

**STRUGGLE, SUCCUMB OR SUCCEED A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SHASHI  
DESHPANDE'S JAYA AND ANITA NAIR'S RADHA**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Thematic similarities and differences between Anita Nair's Radha from *Mistress* and Shashi Deshpande's Jaya from *That Long Silence* are examined in this research. Both characters have to deal with the limitations placed on them by patriarchal civilisations, yet how they handle these limitations provides a rich commentary on the agency and self-realization of women. The main source of Jaya's struggle is her quiet perseverance inside the confines of a traditional marriage, which betrays her dejection and inner turmoil. Radha, on the other hand, must explicitly challenge society conventions in order to recover her identity and independence. Through a comparative analysis, issues of empowerment, resignation, and resistance are explored. The study focusses on the battles, moments of defeat, and routes to personal success that Deshpande and Nair depict as women's efforts in patriarchal environments. The research clarifies the larger conversation about gender roles and the desire for self-assertion in modern Indian literature through this contrast.

**Keywords:** Shashi Deshpande, Anita Nair, Jaya, Radha, Female agency, Resistance, and Self-realization, Patriarchal culture

**INTRODUCTION:**

The representation of women's lives within patriarchal systems has been a major topic of study in contemporary Indian literature. Anita Nair's *Mistress* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* both present complex portraits of female heroines battling social expectations. In order to better understand the greater themes of female agency, resistance, and self-empowerment, this analysis looks at the responses of the characters Jaya in *That Long Silence* and Radha in *Mistress* to their individual problems. Jaya, personifies the silent perseverance of a woman confined by both personal disappointments and social conventions. Jaya is a character created by Deshpande to represent the nuanced interaction between resistance and resignation in a patriarchal marriage. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, Jaya's silence is a sophisticated coping mechanism for her internalised persecution rather than just being passive. (Mukherjee 124) The conflict between the need for personal fulfilment and fitting into traditional roles is highlighted by Jaya's journey. On the other hand, Radha stands for a more direct challenge to social norms. Radha is portrayed by Anita Nair as a woman who, despite being first constrained by her duty as a devoted wife, eventually aspires to reclaim her identity and follow her passions. Shoma A. Chatterji asserts that Radha's metamorphosis from a subservient spouse to a self-advocating lady represents a paradigm shift in the way women are portrayed as possessing agency. (Chatterji 67) Despite social restraints, Radha's journey demonstrates the possibility of self-assertion and transformation. This analysis intends to show how Deshpande and Nair approach issues of resistance, submission, and empowerment, providing insights into the various ways women negotiate patriarchal hierarchies by contrasting Jaya's hidden struggle with Radha's active pursuit of self-fulfilment.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Meenakshi Mukherjee offers a thorough examination of Jaya's silent perseverance and the thematic subtleties of surrender and resistance in Deshpande's *That Long Silence* in *Realism and Representation: Essays on Contemporary Indian Fiction* (2004). Though she does not limit her

analysis to Nair's writing, she contrasts these themes with the more overt manifestations of agency found in contemporary Indian literature. According to Mittal Gor's analysis in *Jaya's Transformation through Suffering in Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence* (2018), Jaya inherited that long quiet from previous generations of women who had been silenced by patriarchy rather than having chosen it herself. She erases the silence that has killed many generations of women before her, in addition to her own. Unlike other female characters in the book, Jaya resists the patriarchal decision to become a martyr for patriarchy. The analysis of Radha's character in *Mistress* by Shoma A. Chatterji in *Revisiting the Indian Woman in Contemporary Fiction* (2009) emphasises the transformational path from subservience to self-assertion. Her comparison helps to clarify how Jaya's more passive opposition to society standards and Radha's active challenge to them differ.

*Women in Transition: A Study of Feminine Identity in Contemporary Indian Literature*, (2019) by Asha Nair examines how figures such as Radha signify a shift from conventional roles to self-affirmation. Her research offers a comparative framework that aids in placing Jaya's quiet battle in the light of a larger conversation about female empowerment.

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- i. To investigate how Shashi Deshpande's Jaya and Anita Nair's Radha react to social limitations in patriarchal countries;
- ii. To examine how the characters deal with self-realization and resistance, contrasting Radha's overt disobedience with Jaya's inner conflict;
- iii. To investigate the ways in which women recover autonomy within conventional gender norms and assert their identities in settings where men predominate;
- iv. To examine how the writers' critique patriarchal structures and provide a variety of strategies for overcoming gendered oppression in order to depict female empowerment through their protagonists.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The research paper *Struggle, Succumb or Succeed A comparative study of Shashi Deshpande's Jaya and Anita Nair's Radha* employs a qualitative and comparative methodology, emphasising literary analysis to investigate the themes of patriarchal society, female agency, resistance, and self-realization as depicted in two novels. This multi-layered approach provides a nuanced analysis of two renowned female protagonists in contemporary Indian literature, allowing for a thorough comprehension of how Deshpande and Nair depict female agency, resistance, and self-realization.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

Concerning women's place in society, female awareness has long been a divisive topic. Because of their perceived inequity in a variety of areas of life, women have been oppressed, discriminated against, and exploited in a world dominated by men. The intrusive nature of this issue is highlighted by the persistent concern of why women are unable to forge their own identities. Indian English fiction has done a great deal to address the predicament of women caught between tradition and modernity. Over the years, women's struggles in the face of patriarchal authority have been portrayed in Indian English literature, providing insight into their search for identity. Women have always been oppressed by patriarchal ideals, which has made it difficult for them to claim their uniqueness. Women have frequently been denied the ability to freely express their thoughts, feelings, and grief despite social improvements. Prominent Indian novelists have depicted the multifaceted reality of women in their works: Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shobhaa De, Jhumpa Lahiri, Namita Gokhale, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair, Jaishree Misra, and Meena Kandasamy. The difficulties faced by self-reliant, middle-class women in juggling tradition and modernity have been eloquently depicted by these writers. A deliberate change in the roles and values that define female identity is reflected in their

characteristics. The stories highlight the resolve of women to attain parity with males in terms of not just physical attributes but also mental and social standing. However, the social institutions frequently prevent them from having the freedom to express who they really are. In spite of these obstacles, Indian women writers of novels have given voice to their female characters in English literature, empowering them and bringing attention to the shifting nature of gender roles and the changing identity of women in modern society. Dr. Shaily Asthana rightly observes that the key works of this decade's notable writers, including Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhanthi Roy, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, and many more notable names, are periodically evaluated and interpreted by a variety of academics and renowned critics. But given that Indian women novelists were acutely aware of the women's liberation movement, it is evident that the Indian feminist movement was carefully crafted by them. They have, for the most part, depicted women and their tales with awareness of the injustice's society inflicts upon them. (Asthana d412)

### **WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY :**

In the realm of contemporary Indian literature, Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* and Anita Nair's *Mistress* offer compelling explorations of female agency in patriarchal societies. Jaya and Radha, the protagonists, embody the struggles of women trapped between societal expectations and personal desires, reflecting the nuanced dynamics of female resistance and self-realization. Jaya, a middle-class housewife starts to doubt the silence that both society and she have forced upon her following a personal catastrophe. Jaya's internal conflict between her repressed writing aspirations and her responsibilities as a wife and mother characterises her path towards self-awareness. Deshpande emphasises that "the silence that Jaya initially accepts as her fate becomes a metaphor for the internalised oppression faced by women," showing Jaya's awakening as a subtly rebellious gesture." (Nair 104) Jaya's ultimate choice to speak again represents her assertion of agency and her defiance of societal norms that dictate her submission and self-effacement. In a same vein, Radha's existence in *Mistress* is moulded by her conflicting desires and her involvement in a traditional culture that assigns women to specific tasks. Radha rebels against her desire for independence by having an affair with a foreigner. Nair adeptly depicts Radha's ordeal as a representation of the contemporary woman's pursuit of identity within patriarchal limitations, wherein "the clash between societal norms and individual desires is a recurring theme, driving Radha's search for meaning." (Menon 138) The two novels highlight the need for women to strike a careful balance between resistance and conformity on their paths to self-realization. The stories highlight how, despite the constraints placed by patriarchy, women persistently look for ways to exercise their agency and carve out places for self-expression inside constrictive social structures.

### **SILENCE AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE, SURVIVAL AND SELF-REALIZATION:**

Jaya's silence is a complex representation of perseverance, resistance, and ultimately self-realization. The protagonist's internalisation of patriarchal ideals, which define her responsibilities as a wife and mother, is the primary cause of her silence. Deshpande's depiction of Jaya emphasises how women's resistance in patriarchal society is frequently demonstrated by persistence and subdued defiance rather than by outright rebellion. Meenakshi Mukherjee notes that Jaya uses her silence as a potent tool of resistance, subtly expressing her dissatisfaction with the demands that are placed on her. (Mukherjee 124) Jaya's battle with conventional gender norms is closely linked to her silence. She is supposed to put her family's needs ahead of her own goals and ambitions as a wife and mother. Because of the demands placed on her by her role, Jaya represses her uniqueness and avoids conflict. When she considers her unmet writing goals, it is clear that she is experiencing internal conflict: "I was a coward. I had nothing to say to anybody. It was safer to say nothing at all." (Deshpande 36) This self-evaluation demonstrates that although Jaya's silence is a defensive strategy, it also stems from her internalised fear. According to Nityanandam, Jaya's silence has drawn criticism for serving

as an example of how women internalise patriarchal ideals and suppress their own wants. (Nityanandam 42) Jaya's perseverance goes beyond simple acceptance; it's a means of surviving the inflexible constraints of patriarchal norms. Jaya uses her quiet as a kind of emotional fortitude, enabling her to get by in a situation when being herself would cause her family or friends to reject her. Her quiet in this situation is representative of the internalised oppression that many women go through, where resistance is nullified by the necessity of surviving in a dangerous setting. Jaya admits, "To keep the peace, I suppressed my thoughts, my desires, and became the wife and mother they wanted me to be." (Deshpande 82) This admission of her self-effacement illustrates how deeply established society rules have become in her mind. Jaya's silent, though, is a reflection of her internal struggle between her private and public identities as well as an act of submission. Jaya's silence, in M. Rao's opinion, both indicates her internalised acceptance of society's repressive demands and serves as a kind of resistance against them. (Rao 56) Jaya's character revolves around this paradox: she both opposes and supports the systems that oppress her. Her quiet turns into a negotiation in which she mutes her voice to meet expectations but quietly rebels via her unsaid frustrations and ideas. *That Long Silence* presents Jaya's quiet as a coping mechanism that furthers her estrangement and unrealised potential. She starts to wonder if keeping quiet has actually helped her survive or if it has just made her oppression worse. As she considers the cause of her quiet and her dread of speaking up, it is clear that she is going through an internal struggle. Jaya's journey sheds light on the intricate connection between internalised injustice, perseverance, and silence for women in patriarchal systems. Her quiet serves as a metaphor for the difficulty women have in juggling their needs with those of society. Deshpande's depiction of Jaya illuminates the unsung battles faced by women in patriarchal systems and the ways in which they rebel against them. Though Jaya's silence at first seems passive, it soon becomes clear that it is actually a subdued form of resistance. Her silence allows her to quietly express her unhappiness while navigating the harsh institutions of her life. Mukherjee claims that Jaya deliberately chose to remain silent, expressing her reluctance to overtly challenge the patriarchal system while gradually developing her sense of self. (Mukherjee 126) Deshpande uses the concept of silence to symbolise the hidden struggles of women like Jaya, who, rather than overtly defying patriarchal conventions, defy them with silent perseverance and thought. Jaya's decision to remain silent is also a survival tactic in a culture that forbids women from having an open dialogue about their feelings. Her quiet acts as a deterrent as much as a covering. She is shielded from the negative effects of defying social standards on the one hand, while her own potential is not completely realised on the other. Jaya starts to recognise her role in maintaining her own oppression as she starts to comprehend the duality of her silence. Jaya discloses: "I had deliberately created a comfort zone for myself, a zone of silence that insulated me from the world and its expectations." (Deshpande 98) This insight represents a turning moment in Jaya's development. She starts to realise that while being quiet has helped her to preserve the status quo, it has also prevented her from claiming who she really is. At the book's conclusion, she makes the hesitant but important choice to "break the silence" in order to regain her agency and voice. But rather than being a dramatic act of defiance, her breaking of the silence is a subdued declaration of her wish to be acknowledged and heard within the confines of her social environment.

Jaya's silence in *That Long Silence* is a nuanced representation of resistance by perseverance. Deshpande skilfully conveys the complexities of women's existence in patriarchal cultures, where keeping quiet may be a tactic for resistance as well as a means of survival. The difficulties faced by many women who attempt to preserve their individuality while navigating restrictive structures are reflected in Jaya's path from silence to self-realization.

#### **RADHA'S DEFIANCE: ASSERTION OF DESIRES AND IDENTITY:**

Radha's character in Anita Nair's *Mistress* represents a defiant attitude towards patriarchal standards, in contrast to Jaya's quiet perseverance in Shashi Deshpande's film. Radha's journey is characterised by her audacious declaration of her aspirations and her redefining of her identity, which reflects a

contemporary mentality that challenges conventional gender norms. In contrast to Jaya, whose quiet and perseverance represent internalised tyranny, Radha's story is one of outspoken defiance, in which she reclaims her autonomy and happiness by confronting the demands placed on her as a wife and a woman. At first, Radha's disobedience is hidden behind her duty as a devoted wife in an unhappy marriage. She's trapped in a relationship that stifles her uniqueness and she starts to realise how unfulfilled her dreams and goals are. Her eventual transition is paved by her discontent with her marriage. Radha's relationship with Chris, a foreigner who serves as both a catalyst and a symbol of her rebellion, marks a turning point in her journey. Her relationship with him is a rejection of the social conventions that have kept her imprisoned as well as an act of infidelity. Radha contemplates: "For once, I had the audacity to be myself. To be desired for who I am, not for the roles I play." (Nair 232) Radha's identity has significantly changed as a result of this insight, moving from one of a passive conformist to an active participant in her own life. A big part of Radha's disobedience is her rejection of the roles that have been assigned to her. Unlike Jaya, who feels guilty and anxious about her unfulfilled goals, Radha embraces her desire for self-actualization. Shoma Chatterji notes that Radha's declaration of her own wishes shows a dramatic change from submission to active resistance, signifying the modern Indian woman's empowerment. (Chatterji 67) When Radha chooses to prioritise her happiness over societal norms, she redefines her identity in accordance with her own criteria. Her disobedience is not simply an act of rebellion but also a conscious decision to follow her own path in defiance of social pressures. In Radha's story, the conflict between obligation and self-fulfilment is a major topic. Her persona challenges the conventional wisdom that holds that a woman's identity is determined by her connections with other people, whether or not she is a wife, mother, or daughter. Radha muses: "For years, I had been playing a role, fitting myself into molds created by others. But I was suffocating within those roles. It was time to break free." (Nair 305) Her resolve to recover her identity is demonstrated by her admission of the limitations placed on her by society norms. Radha's journey is distinguished by her bravery in accepting the results of her decisions. Radha is defiant and willing to face the consequences of her actions, in contrast to Jaya, who is stuck in her quiet and internalised acquiescence. According to S. Banerjee, Radha's story offers a potent reflection on how Indian women's lives are evolving and how the need for personal autonomy and self-fulfilment is challenging societal norms. (Banerjee 58) Thus, her defiance represents more than just her refusal to comply with patriarchal conventions; it also represents her right to determine her own course in life, even if it deviates from accepted social standards. Radha's bond with Chris serves as a symbol of her larger defiance of patriarchal control. Her romance with Chris represents the possibility of a life where she can freely express her wants, while her marriage represents the restrictive systems she aspires to escape. Anita Nair describes: "In Chris's gaze, Radha found a reflection of herself—untethered, unjudged, and unafraid." (Nair 278) Radha may explore her wants in this relationship without having to worry about what other people think of her, which helps her to re-establish herself as a confident and independent woman. Radha's disobedience in *Mistress* highlights the transition from subservience to self-assertion and serves as an audacious rejection of patriarchal conventions. In contrast to Jaya, whose quiet is a symbol of internalised tyranny, Radha's story is one of proactive defiance and independent reclamation. Her persona represents the fight for independence and the will to live a true life, signifying the empowerment of the contemporary Indian woman who defies conventional norms. Although they both experience patriarchal oppression, Jaya and Radha have different strategies for overcoming it and different routes to self-realization. Radha's journey is external, characterised by active disobedience and a need for self-expression, whereas Jaya's is inward, based in reflection and subtly defying authority. Jaya's restrained and circumspect resistance is indicative of the concessions that women frequently make inside of established organisations. However, Radha's disobedience highlights a departure from traditional roles and the potential for self-realization through individual initiative.

**CONCLUSION:**

Although they both experience patriarchal oppression, Jaya and Radha have different strategies for overcoming it and different routes to self-realization. Radha's journey is external, characterised by active disobedience and a need for self-expression, whereas Jaya's is inward, based in reflection and subtly defying authority. Jaya's restrained and circumspect resistance is indicative of the concessions that women frequently make inside of established organisations. However, Radha's disobedience highlights a departure from traditional roles and the potential for self-realization through individual initiative.

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