

The Fragmented Psyche: Female Consciousness and Inner Conflict in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence (1988) tells the story of Jaya, an Indian woman trapped by society's expectations, emotional control, and confusion about her own identity. This paper looks at Jaya's thoughts and feelings using ideas from psychology and feminism. Based on the theories of Freud and Chodorow, it explores how Jaya's guilt, repression, and silence affect who she is, and how she slowly becomes more aware of herself. The study shows that Jaya's silence is not just because of social pressure; it comes from deep inside her, shaped by years of gender inequality and emotional neglect. Her effort to balance her roles as a wife, mother, and writer reflects the inner conflict many women face in a male-dominated society. The novel, therefore, acts as a psychological journey of a woman's life, where silence and speech become ways of coping and resisting.

Keywords: Psyche, Feminist Consciousness, Inner Conflict, Repression, Self-Identity

Shashi Deshpande, a well-known Indian English writer, gives in *That Long Silence* (1988) a deep look into a woman's inner world, caught between tradition, marriage, motherhood, and the need to express herself. The main character, Jaya, represents the modern Indian woman, educated and intelligent but still emotionally trapped by society's expectations. Through Jaya's broken and reflective storytelling, Deshpande shows the emotional pain caused by social rules and the pressure to stay silent.

In the novel, Jaya's voice moves between honesty and hesitation, strength and self-doubt. Her story is like a journey into her own mind, as she tries to make sense of her confused identity. The "stream of consciousness" writing style reflects her inner conflict and hidden emotions. Deshpande shows Jaya as what Freud describes as a "divided self," torn between her natural desires (id), her sense of reality (ego), and the moral values forced by society (superego). Jaya's silence is therefore not just social; it is also psychological, a way of coping in a world that limits her freedom.

In *That Long Silence*, silence is not just the absence of words; it is a complex mental and emotional state. It shows both weakness and

strength, obedience and protection. From Freud's psychological view, Jaya's silence represents repression when emotions and desires are pushed deep into the unconscious mind. Deshpande writes, "To achieve anything, you've got to be a silent woman. Silent and strong" (*That Long Silence*, p. 33). Jaya has learned this lesson so deeply that it controls her behaviour, forcing her to hide her real feelings and disconnect from her true self. Throughout the story, Jaya's silence acts as a defensive mechanism; it protects her from facing fights with her husband, Mohan, and from confronting her own hidden wishes.

Freud said that repression is the foundation of human psychology, and for Jaya, this repression appears as conformity. She hides her anger, sexual feelings, and ambition to keep her marriage peaceful and appear as a "good wife." Deshpande uses the home as a symbol of Jaya's trapped mind. Her house is not just a physical space but also a sign of emotional imprisonment. Jaya realizes that her marriage has trained her to be silent: "I had learnt it at last. No questions, no retorts, only silence" (Deshpande, p.30). Her silence helps her survive under male dominance and emotional neglect, but at the same time, it isolates her from her real identity.

Jaya's marriage to Mohan becomes the centre of her mental struggle. In a patriarchal society, she is expected to act like an obedient wife and suppress her individuality to protect her husband's pride. Because of this, Jaya's personality starts to break apart. She admits, "I had thought of myself as a strong person, capable of standing on my own. But I was afraid of being alone" (Deshpande, p.47). This confession shows her inner conflict between wanting independence and fearing loneliness.

Freud's theory of the ego and superego helps explain her confusion. Her ego tries to balance her personal wishes, to write, to speak freely, to be independent, while her superego, shaped by society, tells her to obey and remain quiet. This constant battle tears her apart, leaving her with a divided self. When Mohan faces failure at work and leaves home, Jaya's world begins to crumble. Yet, this silence also gives her time to reflect. She realizes the depth of her suppression, saying, "I had once thought of writing a story about a woman who had been silenced, but now I realized I was that woman" (Deshpande, p.135). This moment of realization marks her growth in self-awareness; she finally sees that her silence is her own story.

Jaya's mental and emotional breakdown is closely connected to her deep sense of guilt. She feels guilty for many reasons: not living up to society's expectations, not being able to show love, feeling anger toward her husband, and being unable to write. Freud's ideas of repression and the return of the repressed help explain her state of mind. The emotions Jaya tries to hide, like anger, frustration, and desire, do not disappear. Instead, they come back in hidden ways, causing her inner conflict and emotional distress. One of the strongest scenes in the novel is Jaya's memory of her childhood, when her mother warned her not to argue with her father. Her mother had said, "A husband is like a sheltering tree" (Deshpande, p.32). This idea, shaped by patriarchy, becomes a rule that Jaya carries inside her mind. It teaches her that being quiet and obedient is a woman's strength. However, this belief later becomes the cause of her emotional struggle; the superego (the inner voice of moral judgment) keeps making her feel guilty whenever she wants freedom or independence.

Freud says that when a person's natural desires and moral rules clash, it causes emotional pain (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 72). For Jaya, this pain shows up in her inability to write. Her writer's block is more than just creative problems. It reflects how her true voice as a woman has been suppressed. Writing represents Jaya's freedom and identity, but society's expectations have silenced that part of her. She recalls, "I had once written a story about a man who could not speak. Mohan had been furious. 'Why do you always write about unhappy things?' he said. I stopped writing after that" (Deshpande, p.98). Her silence as a writer is the same as her silence as a woman; both come from being emotionally and socially repressed.

The main idea of fragmentation in *That Long Silence* comes from Jaya's struggle to balance her many roles. She is a woman, wife, mother, and writer, and each of these roles demands a different version of herself. According to psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, women's identities are formed through their relationships and emotional bonds rather than through independence. Jaya's sense of self is also built around others, her husband, children, and parents, until she starts questioning this dependence. Deshpande shows Jaya's inner conflict through her storytelling style. Jaya often switches between saying "I" and "she," as if she is watching herself from the outside. This shift shows how divided she feels inside.

When Jaya says, "I was two persons now, the one who watched and the one who lived" (Deshpande, p.143), it perfectly describes her split self. The "watcher" is the part of Jaya that silently observes and questions her own actions and obedience. The "one who lived" is the side that continues to follow social rules and play her roles. This inner dialogue reflects what Freud calls the "psychic split", the separation between the conscious and unconscious mind. Through this split, Jaya becomes both the observer and the subject of her own life, examining her emotional pain and confusion with sharp self-awareness.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya's storytelling is both a confession and a way to heal herself. Her narration works like her own version of therapy, a "talking cure," as Freud described it. Freud believed that speaking about one's hidden emotions helps release inner pain and brings self-understanding. In the same way, Jaya's act of writing helps her face her silence, express her suffering, and find her own voice. Writing becomes a symbol of freedom for Jaya. Through it, she starts to piece together her broken identity and turns her silence into meaningful words.

In the final part of the novel, she begins to awaken to self-awareness, saying, "I will have to speak, to listen, to question. Everything in me is waiting to begin again" (Deshpande, p.191). This moment marks her shift from repression to understanding, from silence to confidence. Deshpande's idea of writing as healing connects with feminist psychoanalytic theory. In her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Helena Cixous encourages women to write about their bodies, emotions, and experiences, turning silence into strength. Jaya's story reflects this idea; her writing becomes a way to take control of her life and identity. By telling her own story, she connects her hidden feelings with her conscious thoughts, moving toward emotional and psychological wholeness.

Deshpande's writing in *That Long Silence* powerfully combines psychology and feminism. Psychoanalysis explains Jaya's silence and emotional pain as her personal mental struggle, while feminism shows that her suffering comes from the larger system of patriarchy. When these two ideas come together, we see that women's emotional problems are not just personal; they are created and reinforced by society.

Jaya's mental conflict comes from internalized patriarchy; the belief she has learned that being silent makes her a good woman and that obedience means love. This mindset leads to what Simone de Beauvoir calls "internalized otherness" in *The Second Sex*, when a woman sees herself the way men see her instead of as her own person. Jaya's gradual realization of this truth shows her difficult journey of unlearning these false beliefs. The novel works on two levels. Psychological: It shows how repression breaks a woman's mind and spirit. Political: It exposes the patriarchal system that causes this repression. Deshpande's story reminds us that a woman's personal pain, like Jaya's silence and inner struggle, is not just about her alone. It reflects the deeper social inequalities that affect all women.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is a deep study of a woman's mind, where silence acts as both a sign of suffering and a symbol of strength. Through Jaya's broken and reflective thoughts, Deshpande shows the emotional price women pay for living in a patriarchal society that expects them to obey and stay quiet. The novel's inward-looking style reflects Jaya's divided identity, as

she moves between obedience and rebellion, repression and self-expression. Psychoanalysis helps us understand Jaya's hidden feelings, her guilt, fear, and unspoken desires, while feminist theory shows how society's gender rules cause her emotional pain.

When Jaya finally begins to speak, it marks the start of her healing and freedom. Her move from silence to speech represents her taking back control of her own identity. Deshpande's strength as a writer lies in her ability to blend deep psychological understanding with a strong feminist message. *That Long Silence* becomes a reflection of the inner struggles faced by many women trying to balance social expectations with their true selves. In the end, Jaya finds peace not by staying silent or obeying, but by becoming self-aware and brave enough to end her long silence.

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