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## Domestic Violence against Women: A Study of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Domestic violence is the violence by one person against another person at the domestic levels such as in marriage or in any other relationship. It is also called family violence or domestic abuse. Partner commits violence against another in a marriage relationship. Domestic violence also includes violence against children, parents and may be done for self-defence. Domestic violence can be several forms such as physical, psychological, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, and sexual abuse. *Cambridge Dictionary* defines domestic violence as: "the situation in which someone you live with attacks you and tries to hurt you." *The Free Dictionary* defines it as: "physical or emotional abuse of a household member, especially one's spouse or domestic partner." *Online Etymology Dictionary* defines the origin of "Domestic" as: this word derived from Middle French word *domestique* and from Latin *domesticus* which means "belonging to the household." The noun meaning "household servant" is the 1530s. Domestic violence is attested from the 19<sup>th</sup> century as "revolution and insurrection;" 1977 as "spouse abuse, violence in the home."

*Domesticviolence.org* defines domestic violence as: "Domestic violence or emotional abuse are behaviours used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Partners may be married or not married; heterosexual, gay, or lesbian; living together, separated or dating." Examples of domestic violence include: name-calling or putdowns, keeping a partner from contacting their family or friends, withholding money, stopping a partner from getting or keeping job, actual or threatened physical harm, sexual assault, stalking, intimidation etc. victims of domestic violence can be any sex, race, culture, age, education, religion, employment or marital status. Both men and women can be abused, most victims are women. Children are more likely to be neglected or abused in homes

Any act that threatens the safety of an individual is termed as abuse, while domestic violence is the systematic method in which one partner gains power and control by infusing fear and forcing subservience. The social stigma of public dishonour is the greatest cause for a woman to become trapped in this atrocious environment, and another important reason is economic dependence on her perpetrator. Many times a woman feels that the abuse she goes through is her fault, that she has made a mistake. This inference is false; abusing is the abuser's fault, not the victim's. At the beginning of this horrifying journey the victim may feel the reasons for being abused are justified, as time goes on and she keeps changing herself for the abuser, she then realizes that there is no escaping from his wrath, he will be violent for any reason and no reason at all. An abuser feels entitled over the victim's body and her mind, she is not allowed to have individuality, for the abuser she is his commodity. Many women believe that residing with her husband and tolerating this abuse would be in the best interest of her children, as the family is kept together. But a study conducted by psychologists saw those infants that were victims of extreme abuse, had also become abusive towards other children and lacked the ability to express empathy. Abuse becomes a learned behaviour and a vicious cycle. Studies have shown it is in the best interest of the child for the parents to separate if they cannot maintain a healthy relationship. A mother is doing a disservice to her child by continuing with her toxic relationship, and a greater disservice to herself.

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There are severe effects of domestic violence on the victim. She slowly becomes dependent on the male as her freedom is snatched from her and she is cut off from family and friends, she is made to feel incompetent and doesn't have the confidence to leave him. If a daughter sees her father abusing her mother, and is a victim of that abuse herself, subconsciously she is more than likely to choose a partner who will show the same traits. When she will go through the same experiences as her mother, it brings a feeling of normalcy and a greater acceptance of this indiscriminate act, as her mother suffered in silence for years so will she?

Domestic violence is an intrinsic part of our society. The major causes could be the desire to gain control over another family member, the desire to exploit someone for personal benefits, the flare to be in a commanding position all the time showcasing one's supremacy so on and so forth. This form of domestic violence is most common of all. One of the reasons for it being so prevalent is the orthodox and idiotic mind-set of the society that women are physically and emotionally weaker than the males. Though women today have proved themselves in almost every field of life-affirming that they are no less than men, the reports of violence against them are much larger in number than against men. The most common causes for women stalking and battering include dissatisfaction with the dowry and exploiting women for more of it, arguing with the partner, refusing to have sex with him, neglecting children, going out of home without telling the partner, not cooking properly or on time, indulging in extramarital affairs, not looking after in-laws etc. In some cases, infertility in females also leads to their assault by the family members.

The greed for dowry, desire for a male child and alcoholism of the spouse are major reasons of domestic violence against women in rural areas. In urban areas, there are many more factors which lead to differences in the beginning and later take the shape of domestic violence. These include – more income of a working woman than her partner, her absence in the house till late night, abusing and neglecting in-laws, being more forward socially etc. Working women are quite often subjected to assaults and coercion sex by employees of the organization.

Women are usually scared to report cases of domestic abuse in fear that her husband will be arrested, that a long legal proceeding will ensure bringing public shame and scrutiny. For this reason 'Special Cells' have been created, it provides counselling to husbands and wives where they teach communication methods, and the counsellors slowly work to remove aggression. The first attempt is always to save the marriage, as the solution to domestic violence is not always separation. Yet this decision is in the hands of the wife, if she believes she does not want to stay with her husband then she is not obliged to go through counselling.

The present paper tries to analyse domestic violence against women in Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*. Deshpande shows two different kinds of Indian Women at two levels- the lower class women engaged in menial domestic chores to earn their living, and middle-class women of some financial independence. She further divides middle-class women into two categories: those who never question their marriage and submit to insult, injustice, injuries and humiliation without any complaint, and those who, refusing to become the victims of tradition, raise their voice against oppression. Jaya, the protagonist, belongs to

the second category of middle-class women. In the beginning, she is not different from other women of her class, but towards the end, we notice a great change in her personality. Deshpande brings out the similarities and differences among Jaya and other female characters in the novel- among women of different generations (Jaya, her mother and her grandmother), among women of different classes (Jaya, Tara, Nayana and Jeeja), among women of the same class and generation (Jaya, her cousin Kusum and her neighbour Mukta).

*That Long Silence* is a story that happens in every middle-class and educated Indian women's lives. The middle-class housewives fare slightly better than their lower-class counterparts, but marriage is the only career for them in the most cases and a husband their "destiny". The novelist has shown the loneliness of a woman living silently in a cage called marriage. Their suffering is more mental than physical, as in the case of Jaya. She is convent-educated and cultured; she has been brought up with love and care by her father. But she has been conditioned from the very beginning to accept her husband as "sheltering tree" and be good to him, even at the cost of her sensibilities and aspirations because the happiness of her husband and home depends on her. Such well-meant advice keeps haunting Jaya and she realizes that since a husband is like "a sheltering tree" (32), he must be nurtured and nourishment in a marriage. As Vanitamami says to Jaya:

A husband is like a sheltering tree. Without the tree, you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. This followed logically. And as you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies (34).

Jaya has been taught to merge her own identity with that of her husband. She "had learnt it at last – no questions, no retorts. Only silence" (143).

So after her marriage, Jaya, who used to contemplate her independent and intelligent, adapts herself to the requirements, whims, and desires of Mohan. She remains passive and submissive to his desires and demands. She transforms herself into "stereotype of a woman: nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support" (76). Apparently, she is a contented housewife with all material comforts. But in order to become that, she has had to compromise and suppress many aspects of her individuality. In order to become an ideal wife and mother, she devotes herself to the comforts of her husband and to keep the house in order. In the process, she feels that she has no identity, no status of her own. When the editor of a magazine asks her to provide her bio data, she feels that she has nothing meaningful to offer, except such irrelevant facts as: "I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third one live" (2).

Jaya keeps changing herself in accordance with her husband's likes and dislikes, wishes, and desires, as a result of which her individuality gets annihilated. Now whatever she does is dictated by only consideration – what will her husband think of it? Mohan is demanding and dominating like his father. Mohan gives her another name, Suhasini, after marriage. Her own name Jaya means victory, whereas Suhasini means "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman," which she precisely has become over the seventeen years of married life. She has learnt that a woman has no right to be angry with her husband because that undermines his

position of authority in the household. "A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated" (147). She bottles up her feelings and emotions; she cultivates silence. She cannot even express her physical desires and there is lack of communication between Jaya and Mohan. Their lovemaking twice a week has become mechanical and there is nothing except emptiness and suppressed silence between them. Deshpande shows the dominance of a husband over his wife:

Where did you go today? Tell me. Open your mouth, you bloody whore? Open your mouth and speak the truth. Where did you go today? Can't you reply? Has someone cut your tongue? Tell me quick. Talk. Fast. Say something... Open your mouth? (159).

Jaya thinks over her role throughout the novel. Is she living her own life or someone else's? She searches for her identity as an individual. She is a failed writer who is haunted by the uneasy memories of her past as Mohan leaves her. She describes their relationship as:

A pair of bullocks yoked together...it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?...A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman (11-12). Because of the "emptiness" of her life, Jaya is drawn towards her widower neighbour Kamat, a middle-aged intellectual. He treats Jaya as an equal and she is able to share her innermost thoughts and feelings with him uninhibitedly. But there is no physical relationship between the two. When she finds Kamat lying dead on the floor, Jaya leaves quietly.

Jaya has to suppress her creative urges to keep Mohan happy because, a traditionalist, Mohan wants Jaya to conform to his expectations. Marriage thus hinders Jaya's intellectual growth and undermines her sense of self. People can't relate to her without Mohan and she exists only as a complement to her husband. This is clear from the conversation Jaya has with her Dada's friend, Dr Vyas, in Sion Hospital where Jeeja's son Rajaram has been admitted after a drunken brawl. She realizes that she has no identity of her own after Mohan leaves her and she starts questioning herself.

The condition of women from the lower class, as revealed by the writer, is really pitiable. Their suffering starts much before their marriage. They start adding to the family income at a tender age the way Jeeja's granddaughter Manda does. They continue working and earning all their life. They are married off at an age considered suitable to any boy who looks like any man. Marriage does not bring any change in their lives, but it brings endless pain, suffering and burden. They have to earn to support their family as, in most cases, their husbands turn out to be drunkards and ill-treat them.

The lives of Jeeja and Nayana, Jaya's housemaids, are a living hell, nothing but endless drudgery as they both ill-treated by their respective husbands. Nayana has an apathetic attitude to life. She wants a son not because she wants any help from him in her old but she does not want a daughter to suffer at the hands of some drunkard, as she herself has suffered. Nayana says to Jaya:

"Why give birth to a girl, *behnji*, who'll only suffer because

of men all her life? Look at me! My mother loved me very much, she wanted so much for me a house with electricity and water, shining brass vessels, a silver waist chain, silver anklets and what have I got? No, no, *behnji*, better to have a son" (28).

Like Nayana's husband, Jeeja's husband is also a drunkard and he often beats her. She bears the burden of the entire household on her shoulders, yet she never complains. She accepts his second marriage as perfectly justified because she has failed to give him a child. She says stoically, "With whom shall I be angry?" Her daughter-in-law Tara's life is another example of the suffering and marital problems of the lower-class women. Her husband Rajaram is also a drunkard who beats and bashes her regularly when she refuses to give him money for liquor. Frustrated, Tara curses her husband but Jeeja shuts her up by saying that husband is a symbol of social prestige and acceptance: "Don't forget, he keeps the *kumkum* on your forehead. What is a woman without that?" (53).

Jaya makes her choice by refusing to let go of her identity and determines to break her long silence. But others of her ilk – Vanitamami, Kusum, Mukta, Mohan's mother and Mohan's sister Vimala continue to suffer silently. Vanitamami, who had never known what it was to choose, represents a typical traditionally suppressed woman. As a wife and daughter-in-law, she is ruled by her husband and mother-in-law and she has no participation in decision-making in the family. The interest she takes in Kusum is the only protest she can register successfully. Kusum is a victim figure. Passive surrender and insecurity, which have been her lot in her mother's home, pursue her in her new family after marriage. Kusum becomes insane as she has internalized all her anger. She becomes a burden on her family. Finally, she commits suicide.

Mukta, the bone-thin widow, Jaya's neighbour, works under financial compulsions to bring up her daughter Nilima. She is independent but increasingly superstitious. She has calmly accepted the blame for not providing a male inheritor to her dead husband, Arun. On the other hand, her daughter Nilima is the free spirit; she is proud of the fact that she was born after the death of her father.

Mohan's father embodies the authoritative patriarchal attitude. Mohan tells Jaya that his mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her. Mohan's father wants fresh food to be served when he returns home and his wife's failure to provide fresh *chutney* late one night drives him to fury. He picks up the plate and flings it at Mohan's mother. She picks up the plate, cleans it and sends her son to next door to borrow some chillies. Patiently, she prepares fresh *chutney*, lights the fire, cooks again and sits down to wait for her husband to have his meal. According to Mohan, this tolerance of women is the strength of women. But Jaya thinks differently:

He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw 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).

Mohan's mother and her sister, Vimala, both suffer throughout their lives. But they never utter a single word of protest. Vimala, Mohan's sister, follows her mother in suffering silently. Finally, both of them die in silent agony. But Jaya, being educated and awakened, fails to conform to the views of the women belonging to the older generation. She feels angry when these women conform to tradition.

One thing, however, is common to all these women – they all work hard to maintain their marriage at any cost.

All the marriages in the novel show that marriage is used as a tool in patriarchy to the advantages of men and to suppress women. Tolerance, lack of protest, submissiveness and faithfulness are the qualities that society expects in a woman. Conformity to these norms is appreciated while any deviation from these is considered unwomanly, even immoral. Self-assertion on the part of women is regarded as contrary to these values. A woman aspires to love, respect, and expression of herself in marriage, but she is denied this.

A balanced and purposeful life is not a utopian fancy for a woman if she liberates herself from the stereotyped conditioning of society. A woman's relations with her family must develop within the totality of her life as a woman if there is to be harmony and fulfilment in married life. So, Deshpande seems to give the message that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their own victimization. It is only through self-analysis and self-understanding, through vigilance and courage, they can begin to change their lives. Changes do not happen overnight, but we should not lose hope. As Jaya says:

We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything to know it is this: life has always to be made possible (193).

The Indian Law has come to realize that there are multifaceted problems faced by women in domestic affairs. The Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act (2005) protects women, helps women, and also provides safety to women economically, physically and mentally. We tend to ignore the fact that help is needed from both sides. The abuser needs to go for psychological counselling and should have anger management therapy, while the victim needs counselling to regain her sense of self and individuality, to make her more independent and self-assured. Being an extremely aggressive individual with no control over your emotions do not have to be your destiny, it can be stopped with the application of the right methods and getting the right help.

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