



English

M.A SEM-IV (ENG 22)

Women's Writing

*That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande

Dr Sarita Pandey, Department of English

[Sarita09bhu@gmail.com](mailto:Sarita09bhu@gmail.com)

**Disclaimer-**The content is exclusively meant for academic purposes and for enhancing teaching and learning. The information provided in this e-content is authentic and best as per my knowledge.



### Introduction

Indian feminist author Shashi Deshpande's fifth novel, *That Long Silence* (1989), won the Sahitya Akademi Award, given by the Indian Academy of Arts and Letters to outstanding works written in any of India's twenty-four major languages in 1990. During her career, Deshpande has also been awarded the Padme Shri for cultural contributions and been shortlisted for a Hindu Literary Prize for her novel *Shadow Play*.

### Plot

The main character of *That Long Silence* is Jaya, a girl born into a middle-class family. Her name is Jaya. When she is young, she is clever, curious, and bright in her studies, all qualities considered unlady-like by the mainstream society. Jaya's grandmother constantly encourages her to act more conventionally so that she can get a better husband when she gets married. She explains that civilized and cultured girls are skilled at cooking, cleaning, and household labor. In addition, she tells her to learn to be more accommodating and to keep quiet when she disagrees.

Eventually, Jaya learns to play the part of a subservient woman, while retaining a sense of individuality. She writes articles in her free time, though she has failed to become successful as an author. As she grows up, Jaya becomes keenly aware of the fact that people, in general, do not like it when she expresses herself or her individuality, and she

learns to hide it. She refers to this stifling of herself and her ideas as “the long silence” since it stretches across her life from childhood to middle age. Only Jaya’s father encourages her in her writing and sees her as an individual.

Jaya gets an education, and after college, she marries Mohan, a successful businessman. Jaya and Mohan disagree on many things and their marriage is not intimate or happy. There is no place in their relationship for Jaya to express her point of view, as Mohan expects her to go along with everything he says unquestioningly. Jaya takes care of the household while Mohan works, feeding him and cleaning up after him as if he were one of their two teenage children.

When Mohan is suspended from his job due to misconduct, Jaya is compelled to take account of what her life has become. Jaya and Mohan are forced to move from their spacious apartment into a small and dingy one, while their children stay behind with relatives. Jaya begins writing more to supplement the family income. Some of her articles are frank and open about her dissatisfaction, including the way in which her husband is unable to connect with her or their children. Though Mohan is not happy with the article, he does not say anything about it to Jaya. She merely senses from his expression that he does not like her writing and automatically and unthinkingly seeks to please him.

Mohan faces further disgrace when he is found guilty of counterfeiting at his job and fired. Jaya’s sister Kusum visits Jaya and discusses her own husband from whom she has recently separated. Jaya thinks that Kusum’s abusive husband and her own distant one have very different flaws but that they stem from the same cultural expectations of the way men should treat women. Next, Jaya meets with her brother Ravi, who speaks harshly about Mohan. When Mohan learns about this, he is angry with Jaya.

It is clear that Mohan needs Jaya’s support and love while he faces a trying period, but neither of them has ever been comfortable talking about their feelings and fears with each other. Mohan has no idea how to ask for what he needs, and Jaya has no idea how to offer it. The situation becomes even direr when the couple’s son, Rahul, runs away from home. Eventually, Mohan leaves the house.

Thinking about what has led to their separation, Jaya understands that she is partly to blame for withdrawing from her husband during his difficult times. She recognizes that the long silence has stifled communication and openness in her family, making it difficult to support her husband and vice versa. Mr. Kamat, an elderly man in her apartment building helps Jaya think through her feelings about herself as an individual and her relationship towards her husband.

## **Conclusion**

The book ends with Mohan sending a telegram to Jaya saying that he will be home soon. In addition, his job is willing to take him back. Jaya is ready to accept Mohan back into her life, and she vows that never again will she let the long silence separate them emotionally from each other.

