

**Representation of Indian Women's Lived Experiences: a Reading of *My Story*  
and *That Long Silence***



Inspiring Excellence

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**Representation of Indian Women's Lived Experience: A Reading of *My Story*  
and *That Long Silence***

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	05
Introduction.....	06
<i>My Story: A Conventional Woman's Journey towards Fulfilling Her Yearning for Self Identity and Love.....</i>	14
<i>That Long Silence: Shashi Deshpande's Depiction of Silence and Suffocation in Women's Life.....</i>	28
Conclusion.....	35
Works Cited.....	36

## Abstract

A large number of men have the tendency of objectifying women by thinking that women are nothing but a lump of flesh having no intelligence or ability to cope up with them in the outside world, and thus they should not have any importance in the society. For ages, a number of rules, created by the patriarchal society which is built upon misconceptions regarding women's intelligence, strength and capability, never allowed women to prove their intelligence outside home. In such a society, women are taught not to break barriers and accept their allotted gender roles to break the barriers as they think that life without conflict is comfortable. Women writers have portrayed the lived experiences of women through many literary works where they open up about the subjugation they have to face in order to maintain a life without conflict and struggle. This thesis aims to show the journey of women from childhood where their upbringing shapes their ideologies to fit in the society by silencing their voice, repressing their talent as well as not providing any environment for their true development. Through the selected novels by Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande, I want to show the exploitation of women's individuality in patriarchal Indian society as well as how their exploitation is partially caused by their own choice of not going against patriarchy in order to maintain a safe life. The selected novels are Kamala Das's *My Story* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. Besides these primary resources, I have also taken secondary resources from scholarly journals and articles.

## Introduction

In her book *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir has showed how society which is created by men has a general negative outlook towards women. A large number of men have the tendency of objectifying women by thinking that women are nothing but lumps of flesh that do not have any intelligence or ability to cope up with them in any field of outside world and thus they should not have any importance in the society. To prevent women from realizing their self-worth and individuality, men have created a number of rules that are built upon misconceptions in Indian society regarding women's strength and capability rendering them powerless and inferior. To hinder women, they are being told that they cannot achieve any position or space in the society without helped by men. Men are superior to women and women are expected to remain happy with their allotted inferior position here. Regarding this, Beauvoir says, "She is defined and differentiated with reference to men and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute-she is the other" (22). Thus, a man has self-proclaimed right to dominate woman as he is the 'self', the superior one in the society. The issue of women's subaltern position has also come out in South Asian women's literature. Writers have articulated their experience and opinion on such issues. Among them Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande are worth mentioning. In this paper I want to show how the novels by Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande illustrate women's exploitation in patriarchal Indian societies.

Women's position in Indian is society is pre-destined as the 'other' who should abide by the rules and customs which hinder their mental and intellectual growth. The hindrances that a woman experiences can be found more or less in every society, but some of these are more

severe for South Asian women. In a patriarchal society, men think that women are incapable of facing the danger of the world outside, as they are physically and intellectually weak. Men have the needed practical knowledge of facing the difficulty and complexity of their individual working places. Thus, they have divided the world into two places—the home and the outside world. Regarding it Partha Chatterjee in his article “Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India” says, “ The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one’s inner spiritual self, one’s true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world-and women is its representation” (624). Moreover, most of the families see their daughters as objects to be handed to their in-laws and, hence, they should not be given attention to as much as is given to their sons. Few are lucky to have their parents sticking to their side and approving their daughter’s decision by encouraging and supporting her. The majority of women do not have the chance to explore the outside world like men, as they are trapped in home with their dreams buried under men made restrictions. Regarding it in her article “Patriarchy and the Indian Women-poet”, Roopali Sircar Chibber says, “Women are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness and instead must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them. The ideal woman is seen as passive and docile, and above all a selfless creature” (166). Thus, to be an ideal woman, girls are taught from their childhood to lower their voice while speaking, suppress their desire and to never act against a man’s will. To impose their supreme reign over women, men provided them with the knowledge that woman who talks against or questions the society are monster-women.

When men see a woman as a threat to them and bearer of negativity to their perfect kingdom, they point out that woman as a monster and try to banish her from the embrace of love and happy life. Thus, according to Chibber, monster-woman “[I]s the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, has a story to tell and rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her” (166). Only because she has a different perspective on life and courage to express her opinions, she cannot be the woman that anyone wants to live with. She is neither the angel that men praise and love, nor the inspiration of any poet’s imagination or the role model of other women. Society hates as well as is afraid of her courage and this is why they are not able to be a part of a place where other feminine women have secured their position.

Through the preservation of past events and beliefs, myths carry guidelines to the people of modern age so that they can follow the cultural norms as well as values and live in the society accordingly. Describing the importance of mythical narratives in literary works Jewelina Chowdhury in her article, “Relevance of Ancient Myths in Contemporary Marital Domesticity : A Study in Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*” says, “Though it surpasses the ordinary human world, traditional values in the form of Hindu scriptures dominate the minds of human beings even today. The scriptures emphasize fulfilling obligations of domesticity and make the man-woman partnership in marriage an indissoluble bond, which continues even in contemporary lives” (53). Thus myths also play an important role in shaping the idea that woman who is passive and submissive to the authority of men are always respected, loved and desired by all, whereas rebellious women are unwanted, punished and cursed. For example, in Jewish Mythology, Lilith is a night demon that is known for her extravagant sexual energy and the reason for child death (more accurately infant death). It is said that Lilith is the first wife of Adam who was created with Adam from the same sand. The only difference is that Adam was



created with pure sand but both sand and dirt were used while creating Lilith. She is said to be an independent figure who speaks her mind and values her freedom. Confliction between them rises when Adam wants to authorize his dominance over Lilith by telling her to position her below him during sexual intercourse. Lilith denies his dominance and leaves him. This incident makes her cursed and unwanted. Through her story women learn that to be appreciated, loved and to create a space in this society, they need to be obedient to men's order. On the other hand, Sita in *Ramayana* gains ultimate respect and love from people for her loyalty and obedience towards Raam. Hindu women are expected to be like Sita who will follow her husband in any circumstances and will remain faithful and patient no matter how much she has to suffer.

Myths also influenced the treatment of women in a society both in ancient times and now. These two options of patriarchy are same in a way as this created dominance over women and gave ultimate importance to men to make them the center of attention. Judith E. Walsh in her article "What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice: Rewriting Patriarchy in "Late Nineteenth-Century Bengal"" describes what old patriarchy and new patriarchy mean. She says, "There were after all two patriarchal alternatives available to women in late-nineteenth-century Bengal—an older orthodoxy inscribed in Sanskrit texts which found its lived expression through the customs and hierarchies of extended family life, and a "new patriarchy", inscribed in the nationalist discourse of (among others) advice manuals which was presented to women most frequently through the teachings and person of their husbands" (646-647). Regarding old patriarchy, she also describes how these traditional scriptures shaped and created limitations over women's role in the society in early nineteenth century. Women were forbidden to have knowledge of outer world as well as pleasure of being an individual with dreams and ambitions. Regarding the influence of these orthodox beliefs and practices, Walsh has described the horror

and pain that women had to endure in old patriarchy. She says that these orthodox “[V]iews on women’s conduct and behavior were widely assumed to include practices and beliefs centering around customs such as child marriage, the ban on widow remarriage, the practice of purdah, as well as the general prohibition against women’s literacy” (647). This practice of mistreating and misjudging women has also been illustrated by an unknown traveler who was visiting India in the early nineteenth century. In his journal, he talks about how women were seen as nothing but a lump of flesh that are thought to be have wicked character. They were treated as greedy creatures with irrational thoughts. They were not to be trusted, and thus they had to be under control in every stages of their life by their fathers and husbands. He also writes that for every small wrong action, they were punished by the male members in the family. In his article, Partha Chatterjee includes excerpt of this traveler’s journal to illustrate the severity of ill treatment and misjudgment of women’s ability to the readers. Some of the notable lines of this traveler are, “[A]t no period of life, in no condition of society, should a woman do anything at her mere pleasure. Their fathers, their husbands, their sons, are verily called her protectors; but it is such protection! Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of absolute dependence. A woman, it is affirmed, is never fit for independence, or to be trusted with liberty...” (622). His observation also matched with *The Laws of Manu*. Manu was an orthodox intellectual who wrote a number of scriptures on Hindu customs and how these customs should be followed by every member in the society. To him, women are inferior to men and their only job is child bearing and maintaining home. Judith E. Walsh has included a popular verse from the laws written by Manu in her article where he says, “Her father guards her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth, and her sons guard her in old age. A woman is not fit for independence” (647). Thus old patriarchy was harsh on women to a great extent as women are

denied the freedom to use their capability by not giving them chance on gaining knowledge. They are only taught to become faithful wives to their husbands who could not grow any individuality in front of their dominating patriarchal society. Their only aim should be growing up as a wife like Sita. As Walsh noted, “[I]ndigenous stories equated the good and virtuous wife—the one who through her good conduct brought happiness and prosperity to her husband’s home—with a goddess. In Bengal such a woman was called a grihalakshmi...” (648).

After the British came to conquer India, customs and traditions gradually started to change as British tried to reform the orthodox Hindu society into a modern one where the mistreatment of women were given much importance. To create a position among the British, the Indian men started to mould their appearance and customs. To adopt themselves with British culture, men started to bring changes in their food pattern; clothing style and pay heed to make their wives cultured by educating them. New patriarchy thus started by giving women a little relief from the old customs as they are able to gain knowledge according to their husband’s interest. Though they have the chance to gain knowledge, women were still bound to the rules of maintaining home more than before. As their husbands were failing to stick to their traditional religious customs and its spirit, they made sure that their wife fulfills the duty to the family which men are failed to attend. As men were being dominated by the British ruler in their working place, they made sure that the dominance that they established on their wives is kept intact. Regarding this Partha Chatterjee has says that “The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honor of a new social responsibility, and by associating the task of female emancipation with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination” ( 632). Women started to become fond of the concept of new patriarchy over old patriarchy as it has given them a limited freedom which they

never got in old patriarchy. As I have discussed previously that men started to lose their ultimate dominance in every sector of their working place after the arrival of the British, they started to plan on balancing their position between work place and home. They accepted that women needed to be cultured and refined to become new women who can adopt the new lifestyle but, then again, they should not be more knowledgeable than necessary as they believe that women still are inferior to them. Thus Judith E. Walsh says, “The central concern of new patriarchal constructs was the reformulation of the domestic world, both to create a “new woman” more suited to contemporary life in British India and, simultaneously, to create within the ‘private’ space of home an area of autonomous power and authority for men whose ‘public’ lives were spent under conditions of British domination and control. To achieve these ends manual authors were in agreement on the need for two aspects of the domestic reformulations they proposed: first, that Bengali women must be literate and educated, and second, that within the home, the authority of the husband must be supreme” (650).

Thus through the works of Indian women writers like Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande, this thesis aims to look at the position and role of Indian women in the society. The works that I will focus on are Kamala Das’s autobiographic novel *My Story* (1977) and Shashi Deshpande’s novel *That Long Silence* (1988). This autobiography of Kamala Das reflects the mental trauma of women whose dreams are being shattered from the childhood—the dreams of being appreciated for their opinion and talent, being loved for who they are, being wanted and being desired not only for their feminine body but also as individual human beings. The confessional tone of her novel gives the readers the essence of agony she has endured in search of true love and being cherished for the woman she has become by breaking the barriers of society. Her journey of turning to an independent woman from a submissive woman reflects the

journey of every woman who suffers in silence by being docile as well as those women whose sufferings continue as they failed to cope up with the given roles. Again, In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande portrays ordinary life of Indian women through the character of Jaya who turns to a docile woman after marriage to cope with the aspects of her husband and to play the role of a perfect wife as well as a mother, only to fulfill the expectations of society. Through the walk in a memory lane with Jaya, readers get the reflection of dilemma that modern Indian women have to face as they are torn between following a tradition and silencing their dreams as well as desire to cope. This novel shows the reasons that force a woman to choose silence to prevent conflict in their personal life as well as to secure the role of perfect wife and woman in the eyes of her husband.

Simon de Beauvoir begins her second volume “Lived Experience” of her book *The Second Sex* by saying, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (330). Thus this thesis aims to show the journey of women from childhood where their upbringing shape their ideologies to fit in the society by silencing their voice, hiding their talent as well as forgetting about their own individualistic charisma. It will also focus on how most of the women are not only forced to cope but also choose to cope in order to live a struggle free life. Most of the time a society succeeds to create a mindset in women where they do not fight to break the barriers as they think that a life without conflict is comfortable. Thus, with the selected works, this thesis will show the emptiness of the life of Indian women which is partially caused by their own choice of not going against patriarchy as well as the role that patriarchy plays in silencing their voice so that men can get the privilege of being superior in the society.

## ***My Story: A Conventional Woman's Journey towards Fulfilling Her Yearning for Self Identity and Love***

In the Preface to *My Story* (1977), Kamala Das explains the reasons to write her autobiography that has shocked the entire conservative Malayalam community as she opens up to the readers about the trauma she had faced in her married life as well as her quest for love through various affairs in spite of being a married woman. She says, “*My Story* is my autobiography which I began writing during my first serious bout with heart disease. The doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of a sudden death and, besides, there were all the hospital bills to be taken care of....Between short hours of sleep induced by the drugs given to me by the nurses, I wrote continually, not merely to honor my commitment but because I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets so that I could depart when the time came, with a scrubbed-out conscience...” (Das, Preface). By writing this autobiography she proves that she is an exceptional woman as she is not afraid of the criticism she was receiving from a number of readers and critics. She has created her self-identity as a writer through a number of poems and short stories that represent her trauma, conflict, and yearn for finding true love. Her writings fail to please a lot of people, but she never shows fear of expressing her desire. She also talks about how she does not feel sorry about expressing her individuality and opening about her affairs when her autobiography was published as a series. She says, “The serial had begun to appear in the issues of the journal which flooded the book stalls in Kerala. My relatives were embarrassed. I had disgraced my well-known family by telling my readers that I had fallen love

with a man other than my lawfully wedded husband... This book has cost many things that I held dear but I do not for a moment regret having written it” ( Das, Preface).

Kamala Das (1934-2009) is one of the most distinguished female writers from India who is known for not being afraid to express her genuine desire for true love, sexuality and representing what a woman wants from her marriage as well as life. She explores the incidents of her life through her writings that connect her with her female readers who are facing the equal trauma in their life but never find the courage to express it to others. Regarding her writing Anshu Sailpar in his article “Subjective Identity: A Study of Kamala Das’s *My Story*” says that, “Das tries to unify herself to locate her true existence and identity. She caricatures the male to underline the plight of the female in the world of man and manners. She exposes her own realization of the uselessness of her anger and protest against social patriarchy” (30). Kamala Das was born in a conventional family of Kerala. She used the name Madhavikutty while writing most of her short stories and poems in Malayalam. She also composed a number of her works in English. Besides *My Story*, some of her works in English are: the novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1977), the poetry collections-*Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* (1973), *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing* (1996) and her collection of short stories-*Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992). She was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. She has also received several awards including PEN Poetry Prize and Sahitya Akademi Award for her outstanding performance in writing.

*My story* was first published in Malayalam under the name of *Ente Katha* in 1973. Regarding its sensation among the readers, K. Satchidanandan in his article “Relocating *My Story*” says that, “With its frank and uninhibited handling of feminine desire, it had already created a sensation in Kerala when it was serialized in the popular weekly *Malayalanadu*,

literally shaking up the prudish Malayali reading community used to shoving under the carpet all matters relating to physical intimacy” (vii). It disturbed her family to the extent that her father V.M. Nair who was a powerful Managing Director of the Mathrubhumi group had requested the editor of the weekly to stop publishing it. Nonetheless, Kamala das never paid heed to any of the criticism and obstacles she had in front of her which made it possible to publish it fully. To describe the enchantment of her writing, Satchidanandan also comments that, “The readers of the serialized autobiography were drawn into a charming and intriguing life of love and longing, of desire and disloyalty” (vii).

In this chapter I will explore how Kamala Das has described her personal experiences to show that a woman, too, has desire for love and companionship. She shows that a woman is afraid to let the world know about her sexuality and desire to explore herself in the name of morality that society has burdened her from the childhood. Her story tells her transformation from a child to woman as well as regaining consciousness about her self-identity after being submissive for a long time in her loveless marriage. She also talks about her quest for true love and how much she yearned for fulfilling the hollowness of her mind through love only. She might be misjudged by conventional society but what she only wanted through her life is to be loved genuinely and whole-heartedly by a man that her husband was unable to give her.

The relationship of Kamala Das with her father and mother is not worth mentioning as her parents do not have significant role that would strengthen their bond with Kamala and her only brother. They grew up mostly on their own with the lack of attention and love from their parents. To describe her parents Das says, “My father was always busy with his work at the automobile from where he was employed, selling Rolls Royeces, Humbers and Bentleys to the Indian princes and their relatives. My mother, vague and indifferent, spent her time lying on her



belly on a large four-poster bed, composing poems in Malayalam” (2). These lines show that neither her mother nor her father were the caring figure that children need while growing up. The reason of their absence and effort to make their family bonding stronger might be found in the relationship of her parents. Her mother is forced to marry her father like all the girls of Nair family had to face eventually. They have different personalities and different aspects towards life which failed to create any bond and that also affected Kamala and her brother who yearned for their parents love but never found the affection that could fulfill their expectation. In the second chapter titled “The Park Street Home”, Das says how empty is the relationship of her parents which only stand upon her mother docile nature and ability to cope with her luck. She writes, “My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched. But my mother’s timidity helped to create an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends” (4).

The love that her parents failed to give her was fulfilled to some extent by her grandmother. When The Second World War started to spread panic over people, her father sent her along with her brother in Malabar where their ancestral home called the Nalapat House was located. This house created a great impact in the child Kamala’s mind as she got the chance to explore the nature from a close sight and passed her days under the care of her grandmother. Everything was new to her as she found there none of her white classmates and teacher who used to mock her personality and ability. Growing up in the city as a lonely child, she found village life in Malabar thrilling and loving. Regarding it she says in the chapter titled “The Village School”, “When I joined the elementary school at Punnayurkulam, which was only two furlongs away from the Nalapat House, I felt that I had died a cultural death and was getting reborn into another kind of world where the hard-eyed British were no longer my co-rivals” (18). Here she

started to learn the difference between wrong and right from the point of view of her grandmother. Her grandmother was a religious woman and a strict follower of Mahatma Gandhi like the other members of the Nalapat House. In Chapter four titled “The Nalapat House” she gives description of her grandmother and her lifestyle. She says, “My grandmother spun khadi yarn on a thakli holding it aloft over her head in the afternoon, while the others slept and the old windows cracked in the heat. She was plump, fair-skinned and good-looking. Her throat, whenever I nestled close to her, smelled of sandalwood. She told me of the trip of the ladies of the family once made to Guruvayoor to donate their jewellery to the Harijan Fund” (13). Besides believing in the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi, she was an orthodox woman with high sense of morality. She selected with whom Kamala should associate and whom she should avoid. Her grandmother created and molded the personality of young Kamala and taught her about the rituals and myths of Hindu religion that particularly a good Nair woman has to follow.

Though women in Nair society are seen as powerful but men have the ultimate power to control how a Nair woman should behave in public and how her place is destined in the domestic sphere only. Throughout her autobiography, Das has also criticized this subjugation of women in her family. In chapter six, she has described the relationship between her grand-uncle and grand-aunt which was based only on fulfilling his sexual desire. The understanding and respect that a couple should have between them are absent there and her grand-aunt is fine with it. She says, “I have heard my grand-uncle tell his wife that she was the most empty-headed woman he had known. She used to laugh melodiously at such comments. At night she enslaved him with her voluptuous body. So she could well afford to humor him in the day” (21). Another incident in Chapter eight titled “Matriarchy” shows how men use to objectify women’s body and see them as tools for fulfilling their carnal desire. What is most surprising is that their wives do not find it

humiliating as they have always thought that they are supposed to be treated in that way by their husbands. In this chapter she talks about Lazar and his treatment towards her wives. She says, “Beyond the northern rice fields lived Lazar, the oil seller who drove his white cow and the three women of his house round and round his old mill, to extract oil from the copra and the sesame while he rested, leaning against a tree, abusing them in pornographic language which only amused his victims, for he was always a good provider and they were, by nature, masochistic” (26). These two incidents also justify the sayings of Prof. Shirley Stewert and Sangeetha Rachel Koruth who write in their article “Male-Domination, Identity Quest and Motherhood: A Thematic Study of Selected Works of Kamala Das” that “[D]as narrates the despondent existence of a wife and mother. In this work despite her personal life, she also comprises the anecdotes of other women related to her family, who are subdued under the ideals of a patriarchal society. The woman was a block-head, a sensuous figure that gratifies the man’s sexual ventures” (32).

The word sex was banned from Nair family as they thought that a good Nair woman should not learn this word before marriage, as it could exploit their pure mind and soul. As previously mentioned, Kamala’s grandmother taught her about the teaching of orthodox Hindu scriptures and myths, she also made sure that Kamala should maintain the conventional characteristics of a Nair woman too. Regarding it Kamala mentions in chapter seven titled “The Feudal System”, “No wonder the women of the best Nair families never mentioned sex. It was their principal phobia. They associated it with violence and bloodshed. They had been fed on the stories of Ravana who perished due to his desire for Sita and of Kichaka, who was torn to death by Draupadi’s legal husband Bhima only because he coveted her”. (23). She also says how they are supposed to know about it only in their wedding night which created great shock on many

girls. She says, “It was customary for a Nair girl to marry when she was hardly out of her childhood and it was also customary for the much older husband to give her a rude shock by his sexual haste on the wedding night” (23-24). Though her grandmother had a kind soul, she never supported the maid Kunhukutty who had an illicit affair with the cook and was caught while performing abortion in her room. The cruelty of her grandmother’s decision to punish her by throwing her out of the house shocked Kamala. Priya Menon in her article ““I too call myself I: The Non-normative Subject in Kamala Das’s *My Story*” says that, “Good Nair Women not only follow the norms, but at times they seem to even viciously enforce them” (100). To preserve the purity of home and their rules, Kunhukutty had to pay price as it is a woman whose sin is to be punished. Regarding it Menon also says that, “The ideology of the good Nair woman, who does not transgress societal norms, prohibits the usually charitable grandmother from being sympathetic to the poor Kunhukutty’s cause. For each of them, the tension between the expected liberal humanism from an upper class Nair woman and the reality of a confined existence, creates an ethical crisis for struggle that is finally addressed by Das, who may be seen as a figure of resistance in promotion of her own difference from the group” ( 101). She adores and loves her grandmother but also felt free after her death as the depth of the love for her grandmother kept her away from living a life on her own choice. Her orthodox mentality made Kamala afraid to express her true desire for creating her self- identity to grandmother. She never wanted to hurt her and thus she chose to write under a pen name so that her grandmother would not find about her writings that stirred the readers of Kerala. Thus, when she got the news of her death, she felt a tingled emotion which was mixed with the sadness of losing her as well as a little happiness of being free from that emotional bond. Regarding it, Kamala says in Chapter Twenty Seven titled “Sedation”, “Before the second week of April she passed away. She was orthodox and very

puritanical. I did not wish ever to cause her unhappiness by my unconventional way of thinking. So when I heard that she had died, a part of me rejoiced at my new-found freedom, while another felt only a deep desolation” (107).

From childhood, Kamala wanted to be a lawyer so that she could earn a lot of money and live her life with her own created identity. She loved to be the centre of attention that is admired by all. Thus while performing in various stage dramas along with her brother, she made sure that she could explore various roles that will bring her yearning for freedom and power to reality. Reminiscing one of her most memorable performances where she played as Moghul queen Noor Jehan, she expresses how she loved the responses of the audience regarding her performance. She says in chapter ten titled “A Children’s theatre” that, “I felt intoxicated with the warmth of their response. My brother later congratulated himself for having insisted on giving the role to me against the wishes of other members who had felt that a prettier girl would be more suitable. The prettier one got the part of Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of prince Khurram, and she did display creditable prettiness” (35). These lines show that other than performing as docile characters, she loved challenging roles that also express her unconventional personality to prove her worth in front of the society. Regarding it Stewart and Koruth in their article state that “Das always fantasized a life of luxury and splendor where she can enjoy her individuality, freedom and dictate the public within her ambit. Therefore she always wished to pick up the role of an empress in the plays staged at her ancestral home and wished to become a lawyer inspired by their opulent life. She assumed that money and power would help her to assert her identity as a woman enjoying the same position equivalent to men because in Indian society the very one fact that led to the superiority of male over female is his role as an earning member of the family” (35).

All of her dreams are shattered when she was forced to marry one of her older relatives soon after reaching puberty. After returning into the city life of Calcutta, she started to feel lonely because her parents were indifferent towards them as well as not interested to understand her or her brother's emotions. Though her brother was not bothered by their behavior, Kamala was disturbed by it. Regarding it in chapter nineteen titled "Mother's Long Illness" she says that, "They took us for granted and considered us mere puppets, moving our limbs according to the tugs they gave us. They did not stop for a moment to think that we had personalities that were developing independently like sturdy shoots of the banyan grew out of crevices in the walls of ancient fortresses" (71). Her mother had to stay in Malabar for her illness whereas her father had to live in Calcutta for his job. At this time, her family thought of marrying her off and re-creating the destiny that every woman of her family had to meet with. Regarding this ritual of early marriage in their family, Menon in her article says, "As in the case of Das's family, men regularly controlled women of their family by using the practice of *Marumakkathayam* ,i.e the early arranged marriage of young girls to a much older relative, sometimes as old as or older than their own fathers. Apparently, the Nair patriarchs of the Nalapat family too find their daughter's sexuality valuable assets, a commodity that they exchange with whomever they deem fit, most often with a much older male relative in order to safeguard the family property. Das herself was not exempt from this as she was asked to marry her cousin to appease caste norms" (98). In chapter twenty named "A Brush with Love" when her grandmother told her that she has to follow the rules of her family and did not care for her opinion about this, she realizes that her wishes do not matter as she is a girl. She says, "I was a burden and a responsibility neither my parents nor my grandmother could put up with for long. Therefore, with the blessings of all, our marriage was fixed" (77).

Kamala was not a bit happy with this arranged marriage as her would be husband never showed any interest in knowing her and her dreams. He was only interested with her body as whenever he got the chances before marriage, he focused on forcing her to be undressed and show him her body so that he could touch and satisfy his needs. Rather wanting to get to know and understand each other, he only saw her as a lump of flesh that is bound to obey him every time he needs to satisfy his hunger. This personality of her would be husband made Kamala very disappointed and afraid of this marriage. In chapter twenty one named “An Arranged Marriage” she expresses her discontent in him by saying, “I had expected him to take me in his arms and stroke my face, my hair, my hands and whisper loving words. I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be, and my mother. I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms the loneliness of my life...” (80). These lines express what a woman expects from her husband and these expectations never start with physical relation only. What most of the men failed to understand is that a woman also needs the feeling of love and warmth in her life which her husband is expected to provide her with. All in her life, she searches for a companion with whom she can share her joys as well as sorrows, an understanding partner who could fulfill her and satisfy her thirst for love. Kamala’s parents were happy with the marriage but she was too afraid to express how unhappy she was. She says, “I felt lost and unhappy. I could not tell my father that I hoped for a more tranquil relationship with a hand on my hair and a voice in my ear, telling me that everything was going to be all right for me. I had no need at all for rough hands riding up my skirts or tearing up my brassiere” (80).

Gradually she realized that she has no alternatives other than entering in this relationship where no bond of her dreams can be created. As she is born into a helpless woman who is not

lucky enough to complete her study, she has nowhere to go and start her life independently. She always dreamt of a life full of love and warmth but when the realization hit her, that to maintain her given space in the society, she needs to bear with this loveless marriage. She agrees to go with her family's choice by saying, "My life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives. I was to be the victim of a young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out of our union, there would be born a few children...I would wash my husband's cheap underwear and hang it out to dry in the balcony like some kind of a national flag, with wifely pride..." (81). Through these lines Das expresses the helplessness of Indian women when trapped in an indifferent marriage and forced to living a passive life with mundane routine. She shows how girls are trapped in a marriage where there is no mutual respect. It is no use to show courage as Das does not want to frustrate her family with her unconventional opinion on marriage and thus she accepts her fate by marrying him. The expensive marriage and her father's showing off his wealth made her feel shameful of her own worth. She again realized another truth that, "Marriage meant nothing more than a show of wealth to families like ours. It was enough to proclaim to the friends that the father had spent half a lakh on its preparations. The bride was unimportant and her happiness a minor issue" (82).

The night of her marriage changed her innocent and romantic soul as she faced the brutality of unsuccessful marital rape. Her husband was inconsiderate of her emotions and hurt her throughout the night to please his needs. Kamala failed to satisfy him and that made him lose interest oi her. Though he never tries to understand her, young Kamala somehow fell in love with her husband. In chapter twenty two named "The Brutality of Sex" she talks about the unfair treatment that her husband gives to her and how in the middle of all she felt love for this man. She says, "I was at that time deeply in love with him and would have undergone any torture to be



able to please him, but my body was immature and not ready for love-making. For him such a body was an embarrassment, veteran that he was in the rowdy ways of sex which he had practiced with the maids who worked for his family” (85). Her husband started to stay away from her in the name of work and did not give her any importance at all. She suffered from the pain of her scattered dream of being loved by the man with romantic notions and genuine feelings, and that broke her internally. She says, “At the end of the month, experiencing rejection, jealousy and bitterness I grew old suddenly, my face changed from a child’s to a woman’s and my limbs were sore and fatigued” (85). Gradually she had grown tired of her husband’s lack of interest in her and got involved in numerous infidelities in order to satisfy his physical needs. Kamala felt humiliated and realized that she would never get the genuine love from him as he could never shower her with the intimacy that she yearned for. She started to gain consciousness on the fact that if she wants something truly from her heart, she have to look for it even it is unconventional for her. In chapter twenty three named, “Like a Toy, a Son” she expresses how her humiliation give her epiphany that her husband only married her for her social status and he is not willing to give her the respect of a wife. She says, “I yearned for a kind word, a glance in my direction. It became obvious to me that my husband had wished me to marry him only because of my social status and the possibility of financial gain. A coldness took hold of my heart then. I knew then that if love was what I had looked for in marriage I would have to look it for outside its legal orbit. I wanted to be given an identity that was lovable” (90).

Though she wanted to leave her marriage, she put on the mask of a good housewife by performing household functions perfectly proving the others that she is living a life of a good traditional housewife. In chapter twenty four named “Mental Depression” she says, “Then I settled down to housekeeping and sewed the buttons on and darned our old garments all through

the hot afternoons. In the evening I brought for my husband his tea and a plate of snacks. I kept myself busy with dreary housework while my spirit protested and cried, 'Get out of this trap, escape...'" (93). Her son made her days bearable amidst all depression, trauma and heartache. After the birth of her eldest son, her husband's indifference towards him and Kamala made her lose the little emotional attachment that was left in her mind after she stopped loving her husband. She was only needed when he was stressed of his work loads and that time he used her only as a tool of distraction. In chapter twenty five named "A Desire to Die" she writes, "His nerves were perpetually on edge and I did not once try to argue with him. I let him take my body every night, hoping that the act would relax his nerves and make him tranquil. At night after all had slept, I sat in our tiny sitting room, sobbing and trying hard to believe in a destiny that might change for the better" (97).

Though she had numerous affairs in search of genuine love and care that she never gets from her husband, she never thought of starting new life with her sons only. She has an unconventional point of view on life and love but in the core of her heart she knew that to maintain her position in her family, she could not give up on her lawfully wedded husband as divorcing her husband would throw her out of the secured and sheltered life. She is also afraid because she has a limited education which is not enough for getting a job that could make her financially independent. Regarding it she says, "I did not have the educational qualifications which would have got me a job either. I could not opt for a life of prostitution... I was a misfit everywhere"(97). Moreover, she was mostly afraid of hurting her parents and relatives who never supported divorce in their family. Maintaining her family's reputation that time was important to Das. She says, "My parents and other relatives were obsessed with public opinion and bothered excessively with our society's reaction to any action of an individual. A broken

marriage was as distasteful, as horrifying as an attack of leprosy. If I had at that time listened to the dictates of my conscience and had left my husband, I would have found it impossible to find another who would volunteer to marry me..." (97). Thus the confliction she has faced all along in her married life is relatable to her readers as most of the women choose secured and settled life over uncertainty and negative remarks of society. The dilemmas Das experiences can be related to Simon de Beauvoir's saying, "The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways, but they do not succeed in living the life of a human being" (12). Das wants to be a liberal woman by being self confident and not restricted by a loveless marriage but she could not break the boundary in fear of others' opinion. Thus she chooses to live a dual life. Regarding her negotiations and conflicted mind, Anshu Sailpar in her article "Subjective Identity: A study of Kamala Das's *My Story*" says, "The writer's self-frevents the past and present in a commendable effort to redefine her identity. Her rebellious attitude against the patriarchal world detaches herself from the crisis of identity. On the one hand, she rebelled and broke away from traditions. On the other, she regretted the loss of what she had lost in anger and protest. Her conflict is rooted in her East-West conflict of ideas right from her childhood" (31). Thus, her struggle between breaking the boundaries and staying within her allotted space reflect the life of women who also choose to cope though being trapped in the limitations of society.

### ***That Long Silence: Shashi Deshpande's Depiction of Silence in Women's Life***

Shashi Deshpande portrays the mundane life of housewives who are constantly trying to cope with their surroundings. Through Jaya, Deshpande shows how women are taught to be silent from their childhood and how this lesson of shutting their desires and dreams off creates a huge barrier in their adulthood. Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. In early years of her marriage, she stayed in home to take care of her children but after some years she wanted a change in her life and thus she started studying again by taking a short courses on Journalism. Her writing career began in 1970 and she started with writing short stories at the beginning. She won the Sahitya Akademi award for her novel *That Long Silence* in 1990. Her other notable novels are- *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *If I Die Today*, *Come Up and Be Dead* and *Roots and Shadows*. Regarding Deshpande's writings and her protagonists, Seema Rani in her article "Endemic Imbalance in Marital Relationships: A Study of Female Characters in *That Long silence* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*" says, "Through the protagonists of her novels, she presents the picture of modern, educated young women who are crushed under the weight of male dominated and tradition bound Indian Society" (251). While reading her novels readers can relate themselves with the experiences of her protagonists as she portrays what most of the women can go through; the conflicts and constant worrying of pleasing the patriarchal society in order to please everyone. In *That Long Silence* (1988), Deshpande has represented such dilemmas of modern Indian women through her protagonist Jaya, a brilliant woman who is an English graduate, a writer and a columnist of magazines. Despite of being a sophisticated woman, her husband fail to appreciate her and her creative persona as Jaya in his eyes is none but a woman who maintain his household and family take care of his needs as she is supposed to do as a wife. He never could see what an amazing women she is who also needs his love and

understanding that can erase her despairs. She spend all her marriage life about what will make her husband happy and make her a perfect wife in his eyes but while spending days with Mohan in her Dadar flat after he is suspended from his job, she realizes that in order to please him, she had given up her individuality. At the beginning of the novel, Deshpande sets the tone of their marriage which lacks love, understanding, respect and among all the mental connection with each other. Throughout the novel, the issues of their marriage have come up. The emptiness of her life and failure to achieve her goals has break her confidence as she cannot think about anything rather than being a daughter, wife and mother while talking about herself. Jaya says while introducing her to the readers, “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 live. Maybe this is enough to start off with” (Deshpande 2).

Jaya was born in a sophisticated family in Saptagiri. From childhood her father was the only one who shows her dream to earn big achievements in life. He supported her curious mind while others were disappointed with Jaya as she used to questions a lot about every customs. She had a bubbly personality that time which amuses her father. He sent her to study in convent so that she can study and learn to speak in English which was not approved by others. Her grandmother and mother never appreciate her. They thought women need to speak in soft voice and stop questioning as well as talking back in order to maintain their femininity. While reminiscing, Jaya reveals that once irritated by her personality her grandmother said, “‘I feel sorry for your husband, Jaya, whoever he is’, she had said to me once. ‘What for, ajji?’ ‘Look at you-for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that?’” (27). This comment of her grandmother shows that not only men, women also implanted the rules of patriarchal society on other women. From the childhood they are taught by their

mother, grandmother, aunts and neighbors that women are born to be docile. A good woman should follow what men want; a docile woman who does not question their every decision. We can see that after her father's death, she becomes a burden to her family. They wanted to marry her off without thinking about if she wants to marry that time or not. When she realizes that reducing responsibilities is more important to her Dada than thinking about his sister's aspiration, Jaya felt hurt and agreed to be married to Mohan. She says, "Only later had I come upon them with a painful awareness. Dada had wanted me off his hands; he had wanted to be free of his responsibility for a unmarried younger sister, so that he could go ahead with his own plans...And so Dada had cleverly manoeuvred me into a position from which not marrying Mohan would have been childish, irresponsible and unfair to Dada" (93). Not only burdening a girl with her parents wish, but also preparing a girl from childhood to learn household activities for her husband, to learn to live according to her husband's and in laws wish and destroying their individualistic personality in this process can be seen in most of the families. Before her marriage she is also been taught with the advices by her family members and neighbors to not displease her husband no matter how hard it is. One of the advice comes from her Vanita mami who always used to tell her, "Remember, Jaya,'she had said, 'a husband is like a sheltering tree'" (32). Thus to live under his shelter comfortably, a woman need to cope no matter how neglected she feel. They are also taught that their world is home and their duties are to maintain their home only. Jaya says, "[B]ut for women the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws' home. Wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I got married, I had done nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan to come home, waiting for the children to be born, for them to start school, waiting for them to come home, waiting for the milk, the servant, the lunch-carrier man..." (30). These lines show

that how the life of a woman becomes monotonous and empty as there is no room for her own to think about herself. A woman should not think about herself or give priorities to her desires in order to become an ideal woman, a woman whom patriarchal society would approve. Regarding this upbringing of women that shape their ideologies, Simone de Beauvoir says in the second volume "Lived Experience" of her book *The Second Sex* by saying, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (330). We all are born as a human being but after birth the gender roles of the society does not let a woman grow as a man which destroys the possibilities of a woman to grow up as an individual person.

Though women have many restrictions but it is a woman who has a choice to fight for her right to choose what she wants. In this novel, Deshpande shows that not only Jaya, but also other women that she knows are also suffering in silence in order to keep their family conflict free. They are suffering but they do not want to let their pain to be shown by others especially to their husbands. In her Dadar Flat, Jaya has a maid named Jeeja who is an independent woman as she earns her own bread while her husband does nothing but being drunk with her earned money. She is beaten up by her husband frequently, but she thinks that it is acceptable as she could not give him a male child. She is the one at fault that her husband is an addict. Regarding Jeeja and her acceptance towards her husband's violence Jaya says, "She knew what her purpose in life was-it was to go on living. Enduring was part of it and so she endured all that she had to" (51). She is self-victimizing herself as she thinks that it is a woman's fault if her husband is unhappy. Not only she accepts it but also she scolds her step daughter in law when she wants to talk back in reply to his step son's violence. Jeeja says, "Stop that! Don't forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without that?" (53). Thus, a woman has no position in this

society without their husbands. Their abilities to create their position through their own are ignored by them.

Jaya's husband Mohan is the representation of male supremacy and their dominance over women in a patriarchal society. Mohan is typical male character who thinks that wife should be obedient to their husbands no matter what. After marriage Mohan changed Jaya's name into Suhasini as he thinks that this name has a feminine attribute as Suhashini reminds him of women who are soft, not rebellious and always smiling in any hardship. Jaya's father named her Jaya which stands for victory as he always wanted his daughter to achieve her goals no matter what barriers she has to face. Most of the men oppose this characteristic of a woman who is not afraid to achieve their dreams. They prefer women who are docile and passive. Two of her names show the change of Jaya before and after marriage. Jaya was curious and full of possibilities who never shows fear to speak her mind whereas Mohan's Suhashini is utterly opposite of her old self. Regarding it Jaya says, "And I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well. I can see her now, the Suhashini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped" (16). There is nothing wrong with being a nurturing woman, but it is wrong when a woman has to cope up by giving up her individuality turning into a doll which Jaya has become after her marriage. Mohan thought that a woman has to be tough like his mother who never utters a word even after being treated poorly by her husband. To Mohan true women are those who kept their silence intact. He always felt proud by talking about his mother's hardship and how she never talks back to his father. Though Jaya understands what a man can never understand that how much pain is hidden under that silence of his mother. It is not the respect that shows to her husband, it is her behind her toughness and silence. She says, "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw



despair. 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. I'm a woman and I can understand her better; he's a man and he can't" (37). Mohan could never understand Jaya as he has taken her for granted. She is a wife and she has the duty to understand his agony but though he is the husband he never wanted to know what Jaya wants. As Hindu women are taught the story of Ram and Sita where Sita is the one who follows Ram and has to prove her loyalty by going through different hardships. Not only Sita, the mythical characters and characters from scriptures provide them with the examples of women who obeyed and coped thus they are the ideal women. A woman needs to follow their footsteps for being in the good sight of society. Regarding it Jaya says, "I remember now that he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails..." (11).

She blames her failed writing career to Mohan as Mohan never appreciates her stories as he gets angry thinking that she is writing about their personal life in the name of stories. He advised her to write meddles which is more womanly. Though writing these pieces does not lead her anywhere. She was always happy in front of Mohan by obeying her advice. While calculating the gain and loss of her life throughout the novel she finally realizes that it is not Mohan who has destroyed her writing career. It is her who never fought for fulfilling her dreams; she never took stand on her opinion, or believes on her abilities. She is the one to be blamed for hiding her true persona in the fear of failure of pleasing everyone. Her friend Kamat pointed out it first but Jaya never believed to him then. Regarding her lack of time as an excuse to not write and working on herself he mimicked her by saying, "[i]f only I had the time. But I'm a wife and mother first, my home and children come first to me...blah blah blah." Pah! The fact is your'e

scared....Scared of writing. Scared of failing”” (148). As he pointed out, now she realizes that she has the choice always to fight for what she thinks is right. Thus she understands that to live in a safe place and a conflict free life with Mohan she wronged her own self. Every person has restrictions in their life but it is their choice to choose their path and no one is to blame other for their own choice. Ekta Gupta in her article “Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* : Suffocation of Silence and Dilemma of Indian Women” says, “ Shashi Deshpande’s novel *That Long Silence* is the understanding of women’s silence and it’s suffocation. Jaya internalizes silence as the heritage of her culture. But it continuously sickens her soul. Throughout the novel she tries to calculate the gain and loss of being silent and eventually finds that she always hides her faults behind her relations and responsibilities” (2). These lines reflect the conflict of her mind throughout the novel regarding staying silent in order to cope up with Mohan’s demand but also blaming him for the failure of her writing career silently.

## Conclusion

Through the novels by Kamala Das and Shashi Deshpande, this thesis tried to show that women are always being dominated in a patriarchal society. They are denied their right to grow up as individual human beings, and that the society destroys dreams of many women from their childhood. In this oppressive and masochist society they feel safe only when they hid their dreams and remain silent. In *My Story* Kamala Das shows that to achieve dreams a person need to break the barriers. These barriers are not easy to break as most of the people will always criticize and make fun of whoever wants to bring about a change. If a woman wants to show her potentials to the world and to achieve her dreams, she should not be afraid of anything. She has to stand for herself in order to be remembered as an individual. Shashi Deshapnde, through her novel *That Long Silence*, shows that blaming others for their failure will not lead them into achieving their dreams. Most of the women have coped up with the alleged fact that they are inferior to men and they should only live by what men want. If a woman wants to change her fate, no one will help her if she does not want help herself first. To conclude, I will say that this reflects that in order to ending their sufferings, a woman have to be brave enough to fight for her own dreams.

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