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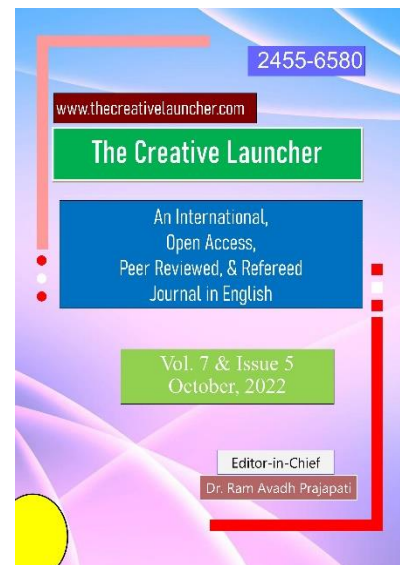
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RESEARCH ARTICLE



From Silence to Speech: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande portrays the life of Jaya, an educated, married writer. As a writer, she should be able to use her thinking and analytical skills to show the problems and contradictions in society in her writing. However, this does not happen for several reasons. She has to surrender to family and societal pressures. Not being able to say or write what she feels like saying or writing, she is forced to write what patriarchal society wants to read or hear. Even though she is educated, she remains silent against the injustices that have befallen her.

Not only Jaya but also the other women characters portrayed in the novel— Jaya's mother, grandmother, cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbor Mukta, and the women in general— have also maintained silence for centuries. Deshpande goes on to show how the social environment, as well as family preaching and practices, play a significant role in this. When Jaya gets time to reflect on the happenings of her life, she finds herself in a dilemma about what to do and what not to do. This paper aims at analyzing the factors, taking into consideration the comments and observations by other critics and theorists as well, responsible for Jaya's crisis in particular and the misery of women in general, as well as showing how, through introspection, Jaya, the representative of modern women, comes out of her victimization and crisis and breaks her long silence.

Keywords: Silence, Patriarchy, Society, Identity, Women, Dilemma, Gender, Resistance, Relationship, Health issues

I don't like to read my own words . . . But to read this novel is particularly painful. The raw emotions, the suppressed anger, the humiliating feeling of a loss of self-worth, the claustrophobia that envelops the novel – they came out of the life I was living then . . . Many first novels are autobiographical. *That Long Silence* was not autobiographical in the personal details, but it was so mainly in the ideas, in the thinking. I said things here I had been struggling to get out of me for years. In this novel, I asked questions I had never articulated even to myself. Above all, it was an attempt to penetrate the dense forest of lies and half-truths in which we live our lives, the lies and half-truths which make life possible (Deshpande, *Listen to Me* 180–81).

It took Deshpande a long time, “six years” (Deshpande, *Listen to Me* 50), to complete *That Long Silence*. At that time, she had to go through many struggles in her personal life— "A struggle to find time, a struggle to keep going in the midst of all that was happening in our lives, including my father's death, a struggle to pick up after long breaks, a struggle with health problems, and a struggle to continue to believe in my novel" (Deshpande, *Listen to Me* 180). But even after writing the novel with so much effort, she was not happy with it. It seemed to her that there was a problem somewhere still. So, for the first time,ⁱ she sent the manuscript to Shama Futehallyⁱⁱ for feedback on her novel, and after getting Futehally's opinion, she re-wrote the novel and was finally satisfied (Deshpande, *Listen to Me* 172).

Deshpande has chosen the title of the novel from the speech of a suffragette, Elizabeth Robbins, about the eternal and long silence of women, to the Women Writers Suffrage League (WWSL) in 1907 and a selection from the speech, "If I were a man and cared to know the world I live in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy – the weight of that long silence of one-half the world," has been chosen as the epigraph of the novel which sets the tone of it as well. Which publisher to send this book to was also a crucial issue for Deshpande because it was a 'woman's novel'— "a quiet, introspective book on a very small canvas" (Deshpande, *Listen to Me* 179). Deshpande says, "This was so much a woman's novel, a woman's ideas about her life, about her relationships. A novel confined within the four walls of a home, located mostly in the spaces of a woman's mind" (Deshpande, *Listen to Me* 173). Virago, a London-based

publishing house, published the book in 1988, making it her first published novel abroad. A year later, it was published in India by Penguin Books India.ⁱⁱⁱ

That Long Silence is Deshpande's fifth published novel. It got the Sahitya Akademi award in 1990 ("Shashi Deshpande"). The novel is divided into four parts, and the flashback technique, most of the time, has been used with a first-person narrative. Geethamala opines, "The shifts in time are complex, almost kaleidoscopic. The narrative is structured almost cyclically so that there is circling involved, a return to the same characters and events again and again, to gain further insight into the family politic" (Geethamala 96). Regarding the narrative style, Deshpande says, "I changed my mind about the narrative style (after having agonised about it for long) until I stumbled upon the fact that this was Jaya's story and that she had to tell it herself" (Deshpande, *Listen to Me* 180). Vimala Rama Rao's comment in this regard is noteworthy:

Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English fiction who processes 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. (Qtd. in Reddy 73)

The novel's story revolves around a few houses in Bombay— the Churchgate bungalow, the Dadar flat, and the houses in Saptagiri and Ambegaon, from the pre-independence Gandhian era to the post-1970s.

In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande mainly portrays the life of Jaya, the novel's protagonist. Jaya is a graduate, married to an engineer, Mohan, has two children— Rahul and Rati, writes articles for magazines, and is very busy looking after her family, that is, her husband and children. Though they are leading a seemingly happy upper-middle-class lifestyle in a large house in Churchgate, the same monotonous everyday routine for seventeen years of their married life bores Jaya, "I had often found my family life unendurable" (Deshpande, *That Long Silence* 4).^{iv} She keeps praying for a change in the daily pattern of living, some disaster so that the boredom breaks, and finally, all of a sudden, a disaster comes, Jaya's "own special disaster" (4), and their family life falls apart.

Mohan's successful and secure career as an engineer in the purchase section of his office is suddenly threatened because of his unfair and dishonest dealings, for which a serious inquiry has been started. Being afraid of getting caught, he leaves or flees from his posh bungalow and shifts to Jaya's old small flat in Dadar with Jaya. There, Jaya gets a break from her busy daily family life and finds ample time to immerse herself, like Indu in *Roots and Shadows* (Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows*) and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (Deshpande, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*), in deep thoughts of her own life— past and present. Adele King comments, "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" (Qtd. in Sandhu 36). Though Indu and Saru returned to their fathers' house, for Jaya, it was her own flat got from her brother, who got it from her mother, and she got it from her brother, Jaya's Makarandmama. For Indu and Saru, the return was self-motivated, but for Jaya, it was not. She was there in Dadar not because she wanted to spend time there to analyze her problems and find solutions initially like Indu and

Saru; she was there because her husband took her there to hide, not even thinking of asking her. He took her for granted that she would follow him wherever he went.

However, while contemplating, Jaya does not find any similarity between the Jaya before marriage and the Jaya after. The promising Jaya, who dreamed of studying at Oxford University, sits down to reckon about how she has become a wholly submissive and voiceless one. She realizes how her mother, grandmother, cousin Kusum, widowed neighbor Mukta, and the women in general, have been maintaining the same silence for centuries. When she tries to assess her life, she sees how those for whom she has sacrificed so much have, at the end of the day, left her alone. Even after fulfilling all the responsibilities of a mother and a wife with the utmost effort, she appears as a failure. Her whole life seems meaningless. She is in a dilemma about what to do and what not to. From there, how, through writing the story of her own life, through self-analysis and analyzing different relationships she was involved in, different perceptions and changes occur in her, and she finds, finally, her own voice that has been presented in this novel. Like Indu and Saru, Jaya comes out of her crisis through a troublesome process of self-discovery. Saru finds her solution through 'telling;' Jaya gets it through the process of writing.

After a short stay in Lohanagar, Bombay, they shifted to the Dadar flat after their marriage. Mohan's economic condition was not good then. Mohan has grown up through many hardships since childhood. His only aim was to overcome his financial crisis and ensure a comfortable upper-class lifestyle. In his boyhood, Mohan, a son from a poor Brahmin family, took part in a program at Crossword House in Saptagiri, where he saw three English-speaking women, and got inspired by their affluent lifestyle and began to dream of such a life, and "It was here that it all began" (87) for him. Fastidious Mohan becomes so fascinated by those three elegant women that the only criterion he sets for his would-be bride is that she has to be an "educated, cultured wife" (90) who can "speak good English" (90). He decides to marry Jaya only because Jaya is educated and speaks good English.

Mohan has always tried to ensure his economic stability— both legally and illegally. While working as a Junior Engineer at a cement plant in Lohanagar, he got into trouble there. There was an inquiry on him too. So he tried his best to please the Chief Engineer (C.E.) for the transfer from there. Mohan even wanted to use Jaya for his career development. He repeatedly told Jaya to develop an informal relationship with the C.E.'s wife so that he could take advantage of it. Later on, by managing the C.E., he got himself transferred to the Purchase Department in his office in Bombay and was able to move into a luxurious government bungalow at Churchgate. Now they have all they want, but Mohan does not stop there; he wants more. He wants to raise his living standards higher, to make sure that he never suffers from poverty.

Jaya's silence is partly responsible for Mohan's dishonest acts. Although Mohan is adamant about pursuing his personal goal, Jaya could try to warn or forbid him, but she says nothing; instead, like Gandhari,^v she follows Mohan with her eyes closed, no questions asked. Mohan plays a major role in Jaya's silence. Mohan, the son of an orthodox Brahmin family, has grown up with a patriarchal outlook since childhood. The husbands of the protagonists of *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* were from lower castes. Indu's Akka and

Saru's mother, Kamala, predicted that marrying in another or lower caste would bring sorrow instead of happiness, but even though the main characters of this novel are of the same caste, it does turn out to be a happy one. Jaya's parents were liberal and progressive-minded. They did not differentiate between sons and daughters in that way. Jaya's father did not think that a daughter was a liability to get over by handing her over to a man. He always motivated Jaya to pursue her dreams. He made her feel "someone special" (136) and "different" (136) from others. He named her Jaya, "Jaya for victory" (156). Jaya's mother was also different in attitude from other women. While others worried about their daughter's skin color being a little darker, Jaya's mother was not worried, "Does the color of one's skin matter?" (93). She even disapproved of Mohan's marriage to Jaya initially because she knew Mohan's family well as she lived in the same area, saying, "they're orthodox, old-fashioned people" (94). Later on, due to Mohan's orthodox nature and responses to different situations according to his beliefs, liberal-minded and free-spirited, Jaya gradually becomes silent.

In the early days of their marriage, Mohan and Jaya had a heated argument over Jaya's addressing Mohan's mother 'a cook'. Jaya's temper flared, and Mohan was stunned. He could not accept that his wife could behave like this, "How could you? I never thought my wife could say such things to me. *You're my wife . . .*" (82, emphasis mine). He stopped talking to Jaya. In the end, Mohan turned normal when Jaya became a little softer and took the first step to melt the ice between them. Jaya realized then that her anger "had shattered him" (82). Jaya realized that women should not show more power than males because it could hurt the patriarchal ego.

After being pressurized by Jaya's grandmother, *ajji*, Jaya's father abandoned his dream of joining Gandhi's ashram, but out of anger, he quit his studies and job and started a business as a partner in the printing press. When he failed in the business adventure, he got married and left home. Jaya's Chandumama fell under the pressure of his mother, Jaya's other-*ajji*, and had to stop pursuing his F.R.C.S. degree and finally ended up becoming a small-town doctor and living his dissatisfied life. He married a woman he had no feelings for. He later got involved in affairs with different women, including his housemaid. These examples warned Jaya about the patriarchal ego. Through that quarrel with Mohan, Jaya understood well, "to him anger made a woman 'unwomanly'" (83). When Mohan informed Jaya, "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her" (83), Jaya began to control her anger, "to hold it on a leash" (83). She understood what Mohan expected of her and how she had to behave if she wanted family peace. Seeing the way of life of the women of Mohan's house, where the code of conduct of women was clearly presented, Jaya could understand the difference between the way of life of the women of her own house with them, "I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before" (83). Jaya's mother did not rear up Jaya as an ordinary woman who held patriarchal views, "she had prepared me for none of the duties of a woman's life" (83). So Jaya did not realize that it was her fault, as a wife, to leave the button on her husband's shirt unstitched or unrepaired. So, for healthy family life, she changed her way of looking at things, "These women of Mohan's family were right, I had decided. I would pattern myself after them. That way lay – well, if not happiness, at least the consciousness of doing right, freedom from guilt" (84), and since then, Jaya had "cringed in guilt" (84) if she failed in executing her roles

as expected by the society from a woman. If she could play her roles properly and someone appreciates it, Jaya says, "I almost wag my tail, like a dog that's been patted by its master" (84).

After their marriage, Jaya waits for intimacy to form between them, but to Mohan, marriage means they are husband and wife, and as the husband, he starts playing his role without thinking of making any emotional bridge with his wife. He does not show interest in the concept of 'love.' So they have sex in silence without words. Mohan has no interest or desire to know what Jaya feels, what she wants, or how she wants it. Jaya also does not reveal anything. After finishing the act of sex according to his wishes, Mohan only asks, "Did I hurt you?" (95), and Jaya replies, as expected, "No" (95). K. Sandhu opines, "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" (Sandhu 38). However, the same pattern keeps repeating for years. One night, Jaya responds to Mohan passionately, and seeing her passion, Mohan turns away. Like Jayant of *Roots and Shadows*, Mohan withdraws him. Jaya feels desolated and humiliated. That night she starts crying. She cannot even make any sound while crying lest Mohan wake up. Mohan never tries to understand Jaya or her wishes, Jaya says, "We had never come together, only our bodies had done that" (98).

With time, silence becomes Jaya's habit. She now observes silence on various occasions, even where she has the opportunity to comment. Jaya never does anything that would hurt Mohan, "I could never laugh at Mohan, at anything that mattered to Mohan. If I did so, it diminished him; and who wanted a dwarfed husband?" (169). Seeing the plight of some Army families on the street, Mohan once expressed his surprise to Jaya that how the husbands of those Army families could do such an objectionable thing that put their families in such a crisis! This time, after knowing what Mohan has done, Jaya wants to give him back those exact words, but she cannot. She remains silent. The house runs on Mohan's wishes, and Jaya "went along with him" (25). Jaya says, "To know what you want . . . I have been denied that" (25). Jaya still does not know what she wants. Jaya liked to ask questions when she was unmarried. Her paternal grandmother, *ajji*, used to tell her that if she asks so many questions, she will find herself uncomfortable in her husband's house. Now Jaya does not ask questions, but even then, she does not get any comfort, "So many subjects were barred that the silence seemed heavy with uneasiness" (27).

Jaya's father was an admirer of Indian classical music, but the common people's tastes began to change. In the 1970s, the popularity of film music began to spread, and Jaya became a fan of it, but to her father, film music meant lower standard music that lacked quality. So, when he came to know about Jaya's liking for them, he expressed, "What poor taste you have, Jaya" (3). These words shamed Jaya then and still, a kind of shame-feeling works inside her when she remembers it. That is why, when, one day, Mohan and Jaya are late to go to the cinema to watch a movie, Mohan persuades Jaya that some ads will be missed and those ads are not worthy of being watched. Although she likes those ads very much, Jaya does not say anything to Mohan, "never dared to confess it to him" (3), lest Mohan question her taste like her father did. She remains silent.

When Mohan comes to Dadar and cannot think of what to do, he asks Jaya for suggestions, "What do you think, Jaya? What do you say?" (31), Jaya cannot find anything to

say to him. Mohan's relatives often seek his help on various issues at different times, but now, when Mohan gets disturbed, "I'm sick of them all" (78), Jaya cannot tell Mohan that he was the one who himself used to tell them to come to him for any help to show his "power" (78). Jaya comments, "I knew his mood was best met with silence" (78). Jaya remains silent when Mohan openly shows more concern for his brother's daughter Revati than his own son. At one point, Jaya fears Mohan will die but cannot even express her frenetic emotion to him. When she cannot find her name in the Family Tree shown to her by Ramukaka, she comes to know that her name would be there in her husband's Family Tree as her husband's home is now her home. However, Jaya gets surprised to find that the married female relatives of her side are not in the Tree. She wanted to ask Ramukaka why but could not. Mohan could not be questioned about this either because, by then, Jaya had learned, "No questions, no retorts. Only silence" (143).

One of Jaya's writings has got published, for which she also received a prize, but Mohan objected to the subject matter of that piece, saying that their personal life was being made public, although according to Jaya, there was no such thing in the story. However, Mohan was severely hurt. Seeing his reaction, Jaya stops writing. Although Mohan does not tell her to stop writing, Jaya "had been ashamed" (144), so she became silent. Seeing Mohan's stricken face, Jaya understands, "I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that" (144). The fear in Jaya reinforces Jaya's decision to stop writing, "scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage" (144). Even after that incident, Jaya wrote some pieces, but those were restricted, self-censored, and safer kind, so that no one would get hurt, and she would write as society wanted to see her writing: her 'Seeta' column, but she was not at all satisfied with what she was writing. On the contrary, she became very angry when her writings were rejected and returned. Seeing her anger, Kamat suggested, "Express your anger in your writing" (147). According to Kamat, Jaya was "scared" (148), but she had no options. She did not have that freedom in her society. She realized that women have no right to be angry, she says to Kamat, "Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?" (147).

After their marriage, Mohan changed her name to "Suhasini" (15). Gradually she had to become Suhasini from Jaya, Suhasini, "a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped" (15-16). This practice of changing women's names by the husbands is similar, according to Nabar, to the "feudal ownership of the woman from father to husband" (Nabar 121). Jaya started reading women's magazines, the subject matter of which was how to keep men happy. She had her beautiful hair cut short at Mohan's request, "like Mehra's wife" (96). Mohan used to tell Jaya to dress up in the way the upper-class women dressed, and Jaya would quietly follow it, but even then, Jaya says, "I had always been apprehensive of not pleasing him as a woman" (96). Like the sparrow in 'the crow (a male) and the sparrow (a female) story,' Suhasini's only concern was her own family. However, now Jaya knows that this story has a far-reaching effect on the psyche of children, especially on the subconscious mind of little girls, whose essence is, "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe" (17) and Jaya now knows, "Safety is always unattainable. You're never safe" (17).

Not only Jaya but other women in the society are also maintaining silence to survive in the patriarchal society. Silence is their only shield to avoid further disaster. In Indian tradition, a wife does not eat until the husband has eaten. P. V. Kane has shown that almost all the influential Indian mythological texts have advocated that "the foremost duty of a wife is to obey her husband and to honour him as her god" (Kane 561–62). This patriarchal society seems to have given men the license to verbally be angry with their wives and beat them up according to their wishes. Mohan's father was cruel to his mother, but she did not respond; she executed her duties silently. Mohan's comment remembering his mother is, "women in those days were tough" (36), but Jaya finds despair in his mother after listening to his version, "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" (36). Jaya comes to know from Mohan's sister Vimla that her mother died in silence while undergoing an abortion. Her mother could not tell anyone about her plight. Although Vimla herself considers this fact of her mother shameful, she also dies in silence. She does not express the suffering she was going through because of her ovarian tumor, "She sank into a coma and died a week later, her silence intact" (39). Jeeja, the maid in Jaya's Dadar flat, also maintains silence. She has no children of her own. However, she has to raise the two children from her husband's second wife because they, her husband and the second wife, have died. Jeeja has accepted life as it is. She harbors no anger and has no one to blame. From her experience, she explains to her step-daughter the importance of kumkum in a woman's life. Mukta, a neighbor of Jaya in Dadar, is quietly living her life. Indian women fast to prevent widowhood. Mukta used to fast when her husband, Arun, was alive, but even after his death, she continues to fast because changing habits is not so easy.

Society has always kept women in the margins and men at the center. A son takes the family lineage forward; he is the lamp of the family; he has the right to light up the pyre; a son means wealth to come to the house; he is a support system for the parents in their old age, and so, a son is adorable. Women are so much influenced by patriarchy's propaganda that they unknowingly accept it as it is, and that is why Kusum does not get any attention from her parents, but they adore and celebrate their son Dilip. Jaya's maid in Dadar, Nayana, is still trying for a son. When Mukta's husband, Arun, dies, her relatives console the pregnant Mukta saying that a son will be born, "who would be both her solace and her support" (64). Besides, society has separated the work of boys from the work of girls where girls have been assigned the housework and kept inside the house for a lifetime, and girls have accepted it without any questions because they had no alternatives. When someone asks why the boys are not cooking and cleaning, the women themselves start laughing at the question because it has become ingrained in their minds that "Cooking, cleaning up had exclusively been female operations" (81). Simon de Beauvoir comments, "Few tasks are more *like the torture of Sisyphus* than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day" (Beauvoir 470).

Jaya's married life has been going on like this for 17 years, but Mohan's recent scam in his office turns her balanced life into an unbalanced one, and when Mohan tells Jaya to justify his action by saying, "It was for you and the children that I did this" (9), Jaya, though she could not say anything, finds it very hard to digest it either. Indira Bhatt opines that Mohan "wishes

to use his wife as buffer, an opiate to soften the impact of the forces he has set into motion against himself" (Qtd. in Bala 102). Later on, her husband informs her of his decision to move to the Dadar's flat, and she follows him without any words like the celebrated and often referenced mythological stereotypes Sita, Savitri and Draupadi, "So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails . . ." (11). However, the thing that surprises Jaya is Mohan "had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans" (11). It strikes her, and she realizes her position and value to her husband. Before her marriage, Jaya was free-spirited, "I'll do just what I want!" (75), and had a fearless heart, "I was not so full of fears" (76) but now she is unable to find any similarity between the Jaya before and the Jaya now.

Sitting in the Dadar flat, with endless leisure in hand, when she reads her diaries, she finds, to her dismay, that she, Jaya the self, is not there; instead, the entries show only her roles as mother and wife. Putting those diaries together, she thinks the proper title should be "The Diaries of a Sane Housewife" (70), and so she declares to Mohan, "I know you better than you know yourself" (75) because Jaya's only job was looking after Mohan. Looking at her past days in those writings, Jaya feels that "the picture of a life spent on such trivialities scared me" (7), but what was not there in the diaries was, Jaya now realizes, "The agonised cries – 'I can't cope, I can't manage, I can't go on' – . . ." (70). Jaya defines their relationship when they are about to enter their Dadar flat to hide as "A pair of bullocks yoked together" (7). Jaya swallows Mohan's statement that Mohan has followed a dishonest way only for Jaya and the kids because any reaction from her part will worsen the situation. In all respects, Jaya, as always, prefers to remain silent because "It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful" (12). So Jaya steps cautiously and adjusts to situations. She analyses her relationship with Mohan: "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel" (7).

However, though Mohan's objectionable comment could not be immediately verbally protested, she indirectly expresses her anger towards Mohan. When Mohan wants the key to open the door of the Dadar flat, Jaya, instead of giving him the key, opens the door herself and goes inside, leaving Mohan behind. Mohan silently follows her. Perhaps, Mohan has accepted his failure; otherwise, Jaya thinks, "why else would he have so quietly submitted to my refusal to give him the keys?" (9). The fact is that Mohan is so engrossed in the present upheaval in his career that he has no idea what is going on around him or with him. If something like this had happened at other times, his real face would have been shown to Jaya. Moreover, the demonstration of Jaya's rebellion is not that much impactful to grab Mohan's special attention. Mohan has become indifferent to various things since he got into trouble. He is a "frightened man" (8) now; "A sad, bewildered man . . . obsessed man reconciled to failure" (8).

Mohan used to remain busy with his job and Jaya with her husband, children, and the household chores. Jaya's days revolved around the family, but now Jaya's "career as a wife was in jeopardy" (24-25). They now have endless time on their hands after being suddenly out of a busy schedule. They do not know what to do now. Jaya and Mohan both suffer from post-modern anxiety, "what are we going to do with ourselves this moment, this day, the next moment, the next day . . ." (24). Mohan becomes restless, "I must do something. This waiting

is getting me down" (30). However, for women, this waiting has been going on since time immemorial, *"Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws' home. Wait until you have kids"* (30).

Jaya also has been a victim of this waiting game since her marriage. Though apparently, the game for Jaya has come to an end in Dadar, Mohan always suffers from tension and instability about his future; a kind of psychological breakdown happens in him, which shakes the foundation of their relationship also. Like Jaya, Mohan has some ghosts of his own. He repeatedly immerses himself in his memories of his deprived childhood, parents, and hardships.

Mohan was desperately searching for a way out, obsessed with getting himself back and waiting for any kind of positive news. Mohan comes to know that Jaya had a meeting with her brother Ravi, and Ravi talked about the problems Mohan was going through. Mohan is in a state of mental turmoil, and at such a time, usually, anyone's mood remains irritable. After so many years of a successful journey, when for someone a sudden identity crisis arises, one starts to feel helpless, and if s/he feels that someone close to her/him is showing a little bit of indifference towards her/him, s/he becomes more broken and the same thing happens to Mohan. Ravi's meeting with Jaya was a casual meeting between siblings, but even with that, Mohan becomes astonishingly serious. He gets angry with Jaya about why she did not try to find out more from Ravi about what he knew about Mohan's scam. He complains, "You've been totally indifferent. But you've always been this way" (116). The words hurt Jaya terribly. At one point, when Mohan says, "I've let you do what you want" (119), Jaya cannot but utter, "My writing" (119), "I gave it up because of you" (119). Jaya cannot believe that "he accused me of not caring for the children, of isolating myself from him and his concerns" (120). Jaya wanted to do a lot of things – a particular job, a baby to adopt, an anti-price campaign to take part in – but could do nothing. Without saying these words, she simply tells Mohan, "I've done everything you wanted me to" (120), and "I've sacrificed my life for you and the children" (120). Jaya is crushed under the pressure of Mohan's vision of those three women in the Crossroad House. Jaya is about to break the barrier of patience, yet she cannot say anything; instead, she becomes dumb under the pressure of Mohan's anger. The 'Suhasini' in her is almost dead.

According to Mohan, all women are of the same nature— indifferent. He tells Jaya that he knows why Jaya is so indifferent toward him. He thinks Jaya has started treating him differently since he is in danger. He laments that he has always prioritized his family, but Jaya has become indifferent to him because he is in jeopardy. Furthermore, Mohan accuses Jaya of not caring for him ever. Hearing this, Jaya wanders what she, then, has been doing for the last 17 years!

During her marriage Jaya was given several advices by her relatives— her brother Dinkar advised, "Be good to Mohan, Jaya" (138); Ramukaka reminded her, "Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (138); Vanitamami warned, "A husband is like a sheltering tree" (137) and "Without the tree, you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable . . . And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies" (32). Jaya tries her best to obey those only in the hope of a happy

family, but after all her sacrifices for Mohan, Mohan is now accusing her of not caring about him. This objection becomes unbearable to her, and her patience breaks, and she starts laughing, "Laughter bursts out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly" (122). It was pure "hysteria" (122) on Jaya's part. When she calms down, she finds herself "alone" (122) in the room. Mohan leaves the house in utter shock and silence, and despair. Jaya is scared that perhaps Mohan has left her forever. She comforts herself that Mohan will return but "He was gone" (123). Jaya feels lost and utterly lonely without Mohan.

Kusum and Kamat, these two people, play a crucial role in Jaya's characterization. Jaya took a firm stand against everyone's opinion to take care of the mentally sick Kusum, "For the first time in years, I had really fought him" (19), but when Jaya finally decides to leave Kusum in her state, Kusum goes home from Jaya's Dadar flat and, after a few days, commits suicide by jumping into a waterless well. Her relatives were not saddened by her death because "She was of no use to anyone" (22). It shocks Jaya severely. She also starts thinking that the same thing may happen to her if she becomes of no use in the future. That is why she always remains ready to carry out her duties with complete devotion. She cared for Kusum because she could feel Kusum's "anguish, her fears, her despair" (23). She felt her existence through Kusum,

. . . with Kusum's madness I became aware of my own blessed sanity . . . Kusum, you're nuts . . . Because you're that, I know I'm balanced, normal and sane . . . as long as Kusum was there, I had known clearly who I was; it had been Kusum who had shown me out to be who I was. I was not-Kusum. (24)

Like Naren in *Roots and Shadows*, Kamat acts as the outlet for Jaya's emotions. Jaya could open her heart to him. There was an ease between them. She could be herself when she was with him. Like a true well-wisher, Kamat gave her feedback on her writings and personality issues. However, now both Kusum and Kamat are dead. Only Mohan is left for Jaya, but Mohan also leaves her alone. She is now completely alone, "Alone, alone, all, all alone,/ Alone on a wide wide sea!"(Coleridge).

However, Jaya waits for Mohan. While waiting, her psychological breakdown accelerates. She starts identifying her condition with Kusum's, "I found myself engulfed by the ghost of Kusum, welcoming me to the category of unwanted wives, deserted wives" (125). Not only that, Jaya thinks, "we were, both of us rejected by our husbands, our families, failures at everything" (126). A few days later, when there is no news of Mohan, Jaya even assumes that Mohan has, maybe, died. The storm that blows through Jaya in these few days of Mohan's departure, the helplessness she suffers, the terror of being alone she goes through, and the consciousness of being deserted and rejected shatters Jaya. A change occurs in her psyche. She realizes that she is no longer the old Jaya or Suhasini. Even if Mohan returns, Jaya declares to herself, "We couldn't go on as before. We had come to the end of this road" (127). She analyses and accepts the reality of their relationship, "Deception, lies, evasions – was this all we were able to offer each other in our years together?" (132). Jaya tries to pacify herself, "I'm Jaya, Jaya for victory" (137), but only her anger grows inside. She has shaped herself according to Mohan's wishes throughout her married life, and now she, suddenly, discovers herself as an utter failure! She is utterly lonely and has "Nothing. Just emptiness and silence" (144).

Meanwhile, the news of Rahul's, her son who was on a trip to South India with her neighbors cum friends Rupa and Ashok, disappearance comes. Jaya regrets that she has failed to understand her son properly. Learning from the bitter experience of her own life, she decided that she would be a good, caring, attentive mother. After so many years of pursuit, now it seems that she is a failure as a mother also, which further deteriorates her mental stability.

Thinking about all this, when she is on the brink of losing her self-control because of the pressure built on her psyche, she leaves the flat and goes out on the street. She returns home almost unconscious with a fever because of getting drenched in the rain. She gets terrified of being alone. She has always, like the sparrow, tried to keep the family members safe but utterly failed. When the disaster will subside, and everything will calm down, she thinks, "Could we go back to being what we were?" (182) because she has already understood that "people don't change" (180), which is more frustrating for her. Jaya feels completely empty, destitute, "as if there were nothing left in my life" (184).

In Mohan's absence, Jaya feels her identity crisis, "All these years I thought I was Mohan's wife; now he tells me I was never that, not really . . . and now, without Mohan, I'm . . . I don't know, I don't know what I am" (185). After all these years, she is asking herself, "Why had I done that? Why had I suppressed that desperate woman?" (191), and after a long introspection, she realizes and accepts, "I was scared, scared of breaking through that thin veneer of a happy family . . ." (191). Now she is no longer afraid because she has accepted that she is a failure—both as a wife and as a mother. So the idea of a happy family also evaporates from her. Jaya declares, "I'm not afraid anymore. The panic has gone" (191). So far, she has tried to be Mohan's wife, leaving everything else aside, but now she knows she cannot do it anymore. She decides to let go of the hold on her son, Rahul, and by doing so, she starts feeling lighter. She is now ready to reject the image, "Two bullocks yoked together" (191). Jaya now believes in one life with so many choices. She remembers and gets inspired by the Sanskrit words written in her father's diary, "*Yathecchasi tatha kuru*" (192), meaning 'Do as you desire.'^{vi} Sumitra Kukreti remarks, "The realisation that she can have her own way – *yathecchasi tatha kuru* – gives a new confidence to Jaya. This is her emancipation" (Qtd. in Sree 86–87).

Jaya finally gets a telegram from Mohan regarding his coming back, but Jaya is not the old Jaya anymore. She declares, "It is no longer possible for me. If I have to plug that 'hole in the heart,' I will have to speak . . . I will have to erase the silence between us" (192). Jaya realizes that she herself is responsible for her present condition. She knows people do not change but hopes it will happen gradually, with time, and she believes that without hope, "life would be impossible" (193). She concludes by accepting the philosophy, "life has always to be made possible" (193). Thus a new Jaya is born.

According to some critics, Deshpande has not provided any solution to the problems raised in her novels, but that is a partial view. Most people live a life of despair without realizing what their problem is, but Deshpande's protagonists navigate deeply into their problems and try to understand what is happening to them and why. Diagnosis of the disease is a very important step to cure it, and that is what has been explored in the early novels of this author. Her protagonists have become aware of their problems, which is the first step in solving them.

Not only do Deshpande's protagonists understand the problem, but they also decide what to do next. Jaya declares to erase the silence between her and her husband. This is a very crucial step towards the ultimate solution. It is not so easy to break existing social structures. Deshpande knows it well. So she has chosen the individual as the unit of change. First, the change should come within oneself, and one day, a big difference will take place. Thus, Deshpande offers us a new vision. Deshpande knows that 'people don't change,' but she is as optimistic as her character Jaya who trusts that people will change, with time.

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ⁱ She usually never takes feedback and shows her writing to anyone except her husband before publishing the piece.

ⁱⁱ The daughter of Deshpande's writer friend Laeeq. Futehally, later on, became a good friend of Deshpande also. To know more about Futehally and her works, see http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/Shama_Futehally

ⁱⁱⁱ This edition has been used for the present study.

^{iv} All references to the text, from the next one, are indicated in this paper only by respective page numbers within brackets.

^v Gandhari, the daughter of the king of Gandhara (now Kandahar), is the wife of Dhritarashtra, the blind king of Hastinapura, the eldest prince of the Kuru kingdom in the epic *The Mahabharata*. She is said to have impressed Lord Shiva with her service and received a boon to bear 100 sons. After marrying the blind Dhritarashtra, she covers her eyes with a cloth for the rest of her life to live like her husband. She represents the stereotype of a dedicated and devoted wife. However, she does not have any other name of her own in the epic except being addressed as Gandhari, 'the daughter of the Gandhara kingdom. For more information see, <<https://www.vyasaonline.com/encyclopedia/gandhari/>>

^{vi} According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 18, Verse 63, Lord Krishna said these words to Arjuna in the field of Kurukshetra war. Lord Krishna says to him that he has been given knowledge and now he will have to take his decision on the basis of his knowledge.