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Pursuit for identity and self-concept in Shashi Deshpande's "A long silence"

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande's sad story, "A Long Silence," offers a rich tapestry for digging into Jaya's complex interplay of identity and self-concept. In this piece, the research delves into Jaya's introspective journey as she struggles with social expectations, familial duties, and a profound desire for personal satisfaction. The study delves deeply into the tremendous consequences of a "long silence" instilled in Jaya from infancy, revealing insight on her psychological battle with the duties forced on her as a wife and mother. This inquiry looks at how Jaya's introspective questioning is triggered by the limits of her restrictive household surroundings. It forces her to confront the mismatch between her own goals and the cultural standards that shape her existence. This essay dissects Jaya's emerging self-awareness layers by layer using Shashi Deshpande's skilled use of stream-of-consciousness and internal monologues. The essay examines how her hidden rebellion reveals itself via acts of disobedience, literary discovery, and her blossoming relationship with an unorthodox lady. In unraveling these memories, this analysis demonstrates the steady deterioration of the "long quiet." It shows Jaya reclaiming parts of her own identity and reshaping her self-concept, indicating a transforming path of self-discovery.

Keywords: Shashi Deshpande, long silence, self-concept, own identity, protagonist, self-awareness

Introduction

Shadows gently flow across the walls of Shashi Deshpande's "A Long Silence," resonating with faint murmurs of longing aspirations. Jaya appears as a lady shrouded in unsaid longings, her look providing a doorway into a universe of emotions held prisoner. The suffocating walls of domesticity change into a haven for reflection, with each creak of a floorboard telling a quiet story of unrealized promise. A symphony of self-discovery awaits in the language of her deep silences.

This research delves into Jaya's quiet life to demonstrate the transforming effect of a woman reclaiming her story. We'll explore the labyrinthine places of her heart, where societal expectations conflict with the quiet murmurs of her true self. From subtle rebellion against assigned identities to modest acts of disobedience that gradually dissolve the "long stillness," we will follow her journey—a monument to the human spirit's unending desire for resonance.

Identity in A Long Silence

The investigation of identity crises or the search for identity has gained popularity in postcolonial writing, notably in modern women's fiction. The struggle for identity, which is frequently oriented on self-definition, appears as a key subject in these stories. This process is both ecological and psychological, symbolizing a journey toward feminine individuation and a greater awareness of one's own identity. Within this perspective, rites of passage act as a woman's awakening to the reality of her social and cultural position, prompting her to re-examine her life through the lens of newly discovered feminist consciousness. Notably, women authors, notably Shashi Deshpande, are interested in exploring and articulating the process that leads to the female protagonist's deliberate awakening, rather than just searching for identity crises.

In Deshpande's works, the female protagonist, such as Jaya in "A Long Silence," represents the educated middle-class lady who follows society norms and restraints. Jaya, like many others, is torn between living for herself and living completely for her family. Her presence is taken for granted in the familial realm, prompting her to embark on a journey to uncover her identity. Despite her role as a dedicated wife and mother, she is disregarded and misunderstood by her family. Jaya has an intimate connection with her husband, Mohan, but she fails to connect with him on an emotional level. Her silence symbolizes the innumerable women throughout the world who are unable to express their individuality.

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Jaya's thoughts and memories reflect many women's experiences, as she confronts cultural expectations that prevent her from seeking a career. Despite her attempts to write, her spouse does not recognize her efforts, which adds to her sense of unfulfillment. Even her children, as they grow older and more absorbed with their own lives, neglect her. Jaya, struggling with unhappiness and without the will to revolt, suffers a loss of identity, which is exacerbated by the fact that her name is changed from Suhasini to Jaya after marriage. Reflecting on her seemingly busy yet purposeless existence leads to a sad understanding of her feelings of stagnation. In this novel, the search for identity becomes a profound investigation of the complicated and sometimes unacknowledged conflicts that shape the lives of many women.

Shashi Deshpande uses a first-person narrative to reveal Jaya's silent story. Jaya admits right on that she wants to expose her true self, which is hidden under her quiet exterior. She travels across time, remembering her subservient and docile past. Jaya was born into a liberal household and named by her father, who saw her as brave and fearless. However, her aspirations and emotions were suppressed by her liberal upbringing. Despite her love of cinema music, her father pushed classical melodies like Paluskar and Faiyaz Khan on her, considering film music as inferior. As a youngster, Jaya chose silence over rebellion, which was the first blow to her identity. She felt defeated and lost her sense of self, so she confined her sentiments and emotions.

After marriage, Jaya had similar demands from her husband, Mohan, who expected her to sacrifice her particular tastes for the sake of male family members. Her marriage lacked fun, and she acknowledged being bored with a constant pattern and never-ending monotony. Jaya compared her marriage like a couple of bullocks working together to avoid discomfort. She found parallels with Gandhari, who veiled herself to share her husband's blindness before discovering she had fully changed and lost herself in the pursuit of pleasing Mohan. She changed her name, personality, and job at Mohan's request, since he desired a lady who would serve, support, and comply with his rules.

Jaya was shattered and helpless as she wandered through unknown streets after Mohan abandoned her. This dilemma served as a spark for her self-discovery. Determined to restore herself, she set out to discover her identity. Jaya found a compromise, promising to modify herself in the hope that Mohan would do the same. This compromise, on the side of both the lady and the man, establishes Shashi Deshpande as a liberal writer, avoiding a story that favors complete independence for women while assigning household tasks to males. Deshpande dives into the nuances of the feminine mind, portraying Jaya as a well-rounded heroine who changes throughout time. Initially wanting destruction, Jaya evolves throughout crises, preferring optimism and a new beginning.

The work depicts a feminine journey for identity, with the protagonist yearning for self-discovery, individuality, and independence against her husband's silence and lack of contact. The story has a dual message: it encourages women to speak up and express themselves, while also asking males to better understand women. In a male-dominated culture, women, regardless of profession, are unable to escape their predefined duties as wives and family members, a fact eloquently depicted in Deshpande's chosen works.

"A woman, inherently free and autonomous like all creatures, discovers herself existing in a world where societal norms compel her to adopt the role of "the other" under the influence and expectations set by men." (Naik)

Shashi Deshpande's "That Long Silence" beautifully delineates the subtle swings of mood, the fluctuating periods between joy and sorrow, the pieces of sentiments sensed and suppressed, and the heartbreaking emotional journey of the narrator protagonist, Jaya - a housewife and a failed writer. The story goes into Jaya's life at the silent and unconscious levels, portraying her married life with Mohan in a compassionate and realistic manner. It is an inquiring and critical investigation of the institution of marriage, reflecting the changing viewpoints that have emerged in recent years.

The plot concentrates around the protagonist's inner views, a lady elaborately drawn from inside, whose disturbed daily routine allows her, for the first time, to examine her life and strive to establish her actual identity. Deshpande's investigation depicts Jaya's subtle emotional interaction, exposing the complicated dynamics of her existence as a wife and failing writer. Through this introspective lens, the work engages in a thought-provoking examination of marriage, providing readers with a profound insight into the complexity and transformations experienced by its lead character.

The question "who am I?" echoes so persistently in her thoughts that it becomes an overwhelming obsession, preventing her from discovering her true self (Deshpande, 24). She perceives herself as "an utter stranger, a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motives of her actions seemed impossible" (Deshpande, 69). The resulting agony is articulated through her anguished cries - "I can't hope, I can't manage, I can't go on" (Deshpande, 70). Within the stifling and oppressive household milieu and patriarchal framework, she struggles with the erasure of her feminine identity. Her feminine issue manifests itself in the erratic condition of her intellect, a turbulent mirror of the difficulties she confronts in navigating the complexity of her existence.

"I could and couldn't do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly" (Deshpande, 83).

As the novel nears its end, Jaya acknowledges her writing as a type of fiction and quotes Defoe's definition of fiction as a sort of "lying" that instills "a tremendous hope in the heart." Drawing inspiration from this, she decides to "fill that hole," mirroring a previous emotion, by conversing with Mohan and breaking the stillness between them. This act of wiping the quiet is her assertion of her feminine voice - a voice imbued with hope, promise, and the articulation of her ideas.

Rather than depicting Jaya's life as a completely bleak and hopeless struggle, the novel suggests the presence of "hope" and the possibility of "transformation for the better." This hopeful undertone implies that, even in the face of adversity, the lead character may evolve and have a more positive future.

Change is not an instantaneous process; it may not even occur over extended periods. However, the capacity for hope remains constant. Life would be unbearable without that glimmer of hope. (Deshpande, 193)

The novel's finale foreshadows a new beginning for Jaya and Mohan. Contemporary Indian writers, such as Deshpande, frequently approach the representation of women's subjugation with heightened self-awareness, a

deep feeling of participation, and, at times, tangible outrage. Unlike earlier writers who deified and celebrated women's suffering, post-independence writers approach their condition with more reality.

However, there is a critique of Deshpande's approach, suggesting that she may "overdose the theme of women suffering," risking the novel's transformation into a sociological tract (Deshpande, 6). William Walsh, noting the novel's unique quality, observes the combination of an analytical and detached perspective, highlighting its particular and uncommon nature (Deshpande, 7). This observation underscores the nuanced balance Deshpande strikes in portraying the challenges faced by women in a society undergoing significant changes.

"The emotional turmoil is artfully conveyed through a prose that is both cool and idiomatic, yet sensitive. The narrative is supported by a memory that is remarkably rich and minutely specific. This memory doesn't just evoke isolated vivid images but rather unfolds as a seamless stream of naturally connected scenes. It showcases a creative faculty that possesses the remarkable ability to resurrect past lives in the vividness of the present moment." (Deshpande, 8)

Jaya's reminiscences have a distinct combination of conversational informality and formal articulation, expressing a poignant and melancholy feeling of time passing, ephemeral experiences, and personal loss. The story is told in a quiet and collected tone that exudes sobriety. It reflects the natural movement of a mind that travels across important points in time, providing greater insights on Jaya's experiences. The unbroken stream of consciousness that distinguishes Jaya's story represents the mind's fluidity, registering events via writing laced with remembrance and melancholy. Shashi Deshpande has written the tale such that it moves on its own, ignoring the novelist's position as a meddler or omniscient narrator. Finally, she has expertly brought the reader straight into the internal lives of the characters, without the necessity for interference from the author in the form of remarks or explanations. Finally, she has expertly brought the reader directly into the characters' inner life, without the author's participation in the form of remarks or explanations. (Deshpande, 9).

Deshpande's story satirizes mythological female characters such as Sita, Draupadi, and Gandhari. She questions the stereotype of women who, like these famous characters, blindfold themselves to their husbands' wrongdoings. Deshpande criticizes society's approval of such conduct, citing the ubiquity of real-life Mohans in India. Many spouses earn fortune through immoral ways, and numerous women, like Jaya, enjoy the wealth while turning a blind eye to their husbands' moral violations. Jaya's telling of her own tale is infused with sarcasm, focusing attention on the intricacies and inconsistencies inherent in society norms and gender relations.

"Mohan successfully secured the job, and I never bothered to inquire about the details of how he achieved it. Drawing a parallel with Gandhari, who willingly blinded herself to align with her husband, I realized that, in my own way, I too had become an ideal wife. I tightly bound my eyes, choosing not to delve into the specifics. The crucial aspect, for me, was that we had relocated to Bombay, fulfilling our needs for decent clothing, a refrigerator, a gas connection, and the luxury of traveling first class. Moreover, Mohan had sufficient earnings to support his family – catering to

Sudha's education expenses, Vasant's clothing, and contributing towards Sudha's eventual marriage. In this manner, I mirrored an ideal wife by closing my eyes to certain aspects, prioritizing the fulfillment of our material needs and familial responsibilities. (Deshpande, 120)

Shashi Deshpande's "That Long Silence" expertly depicts the nuanced variations of mood, the alternating moments of ecstasy and misery, and the complex shards of sentiments experienced and buried. The story follows Jaya, the narrator protagonist who is both a housewife and an unsuccessful writer. The story delves deeply into the lives of Jaya and her husband, Mohan, while also providing an inquiring and critical critique of the modern marital structure.

The plot concentrates around Jaya's inner views, a delicately drawn lady from inside who is dealing with a disrupted usual routine. She finds herself at a crossroads, allowing her for the first time to reflect on her life and strive to establish her actual identity. However, the question lingers: could she actually come to a solid knowledge of herself? The story leaves this question open-ended, encouraging readers to consider the complexity of self-discovery and the ever-changing nature of human identity.

The question, "Who am I?" haunts her so obsessively that she fails to find herself. She is "an utter stranger, a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motive of her actions seemed impossible" (Deshpande, 69). Hence her agonized cries- "I can't hope, I can't manage, I can't go on" (Deshpande, 70)

Deshpande's protagonists' stories frequently begin at a key point when, despite having seeming "complete" independence or yielding to their spouses' expectations (as demonstrated in the case of Jaya), they remain dissatisfied and unhappy. As a result, a drive to reinvent their identities arises. Deshpande argues for a woman's inner space and self-expression while realizing the significance of not simply rejecting society structures like marriage and family, as well as the obligations and basic human values that come with them.

Her protagonists are not mere representatives of Deshpande's views; instead, they come across as living individuals with distinct traits that set them apart from both each other and other characters within Deshpande's works. Jaya, the protagonist in "That Long Silence," whose name is described as "small, sharp, and clear, like her face," appears passive and has consciously muted her own voice. Despite this apparent silence, she possesses the latent potential to redefine herself, illustrating the complexity and depth of the characters crafted by Deshpande.

Deshpande eloquently depicts the challenges experienced by her heroes without proposing easy answers. Instead, she lets the many options play out naturally, letting the readers consider the ramifications of complying or breaking free. Her approach frequently appears to echo the ideas of de Beauvoir, whom Deshpande recognizes as an influence. De Beauvoir believes that women should "identify, measure, and explore their distinctive area."

Deshpande says that women, although having more resources than many other Indian women, may absorb cultural standards to the point that they struggle to envisage an autonomous identity. Even if they have the means to liberate themselves, this internalization might cause them to become obedient. Deshpande's depictions appear to undermine the notion of the instantly emancipated 'learned Indian lady.' Despite their education, these women may not

automatically have the freedom and bravery to pursue their convictions. The inability to express oneself or set boundaries with their relationships can be ascribed to a strongly ingrained, patriarchal worldview acquired throughout infancy through socialization. Deshpande's exploration of these interactions provides light on the intricacies and obstacles that women confront while managing societal expectations, education, and personal identity.

Self- Concept in A Long Silence

The notion of "self" is a fundamental feature of human life in the mundane world. Individuals begin to reflect on their thoughts, perceptions, and true or imagined notions about themselves as early as childhood. These self-perceptions help to provide the groundwork for experiences in family and social relationships, which evolve in a cultural framework that is both consistent and changing. When there is a gap between these notions and reality, people may feel alienated, alone, or deceived. Because of the gap between consciousness and unconsciousness, a person has numerous identities, resulting in a disconnected identity and a situation of crisis.

Postmodern literature investigates unsolved questions of the self, and Shashi Deshpande emerges as a key contemporary voice addressing the challenges women confront in society in discovering and preserving their identities as spouses, daughters, mothers, and, most importantly, as human beings. Deshpande's approach does not promote an extreme or strident feminism that blames all problems on males. Instead, she emphasizes the need of balancing relationships, making room for others, and enabling freedom of speech. Deshpande proposes a societal reorientation that promotes harmonious relationships. Her paintings focus on the ongoing conflict between patriarchy, tradition, and women's quests for self-expression, uniqueness, and freedom. Themes such as marital incompatibility, identity crisis, unbalanced family dynamics, and the patriarchal gaze are highlighted, questioning and deconstructing existing conventional standards to pave the way for more constructive solutions.

Deshpande's work "That Long Silence" eloquently illustrates the issues affecting contemporary women. The female characters progress through many stages, from self-oblivion to self-awareness, illuminating the complicated journey of women struggling with their identities in the face of society expectations and patriarchal conventions.

The associated notions of love and marriage play an important part in human connections, with love revealing itself in a variety of ways, including the bond between husband and wife. This specific dynamic has been a major source of worry for feminists all around the world. The manifestation of love in everyday life, particularly in the context of marriage, varies throughout time and location, from a steady fountain to sporadic droplets. However, unequal distribution of this expression frequently results in unhappiness, enslavement, and suffocation, topics well addressed in Shashi Deshpande's books.

In Deshpande's works, the male partner not only changes a woman's identity from girl to woman, but he also asserts authority to the point that she assimilates herself into his identity. This acceptance takes place secretly, not because of fear of social change, but rather of changing her own self, connections, and imposed identity. Internal repression may

be so strong that she does not perceive the need to dispute her prescribed roles and acquire a new identity. "That Long Silence" delves at the cultural and societal construction of female identity, namely in the roles of wife and mother. The story realistically depicts a wide range of women's issues, ambiguities, conflicts, and disappointments.

The story revolves around Jaya, a convent-educated middle-class woman married to the greedy Mohan. Despite living a secure life with two children and performing domestic responsibilities appropriately, Jaya is dealing with an inner psychological crisis. The spirits of Suhasini and Sita haunt her more than any external danger, instilling a fear that exceeds all other threats. In her study, Jaya recognizes that "the ghost most scary to encounter is the ghost of one's own self," emphasizing the female protagonist's emotional struggles and conflicts. (Deshpande, 13)

Conclusion

In conclusion, Shashi Deshpande's "A Long Silence" goes beyond the confines of a novel, becoming a profound investigation of identity, self-discovery, and the quiet resistance that echoes throughout the silences of a woman's journey. Jaya's story, far from being a fairy tale or a sad decline, develops as a complicated symphony, weaving together societal expectations, familial duties, and the constant whispers of an untamed self.

As the echoes of Jaya's narrative linger beyond the last pages, Deshpande's workmanship prompts us to consider the fundamental issue of what constitutes our identity. Is it the roles we play, the expectations we meet, or the silent yearnings that lurk in the depths of our hearts? Jaya's journey teaches an important lesson: self-discovery is not a set destination, but rather a continual pilgrimage. The tapestry of one's identity is sewn not with spectacular announcements, but with the subtle strands of everyday disobedience, the murmurs of self-awareness, and the fortitude to claim one's own narrative.

Deshpande's storytelling method does not deliver a definite response, but rather a fascinating inquiry that encourages contemplation. The enduring influence of "A Long Silence" is not just Jaya's metamorphosis, but also its capacity to drive us to delve within, listen to the faint whispers of our longings, and start on our own journeys of self-discovery—one quiet step at a time. The story is a timeless tribute to the complex dance between society's expectations and an individual's indomitable spirit in forging their own identity.

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