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THE STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM AND FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S *THAT LONG SILENCE*

Ms. Riku Panigrahi

Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Arts and humanities, Sangam University, Bhilwara, Rajasthan, India.

Abstract: That Long Silence presents a compelling psychological and sociocultural study of Shashi Deshpande's female protagonist, Jaya, an educated, middle-class Indian woman, whose life, both as a writer and wife, is constrained by different patriarchal expectations. Although intellectually equipped and aware of the social injustices surrounding her, Jaya finds herself unable to voice her thoughts openly. The contradiction between her potential as a writer and her imposed silence underscores the pervasive control of patriarchal structures over women's self-expression. She extends this theme of silence beyond the protagonist, portraying a lineage of muted female voices: Jaya's mother, grandmother, in-laws, cousin Kusum, and neighbour Mukta, who have all internalized societal norms that demand women's passivity and endurance. The novel thus highlights how generational conditioning, cultural ideologies, and domestic expectations collectively work to suppress women's individuality and agency. This novel is a complex interplay of personal, familial, and societal forces that contribute to Jaya's emotional and creative crisis. Drawing upon feminist literary theory and critical perspectives, including the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, and Indian feminist scholars, the study explores how women's silence has been historically constructed and maintained through both overt and subtle mechanisms of control. Deshpande uses Jaya's story not only to critique the silence imposed on women but also to symbolize the broader struggle of women in postcolonial India to assert their identities, challenge societal norms, and reclaim their narratives.

Keywords: Silence, Women, Patriarchal Society, Dilemma, Resistance, Gender, Self-Identity.

Prologue

"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. It is indeed an achievement."

…. *Shashi Deshpande, Listen to me*

Shashi Deshpande spent nearly six years working on *That Long Silence*, a process she describes as emotionally taxing. While *That Long Silence* isn't autobiographical in terms of specific life events, Deshpande acknowledges that it reflects her inner world of her thoughts and unresolved questions. The novel served as a way for her to express ideas she had struggled to articulate for years and to confront the "dense forest of lies and half-truths" that people often accept in order to navigate life (Deshpande, *Listen to Me*. 2018). The book received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990. Structurally, it is split into four sections and frequently employs flashbacks within a first-person narrative. Commenting on the novel's form, Geethamala observes that "the shifts in time are intricate and resemble a kaleidoscope. The narrative takes a cyclical approach, repeatedly returning to certain characters and incidents to develop a deeper understanding of familial dynamics" (Geethamala,2009). Deshpande also reflects on her choice of narration, stating that after much deliberation, she realized it was essential for the protagonist, Jaya, to narrate the story herself (Deshpande, *Listen to Me*, 2018).

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In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande primarily focuses on the character of Jaya, the central figure of the novel. Jaya, a graduate, is married to Mohan, an engineer, and is the mother of two children, Rahul and Rati. She occasionally writes for magazines, but most of her time is consumed by attending to her husband and children. Although they appear to lead a contented upper-middle-class life in a spacious Churchgate home, the repetitive routine of their seventeen-year marriage has left Jaya emotionally drained. She confesses, "I had often found my family life unendurable" (Deshpande, *That Long Silence,* 1989, 4). She yearns for a change in this mundane existence, even hoping for a disruption that would break the cycle of monotony. Eventually, an unexpected crisis of her "own special disaster" (4) strikes and disrupts their domestic life. The disaster unfolds when Mohan's stable career is threatened due to allegations of unethical practices at work, which lead to a formal inquiry. Fearing exposure, he abandons their luxurious bungalow and relocates with Jaya to her old flat in Dadar. This shift provides Jaya with a rare pause from her routine responsibilities, allowing her to reflect deeply on her life, much like the character of Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (Deshpande, *Roots and Shadows,1983* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors,1990*). As noted, "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" (36). Unlike Indu and Sarita, who voluntarily return to their father's homes for introspection, Jaya's stay in Dadar is not self-initiated. The flat, passed down to her by her brother who inherited it from their mother, who had received it from Jaya's uncle Makarandmama, becomes her temporary refuge. However, she is taken there not by choice, but because Mohan decides to hide there, assuming she would follow him without question. This reinforces how he sees her as someone who will comply without needing to be consulted. While staying in Dadar, Jaya begins comparing her present self with the young woman she once was, a woman with aspirations of studying at Oxford. Through introspection, she recognizes how she has become submissive and voiceless. She identifies a pattern of generational silence among women, including her mother, grandmother, Kusum, and Mukta, the other characters in the novel. As she reflects on her sacrifices for her family, she feels abandoned and disillusioned. Despite fulfilling her duties as wife and mother, she feels like a failure and questions the purpose of her existence. It is through the act of writing and recounting her own story that Jaya begins to undergo a process of self-realization. Similar to Sarita, who finds solace through speaking out, Jaya finds empowerment through writing. Her journey, filled with emotional turmoil, ultimately leads to the rediscovery of her voice and identity. After their marriage, Jaya and Mohan lived briefly in Lohanagar before moving to Dadar due to Mohan's financial constraints. Having grown up in poverty as a Brahmin boy, Mohan's lifelong goal was to escape his deprived background and attain a comfortable life. His ambition was sparked during a childhood visit to Saptagiri, where he

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encountered three sophisticated, English-speaking women. That moment left a lasting impression on him, and as he recalls, "It was here that it all began" (87). Mohan, with his meticulous nature, becomes deeply impressed by three sophisticated women he once saw, and from that moment, he sets a specific standard for his future wife that she must be "educated, cultured" and able to "speak good English" (90). His decision to marry Jaya is based solely on the fact that she meets these criteria. Throughout his life, Mohan remains focused on achieving financial security, pursuing it through both ethical and unethical means. While employed as a Junior Engineer at a cement factory in Lohanagar, he found himself in trouble, prompting an official inquiry. Eager to escape the situation, he made efforts to curry favour with the Chief Engineer to secure a transfer. In his ambition, Mohan even tries to involve Jaya in his career strategy, urging her to establish a personal connection with the engineer's wife so that he could benefit professionally. Eventually, through his manipulation of the chief Engineer he obtains a transfer to Bombay, which allows him to shift into a spacious government bungalow in Churchgate. Despite achieving this level of comfort and stability, Mohan remains unsatisfied. Driven by the fear of reliving his impoverished past, he continues striving for greater wealth and social status, determined to ensure he never faces financial hardship again. Jaya's silence contributes, in part, to Mohan's unethical behaviour. However, Mohan is always determined to achieve his ambitions, Jaya never question or challenge his actions. Instead, like Gandhari in Mahabharata, she blindly follows him without protest. However, Mohan is also a key factor behind Jaya's growing silence. Having been raised in a rigid, patriarchal Brahmin household, he internalizes traditional male dominance from an early age. Unlike the male counterpart in *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, who belong to lower castes something that was predicted to bring unhappiness Mohan and Jaya come from the same caste. Yet, even this doesn't ensure a fulfilling marriage. Jaya, brought up in a progressive family, experienced a very different environment than Mohan. Her parents treated their daughter as equal to their son. Her father believed in her dreams, encouraged her independence, and made her feel "someone special" and "different" (136). He even gave her the name Jaya, meaning "victory" (156). Her mother, too, was modern in her outlook. While others might worry about their daughter's darker complexion, Jaya's mother dismissed such concerns: "Does the colour of one's skin matter?" (93). She had initially opposed Jaya's marriage to Mohan, aware of his family's conservative values: "they're orthodox, old-fashioned people" (94). Over time, Jaya, who began her marriage with a liberal mind-set, gradually adopts silence as a coping mechanism. In the beginning phase of their marriage, once Jaya referring to Mohan's mother as a "cook" that deeply upset Mohan. He couldn't tolerate his wife's assertiveness: "How could you? I never thought my wife could say such things to me. You're my wife…" (82). After this conflict, he gave her the silent treatment, and peace was only restored once Jaya softened her stance and initiated

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reconciliation. She came to understand that expressing strong emotions as a woman was unacceptable to Mohan and could shatter the male ego. "My anger had shattered him," she reflects (82). Jaya became aware of the fragile nature of masculine pride. Her own family had examples of men succumbing to patriarchal pressures. Her father, urged by her grandmother (ajji), gave up his dream of joining Gandhi's ashram and eventually failed in a business venture before marrying and leaving home. Her uncle Chandumama, also yielding to family expectations, abandoned his F.R.C.S. studies, settled for an unsatisfying medical career, married without love, and later engaged in extramarital affairs. These incidents made Jaya cautious. From the argument with Mohan, she realized "to him anger made a woman 'unwomanly'' (83). When Mohan remarked, "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her" (83), Jaya began to suppress her anger, learning "to hold it on a leash" (83). She came to understand what to do to maintain domestic harmony. Observing the strict behavioural code for women in Mohan's household, Jaya noted the contrast with her own upbringing: "I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before" (83). Unlike other women, her mother never trained her for the traditional roles expected of a wife: "she had prepared me for none of the duties of a woman's life" (83). Therefore, Jaya didn't think leaving a button on her husband's shirt unrepaired was a serious issue. To conform, she began modelling herself after the women in Mohan's family, believing this would offer not happiness, but at least a sense of correctness and freedom from guilt: "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). From then on, failing in her assigned duties made her "cringe in guilt" (84), and praise felt like validation: "I almost wag my tail, like a dog that's been patted by its master" (84). After marriage, Jaya hoped for emotional intimacy, but Mohan interpreted marriage in purely functional terms. He never showed interest in understanding her emotions or desires. Their sexual relationship lacked communication or emotional connection, their sex happened in silence. Mohan never sought to know what Jaya wanted, nor did she speak up. After each act, he would simply ask, "Did I hurt you?" and Jaya would respond as expected, "No" (95). As K. Sandhu observes, "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" (qtd.in Sandhu, 2010). The same emotional pattern continues in Jaya and Mohan's marriage for years. One night, when Jaya expresses genuine passion during intimacy, Mohan recoils from her. Like Jayant in *Roots and Shadows*, Mohan retreats emotionally. This rejection leaves Jaya feeling humiliated and alone. That night, she cries silently, not even allowing herself to sob audibly for fear of waking Mohan. He never attempts to understand her desires. As Jaya reflects, "We had never come together, only our bodies had done that" (98).

Over time, silence becomes ingrained in Jaya's behaviour. She chooses to remain quiet even

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when she could speak. She carefully started not to doing things that might upset Mohan, saying, "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). Once, after witnessing the struggles of some Army families, Mohan criticized those husbands for causing their families distress. Later, when Jaya finds herself in a similar situation due to Mohan's actions, she wants to confront him with words but remains silent. Their household is governed by Mohan's decisions, and Jaya simply "went along with him" (25). As she admits, "To know what you want... I have been denied that" (25). She is still unsure of her own desires. Before marriage, Jaya was inquisitive and outspoken. But her paternal grandmother, ajji, warned her that too many questions would make her unsuitable for married life. Now, even though she refrains from asking questions, she still feels no peace: "So many subjects were barred that the silence seemed heavy with uneasiness" (27). Her father, who likes Indian classical music, disapproved Jaya's interest in film songs in her early days, which gained popularity in the 1970s. When he found out, he dismissed her taste: "What poor taste you have, Jaya" (3). The comment made her feel ashamed then, and the feeling lingers. Later, when Mohan tries to reassure her that missing a few movie advertisements isn't a loss, Jaya, who enjoys them, doesn't admit it: "never dared to confess it to him" (3), fearing his judgment would mirror her father's. When Mohan is at a loss about what to do in Dadar, he seeks Jaya's input: "What do you think, Jaya? What do you say?" (31). But she cannot respond. Although Mohan used to urge his relatives to come to him for help to display his influence, when he becomes frustrated with them, exclaiming, "I'm sick of them all" (78), Jaya cannot remind him of his past behaviour. She knows, "his mood was best met with silence" (78). Even when Mohan prioritizes his niece Revati over their own son, Jaya stays quiet. At one point, when she fears Mohan might die, she is too emotionally blocked to express her panic. When Ramukaka shows Jaya a Family Tree, she is surprised that her name isn't included, only to be told it would be in her husband's lineage now. But she notices that married women from her side are missing from the chart. Though she wants to ask about it, she says nothing. By then, she has learned, "No questions, no retorts. Only silence" (143). Jaya once had a story published and even won a prize for it, but Mohan objected to its content, claiming it exposed their private life even though Jaya felt it did no such thing. Mohan was hurt, and though he never directly asked her to stop writing, Jaya felt "ashamed" (144) and gave it up. His pain convinced her she had done something wrong: "I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that" (144). Her fear of causing Mohan emotional harm made her retreat: "scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage" (144). Though she continued writing afterward, it was in a limited, censored way, crafted to avoid offense. She produced content acceptable to societal norms, such as her *Seeta* column, but this brought her no personal satisfaction. Rejections of her work deeply angered her. Seeing this, Kamat advised,

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"Express your anger in your writing" (147). He observed that Jaya was "scared" (148), and though she agreed, she felt she had no alternative. In her world, women weren't allowed to express anger. As she tells Kamat, "Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?" (147). After their marriage, Mohan changes her name to "Suhasini" (15). Over time, Jaya was compelled to transform into this new identity Suhasini, described as "a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped" (15–16). This renaming practice reflects, as Nabar notes, the transfer of "feudal ownership of the woman from father to husband" (Nabar, 1995). Jaya began reading women's magazines that focused solely on how to please men. She even cut her long hair short at Mohan's request, emulating "Mehra's wife" (96). Mohan often encouraged her to dress like upper-class women, and she complied, yet she constantly feared she might fail to please him as a woman: "I had always been apprehensive of not pleasing him as a woman" (96). Like the female sparrow in the fairy tale of *the crow and the sparrow*, Suhasini centered her world around her family. But Jaya now understands the deeper implications of such stories on young girls' psyches teaching them that safety lies in domestic confinement: "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe" (17). But now, Jaya realizes, "Safety is always unattainable. You're never safe" (17).

The silence Jaya maintains is not unique to her; many women resort to it in order to survive within a patriarchal framework. Silence becomes their shield against potential harm. Traditional Indian customs reinforce this submission for instance, wives are expected not to eat until their husbands do. As P.V. Kane outlines, foundational Indian texts assert that "the foremost duty of a wife is to obey her husband and to honour him as her god" (Kane, 1941). Such systems seem to grant men unchecked authority, including verbal abuse and physical violence. Mohan's own father was abusive toward his wife, who, in response, simply carried out her duties in silence. Mohan remembers her stoically, saying, "women in those days were tough" (36), but Jaya sees it differently: "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 also learns from Mohan's sister Vimla that their mother died silently during a botched abortion. Although Vimla sees this as a shameful secret, she too dies in silence, never expressing her pain from an ovarian tumor: "She sank into a coma and died a week later, her silence intact" (39). Similarly, Jeeja, the domestic help in Jaya's Dadar flat, also embodies silent endurance. Childless herself, she is raising the children of her husband's second wife after both parents passed away. She holds no bitterness and tells her stepdaughter about the importance of *kumkum* in a woman's life—accepting patriarchal norms without complaint. Jaya's neighbour, Mukta, is another example of quiet submission. During her husband Arun's life, she fasted for his well-being—a tradition aimed at preventing widowhood. After his death, she continues the fast, not out of belief, but because "changing habits is not so easy."

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When Mukta is consoled during her pregnancy after Arun's death, her relatives assure her that a son will be born who "would be both her solace and her support" (64). Patriarchal culture consistently places men at the centre and relegates women to the margins. Sons are seen as carriers of lineage, family wealth, and security for aging parents. As a result, daughters like Kusum are neglected while sons like Dilip are celebrated. Even Nayana, Jaya's maid, is still trying to conceive a son, reflecting how deeply this belief is ingrained. Social conditioning also enforces gendered labour divisions. Girls are groomed for domestic tasks from an early age while boys are exempt. When someone questions why boys aren't also cleaning and cooking, it's the women who laugh because, culturally, it's been ingrained that "Cooking, cleaning up had exclusively been female operations" (81). As Simone de Beauvoir insightfully observes, "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, 1989).

Jaya's marriage had maintained a steady rhythm for 17 years until Mohan's recent involvement in a workplace scandal disrupted that equilibrium. When he attempts to justify his unethical actions by claiming, "It was for you and the children that I did this" (9), Jaya is left speechless, yet internally finds his reasoning difficult to accept. Indira Bhatt notes 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,2001). Later, Mohan informs her of his decision to relocate to their flat in Dadar, and Jaya follows without protest, echoing the mythologized examples of devoted wives Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi: "So had Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails . . ." (11). What unsettles Jaya most, however, is Mohan's unquestioning assumption "had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans" (11) which forces her to confront her diminished significance in his life. Before marriage, Jaya had been independent and fearless "I'll do just what I want!" (75) and "I was not so full of fears" (76) but now she struggles to recognize any trace of that earlier self. In the Dadar flat, surrounded by time and solitude, she rereads her old diaries only to find that her identity has vanished into the roles of wife and mother. She sarcastically considers titling them *The Diaries of a Sane Housewife* (70). Her sharp observation to Mohan "I know you better than you know yourself" (75) reflects the extent to which her life has been shaped around him. As she reflects on those years, she is disturbed by how trivial they now seem: "the picture of a life spent on such trivialities scared me" (7). More hauntingly, she realizes what is missing from the diaries are her internal cries for help "The agonised cries, 'I can't cope, I can't manage, I can't go on" (70). Their marriage, Jaya concludes, mirrors "A pair of bullocks yoked together" (7) a partnership defined by mutual restraint and sacrifice. When Mohan justifies his dishonesty as being for the family's sake, Jaya suppresses her reaction, recognizing that any confrontation would only aggravate their already tense situation. Once

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again, she chooses silence: "It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful" (12). In this way, Jaya adapts to circumstances carefully, analysing their marriage as "a delicately balanced relationship," where both have "snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel" (7). Although Jaya does not immediately respond verbally to Mohan's inappropriate comment, she conveys her displeasure through her actions. When Mohan asks Jaya to give the key to unlock the door of their Dadar flat, Jaya chooses to do it herself and walks inside, leaving him behind. Mohan follows her without a word. Jaya wonders if this quiet submission is a sign of his resignation: "why else would he have so quietly submitted to my refusal to give him the keys?" (9). The reality is that Mohan is so consumed by the turmoil in his professional life that he barely notices what's happening around him. At another time, a similar act might have provoked a harsher reaction from him. However, Jaya's silent protest fails to make a significant impact on him. He has grown emotionally detached since his career crisis began. Described as a "frightened man" (8), he is now "a sad, bewildered man... obsessed man reconciled to failure" (8). Previously, Mohan was preoccupied with his work, while Jaya devoted herself to her husband, children, and domestic responsibilities. Her life once revolved around her family, but now she realizes that her "career as a wife was in jeopardy" (24–25). Both she and Mohan, once caught in the rhythm of busy lives, now find themselves facing a void. With time suddenly abundant and direction unclear, they grapple with the uncertainty of how to spend their days. They both suffer from a postmodern sense of disorientation: "what are we going to do with ourselves this moment, this day, the next moment, the next day." (24). Mohan expresses his frustration openly: "I must do something. This waiting is getting me down" (30).

For Jaya, however, waiting is nothing new. Women have been conditioned to wait through every stage of life: "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 has been waiting silently like this since her marriage. Although their physical relocation to Dadar may seem like a conclusion for Jaya, Mohan continues to experience internal instability and anxiety about the future. His mental distress affects their relationship deeply. Like Jaya, he is haunted by his own past especially memories of a deprived childhood and difficult family life. During this period of vulnerability, Mohan becomes particularly sensitive. When he learns that Jaya met her brother Ravi, and that Ravi mentioned Mohan's troubles, he reacts with heightened irritation. Despite the conversation being a casual exchange between siblings, Mohan takes it seriously and is upset that Jaya didn't probe further. He accuses her of being apathetic: "You've been totally indifferent. But you've always been this way" (116). The accusation wounds Jaya deeply. When Mohan claims, "I've let you do what you want" (119), she responds bitterly with, "My writing" (119), followed by, "I gave it up because of you" (119). She is stunned by Mohan's claim that she has been negligent

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toward their children and uninvolved in his concerns: "he accused me of not caring for the children, of isolating myself from him and his concerns" (120). Jaya reflects on all she had once hoped to do, take up a job, adopt a child, participate in an anti-price campaign but none of it materialized. Without vocalizing all this, 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). She also feels overwhelmed by Mohan's thinking of her as one of the three women in Saptagiri. Although she is on the verge of losing her composure, she remains silent under the weight of Mohan's anger. The persona she once adopted 'Suhasini,' the ideal, submissive wife, has nearly vanished. Mohan generalizes all women as emotionally detached and confronts Jaya, accusing her of becoming insensible ever since he fell into trouble. He believes she has started treating him differently now that he is not doing well despite him always putting his family first. He even claims that Jaya has never truly cared for him. This accusation deeply unsettles Jaya, making her question what her efforts over the past seventeen years have meant. During her marriage, she received a range of advice: her brother Dinkar urged her, "Be good to Mohan, Jaya" (138); Ramukaka emphasized, "Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you" (138); and Vanitamami warned her that "A husband is like a sheltering tree" (137), and that it's a woman's duty to "keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies" (32). Jaya followed all these instructions in hopes of a happy life, only to be accused by Mohan of indifference. This confrontation pushes Jaya to her limit, and she breaks into uncontrollable laughter: "Laughter bursts out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly" (122). The episode is described as "hysteria" (122). When she regains her composure, she finds Mohan gone he leaves the house in silence and shock. Fearing he might never return, Jaya is overcome with loneliness, despite trying to reassure herself that he will come back: "He was gone" (123).

Jaya's emotional world is also shaped by her relationships with Kusum and Kamat. Against others' wishes, she once stood firmly to care for Kusum, saying, "For the first time in years, I had really fought him" (19). Yet, when she eventually lets Kusum go, Kusum returns to her family home and takes her own life. Her family shows little grief, believing "She was of no use to anyone" (22). This shocks Jaya, making her fear she might meet the same fate if she too becomes "useless." Her empathy for Kusum came from recognizing her own anxieties in Kusum's suffering: "her anguish, her fears, her despair" (23). Jaya's identity was reflected through Kusum's madness: "with Kusum's madness I became aware of my own blessed sanity . . . I was not-Kusum" (24). Like Naren in *Roots and Shadows*, Kamat served as a confidant for Jaya. She could express herself freely with him, and he offered honest feedback on both her writing and her personality. But after the death of Kusum and Kamat, Mohan was all she had left, and now he too has left, leaving her in utter solitude "Alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on a wide wide sea!" (Coleridge,1934). As she waits for

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Mohan's return, her psychological distress intensifies. She begins identifying with Kusum, saying, "I found myself engulfed by the ghost of Kusum, welcoming me to the category of unwanted wives, deserted wives" (125), and even thinks, "we were, both of us rejected by our husbands, our families, failures at everything" (126). When no word comes from Mohan, Jaya begins to imagine he might be dead. These days of Mohan's absence bring emotional turmoil fear, loneliness, and a sense of being abandoned all of which culminate in a psychological shift in Jaya. She realizes that she is no longer the old self, neither Jaya nor the transformed Suhasini. Although, if Mohan returns, she reflects, "We couldn't go on as before. We had come to the end of this road" (127). She acknowledges the lack of honesty and connection in their marriage: "Deception, lies, evasions were this all we were able to offer each other in our years together?" (132). She tries to reassure herself, saying, "I'm Jaya, Jaya for victory" (137), but all she feels is anger and failure especially after sacrificing her identity for Mohan and now finding herself empty: "Nothing. Just emptiness and silence" (144). Then news arrives that her son Rahul has gone missing during his trip to South India. Jaya feels she has failed as a mother too, despite having committed herself to being attentive and loving, unlike her own upbringing. The guilt worsens her emotional state. Overwhelmed, she leaves the flat, aimlessly wanders the streets, and returns home sick and feverish after being caught in the rain. Her fear of being alone deepens. She has always tried to keep her family together, like a sparrow building a safe nest, but she feels she has failed. When things begin to settle, she wonders, "Could we go back to being what we were?" (182), though she has already recognized that "people don't change" (180), which disheartens her. Jaya now feels completely hollow, saying her life feels "as if there were nothing left in my life" (184). In Mohan's absence, her sense of identity collapses: "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). She begins to question herself: "Why had I done that? Why had I suppressed that desperate woman?" (191), and concludes, "I was scared, scared of breaking through that thin veneer of a happy family . . ." (191). But now, having confronted her fears, she finally says, "I'm not afraid anymore. The panic has gone" (191). She accepts that she has failed as both a wife and a mother and let's go of the illusion of a perfect family. Jaya decides to release her hold on Rahul and symbolically breaks free from the confined marital image of "Two bullocks yoked together" (191). She now believes in the possibility of individual freedom and choice. Inspired by the Sanskrit literature that she read from her father's diary, "Yathecchasi tatha kuru" (192)" Do as you desire'—she begins to embrace personal agency. Sumitra Kukreti observes, "The realisation that she can have her own way – yathecchasi tatha kuru that gives a new confidence to Jaya. This is her emancipation" (Qtd. in Sree, 2003). Eventually, Jaya receives a telegram from Mohan indicating his return, but she is no longer the same. She asserts, "It is no longer possible for me. If I have to plug

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that 'hole in the heart,' I will have to speak . . . I will have to erase the silence between us" (192). Jaya however, accepts responsibility for her situation. Although she knows people rarely change, she holds on to the hope that change might still come gradually because without hope, "life would be impossible" (193). Ultimately, she concludes her journey by embracing the truth that "life has always to be made possible" (193). In doing so, a new Jaya is born. While some critics argue that Deshpande doesn't offer direct solutions to the dilemmas presented in her novels, this view is limited. Many people live in despair without even understanding the source of their problems, but Deshpande's characters delve deep into their struggles, seeking clarity and purpose. Identifying a problem is the first step toward healing, and that's precisely what her protagonists achieve. They not only recognize the issues in their lives but also resolve to act. Jaya's decision to confront the silence in her marriage marks a crucial step toward transformation. Deshpande understands the complexity of dismantling entrenched social structures. Thus, she begins with the individual, advocating that reformation must come from within. From there, broader transformation becomes possible. While acknowledging that "people don't change," Deshpande and Jaya both hold on to hope.

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