

Comparative Study of Feminist Perspective in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and *The Binding Vine*

Neenu¹, Dr. Madhu Sharma²

¹Research scholar (Dept. Of English), Geeta University, Panipat

²Associate Professor (retired), I.B.(P.G.) College, Panipat

Abstract:

Woman is the originator, creator and producer of the world. A human society is made up of two fundamental elements: men and women. But it is the plight of our nation that women are considered less equal to men. Feminism tries to put an end to the exploitation and oppression and tries to achieve gender equality. Feminism is about respecting women, their experiences, their knowledge, and their strength and giving them equal opportunities to men. Shashi Deshpande's *"That Long Silence"* and *"The Binding Vine"* both examine women's experiences in patriarchal Indian society, but they adopt different approaches regarding their themes and narrative styles. In *"That Long Silence"*, a woman fights for her own happiness. Her silence alludes to women's introspection and restraint. whereas *"The Binding Vine"* focuses on Urmila's pain and her efforts to bring justice to the women around her, who are suffering from sexual assault. However, both books emphasize women's search for self-expression, the impact of social expectations, and the quest for identity.

Keywords: feminism, gender equality, patriarchal Indian society, female protagonists, sexual assault, social expectations

Introduction:

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most well-known Indian novelists working in English. Her writings mostly focus on women's struggles and sufferings in the male-dominated society. The issues and challenges faced by women have been championed by Shashi Deshpande. She discusses how a woman in a middle-class society face a struggle between tradition and modernization. She received the Sahitya Akademi Award for her book *That Long Silence*. The women of the Indian middle class are the subject of her works. In her books, she explores the inner lives of Indian women. In *The Binding Vine*, Urmila finds a way to connect with herself and attempts to put together the tragic story of a lively young woman who endures and composes poetry while living alone in an unpleasant marriage. (Kaur, 2014)

The primary goal of feminism is to dispel the myth that women have less capability than men, which is widely prevalent throughout society. Instead, it emphasizes individual freedom and gender equality. Both books examine women's lives in patriarchal societies, but *"That Long Silence"* concentrates on the protagonist's inner life and her quest for her artistic satisfaction, whereas *"The Binding Vine"* examines a wider variety of experiences, such as sexual violence, grieving, and secret family relationships. But both help to paint a vivid and complex picture of the lives of women in modern-day India.

Women are considered inferior to men despite being a key element of human civilization. Indian women are seen as quiet sufferers in Indian society. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande are from middle-class backgrounds. All of them are urban, well-educated, active, and modern. Despite the fact that they all see marriage to be terrible and torturous, they try to maintain their marriage and never try to break it. (Gaikwad & Songire, 2016)

The fundamental theme of Deshpande's 1988 novel 'That Long Silence', which she claims to be her most autobiographical work, is silence, both by the family and by society. Jaya represents those Indian women who want to break the barrier of a long silence created around them by the male hegemony. That Long Silence depicts the women in an authentic, realistic and credible manner. The entire novel centers on the way of life and changes that Jaya has unwillingly accepted. It's not just one woman's tale; it's the narrative of countless women whose sentiments, emotions, and dreams are being crushed by our society's expectations. Moreover, this is a tale about a couple's communication gap and how it ruined their relationship and their family life.

Her novel *The Binding Vine* (1992), which won the Sahitya Akademy prize, is noteworthy. Based on a true rape story, this book goes beyond the confines of the actual event to tell a complex story about human relationships, family ties, women's rights to their bodies, and the necessity of speaking up to correct injustices. The novel has an essence of love, empathy, and optimism despite its harsh setting of suffering and loss.

Through her writings, Deshpande has portrayed contemporary Indian women's quest for a definition of who they are, how they fit into society and their relationships. The aim of this paper is to investigate the issues and hardship that middle-class women face in patriarchal society and try to find out the ways with which they can respectfully establish themselves in it.

Female Protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence:

In *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande, a woman fights for her own happiness. It illustrates how women silently endure extreme suffering and molestation caused by men throughout their lives. The story perfectly captures the image of a middle-class woman who is torn between the traditional and the modern society.

"That Long Silence" is the most well-known book written by Shashi Deshpande. It is her fifth novel which was published in 1988. This work garnered her critical acclaim within the literary community as well as the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. Deshpande took a very long time—"six years"—to finish *That Long Silence*.

In this book, the author hopes to break the long silence that occur within the marital relationship and desires to change the perspective of the society for women. The pain that an Indian woman endures in a male-dominated family are reflected in that long silence. In addition to the patriarchal system, the author aims to show that women are also somewhat to blame for the deteriorating state of their lives. The oppression of women is a result of their silent suffering and lack of outcry.

Simone de Beauvoir in her book 'The Second Sex' says, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman." (de Beauvoir, 1949)

Women are typically portrayed as a dependent, repressed, and surrendered segment of society. In this way, Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, is not a natural woman. The story is told through the voice of Jaya, an upper-class Bombay housewife. She is a well-educated, sophisticated woman. She has been a rebellious adolescent who possess the nature of questioning everything which she finds wrong according

to her. Before her marriage, Jaya has enjoyed asking questions but she used to be told by her paternal grandmother, Ajji, that she would feel uneasy at her husband's home if she asks too many questions. Thus, she was told to learn how to remain silent. Jaya no longer asks questions, but even then, she is feeling uneasiness in her married life.

The societal taboos around marriage changed her into a woman: "She used to get angry easily as a child." However, she put up with her rage after being married. She understood that rage, in Mohan's opinion, constituted a woman "unwomanly." (83). Jaya's character effectively illustrates her transformation into womanhood.

Jaya was a strong young woman who was supported by her father. She was raised in a household where orthodoxy and conventional social taboos were made less important by modern thoughts. Her life was significantly impacted by her father. Her father gave her the name Jaya, which translates to "victory." (TLS, 15)

Later on after graduation, she married Mohan who is an engineer. Despite being a strong-willed and optimistic young woman, Jaya's all goals and hopes were shattered after her marriage. However, she is renamed Suhasini after the marriage, which translates to "a soft, smiling, calm motherly woman." (15) The former name represents a feminist, whereas the latter name represents a traditional woman who is submissive.

Mohan holds a conventional perspective on the place of women in the home. He views the ideal woman as one who takes care of the home and prioritizes her family over her job. Jaya who was an educated woman, became a housewife after her marriage. She was a girl with high expectations. But she can't prosper and that's why she suppresses her urge to stretch her wings and reach the heights of success. Jaya shaped herself to be a decent wife, devoted daughter-in-law, and mother of two kids Rahul and Rati.

Jaya expects for intimacy to develop after marriage, while Mohan views marriage as a union of two bodies only. He doesn't seem to be interested in the idea of "love." Thus, they engage in silent, wordless intercourse. After completing the sexual act as he desires, Mohan only inquires, "Did I hurt you?" (TLS, 95), to which Jaya predictably responds, "No" (TLS, 95).

Jaya's life was calm and peaceful at the start of the novel. But her husband, Mohan, was very money-centric, conventional, and authoritative. However, an unexpected calamity struck their lives when her husband Mohan was accused of financial misconduct and an investigation was launched against him. Deshpande compares a married couple to a pair of bullocks yoked together, implying that the two must go in the same direction, which would lead to pain and discomfort. (Anusha & Kavitha, 2022)

In order to flourish in the patriarchal culture, Jaya as well as other women in the community choose to remain silent. The only thing keeping them safe from more tragedy is to keep silence. When she opens her diaries, she discovers, much to her surprise, that only her responsibilities as a wife and mother are depicted in the diary; she finds her own self, Jaya the person, is lost. She has completely devoted herself to her husband's comforts and maintaining order in the home so that she can become the perfect wife and mother. In this course, she feels as though she lacks something, a sense of self and importance.

Jaya is a writer, but she hasn't been able to express herself freely. The narrator's existence seems so limited that it nearly feels oppressive. She was particularly interested in her premarital and post marital writings, and she attempted to write about her thoughts and about the communication gap in a marriage. However, his husband showed little respect for her outstanding writing. Rather, she was counseled against writing such stories, which are seen negatively in our culture. Instead of asking her to stop writing, Mohan

suggested that she modify her style. Thus, Jaya's writings were entirely influenced by her fear of her husband.

In addition to her family responsibilities, Jaya writes realistic stories for newspapers and periodicals. Her story of "a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body" even earned her an award. Mohan, however, feels hurt because he believes the story is about their private life and it is made public. He states: "Everyone who study this and who know us as well, they will understand that these two persons are us, they will think I am this type of man, How could I face the people then? And you, how can you write such ugliness and these things, and how will you deal with people after that?(143-44).

Jaya once decides to stop writing after observing his response. Jaya's statement that she was "scared of hurting Mohan, scared of ruining the only career I had, my marriage" (TLS, 145) is supported by her fear. Even after that incident, Jaya continues to write, but she wrote in a more constrained, self-censored, and safe manner to ensure that no one would be harmed but she herself is not at all happy with what she is writing. She also continues to write in her "Seeta" column only in order to please the society.

In " That Long Silence," Deshpande portrays Jaya as an educated writer. As a writer, Jaya should have to use her analytical talents to highlight societal issues and contradictions in her writing. But this actually never takes place. For numerous causes, she has to succumb to familial and society pressures. Despite her desire to express herself, she is compelled to submit to male-dominated society's expectations. Despite her education, she refuses to speak out against injustices. (Al Mahmud, 2022)

Kamat is an advertiser and is also Jaya's neighbour upstairs in Dadar. He is a widower and his only son is settled in abroad. He shows much understanding and sympathy for Jaya. He urges, "Take yourself seriously, woman. Work, if you want people to take you seriously. Don't hide behind a fake identity." (TLS, 148) Jaya is encouraged by Kamat to write under a pseudonym. She is able to give Kamat's residential address. Jaya is urged by Kamat to continue her writing career. (Sulaiman, 2024).

In the end, Jaya understands that the prolonged quietness has hindered openness and communication in her family. She feels that she has only lived half of her life and has followed others. She makes the decision to end "that long silence" and speak for herself.

Female Protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's The Binding Vine:

Shashi Deshpande displays the women's strengths as well as their weaknesses. She skillfully manages the contrast of the two scenarios in the Binding Vine —rape that occurs inside the marriage and outside the marriage. Urmila, the protagonist and narrator, emphasizes the pain of two women: Kalpana, who was viciously raped by her uncle, outside the marriage and is currently near death, and Mira, who was raped in her marriage by her own husband. Through Urmila's perspective, Deshpande gives us insight into the lives of many other women who suffer from various forms of oppression, violence, or deprivation. (Santhi, M. 2017).

The novel, The Binding Vine, centers around three women Urmila, Mira and Shakutai. Urmila (Urmila) is struggling to overcome the grief of her one year old daughter Anu's death who has died of meningitis. Her husband is a navy officer and is away from the house. He is not with Urmila during this difficult time. All of her friends and family make an effort to assist her in overcoming her grief. However, all their efforts are in vain.

Urmila doesn't want to let her suffering go. She finds it difficult to move on from her pain. "All I have left of Anu is this suffering. I would lose her completely if I don't have it. (9) She remembers the time spent with her daughter. Her memories torment her. So, she wants solitude. "I don't want anyone to console me.

Am I? I'm trying to cope with my loss. I don't want anyone." (TBV, 23)

When Urmi is fully immersed in her daughter's memories, Akka, Urmi's mother-in-law, brings out an antique trunk. It has some notes, diaries, and yellowing documents. When Akka informs her that these documents belong to Mira, Urmi becomes curious about exploring them. In reality, Mira is Kishore's biological mother who had passed away when Kishore was only a day old, and in order to provide a mother for the baby, Kishore's father had married Akka. Thus, Meera is Urmi's real mother-in-law and Akka is her step mother-in-law.

Through reading the poems in Mira's diary, Urmi gains insight into her tumultuous marriage. She comes to know from Akka that Kishore's father had pursued and married Mira when she was a college student. There's no denying that her husband has an obsession for her. In fact, the forced, one-sided obsessed love makes the marriage a horrific experience for Mira. Through Mira's poems, Urmi is able to imagine the forced sexual activity Mira had to endure in her unsuitable marriage. Urmi considers it as a rape within marriage.

According to renowned lawyer Indrani Jaisingh, "It is believed that a woman who marries a man has consented to have sex with him at any time. And because her consent is presumed, he is not committing an offense (of rape) even if he forces her." (TBV, 17)

Urmi meets Shakuntala (Shakutai), the mother of Kalpana, a rape victim. Kalpana is raped by her maternal uncle, Prabhakar when she rejects his proposal of marriage. Shakutai is unwilling to file a complaint since it will damage the family's reputation. Shakutai however, puts the blame on Kalpana with a stereotypically feminine attitude. She believes that Kalpana faced this tragedy as a result of her own boldness and fearlessness. Shakutai told Urmi: She has embarrassed us, and this stain will never go away. Thus, a rape victim loses on both levels. First of all, she has been raped; second, she is in a much worse situation since society views her as a kulta, or a woman without character.

The media, police, judiciary, and society all have an ungenerous and insensitive attitude that makes the life of innocent recipients of sexual attack even more miserable. The police also attempt to close the case by portraying it as an accident because rape cases, in their opinion, are complicated and challenging.

The history of physical violence and sexual assault on women originates back to the Mahabharata, when Draupadi, who was menstruating at the time, was brought before the Kauravas and the innocent woman's plea for justice was ignored by the Sabha's so-called elders. The authors therefore highlight violence against women, regardless of their gender or caste, in their works. Men in our society are prone to rape or attack women without hesitation because of their sense of superiority. (Sutradhar, 2022)

Urmila is determined not to keep quiet. Urmi says, "I just realized that what happened to Kalpana also happened to Mira." (TBV, 21) Even though Urmi is not related to Kalpana or Shakutai in any sense, still she possesses "sympathy and emotional attachment" for them. She undertakes the responsibility to fight for justice for Kalpana. She asks Shakutai to report the case to the police. (Bahuguna, 2012)

She succeeds in convincing Shakutai that Prabhakar, the actual culprit, is to blame and that Kalpana is not at fault. Urmi is successful in drawing social attention towards the problem, and the government orders for a new investigation in Kalpana's case.

According to Indira Nityandam: This book makes a significant advancement by introducing female bonding, or the eagerness of one woman to support other woman who is less wealthy. Urmila is adamant about having Mira's poetry published and calls attention of the society towards the suffering of rape victims. This was a good thing for the main character because Sarita, Jaya, and Indu were only battling their own fights.

The novel closes on an optimistic note when Urmi muses over "the spring of life" that we all want. At the end, Urmi comes to realize how we all are bound together by the delicate vine of human compassion, empathy and sympathy. Despite its various ups and downs, life continues.

Conclusion:

The novel differs greatly from the previous novels of Shashi Deshpande because it presents the idea of female bonding and a strong woman's determination to support a less fortunate woman. In contrast to Jaya in *That Long Silence*, who are primarily self-centered and seek her own atonement, Urmi in *The Binding Vine* is absorbed by the agony of her dead mother-in-law, who was raped in marriage, and an unknown, unmarried girl Kalpana, who was also raped. It is also mentioned that human ideals might be saved by love.

Thus in the end, we can say that Deshpande's novels are renowned for their compassionate representation of women's problems as well as the honest depiction of Indian society. Her heroines are the women who cope with the successes and failures, problems, and sorrows of life. However, they eventually come to accept it. Even they are strengthened by the problems of life. It is clear how powerful Urmi is when she says, "I am not going to allow myself to break," (TBV,19).

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