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**Feminist Interior Resistance and Ethical Compromise in Shashi Deshpande's  
*That Long Silence***

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**Abstract**

Shashi Deshpande's **That Long Silence** holds an important place in Indian feminist literary discourse for its engagement with the interior lives of women in marriage. This is not a story of overt rebellion or public acts of resistance but rather one in which silence itself is interrogated as an ambiguous and complex feminist strategy shaped by survival, compromise, and ethical ambiguity. Drawing on the insights of feminist thought, this paper argues that Deshpande reconceptualises silencing as an interior mode of resistance wherein women negotiate their lives in stifling domestic and social arrangements.

The paper focuses on the sharpened narrative voice of Jaya, marital disillusionment, and the silencing of creative expression, studying how silence works as both restraint and agency. Drawing from feminist realism, feminist ethics of narration, and gendered subjectivity theories, the paper can reveal that **That Long Silence** resists celebratory narratives of empowerment that equate feminism with liberation or vocal assertion. Instead, Deshpande presents a form of feminist agency that unfolds within limitation, emotional cost, and moral compromise.

The novel points out how women's resistance functions with a quiet tenacity of survival and self-preservation, rather than with rupture or transformation. *That Long Silence* offers an intellectually honest feminist vision through foregrounding ethical discomfort and unresolved tension, thus attesting to the difficulty of resistance within patriarchal institutions like marriage. It is with this that the novel significantly contributes to the contemporary Indian feminist literary discourse by legitimizing interior resistance as a meaningful, though painful, mode of feminist agency.

**Keywords:** feminist silence; interior resistance; marriage; feminist realism; Shashi Deshpande; Indian women's writing

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## 1. Introduction

The Indian feminist literary tradition has always faced the problem of how to construct women's resistance in these deeply entrenched patriarchal formations. The earlier feminist narratives tended to focus on rebellion, reform, or transformation, and there was greater emphasis on the radical, dramatised forms of resistance. Later, there was an increasing tendency to focus on the inner, psychological worlds of women, lived through marriage and domesticity, and to explore their moral spaces. Shashi Deshpande writes in this latter tradition, and her narratives are characterised by their preoccupation with the inner over the outer, and the moral over the ideological.

That Long Silence is a critical feminist intervention that finds the voice of Jaya, a middle-class, educated woman, who lives her life not in the thrall of violence and oppression but in a way that is filled with compromise and the muting of her own voice. The book is written in a manner that records Jaya's internal monologue about her own marriage, her art, and her silence. This contrasts sharply with the stories that see feminism in terms of liberation, resistance, or the expression of feminist ideals.

In this proposed paper, I would explore how **That Long Silence** reproduces a feminist discourse that finds its roots in an interior resistance rather than exterior defiance. Through the deployment of an interpretation of silence that functions as a strategic though painful means of survival, Deshpande subverts simplistic notions of feminist agency. A reading of **That Long Silence** demonstrates how women exercise power through means of negotiation, retreat, and ethical compromise, thereby extending the bounds of feminist literary discourse to include an interior resistance to power.

## 2. Review of Literature

The critical reception of **That Long Silence** has adhered, in particular, to its discussions of the silence imposed upon women, alienation in married life, and the repression of female creativity. Feminist scholars have particularly tended to interpret the novel as a commentary upon patriarchal married life, pointing out, in this instance, the limitations imposed by the household upon the intellectual, emotional, and expressive potentialities of women. Jaya's silence has, in particular, come to be seen as representative of the social conditioning of women.

Some critics have pointed out the middle-class Indian woman as a character through Deshpande's lens. This has been done through the delivery of economic security coupled with emotional deprivation as a recurring theme. Analyses have also been conducted on the narrative form of the story. This is in relation to the use of memory and introspection as a means of accessing the biography of the character's mind. Jaya's experiences as a writer have been interpreted as a metaphor for the status of women in a world of men.

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However, the literature that currently exists has been to prevail upon the status of silence as one of oppression, or victimization. There has been little focus on taking an ethical approach to the well-deliberated, though necessarily restricted, choice of the silent treatment, for the patriarchal patterns that are set forth. There are few, if any, examinations of the subsistence, in the relationship itself, that the silent treatment facilitates for the feminist experience. This particular research paper tackles this crucial shortcoming, in an examination of the status of silence, according to feminist realistic theory.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on the insights of feminist realism, feminist narrative ethics, and theories of gendered subjectivity to analyze *That Long Silence*. Feminist realism recognizes that women's resistance in patriarchal structures occurs without liberation, transformation, or triumph. It refuses to idealize empowerment but instead foregrounds endurance, compromise, and emotional cost. The framework is peculiarly applicable to Deshpande's novel, in which resistance remains interior, partial, and unresolved.

Feminist narrative ethics provides ways to explore how literary texts represent vulnerability, moral ambiguity, and the choice of constraint. Instead of measuring female characters against norms concerning courage, autonomy, or success, feminist narrative ethics secures the emphasis on ethical context and structural limitation. Thus, Jaya's silences can be read as ethically weighty rather than morally wanting, and it locates her choices within the restrictive discourses of marriage and respectability.

Furthermore, feminist approaches to subjectivity also impact the discussion about the internalization of societal demands by women. The concept of silence in the novel transcends being just the absence of voice but also has to do with the internalization of that absence. All these approaches help in constructing a feminist reading of *That Long Silence* that sees feminist agency not in resistance but in negotiation, in survival rather than liberation.

### **4. Marriage and the Production of Silence**

Marriage in "*That Long Silence*" is thus the enabling institution that allows the production, maintenance, and institutionalisation of silence. The relationship that Jaya shares with her husband, Mohan, lacks brutality or physicality but is replete with emotional silence and ideological oppression. The ideology of femininity that Mohan believes in not only demands her silence so that their marital harmony may be maintained, but also that becomes her defining characteristic.

Deshpande shows how this silence becomes an important part of the performance of the "ideal wife." Jaya finds that speech leads to dissonance, while silence leads to respectability. However, Jaya's silence is not imposed on her through force, but through a creative use of emotional consequence and moral pressure. This also evidences how patriarchal power can

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be exercised through normalisation, and not just through force.

Thus, marriage becomes a disciplinary framework which encourages silence and punishes the articulated. The increasing seclusion of Jaya in her self-expression is the process of living in the relationship which provides it with social security but also independence. The silencing of women and the aligning of silence with virtue and maturity by Deshpande shows how resistance becomes morally tainted and dangerous in the framework of marriage.

### **5. Silence as Interior Resistance**

Silence, at first, is the mark of submission, but Deshpande gradually transposes this quality of silence into one of interior resistance. In the case of Jaya, the silence is not emptiness, the negation of presence, but accumulation – accumulation of anger, of disappointment, of reflection, and of implied critique. This accumulation is the result of interior contemplation and is what the novel exposes.

Rather, it does not tear apart the patriarchy, but it retains subjectivity. Jaya's failure to fully accept her husband's ideology, to fully assimilate into his worldview, makes her retain her identity even while she seemingly submits to it. Subtly, through silence, she draws a protective boundary to survive in an unequal relationship.

Deshpande's most important decision, however, is not to romanticise silence. Silence is portrayed as painful, isolating, and psychologically damaging. However, it is also portrayed as having meaning in it. The feminism in the novel is not about roaring, about change, or about victory. It is about silence, persistence, and complexity. In not dichotomising between resistance and submission, **That Long Silence** makes the very act of survival a form of feminist resistance when it comes to defiance.

### **6. Female Creativity and Narrative Suppression**

The struggle that Jaya faces as a writer can be seen on par with her marital silence, where creative freedom is repressed alongside emotional freedom. Her voice is repressed not directly by prohibition, but by indirect modification and moral control. The writer's words that question social conventions or point towards discomfort are considered improper, causing Jaya to repress her voice both in her stories and outside.

This repression of creativity is part of the larger cultural fears about women's articulation. Women's writing is dangerous for patriarchal society because women create alternative discourses that can disrupt the patriarchal hierarchy of the domestic space. The silence of Jaya in term of writing is thus symbolic of the silence of Jaya in terms of being a wife.

Deshpande's target is a society which permits the education of women but rejects their articulation. Intellectual capability is allowed, but articulation is suppressed. This is where

writing becomes a source of possible transgression; however, keeping quiet will ensure acceptance within society and a stable marriage. The silencing of Jaya's creativity helps the novel convey how the voice of women is disciplined in both private and public domains.

### **7. Feminist Realism and Ethical Compromise**

One of the most important contributions this novel makes to feminist discourse is its refusal to provide resolution. Jaya does not escape marriage, recover her voice publicly, or gain artistic release. She remains within compromise, negotiating her existence through partial awareness rather than transformation.

This refusal aligns the novel **That Long Silence** with feminist realism. Deshpande is aware that there are a good number of women who cannot dismantle patriarchy without paying an unbearable cost in emotional, social, or economic terms. So compromising on ethical grounds emerges not as a moral failure but, rather, as a survival strategy while living inside unequal systems.

By renouncing triumph, the novel resists the neoliberal feminist narratives of empowerment as individual success or visible rebellion. Jaya's survival is neither heroic nor passive; it is an ethically complicated and emotionally costly endurance. Feminism here is negotiation, not revolution; persistence, not rupture. The feminist realism of Deshpande insists on making visible those injurious choices women make when resistance itself comes with survival-threatening consequences.

### **8. Silence, Gender, and Middle-Class Respectability**

"That Long Silence places the notion of silence beneath the aegis of middle-class respectability, emphasising the intersection of class and gendered expectations." This is because middle-class economic security conceals emotional poverty, which makes the pain of women invisible and acceptable. Silence is used as a badge of respectability to align the social world along patriarchal lines.

Deshpande targets the respectability of this through the psychological cost it imposes. Jaya gets rewarded for her silence in terms of social acceptance, but even that is psychologically and emotionally damaging to her because she develops an attitude of alienation and repressed anger. The middle class teaches women to be well-organised and well-put-together, and thereby silencing themselves while articulating themselves gets equated to maturity.

By laying bare the way respectability regulates women's emotions, the novel questions how gender inequality is maintained by subtle means. Patriarchy in this text is not oppressive in terms of-violence; it is normalising, urging women to regulate themselves in order to be respectable. The silence in this text is at once survival and pain, signifying the difficult moral landscape that women must traverse in working-class household spaces.

**9. Feminist Agency Without Triumph**

Ultimately, **That Long Silence** resists feminist triumph. The agency of Jaya is only partial, impaired, and inconclusive. Jaya's self-consciousness does not lead to liberation but undercuts complete effacement by maintaining an inner awareness.

This representation contests the feminist critique that calls for either resolution, empowerment, or escape as the gauge for agency. Deshpande strongly states that resistant action in the patriarchal structure occurs without triumph. Silence, as damaging as it is, "becomes endurance, which allows women to survive without succumbing totally to ideological domination."

In this light, the novel provides an ethically honest version of feminist ideals, in which the reality of loss must be recognised in tandem with the reality of feminist agency, where the fact of surviving somehow counts, even when the promise of liberation is unavailable. Feminist agency, in this case, lies not in transformation but in tenacity, not in visibility but in ethical self-preservation.

**10. Conclusion**

This paper has made the point that the book **That Long Silence** reconfigures the definition of feminist silence as one of internal resistance through the prism of ethical compromise and survival. Shashi Deshpande's "That Long Silence" contests the historiography of feminist empowerment through the ideological lens of the emotional price of survival in the marriage of patriarchy.

In positioning the resistance within the framework of negotiation as opposed to rupture, **That Long Silence** establishes a feminist literary canon for India that moves past the strict parameters of submission and rebellion as the only options for women. The feminist realism represented by Deshpande's work continues to assert that women's resistance can be quiet, uneven, and untoward, thus valuing the acknowledgement of internal resistance as a salient site of feminist politics, especially within regimes that do not favour rebellion as an option.

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