

**Feminine Psyche of Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's 'That Long Silence'**

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**Abstract**

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* (1988) is a seminal work in Indian feminist literature that explores the intricate psychological landscape of its protagonist, Jaya. The novel examines themes of gender roles, marital oppression, self-discovery, and the internal conflicts of an educated middle-class woman in post-independence India. Jaya's journey is emblematic of the struggles faced by women who are expected to conform to societal norms while yearning for self-expression and individuality. Through an introspective narrative, the novel highlights Jaya's transformation from silence to self-awareness, reflecting the broader feminist awakening in Indian literature. This paper critically analyzes Jaya's feminine psyche, focusing on how Deshpande portrays her oscillation between tradition and modernity, submission and resistance. The study underscores the novel's contribution to feminist discourse by illustrating how Jaya's internal rebellion serves as an assertion of her identity against patriarchal constraints.

**Keywords:** Feminine psyche, gender roles, self-discovery, patriarchal oppression, silence, Indian feminism, Shashi Deshpande, *That Long Silence*

**Introduction Feminine Psyche of Jaya in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence***

Indian literature has often depicted women as subordinate figures confined to societal expectations. Shashi Deshpande, in her novel *That Long Silence* (1989), challenges this traditional portrayal through the character of Jaya, a woman who undergoes an intense psychological transformation. Jaya, an educated yet domesticated woman, represents the silent suffering of many Indian women trapped in the patriarchal web of marriage and family obligations. Jaya's internal turmoil and suppressed voice form the crux of the novel, highlighting the struggles faced by women in a society that expects them to be passive and obedient. Throughout the narrative, Deshpande delves deep into Jaya's feminine psyche, revealing her oscillation between submission and the desire for self-expression. The novel presents her journey of introspection, as she revisits her past and questions the roles imposed upon her as a wife, mother, and writer. Scholars like V.J. Santhi (2012) emphasize how Jaya asserts her feminine psyche by breaking the silence that has long defined her existence. Similarly, P. Rai (2013) explores the agonized feelings of Jaya as she struggles to reclaim her lost identity in a male-dominated world.

The novel also portrays Jaya's conflicting emotions—her longing for independence versus her ingrained tendency to conform. Deshpande skillfully captures the complexities of Jaya's consciousness, showcasing the psychological conflicts that many women face. According to P. Singla (2012), the flux of Jaya's thoughts is not tied down to a linear structure

but rather reflects the chaotic nature of her inner struggle. This fragmentation in narration mirrors her mental state, reinforcing the theme of self-exploration. The quest for identity is a recurring theme in *That Long Silence*. As A.P. Kumar (2015) argues, Jaya's journey is one of self-discovery, where she ultimately finds the courage to confront her fears and acknowledge her suppressed emotions. She realizes that silence has been a means of survival but also an instrument of oppression. Scholars like M. Kapoor and S. Singh (2012) highlight how Jaya's persona merges with that of Deshpande herself, making the novel a semi-autobiographical reflection on the feminine experience in India.

Jaya's transformation is not marked by dramatic rebellion but by an internal shift in perception. As J. Snega (2012) observes, she initially seeks solace in relationships like that with Kamat but eventually understands that true liberation lies in self-acceptance rather than dependence on others. The novel, therefore, is a powerful feminist narrative that gives voice to the silent struggles of Indian women. In conclusion, *That Long Silence* serves as a profound exploration of the feminine psyche through Jaya's journey. Deshpande's nuanced portrayal of her protagonist challenges the stereotypes surrounding women's roles in Indian society. By breaking the silence and embracing self-expression, Jaya emerges as a symbol of resilience and transformation. Through references to various scholarly works, this paper underscores how Deshpande masterfully captures the psychological depth of a woman caught between tradition and modernity.

### **Jaya: A Symbol of the Subjugated Feminine Psyche**

Jaya's character in *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande embodies the psychological turmoil of a woman forced into a submissive role by societal norms. As the novel unfolds, she finds herself caught between traditional expectations and her inner desires. Raised in a society that prioritizes male dominance, Jaya initially conforms to the role of an obedient wife,

suppressing her individuality. She internalizes the belief that a woman's duty is to maintain familial harmony, even at the cost of her own aspirations. The novel serves as a powerful critique of patriarchal structures that confine women to predefined roles. According to Rahman (2016), Jaya's struggles reflect the broader theme of female suppression in Indian literature, where women are often depicted as passive figures. However, Deshpande challenges this notion by presenting Jaya as a complex character who experiences deep psychological conflict. Her silence is not just a lack of speech but a manifestation of years of conditioning that has rendered her voiceless in her own life (Santhi, 2012).

Jaya's predicament resonates with many women who navigate the thin line between societal expectations and personal aspirations. As Neupane (2009) argues, traditional biases falsely represent women as quiet and subservient, reinforcing a cultural norm that discourages rebellion. Jaya initially conforms to this ideal, believing that any form of self-assertion might disrupt the stability of her marriage and family. However, through introspection, she gradually begins to question the validity of these imposed restrictions. The transformation of Jaya's psyche is a crucial aspect of the novel, as it highlights the internal rebellion that many women experience in silence (Kumar, 2015). The motif of silence in the novel is symbolic of the suppression of women's voices throughout history. Kapoor and Singh (2012) point out that Jaya's journey is not one of outward rebellion but an internal realization of self-worth. Deshpande employs a narrative structure that mirrors Jaya's fragmented thoughts, emphasizing the dissonance between her conditioned passivity and her growing need for self-expression. Jaya's thoughts move fluidly between the past and the present, illustrating how her experiences have shaped her perception of identity.

The influence of societal norms on Jaya's psyche is also evident in her interactions with other characters. Her relationship with her husband, Mohan, exemplifies the traditional

Indian marriage dynamic where the husband assumes authority, and the wife remains in the background. As Hussain, Siddiqui, and Singh (2022) note, Mohan embodies the societal expectation that a woman must be supportive, sacrificing her dreams for her husband's success. Jaya, at first, accepts this role, but as the novel progresses, she begins to recognize the oppressive nature of her silence.

Deshpande does not present Jaya's transformation as a grand feminist revolt but rather as an intimate and gradual awakening. Jaya's realization that silence has been a form of self-betrayal is pivotal. As Snega (2012) observes, her struggle is not just against societal oppression but against her own internalized fears and inhibitions. Her character arc represents the psychological battles that many women endure as they seek to define their identities beyond the roles assigned to them. By the end of the novel, Jaya does not radically break free from her circumstances, but she acknowledges the need to assert her individuality. This subtle but significant shift in her psyche signifies a step toward self-empowerment. As Antony (2025) asserts, Deshpande's portrayal of Jaya is a reflection of the changing face of Indian womanhood—one that no longer accepts subjugation as destiny but seeks self-actualization within or beyond societal confines.

Jaya's character in *That Long Silence* is a poignant representation of the subjugated feminine psyche. Through her journey, Shashi Deshpande critiques the cultural conditioning that forces women into silence and submission. By incorporating Jaya's inner monologue, Deshpande provides a voice to countless women who struggle with similar conflicts. Jaya's story is not just about oppression; it is about the possibility of change, however gradual it may be. Her realization that she has been complicit in her own silence serves as a powerful reminder that self-awareness is the first step toward liberation.

### **Marriage and the Burden of Silence**

Jaya's marriage to Mohan in *That Long Silence* reflects the struggles of many Indian women who are expected to compromise their identity to sustain a relationship. Mohan, as the patriarchal figure, expects Jaya to remain a silent supporter of his ambitions, reinforcing the societal notion that a woman's primary role is to ensure the stability of her marriage and family. The silence in their marriage symbolizes not just the suppression of Jaya's voice but also the deeper emotional alienation she experiences. She realizes that her identity has been reduced to that of a dutiful wife, and her creative aspirations, such as writing, have been stifled by the demands of domestic life (Singh, 2014). Throughout the novel, Jaya grapples with the realization that marriage has forced her into a passive role where she must suppress her individuality to conform to societal expectations. According to Usha (2013), Jaya's marital experience represents the fate of many Indian women who are conditioned to believe that self-sacrifice is essential for a successful marriage. Mohan's expectations, rooted in traditional gender roles, leave little room for Jaya to express her thoughts and desires freely. The novel portrays how marriage, instead of being a partnership, becomes a space where women must negotiate their existence through silence and compromise (Indumathi, 2013).

Jaya's internal conflict is further intensified by her reflections on Mohan's mother, a woman who endured years of quiet suffering. As Akram (2021) highlights, Jaya sees in Mohan's mother the embodiment of suppressed female voices, women who spent their lives prioritizing their husband's needs while erasing their own. This generational cycle of silence perpetuates the idea that a woman's worth is measured by her ability to endure, rather than her ability to express. Jaya, however, begins to question this notion, realizing that her silence has only deepened her sense of loneliness and isolation (Ramya, 2021). The emotional distance between Jaya and Mohan is not just a result of their different perspectives but a direct consequence of the gendered expectations

placed upon them. As Singh (2013) notes, Mohan believes he is fulfilling his duties as a husband by providing financial security, failing to acknowledge Jaya's need for emotional connection and intellectual fulfillment. This misalignment in expectations leads to Jaya's increasing disillusionment with marriage. While Mohan views silence as a means of maintaining peace, Jaya begins to see it as a tool of oppression that prevents her from asserting her identity (Mohan, 2006).

Despite her realization, Jaya's transformation is gradual. She does not instantly rebel against Mohan or abandon her marriage, but she does acknowledge the need to reclaim her voice. Antony (2025) argues that Jaya's eventual decision to break her silence symbolizes the awakening consciousness of Indian women who are beginning to assert their individuality within oppressive structures. Her journey signifies a shift from passive endurance to self-awareness, marking the first step toward personal liberation. Jaya's marriage in *That Long Silence* serves as a poignant critique of the societal expectation that women must compromise their identity for the sake of marital harmony. Her struggle highlights the emotional and intellectual suffocation that many women experience within patriarchal marriages. Through Jaya's journey, Deshpande challenges the traditional notion of marriage as a woman's ultimate purpose, instead advocating for self-expression and personal fulfillment.

### **The Conflict Between Traditional Values and Self-Realization**

Throughout *That Long Silence*, Jaya struggles with the conflicting values of tradition and modernity. She has been conditioned to believe that a woman's fulfillment lies in being a devoted wife and mother. However, as she embarks on an introspective journey, she begins to question these ideals. Her suppressed desires resurface, compelling her to acknowledge her own needs and aspirations. The tension between her inner voice and societal expectations creates an existential crisis, pushing her toward self-

realization. Jaya's conflict is emblematic of the broader struggles faced by Indian women who are caught between patriarchal expectations and their evolving sense of self. According to Rahman (2016), Jaya's journey from ignorance to awareness highlights the psychological turmoil that many women face when they begin to question societal norms. She realizes that the role she has been conditioned to accept—being a silent, obedient wife—has stripped her of her individuality. This realization forces her to re-evaluate her place in the world and consider the possibility of a life beyond societal constraints (Kakaraparthi, Sahu, & Chenamallu, 2020).

The novel portrays Jaya's struggle as a deeply personal yet universally relevant experience. As Istoroyekti (2010) observes, self-realization is often a slow and painful process, particularly for women who have internalized traditional gender roles. Jaya's silence, which initially represents submission, eventually becomes a source of self-reflection. She begins to recognize that her silence has not only been imposed by external forces but also maintained by her own fears and insecurities (López Bonilla, 2016).

Jaya's internal battle reflects the cultural tensions that arise when traditional values clash with modern aspirations. Rege (1995) points out that postcolonial Indian literature frequently explores this theme, as characters grapple with inherited traditions while seeking personal fulfillment. Jaya's experiences illustrate this dilemma, as she is torn between her duty as a wife and her desire for self-expression. Her gradual realization that she has the right to define her own identity marks a significant turning point in her journey. The tension between tradition and self-actualization is further amplified by Jaya's reflections on her past. Kipp (1993) argues that women's identities in patriarchal societies are often shaped by historical expectations, making it difficult for them to break free from established norms. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya's upbringing and marriage reinforce the idea that silence and sacrifice are necessary for a woman's survival. However, as she begins to question these

beliefs, she moves toward a more liberated sense of self (Chandra, 2004).

Ultimately, Jaya's transformation is not one of immediate rebellion but of gradual self-awareness. She does not reject tradition outright but instead seeks a way to balance her cultural roots with her evolving identity. As Sreeja (2023) notes, modern Indian literature often portrays women's struggles as ongoing, rather than resolved in a definitive manner. Jaya's journey reflects this reality, as she comes to terms with her past while cautiously stepping toward an uncertain future. Jaya's struggle between traditional values and self-realization is a central theme in *That Long Silence*. Her journey reflects the universal experience of women who seek to redefine their roles in a changing society. Through Jaya's introspection, Shashi Deshpande highlights the complexities of identity, choice, and self-expression. By giving voice to Jaya's internal conflicts, the novel challenges readers to question the rigid expectations imposed on women and consider the possibility of a more balanced and fulfilling existence.

### **Breaking the Silence: Jaya's Transformation**

The turning point in Jaya's psyche comes when she recognizes the importance of her own voice. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* provides a profound exploration of the feminine psyche through the character of Jaya. Her journey from self-effacement to self-awareness mirrors the struggle of many women navigating patriarchal expectations. The novel not only critiques gender roles but also serves as a testament to the resilience of women who dare to break their silence. Jaya's transformation is emblematic of a broader feminist awakening, urging women to redefine their identities beyond societal constraints.

Jaya's character is initially shaped by societal norms that dictate a woman's role as passive and compliant. According to Zahoor (2017), Jaya's silence is not merely the absence of speech but an imposed condition that follows her like a shadow throughout the novel. Her

upbringing and marriage reinforce the belief that a woman must endure without complaint, suppressing her desires to maintain familial harmony. However, as the novel progresses, Jaya begins to challenge this ideology, realizing that her silence has not protected her but rather erased her sense of self. The theme of transition from tradition to modernity is central to Jaya's transformation. Ranpura (2020) asserts that Jaya represents the image of a modern woman who faces an existential void due to the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society. Her initial compliance with societal norms is not out of choice but due to a lack of alternatives. However, through introspection, she comes to see silence as a form of complicity in her oppression, prompting her to seek a new path where she can assert her individuality.

Jaya's transformation is not a sudden act of rebellion but a gradual realization of her own worth. As Pati (2017) argues, the culture of silence in which Jaya exists deprives her of agency, making her internal conflict a reflection of the broader struggles faced by women in patriarchal societies. Her growth stems from her ability to acknowledge this suppression and take the first step toward reclaiming her voice. This shift is significant because it highlights the psychological depth of her struggle rather than reducing it to a mere external rebellion. Furthermore, Rashid (2017) suggests that Deshpande portrays Jaya's transformation as a process of unlearning and rediscovering her identity. The novel critiques the relational self that Jaya has been conditioned to accept, in which her existence is defined by her roles as a wife and mother. Kalesan (2023) observes that Jaya initially conforms to Mohan's expectations of a "modern wife," transforming herself from an ambitious, educated woman into a docile partner. However, this imposed identity begins to suffocate her, forcing her to confront the reality that she has been living in submission.

Breaking her silence symbolizes Jaya's resistance against this imposed identity. Kumar (2023) highlights that Jaya's journey reflects the larger struggle of women transitioning from tradition to modernity. The novel does not

present a neatly resolved conclusion; instead, Deshpande leaves Jaya in a state of newfound awareness, where she acknowledges the necessity of self-expression but must still navigate the realities of her societal context. This open-ended transformation aligns with the feminist discourse that emphasizes continuous growth rather than definitive resolutions.

### Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* presents a profound psychological exploration of the feminine psyche through Jaya's journey from submission to self-awareness. The novel serves as a poignant critique of patriarchal structures that confine women to silence and oppression, while also illustrating the internal conflict that arises when traditional gender roles clash with personal aspirations. Jaya's character embodies the struggles of many Indian women who are expected to conform to societal expectations while yearning for self-expression and individuality. Through an introspective and fragmented narrative, Deshpande masterfully captures Jaya's oscillation between compliance and resistance, highlighting the complexity of her transformation. Rather than portraying a dramatic feminist rebellion, the novel focuses on Jaya's gradual realization of self-worth, demonstrating that empowerment often begins with self-awareness. Her silence, initially a means of survival, ultimately becomes a tool of oppression that she must break in order to reclaim her identity.

The themes of marital oppression, identity crisis, and the cultural conditioning of women are woven into Jaya's personal struggles, making her journey universally relatable. The novel critiques the institution of marriage as an unequal partnership, where women's voices are often suppressed in favor of maintaining familial harmony. However, Jaya's transformation signifies a broader feminist awakening, advocating for the necessity of self-expression and personal fulfillment over passive endurance. By the end of the novel, Jaya does not break entirely free from her circumstances, but she acknowledges the power

of her own voice and the importance of asserting her individuality. Her transformation is left open-ended, reflecting the reality that change is often a slow and continuous process. This subtle yet significant shift in her psyche underscores Deshpande's message that self-liberation is possible, even within the confines of a patriarchal society.

Ultimately, *That Long Silence* is not just a novel about Jaya's journey but a larger commentary on the struggles of countless women who find themselves trapped in traditional gender roles. It urges readers to question societal norms and recognize the silent battles women fight every day. Jaya's story serves as a testament to resilience and transformation, reminding us that breaking the silence is the first step toward true self-realization and empowerment.

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