

That Long Silence: Summary

The narrative depicts the story of Jaya and Mohan Kulkarni through the ups and downs of their married life. They are obviously an incompatible couple, aptly described by Jaya as "two bulls yoked together" trying to pull in the same direction so as to avoid causing "pain" to each other, and most of the effort made being made by Jaya in keeping the marriage going.

Jaya, meaning victory, comes from an educated, enlightened middle-class family from Ambegaon. She is convent-educated, English-speaking and cultured, a girl who has been encouraged by her father to develop and behave as an individual from her early childhood as against those girls who have been brought up in a traditional, orthodox manner by their parents and nurtured on the maxim that their "destiny" is marriage. The concept of the husband being "a sheltering tree" has been ingrained in them and they have been taught to do everything in their power to make a success of marriage in the oppressive and male-dominated patriarchal society.

Mohan, on the other hand, has been brought up in a poor, deprived household ruled by his dominating and demanding father. His mother and sister have all alone suffered silently in the patriarchal set-up of Indian society. He wants to rise above his background and roots and marry a convent-educated, English-speaking and cultured woman when he rises above his lowly station in life through education and tireless efforts. So when he gets a job as a Junior Engineer in the Lohanagar steel plant, he loses no time in getting married to Jaya as she conforms to his ideal of a wife. Jaya's family considers it a good match and everyone tries his/her best to offer what they consider meaningful advice to Jaya on how to keep her husband happy at all costs.

That Long Silence

Jaya marries Mohan with stars in her eyes. But love and romance soon fly out of the window when she discovers Mohan to be a typical male chauvinist whose sole responsibility is to be the "provider" to the family and ensure them a life of comfort and luxury – something he has never experienced as a child. In course of time, Jaya comes to accept his domination and suppresses her emotions and feelings, their

place having been taken by a long, protracted silence. She loses her individuality and becomes the stereotype middle-class housewife whose sole aim in life is to keep her husband contented and her children happy. "No questions, no retorts" has guided in her relations with Mohan for the past seventeen years.

Jaya maintains silence when Mohan is involved in a malpractice after he is transferred from Lohanagar to Bombay. An inquiry is set up against him and his boss advises him to make himself "unavailable" for some time. So the family shifts from their comfortable Churchgate home to the dingy and filthy Dadar flat, gifted to Jaya by her elder brother Dinkar who has settled abroad with his wife. Mohan is certain that the storm would blow over soon and he will be reinstated, but he feels insecure and restless inside. He keeps assuring Jaya that whatever he has done is for her and for the children. Jaya maintains her dignified silence as she settles in her new environs and starts searching for her own entity and individuality that she has lost through marriage and motherhood. She cultivates the role of playing a perfect wife and mother "flawlessly, word perfect" by yielding to Mohan's "desires, his approval and his love".

Torn Between Self-Introspection and Love

Mohan leaves Jaya after an altercation and Jaya joins the ranks of middle-class deserted, unwanted wives – a species she has seen around her since childhood (Kusum) and now finds in her neighbourhood as well (Mukta, Nayana and Jeeja). She starts self-introspecting while missing Mohan all the while.

What else could I call it but love when I thought of how I longed for his physical presence, when I remembered how readily, almost greedily, I had responded to his touch. What else could I name it when I thought of the agony it had been to me without him, when his desires, his approval, his love, had seemed to me the most important thing in my life?

Jaya recalls, Vanitamami's pithy maxim of a husband being "a sheltering tree" in a woman's life and Ramukaka's advice, "Remember, Jaya, the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you." Her Dada had also instructed her, "Be good to Mohan." So when she receives an "All well" telegram from Mohan, who being insensitive had also curtailed her writing career, Jaya decides to have another try at making her marriage function. She hopes that she will succeed because "without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this, life has always to be made possible."