The study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence reveal the plight of Indian woman in a tradition bound patriarchal hegemonic society. Shashi Deshpande tries to show different segments of a woman’s life through various women characters in the novel. This paper will look into the different range of feminine emotions starting from the pangs of a growing up girl to the void that is created because of the non fulfillment of a woman’s yearnings that the novel deals with.

KEYWORDS
Shashi Deshpande, wide women emotions, protest, submission, awareness
In that above passage the process of giving birth is juxtaposed and merged with the process of self-realization and expression. The passage can be divided into the three phases of Elaine Showalter. The stage when ‘language falls away’ is the feminine stage, where a woman silently succumbs to the conventions and norms. Then comes the feminist stage of self-protest, where uterine wall breaks and the knowledge and realization of hollow existence comes into the woman. Finally, the last is the female stage, in which the body becomes a mouth, Like a child comes out of the body, words from the mouth, the woman finally speaks out in protest.

Becoming a mother is the best of all the gifts god has endowed on one half of the living beings but at the same time children are not the identities of women. Women like Vanitamami are always desperate to give themselves an identity through the domestic and childbearing roles allotted to them. Mukta's fasts reminds Jaya of Vanitamami's puja's and fasts: “Perhaps Vanitamami had begun the discipline when there had still been the hope in her of having children; but she had gone on with her fasts, her ritual circumambulations of the tulsi plant, peepul tree, even when their aim had gone beyond her reach, when her uterus has shriveled and her ovaries atrophied” (67). But as Jaya points out, the irony is that the uterus which could not carry the child finally carries death. Vanitamami eventually suffers from cancer. The actual fact is that the conservative Indian society believes that the sole purpose of a woman's birth is to fulfill her conjugal duty by giving birth to an heir who can carry her husband's name forward and thus a woman who doesn't succeeds in doing so is just a curse for the family.

Jeeja's inability to deliver a child makes her husband remarry. Jeeja is Jaya's maid and what is surprising is that the later does not protest against her husband's act because she thinks that she has wronged him by not giving a child. Jeeja laments: “God didn’t give us any children- that was his misfortune as well as mine. How could I blame him for marring again when I couldn’t give him any children? How could I blame that woman for marrying him? With whom shall I be angry?” (52). Nayana, on the other hand, has already given birth to four children yet her husband threatens her: “[...] he says he'll throw me out” (28) because the two boys soon died after their birth and only the girls survived. She like Jeeja cannot stop him from getting another woman but retaliates by saying: “Take yourself another woman if you want, roll in the guts, I can’t prevent you, but just you try to throw me out of this house, [...]” (28). The hidden reality behind this statement is that Nayana, a mere sweeper is helpless and fears the absence of ‘the sheltering tree’ as she knows that in India a woman ‘left’ by her husband neither gets shelter anywhere else nor is safe. Men do anything in the name of progeny and that too like Jeeja and Nayana's husbands who as it is do not have a name to speak still women like Jeeja, Nayana can not even imagine their life without their husbands. Therefore, Jeeja scolds Tara, her daughter-in-law when the later curses her own husband: “So many drunkard die, she cried, but this one won't. He'll torture us all to death instead” (53). Jeeja retorts: “Stop that! Don't forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is a woman without it?” (53). If kumkum is everything than what does it gives to Mohan's mother, Avva?

Kumkum gives death, a slow and silent one to Avva. Jaya gives a description of Avva's photo hanged on the walls of Mohan's father's home: “The mother look like any other woman of her time, staring blank-faced at the world, the huge kumkum on her forehead blotting out everything in that face but the ‘blessed woman who died with her husband yet living’” (38). Avva's worth in her house was no more than a piece of furniture, which was used when and the way her husband desired. Washing, cleaning, doing menial works of the house and producing children were the only things kumkum gave her. She constantly suffered because of her husband. Mohan proudly says to Jaya that “My mother have raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her [...]” (83). Mohan does not realize that she did not use to do it out of respect for her husband but because when self respect dwindles, pain or shame is not felt. It was just a week before her death that Avva for the first and the last time cried, shouted, shrieked as if trying to release her pent up frustration, anger and silence.

Silence killed Avva as well as Vimala, Mohan's sister. Vimala never told anyone about her suffering and Jaya recalls, “‘Why didn't she tell us? Why didn't she write to me?’ Mohan had cried out; but Vimala never gave us an answer, even to that question. She sank into coma and died a week later, her silence intact” (39). Vimala never discussed her problem with anyone because she knew that a solution to it can never be found in a society where a woman without child is considered to be a blot and thus bleeds herself to death in silence.

Asha, Jaya's sister-in-law is not meek like Vimala. Ravi, her husband is a man who lives by “drifting on the edge of dishonesty” (110) and does not have a permanent job. Asha and Ravi often quarrel but Jaya knows that their quarrels “in some way are unwarranted by marriage” (109), that is, the duty of ‘traditional’ Hindu wife could never force Asha to put her self respect at stake. Asha is courageous but this courage also stems from the fact that she enjoys the support of her father. Her father does not believe in the conventional notion of considering daughter to be a sheer responsibility. Ravi wants Jaya to instruct Asha: “Go home like a good girl, Asha, I should say. Go back home and obey your husband. And never mind whatever it is he has done, he's your husband, after all, and a husband can do no wrong” (115). However Asha is not a woman who ‘shrugs herself into her housecoat’.

Leena, Jaya's college friend is even more radical: “[...] she spent her weekends with a married man” (141). Jaya had chucked her in the college, thinking her to be a bad girl. Now years later when Jaya thinks over it, she concludes that Leena was not bad. When men can have illegitimate affairs why women's actions can't be considered with a greater understanding and flexibility. Jaya writes an apologia for Leena: “I'm sorry, Leena, I was stupid, naïve, ignorant, I was a narrow-minded idiot and the kind of person you were was beyond my comprehension then. Forgive me, Leena, I didn't intend to be cruel” (141). As in the college, today also Leena successfully pulls her out of, ‘ugly, self-hating despair’.

Shashi Deshpande is undoubtedly a writer who looked into problems of women. She charts women emotions starting from the pangs of a growing up girl to the void created because of the non fulfillment of a woman's yearnings.

REFERENCES