

Gender Discrimination In Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

Today there are different norms and status for both men and women. In spite of one way of life led by both men and women, the attitude and behavioral patterns are quite different in their aims, desires, objectives, aspirations, duties, responsibilities, dresses, and style. However, it is well known fact that women are considered as weaker sex and hence she is been dominated and discriminated, not only at home but even in social life. So the main purpose of this conceptual paper is to assess to what extent the gender discriminations are more found in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*.

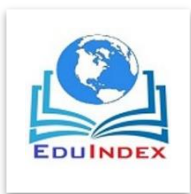
Keywords:

Gender bias/ discrimination, women, inequality, silence

Gender discrimination refers to the practice whereby one sex is given preferential treatment over the others. (Jary, 588)

Today nowhere women are treated equal as they are subjected to inequality, exploitation and discrimination. Shashi Deshpande a clear headed writer has taken deep awareness and utmost care to dive into the emotional problem of women. She started her literary career by force in 1970, initially with short stories. Now she is a multi-talented writer as a novelist, script writer, and translator, also has written books for children's. To her accolade she has won many awards and to her credit some of her novels have been translated into French, Dutch, German and Russia.

Amongst the other Indian women novelists, Deshpande is more of cosmopolitan in her outlook as she deeply focused in day-to-day life of the middle class Indians. She delves more on Indian settings as one could trace the human condition and individual conflict which



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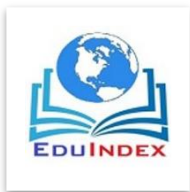


are inherently Indian. Deshpande's writing voiced the sufferings and torments of women and thus she aimed to create an awakening against the suppression and the repression of the women in the dominative patriarchal society.

The novel *That Long Silence* taken for the analysis, has tried to explore how the gender discrimination takes place in the process of marriage life, family, decision making, property rights etc. Jaya the protagonist who passes through various stages of life, faces the gender discrimination and takes strenuous effort to rebel and attack the society. "To achieve anything, to become anything, you've got to be hard and ruthless..." with these lines of Jaya, the novel begins. Jaya the narrator and heroine of the story is a well-educated housewife. Being married to Mohan, she is blessed with two children, Rahul and Rati. As it is a middle class family, Jaya's life financially is checkered. But the sudden jolt in her marriage life disturbs her highly. Her husband Mohan who holds high prestige, security and sophisticated life, indulges in some malpractice, at office. As a result of this, he faces an enquiry and is to lose his job. All of a sudden, Mohan goes missing which highly upsets Jaya. She is alone as her children go on a tour, with Mohan's family friend. It is during this period of isolation, Jaya recollects her life childhood, adulthood, marriage with Mohan, personal failures and fears that begin to haunt and torment her. By her journey to the past, Jaya gets the guidance for the future. Finally she resolves to speak and break her silence, to form a new life, in patriarchal society.

Gender Discrimination is clearly seen to be operating in Jaya's life slowly. After the death of Jaya's father the responsibility of marrying Jaya is laid upon her brother and her relatives. As Mohan agrees to marry her without dowry, her brother and relatives force and finally convince her to accept the man of their choice. But nobody is bothered about her desire, her ideals that are different from Mohan's. Finally Jaya thinks, she can reach out beyond herself toward the social milieu, through her husband. But she has to struggle hard to achieve this end.

Jaya, being trapped in the social institution called marriage, feels oppressed and dissatisfied in life. Both Jaya and Mohan are different in nature and attitudes. So it is difficult for them to live together peacefully. It is Jaya who modifies all her life style to suit Mohan's



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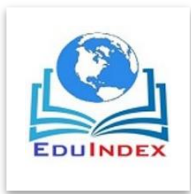
taste. As Mohan desires her to be modern, she cuts her hair short and follows the current fashion in dressing. She fulfills her husband's need both physically and mentally. This clearly shows the patriarchal set up, its impact on the psyche of the married woman and her reduction into a mute witness and silent protestor.

In the name of marriage sex is also treated as a means of social promotion. Jaya experiences disillusionment in sex and suffers a silent sexual humiliation. With her experience she says that sex relation within the frame work of the institution of marriage is not very much satisfying. Thus through Jaya Deshpande has tried to show the inadequacy of marriage as a social institution. One can notice here the shattering of a feminine sensibility that finally destroys woman's being.

Another instance of gender discrimination is clearly shown when Jaya noticed her name missing in the family tree when her paternal uncle, Remukaka prepared the family tree, he excluded Jaya's name. When she asked why her name was missing, her uncle answered with irritation, "How can you be here? You don't belong to this family! You're married; you're now part of Mohan's family. You have no place here." (TLS, 143) Though this shocked her and in return she raised her voice to question more, but didn't dare as he was the head of the family and she had to remain silent.

From various instances of gender discrimination, Jaya learns that woman are not supposed to raise their voice, not to revolt against injustice or whatever unjust treatment that are meted out of them. With these findings, Jaya leads her life in silence and realizes that she is in no way different from other women.

Lack of emotional support and relationship problems from her husband deeply affect her psyche. This crisis forces her to rethink wholly about herself. A threadbare analysis of her experiences, the torture of loneliness and long silence help her to discover her failure to assert herself. After suffering a lot due to her failure to speak in defense, she decides not to remain silent victim anymore. Therefore she decides to speak by breaking "that long silence", imposed on her, by the male dominated society. But Jaya is not satisfied with this much of independence for herself alone, as she knows, there are lot of Jayas, like her suffering silently



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and dying silently. So she fights for the whole class of women, in gender discriminated society.

Jaya realizes that awakening will not come over night, so she asks the oppressed silent women to wait with hope and possibility as she does not know the women would also turn brave like her. She says, "We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible" (TLS, 193).

The novelist through Jaya conveys that women who protest in silence as a sufferer of gender discrimination, sets out to break their silence, assert their individuality by their career and help to bring about a change in the lives of mute and mule like women who live in the half of the population, in the world.

To conclude, Deshpande criticizes the social system that treats women as inferior, sinful and chaste. The novelist wants her protagonist not to be solitary weepers, but to make decisions, perform actions be ready to face the consequences, whatever they are and to be ambitious. She pleads for the need to create a conducive atmosphere for the development of the personality of a woman. She also castigates the social system that assigns roles to women which subordinate them to men.

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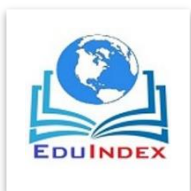
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