The emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit of being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him.” (TLS 98) She knows pretty well that in order to get by a relationship, one has to learn a lot of tricks and silence is one of them. One can never find a woman opposing her husband as it always results in damage of the marriage. Jaya succumbs and surrenders to Mohan without revolting. Silently she wills to his wills. Sarabjit Sandhu points out in his essay on That Long Silence:

All this does not show a natural and harmonious relationship between the two when one is unable to express his or her real feelings to the other. Their physical relationship always ends up with Mohan’s question whether he has hurt her. It obviously shows a forced relationship and not a natural one. Jaya does not immediately react to the situation but the reader is informed through the flashback technique used by the author.22

Jaya strives hard for expressing her silence. There are numerous examples in the novel that Jaya would eventually break her long held silence but in the end of the novel this desire and resolution of her is left for the future. There is a hint that Jaya would break the ice regarding her silence in the time to come. There is no doubt in the fact that she would definitely break her silence despite the fact that she is unable to express her pent up feelings at the present time. She says emphatically, “I’ll have to break the silence between us.” (TLS 192) Her resolve to break her silence is a welcome step. It is a first foot forward towards her freedom. She would eventually create a future for her full of happiness and normalcy where the sexes would play no other game
but a game of love and prosperity. Shashi Deshpande likes to convey: “Where lies the roots of domestic joy understanding, there lies the joy and bliss in the family.”

Jaya has to follow Mohan to Dadar flat as he is implicated in an act of corruption. To avoid the charges he has to go underground for some days and he consequently chooses Dadar flat. He does not ask for Jaya’s consent whether she would like to accompany him as he thinks that it is unnecessary to ask. Jaya’s consent is taken for granted. Indira Bhatt remarks that Mohan uses Jaya, “as buffer, an opiate to soften the impact of the sources he has set into motion against himself.” It is very true in Indian context whenever a girl gets married her husband thinks that he is the owner of that girl as Sarabjit Sandhu in his essay “The Image of Women in That Long Silence” points out: “Whether the husband follows the right path or wrong one, She has to blindly follow in his footsteps.” Consequently Jaya too has to accompany Mohan reluctantly. She often sees Mohan and her own self as animals going in the same direction as they have been burdened with yoke like the bullocks. They have balanced themselves somehow by, “Ours have been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel.”

Temperaments of Jaya as well as Mohan’s are far different from each other; that is why their marital relationship suffers. There is a silence which surges between both of them. Mohan wanted to marry a girl who was well educated and could speak English fluently as he tells her after marriage, “You know Jaya the first day I met you at your Ramukaka’s house you were talking to your brother, Dinkar, and somehow you sounded like that girl. I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you.” But Mohan is greatly disappointed in his choice of wife. Jaya too in her introspection reflects on their marital relationship and notices nothing but sham, pretence and a facade of marriage that is being maintained because of the social obligations. There is silence between them. Jaya cannot respond to Mohan’s questions. Mohan’s questions remain unanswered as Jaya reflects, “I racked my brains trying to think of an answer.”
In Dadar flat their relationship suffers all the more. Jaya is being haunted by her past. She is haunted by all the past happenings. She examines her life with Mohan minutely trying to find the reasons for her disintegration. Mohan at that place wants Jaya’s attention but Jaya being obsessed with past sometimes does not seem to comprehend Mohan. Thus Mohan flings the arrows of all sorts of accusations on Jaya. He accuses her that she married him because she was compelled by her brother Dinkar. He further accuses her that she never cared for him rather she was more interested in her own needs. As Mohan says, “Nothing mattered to you, only your needs and you could see nothing else.” (TLS 118) He also makes her the scapegoat of the malpractices of which he has been accused. He says, “It was for you and the children that I did this. I wanted you to have a good life; I wanted the children to have all those things I never had.” (TLS 9)

Sudhir Kakar says in this context that the super ego, the moral agency is not weakly differentiated and insufficiently idealized in Indians. Whereas in the West, an individual’s behaviour is constantly regulated by the proscriptions of the Super ego, in a Hindu it is regulated by what he calls ‘communal conscience.’ He furthers his argument by saying that communal conscience comprises of family and jati norms and it is, “a social rather than an individual formation: it is not ‘inside’ the psyche. In other words, instead of having one internal sentinel an Indian relies on many external ‘watchmen’ to patrol his activities and especially his relationships in all social hierarchies.”

All these accusations hurt her deep inside heart:

I was full of a sense of angry confusion. What was he charging me with? And oh God, Why couldn’t I speak? Why couldn’t I say something? I felt foolishly inadequate, having nothing to offer in exchange for all the charges he was pouring on me…….. I could say nothing. I sat in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me, excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me cruelly conscious. (TLS 119)

Due to his charging her of immoral acts, she is frustrated and an altercation ensues. He Flings all sort of blames on her and for the first time the dam of silence she has built so carefully in all those seventeen years which has not broken till now, caves in and she pays him in the same coin. She replies furiously that it is for him that she left everything. She even charges him of making her writing career bring to a halt. For the first time she is overwhelmed by a sense of complete anger. When anger overpowers her she finds it difficult to express herself and words do not come
to her: “But as if I’d been struck dumb, I could say nothing. I sat in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me cruelly conscious.” (TLS 121)

The crux of the problem occurs when Jaya bursts out into laughter and Mohan leaves the flat. The laughter that she bursts into is her expression of stupidity of marriage. Mohan’s desertion leaves Jaya half mad. She becomes hysterical. Her marital citadel collapses for which she suppressed every feeling and ambition of herself. Her suffering is all the more enhanced by the news that her son Rahul is missing. Hopelessness and despair seize her. She turns to be a neurotic. There was no Kamat to support her now. She feels that she is becoming mad like Kusum, “I could feel myself gasping, drowning in the darkness, the wild, flailing, panic-stricken movements that I was making, taking me lower and lower into the vortex…. Take your pain between your teeth bite on it; don’t let it escape… It came floundering out of the depths, thinking…. Am I going crazy like Kusum?” (TLS 125) She also thinks about Mohan’s leaving, “I have failed him. He expected something from me, from his wife and I have failed him. All these years I thought I was Mohan’s wife now he tells me I was never that, not really.” (TLS 185) It comes as a great shock to her: “It was like a house collapse during the monsoon. There was something desolating about the ease with which that had so substantial fell away almost contemptuously leaving behind an embarrassing nakedness.” (TLS 174)

After Mohan’s desertion she starts walking on the streets of Bombay. She sees a drug addict girl being sexually teased by two men. But the reality is the girl does not mind rather her attitude is patronising to the men who have been caressing her breasts. Her idea of woman as victim vanishes, as she knows that woman themselves are responsible for many of her troubles. The reality comes before her. All her ideals of revolution melt away. She comes to know that she has identity only with Mohan. She comes to know that she cannot live without him and her children. She is driven with guilt feeling that she is responsible for everything that befell her and her family. She is haunted by numerous past happenings. She understands that Mohan never stopped her from writing it was actually her own fault. When Mohan had asked her not to do autobiographical kind of writing she could have talked to him instead of maintain silence and relinquishing writing. S. Prasanna Sree says about Jaya:
She is not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Jaya moves to accept mutual responsibility in marriage. Painfully, she realises she has tried to make Mohan the scapegoat for her failure as a writer.

Jaya suffers from lack of sleep and an acute sense of detachment. Her dreams turn into nightmares which keep haunting her. Her situation becomes like a mental patient suffering from mental illness and hallucination. Jaya’s nightmares put forward her sense of loneliness and estranged feelings. Her nightmares clearly present her pent up emotions. They tell the readers her very existential dilemma. Life for her is hard to endure. In one of her dream, she visualise Mohan and her own self. They are walking. Mohan suddenly is nowhere and she is alone and passes through a house. The house is vacant but in one of the rooms, there are many girls. She falls dead and the girls mumble in their low voices something. Suddenly Mohan appears on the scene and implores her to run so that they may get a taxi in order to run away. But despite the best efforts it is not possible to go away: “that is too late anyway, we will never be able to make it, and we will never be able to get away.” (TLS 86) The dream clearly voices her unconscious needs. She wants Mohan back. The house is to be taken care of by her. No one can help her to maintain the house clearly. She has to do it herself.

Decision making is a significant step in every one’s life. But the same has been denied to Jaya. Jaya’s introspection informs her that she has never had the courage to speak explicitly. She did never know what she wanted. On the contrary it was Mohan who was crystal clear on the issue of his desires and wants. He knows it quite clearly what he wanted in his life. He wanted a wife who would follow her blindly; he wanted children to continue with his family lineage and a good lucrative job so that their family might continue without any disturbance and hardships. But Jaya never knew it exactly. She did what she was expected to do. She suddenly remembers Maitreyi who rejects straight forward the offer of sage Yajnavalika of property. She asks her whether property would provide her immortality but the answer is no. At the same time, she denies that she does not want property as it would give her no solace. Thus she comes to know that it is imperative to make choices. Arjun was told in Mahabhartha by Lord Krishna after the instructions-yathecchasi tatha kuru-do as you desire-Krishna him. She realises that one has to do according to one’s will; one has to take one stance as Arjuna and Maitreyi took. Now she decides
what she has to do. She is fearful no more. She believes that understanding can pave way where both man and woman can live comfortably. Only through understanding can co-existence be possible.

What Shashi Deshpande actually believes is that women are no doubt victimised members of the society but the whole blame does not rest with men. Women too have taken up the side with their colonisers and victimisers. It is not possible for men to victimise and subjugate women without their consent. If one wants and aspires not to be victimised no one in the world would dare to tie woman to the pegs of slavery and subjugation. Shashi Deshpande’s very brand of feminism is that of liberal one which projects the ideas of living with harmony, peace and co-existence. She outwardly rejects the ideas of radicals that men and women are two different poles which can never co-exist. Sarala Parker remarks in this context:

The important insight that Shashi Deshpande imparts to us through Jaya is that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their victimisation instead of putting the blame on everybody except themselves.28

Luck favours her and it brings for her relief much good news. First is the news from Rahul as he returns. The second good news is from Mohan. Mohan sends a telegram announcing that he will be back as the enquiry ended and he is safe. She is quite happy. She overpowers her hysteria and is back to her usual normal self. But she is perplexed to think:

Mohan will be back ‘All Well’ his telegram says. Does he mean by this that we will go back to being ‘as we were’? Does it mean that, now that Mohan has sorted out his problem, and no longer fears prosecution, joblessness and disgrace, we can go back to our original positions? Does it mean that he will come back and give me a carefully edited version of what has happened-as he has done so often till now- and then ask me, “what do you say, Jaya?”(TLS 192)

She reflects that Mohan would like her to say those things he always wants to listen but this time she decides she would say only those things that she desires. For quite a long time of seventeen years she has been bearing everything silently and keeping the façade of marriage by systematically subjugating her own identity and dancing to the tunes of her family. But now she
rejects the idea of being servile. She outwardly rejects his influence over her. She affirms that she would not tolerate any authority of Mohan over her and say what her conscience allows her to say.

She comes to know that she has been at fault all her life. Though in the beginning of her life at her parental home she has been in quite vehement opposition to what Vanitamami and her grandmother used to say. Her grandmother and Vanitamami are those women of the older generation who generally come into clash with the girls of the new generation like Jaya. Vanitamami’s suggestion that a husband is like a sheltering tree was met with objection by Jaya. She used to wonder regarding her own identity and think that a woman’s sole aim in life is thought in society to find a suitable husband and bear children. Like Sarita of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* who was quite self willed and self assertive Jaya too undergoes huge metamorphosis after marriage; marriage that snatches away the very vitals of her personality. She meets a quite different side of her life and gradually adopts the advice of her relatives that a woman must take care of her husband and family life as without them she is nothing but Jaya is mistaken here. She does not maintain an equal partnership rather like women who could not speak Sanskrit, she speaks *Prakrit*.

While studying Sanskrit drama, I’d learnt with a sense of outrage that its rigid rules did not permit women characters to speak Sanskrit. They had to use prakrit-language that had sounded to my ears like a baby’s lisp. The anger I’d felt then comes back to me when I realise what I’ve been doing all these years. I have been speaking prakrit myself. (*TLS* 192-193)

Jaya too through her reflection gathers strength to break that long silence which she has adopted as weapon. Jaya confidently announces, ”I’m not afraid any more, the panic has gone. I’m Mohan’s wife. I had thought and cut off the bits of that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible” (*TLS* 191) Thus in the end of this novel there is still a hope that Jaya-Mohan relationship will not end in despair rather Jaya through her efforts will again exert to sort out their problems and they would in future lead a happy life. So Jaya hopes for a change: “…it’s possible that we may not change 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.” (*TLS* 193) What Shashi Deshpande exhorts through this novel
is that women must fight for their rights. The subjugation of women can be rooted out only if women start breaking their long silence as in the case of Jaya.

REFERENCES-


