

**Rewriting Indian Women:
A Study of the Novels of Shashi Deshpande**

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Women have been victims of exploitation and oppression in patriarchal power structure since time immemorial. At present feminist movements, representations and discourses are goading towards women's emancipation. The domain of creative writing has become a niche for women to get actual and virtual representation. Shashi Deshpande is one of the many writers who have taken up the endeavour to represent the realities and actualities of women's lives. In order to show women's inheritance of oppression I have taken refuge to historical study. So in the introduction I have dealt with women's subjugation, their participation in the political struggles during colonial period and the status of women after independence in India. To raise women from their deplorable condition had been one of the major concerns for the reformers of the nineteenth century. Though women also participated in large numbers in India's struggle for freedom there was absence of consciousness among them to address certain issues related to them independently to ensure a better life. After independence women got equal rights in the Constitution. In reality equal rights remained a myth though provisions for education and employment have been certainly increased over the years.

I have taken up six of Deshpande's novels to show the particular oppressions and resistance that women face since childhood. Deshpande has presented women in transition who want to be free from the shackles of traditional mythic culture of India and become a new confident woman with a niche of her own. Women's resistance towards oppressive patriarchy has been presented in these novels. Deshpande's women question tradition and move towards a new dawn by gaining confidence through experience. Her perspective on the unequal position of women in India becomes vivid through her heroines. Her women are not home breakers or radicals to break away from the relationships. They rather remain within bonds and try to touch the shore of happiness by bonding with their husbands. The novels show how oppression is still pervasive in women's lives in India.

Her women show how life has to be made possible. They demonstrate how life becomes meaningful in the living of it and not in the escaping from it. Women's inner strength, their insightful reflections on life and their patience in time of crisis can lead them to their

cherished domain. Therefore Deshpande is rewriting Indian women's life and experience to show how even today they are the victims of patriarchy. She also delineates how present day women survive the discriminations and emerge victorious.

I deem it to be my proud privilege to carry on my research work under the supervision of Dr. G. N. Ray, Prof. of English, University of North Bengal. Without his necessary guidance, invaluable counselling and patient checking at every step of my work this project could not have seen the daylight. I am also grateful to his wife, Dr. Niyati Ray for the warm hospitality she has always extended to me.

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Shashi Deshpande is one of the large numbers of women writers who have taken up their pens to create the world of women. As a result the protagonists in Deshpande's novels are all women. It is their outlook, their perspective that is projected. Obviously all these women are in relationships which Deshpande has delineated. Deshpande presents relationships as they are but the stream of consciousness of her heroines makes it clear how gender-oriented norms and taboos mark their experiences. All her novels are but unmasking of patriarchy in different garbs. They extend to the readers an insight into the characters voicing resistance against the different facets of patriarchy. Her profound perception and her shared feelings for being a woman have made it possible to bring her point home. She is well aware of the ways a woman is viewed in Indian culture and society. Her intervention into the cultural and social representation of woman makes her take an active role to decode the traditional images of women. Therefore she engages in re-inscribing the images of the passive and watched women. Her principal focus is on sexual and domestic structures that uphold a particularly coercive order. Women's subjection to different forms of social control marginalizes them but her characters succeed in recognizing the need for asserting their true selves. Her novels are but open-ended explorations of women's experiences which help to understand the lived experience of Indian women. They also provide basic information about Indian women which help the readers to situate and understand the dynamics of emergent Indian women in transition in a better way. This gets attested in Deshpande's use of cultural myths which are venerated through generations. Her women confront them, deconstruct them and manage to squeeze their meanings which can be validated in the present context and situation. Deshpande interrogates the subjectivity of women and projects the emerging women in her discourses. Women's subjectivity as a daughter, wife and mother may be found in Indian culture since ancient times. Indian society still remains basically patriarchal. At present interventions like Deshpande's prove that women no longer want to remain in their subjected position. The desire to do away with the shackles of 'good-wifeness' syndrome was also there since ancient times as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out:

If we seek a more radical repudiation of the entire syndrome of 'good wifehood' of which the act of Sati is only an item, we shall find it in the lives and works of the women *Bhakta* poets of India. These women-saints, mystics, poets- had to make life-choices: their devotion to god came into conflict with their sexuality and with the life of domesticity, both of which were normally regulated by the institution of marriage. They resolved this conflict by either bypassing marriage altogether, or once married, opting out of marital commitment. Here too we must be careful not to read their poetry as feminist credos. The ideological structure of the man-woman relationship is not itself displaced; the god of these women poets is male, cast as lover, husband, father or child, frequently indeed the first two, so that a highly eroticized idiom is brought into play. Nevertheless, as Madhu Kishwar has pointed out, *bhakti* did make a 'social space' available for women 'outrageously defied what are ordinarily considered the fundamental tenets of *stri dharma* [women's duty] - marriage and motherhood (Rajan 1980: 59).

Marriage and motherhood still baffle Indian women. They are strained by the conflict between male chauvinism and the feminist ideal for equal partnership. Deshpande was moved by the pervasive inequality that exists in our society. Her attempts are to recognize them in order to understand the relationship of women to men. She expressed her feelings vehemently as dismissal of women's experiences moved her. Her novels therefore became acknowledgements of women's experiences. Deshpande represents women's thought process, subversion and their recognition of selves. She portrays assertive women who fight patriarchy and agencies of patriarchy like stereotype women representing patriarchy.

Feminism and Deshpande

Deshpande's novels are not protestations of feminism as she herself says Feminism is not her subject as a movement. Still feminism works in her novels in a different way:

If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy – the weight of that long silence of one-half the world.
(Elizabeth Robins, in a speech to the WWSL, 1907)

Thus goes the epigraph of *That Long Silence*. And this only speaks volumes of Deshpande as a novelist. Though Deshpande is of the opinion that she writes without any specific agenda, she herself points out: 'But my ideology is going to permeate my writing; and my feelings, thoughts and ideas about women are very important parts of my ideology' (Naik 2005: 228).

As a consequence all the protagonists of her novels are educated, urban middle-class women. The reason she points out is – 'the people I know best are middle class'. That she pens the educated urban middle class woman is further clear from her own words: 'There are three things in my early life that have shaped me as a writer. These are: That my father was a writer, that I was educated exclusively in English and that I was born a female' (Deshpande 1996: 107).

Yet Deshpande has vehemently protested to be tagged as a feminist writer or a woman writer for she thinks she is interested in human relationships, not just women. But very recently she has expressed that it took her time to accept that she is a feminist writer or she is voicing forth woman's cause in her novels. As she says:

I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it (Deshpande 1983: 26).

Her idea about feminism is clearer when she says:

Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is different to apply Kate Millett or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it (Deshpande 1983: 26).

Thus Deshpande cannot be categorized as a feminist writer in the usual Western sense. She writes her novels to explore the experiences of woman and not to uphold women's liberation movement. In other words, her novels are articulations of womanhood in Indian context not banners of feminism. She is acutely conscious of gender inequality and suppression of women's individuality. Her acute awareness of the unequal position of women in society is apparent in her own words about her writing:

Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing roles enjoined on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing very clearly woman's writing (Deshpande 1996: 99).

Therefore, her protagonists are made to revolt against the age-old domination, discrimination and subordination. What is interesting and thought-provoking is the way they deal with their lives. They do not walk out on their husband and children rather they unite with the family with renewed courage and clear conception about the intricate nature of relationships. Deshpande chose to write about the experiences of life through the eyes of her protagonists. As the protagonists are women their experiences as women became indispensable for the novels. Though the experiences of her protagonists differ from each other they all are entangled with same problem of being subservient. This is the result of male chauvinism in the patriarchal society of India where women are treated as the 'Other'. A woman has to play certain roles at different stages of life remaining oblivious of her true self. Deshpande shows how modern educated urban women have tried to shake off the shackles of tradition and social taboos. Their education and experience have enabled them to assert their autonomy. Their indomitable spirits have helped them conquer many of their social impediments.

In the subsequent chapters I have tried to examine how Deshpande has projected Indian women in her novels. How in spite of her vehement protest to be a feminist writer in particular she has articulated characters who speak of Virginia Woolf and Betty Freidan. All her characters are victims of social injustice prevalent in Indian society. The

predicament of her characters is portrayed with graphic reality. Through her novels I would also try to investigate the particular discriminations that women face and resistance that women put up in Indian society. Though she has undertaken educated urban middleclass characters as her heroines, they seem to represent the women of India in general. Their experiences, feelings, thoughts are what every woman faces from childhood onwards.

In order to demonstrate how Shashi Deshpande is rewriting Indian woman it would be relevant to trace Indian woman's image in the historical context. Before it is done in case of India in particular, a general reference to the evolving discourse will be worthwhile.

In the history of human race the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been most remarkable in the lives of women for these two centuries have drastically changed and shaped their lives all over the world. One of the leading concerns of these centuries in the world is the subjugation of women. Women seen as the 'Other' have come forward to remove the stigma of womanhood enforced on them. The striving for equality was voiced forth first by the working-class women in their demand for equality of wage. Gradually the urge for equality spread out in the higher classes too. In 1928 English women got the right to vote. This alone shows that women have been denied equality until recently. When women woke up from their slumber and voiced forth their protest to achieve equal rights, their movement came to be known as feminism. Feminism is a movement of 'women, by women and for women' to achieve women's rights. It aims at sexual equality, eradication of sexual dominance with the goal to reach a transformed society where women are also considered as human beings.

Though the history of women suffrage dates long back, the patriarchal notions and ideologies were challenged most frequently in the twentieth century. Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own* in 1929 and described how women are socially and physically dominated by men. She argued that the patriarchal society denied space to women generating gender inequality. Woolf reacted vehemently how women were considered as 'looking glass' by men and are regarded as the 'Other'. Rebecca West analysed the features of male power and reacted strongly against economic exploitations of working-class women. Vera Brittain was of the opinion that ideal marriage should be the combination of generous and intelligent comradeship. Simone de Beauvoir made outstanding contribution to feminism through her *The Second Sex* in 1949. Her opinion

that women are viewed in the society as the 'second sex' or the 'Other' is analogous to what Woolf said that woman is seen in the society as mirror. Beauvoir said 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman'. She explained how women have been given an inferior position in the male/female binary among such others as culture/nature: production/reproduction etc. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) shared the view of Beauvoir and objected to the idea of woman as the 'Other'. Kate Millett's '*Sexual Politics*' (1970) argued that ideological indoctrination and economic inequality are the causes of women's oppression. The above discussion shows how women outside India fought for their rights and how they are trying to achieve equality in the male-dominated society. The representation of the Third World woman in the feminist and postcolonialist discourses should also be taken into consideration. The Third World woman is doomed to be doubly colonized under imperial ideology and native and foreign patriarchies as Leela Gandhi opines in her book *Postcolonial Theory: A critical Introduction*. She points out that critics like Sara Suleri and Spivak object to the marginalized accommodation of the third-world woman in the Western discourses and literature. Trin. T. Minh-ha also points out how western feminist "creates an insuperable division between 'I-who-have-made-it and You-who-cannot-make-it'" (Trin. T. Minh-ha 1989: 86). Similarly Chandra Talpade Mohanty discerns in her article 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' that a discursive colonialism plays a vital part in the production of the "Third World Woman" as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts' (Talpade Mohanty 1994:196). The Third World Woman becomes a victim to double colonization because of the gap between the real and representational portrait of her. Edward Said also conceded about colonial discourse that the cultural privilege of the occident helps to represent the subjugated 'Other' or the oriental. Spivak's 'gendered subaltern' is here the 'Other' or the oriental for she has to work against a colonial legacy of patriarchy. In the postcolonial regime Third World women are under imperial threat of either patriarchy or western feminist representation. But the Third World Feminist texts in the last few decades produced self-knowledge by and for Third World women. They are the authenticated version of their plight without misinterpretation voicing resistance in the face of patriarchal ideologies. Here also interpretation of the privileged about their working class sisters may invoke misreading. But the accounts of the middle class educated urban working women in the Third World by the author of the same class as is the case of Deshpande are projections of real, lived experiences.

Image of Indian Womanhood (Historical & Theoretical Overview)

Now the plight of women in Indian context should be discussed in respect of this project. Women throughout the world irrespective of class, creed and race share to an extent the same experiences as regards their exploitation and discrimination. They are the victims of male chauvinism and age-old traditions everywhere. In India women got the right to vote with the adoption of the constitution after independence. The law and the Government safeguard their interests. But the actualities and realities of their experience are not soothing at all. The image of Indian womanhood is both awe-inspiring and baffling at the same time. Presently this image is more questioned by women themselves with their exposure to the world at large.

The individuality of women in India is largely shaped by the traditional beliefs and mythology. Woman is equated with 'Prakriti', the Nature or the field and man puts seeds into it. And this Nature can be tamed and ruled by 'Purusha', a cosmic personality. These 'Prakriti' and 'Purusha' unite through the sacred vows of wedlock and life springs on earth to continue the journey of mankind. As nature is both benevolent and fierce at times, men considered women as nature and feared her power and decided to control and rule her by any means. In this respect it is pertinent to discuss the popular code of conduct for women as stipulated by Manu, the Hindu law-giver. Manu preached that women deserve no freedom; they cannot do anything independently even inside their home; a female should worship her husband as God even if he seeks pleasure elsewhere etc. These codes of conduct are the scale by which the image of women is measured. If women do not match this standard, they are abused and outcast by society. Manu constantly stressed on the inferiority of women to men. Manu formulated the basic principle that all through her existence a woman must be made dependent on men:

In childhood must a female be dependent on her father; in youth, on her husband; her lord being dead, on her sons; if she has no sons, on the near kinsmen of her husband; if she has no paternal kinsmen, on the sovereign; a woman must never seek independence. (V. 148)

People want to see women in the age-old frame formed by such obsolete conducts, traditions and myths. The legendary figures of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti and Draupadi are embodiments of chastity, purity, dedication and devotion. Indian society demands that women should incarnate themselves in these images. Through the ages Indian women

have tried to mould themselves according to the demands of society by self-effacement. A woman is revered and worshipped if she abides by the ideology of 'Pativrata' (dedicated completely to her husband). She has been taught that she should achieve salvation if she can save and satisfy her husband and his family. Finally her womanhood gets completed when she has borne sons. Thus at different stages her different roles are those of a dutiful, chaste and dedicated wife and finally of the glorified and loving mother. She has no room of her own, no space for her own individuality and no time for nourishment of her emotional and intellectual self.

Indian society boasts of exalted position of women in ancient age. In Vedic age women were held in high esteem. Women participated in the various social activities and took important role in decision making. Even women are ascribed the authorship of some Vedic hymns. Gargi, Maitrayee, Lopa, Apala were learned women like any man and they also took active part in religious and philosophical discussions. Women's intellectual personality was valued. Marriage was not compulsory for girls. Remarriage of widows was allowed. Women were free to choose their husbands. But in later Vedic age women were held under restraint. The family being patriarchal women were generally subordinate to men. Since important religious rituals could be performed only by a son, male children were highly prized. The prayer for a male child is found in *The Atharva Veda*.

The birth of a girl, grant it elsewhere.

here grant a boy. (VI, 23)

Though in the early periods, women had choice in marriage as the story of Sita choosing Rama at a *Svayamvara* (self-choice ceremony) goes, however, later developments restricted this; choice of husband became subjected to caste, creed and parental control. Widow Remarriage was seen as sacrilegious though at the early stages there are references to widow remarriage. 'Sati', the practice of self-immolation by a woman on the death of her husband was in vogue.

Muslim dynasties took control of Delhi by 1192. A sizeable portion of Indian population became Muslim having converted to Islam. There came a cultural cross fertilization as rulers like Akbar adopted policy of reconciliation between Hinduism and Islam. Islamic women were not bound to wear veil but the institution of purdah was there. The position

of women deteriorated altogether. Female infanticide and child marriage were practised. They were not allowed to move freely and were rendered completely dependent on men. The social and historical necessity resulted into the deplorable condition of women in the medieval age. In the name of protecting women's virtue, honour and chastity, women were imprisoned in the home and were pushed behind the 'purdah'. Though many Hindu authors emphasise that the institution of 'purdah' came with the Muslim rulers, 'the principle of sex segregation and seclusion of women goes far back beyond the Mughal era and belongs to the same tradition as discrimination of widows, child-marriage and the pativrata ideal' (Mies 1980: 66). Thus both Hindu and Muslim women became subject to all the patriarchal oppressions of a caste-bound society.

The condition of women remained almost the same during British regime until the social reform movement of the nineteenth century. In this century both Hindu and Islamic reformers fought against many of these social evils. The nineteenth century social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar raised the issues of 'Sati', Widow-marriage, Polygamy, Child-marriage, denial of Property Rights and Education for Women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was the foremost to champion women's cause in India. Being influenced by Western liberal thought he attempted to reform and rejuvenate Hinduism. He was a learned person whose classical education included Sanskrit, Arabian and Persian. He had been fluent and well-read in English too. He was exposed to the dissident Calcutta British radicals, Unitarians and advocates of free-trade and to Locke, Bentham, Montesquieu and Adam Smith, the liberal political thinkers of the West. Ram Mohan fought for women's rightful position at a time when women's emancipation was addressed in Europe. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) came up with her famous book *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1791) which had great impact in society. Ram Mohan is described as one of the male feminist thinkers of the nineteenth century, who might have been exposed to Mary Wollstonecraft's writings. Issues like 'Sati', Polygamy, Women's Education and Women's Property Rights were addressed by Ram Mohan. He published pamphlets criticizing the oppression of women where he wrote:

At marriage the wife is recognised as half of her husband, but in after-conduct they are treated worse than inferior animals. For the woman is employed to do the work of a slave in the house... to clear the place... to scour the dishes, wash the floor, to cook night and day, to prepare and serve food for her husband.

father, mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and friends and connections (Nag and Burman 1977: 156).

Roy's movement and campaign against Sati moved the public opinion against the practice and Government finally abolished 'Sati' by law in 1835 making it a criminal offence. The deplorable condition of women made Ram Mohan and other enlightened reformers to form Brahma Samaj to purify Hinduism and thus uplift the general condition of women in the country.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), an ardent social reformer stressed on widow remarriage along with other reformers like Debendranath Tagore and Dayananda Saraswati. Vidyasagar published a pamphlet in 1856, '*Marriage of Hindu Widows*' and submitted a petition to the Government for making a law for widow remarriage. Ultimately Widow Remarriage Act was passed by the Government in 1856. Vidyasagar also raised his voice against polygamy along with other reformers. Child marriage was also taken up by Vidyasagar and other social reformers. Vidyasagar pointed out that Child-marriage was linked to the problem of Indian widows for many of the child brides were widowed soon after marriage. In 1872 Marriage Act was passed setting the higher age limit for marriage at 18 for males and 14 for females.

Subsequently, Right to Property was enacted in 1874 giving a widow equal share of husband's property equal to that of a son. Rabindranath Tagore established Santiniketan which was open to women to realise their creative potentiality. English education also enlightened women's minds as Chandu Menon advocated women's education with stress on English education:

If you wish to really enlighten your minds, you must learn English, whereby alone you can learn many things which you ought to know in these days and by such knowledge alone can you grasp the truth that you are of the same creation as man, that you are as free agents as men, that women are not the slaves of men (Menon 1965: 369).

During this time of reformation many schools for women were set up. But the nineteenth century social reformation included women on its agenda to produce good home makers perpetuating orthodox ideology. The politics of power played a crucial role in the nationalist ideology of making the '*bhadramahila*' or a good housewife to the elite male.

Still many women benefited from these reforms. They could embark on the avenues hitherto denied to them. Though education was mainly confined to the higher strata of life, Indian women's battle against the odds of conservatism gradually opened the scopes for women education in different fields.

But so far as the male reformers are concerned, the reform movement was still directed at improving their efficiency as wives in terms of traditional values. As Majumdar concedes:

Education would not turn the women away from their familial roles, but improve their efficiency as wives and mothers and *strengthen the hold of traditional values on society, since women are better carriers of these values* (Majumdar 1976: 49-50).

Unlike male reformers, women reformers 'started to overstep the home and family limits envisaged for them by the reformers' (Jayawardena 1986: 90). Most of these women reformers were linked by birth or marriage to families of male participants of reform movements. Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was one of the most prominent women reformers of the time who fought for women's causes. She was daughter of a Maharastrian Sanskrit scholar and she herself was also a reputable Sanskrit scholar. She had knowledge of the gross social realities in which women in India lived and had a command over Hindu theology. She travelled extensively with the mission to uplift the condition of Indian women. She organised women's organisations and rigorously campaigned for women's education and health care. She wrote *Stree Dharma Neeti* (Women's Religious Law) which advocated women's emancipation and attacked social taboos. Another of her book *The High Caste Hindu Woman* revealed the true status of women in patriarchy. Another prominent woman of the time was Ramabai Ranade (wife M. G. Ranade) who actively worked for the poor and the destitute.

The restoration of the position of women in Indian society was further possible by their participation in the National movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi:

The Congress leaders saw the advantages of mobilizing women and always exhorted them to join the nationalist struggle as equals....Gandhi's basic ideas on women's rights were equality in some spheres and opportunities for self development and self realisation.... He argued that the rules of social conduct

must be developed only on the basis of cooperation and consultation, and should not be imposed by one sex on the other (Jayawardena 1986: 95).

Gandhiji believed that woman is but companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. Women have been suppressed by men under custom and law in the shaping of which women had no hand. He believed that every man and woman should perform his/her duty for self-realisation and social well being. He denounced that even the worthless men enjoy superiority over women by applying 'sheer force of vicious circumstances'. Gandhiji was all for women education but he stressed that men and women would be differently educated.

Gandhiji wanted woman to be self-sacrificing like mythical Sita. Sita was set as the role model for Indian women. Promotion of ideal woman like Sita was believed to help the revival of Hindu ideal. This ideal womanhood also played a strategic role in the political struggle for freedom from British bondage. Mies points out that though Gandhiji appreciated the Indian peasant women's role, he did not have any notion of economic independence for women. As Mies says:

In Gandhi's idealised image of women her economic activity, specially the aspect of her economic independence, is not emphasised. As the most important activity he recommends to the women spinning and weaving, both of which he considers as religious acts and conforming to the nature of woman. On the economic independence of women he speaks evasively. The image of the modern independent career woman does not fit into Gandhi's conception of the ideal woman (Mies 1980: 126).

Yet Gandhiji's role in bringing woman emancipation cannot be denied. He paved the way for women to emerge out of shackles of slavery. His recognition and respect for qualities in women obviously shaped women's liberation movement. He emphasised on women's participation in nationalist struggle. Women's participation in the political and social spheres brought them out of the narrow confines of homes. Gandhi stressed woman's participation in non-violent struggle. He claimed that women had greater ability to endure suffering and therefore they had a key role to perform in the movement. Gandhi, a believer of *ahimsa* (non-violence), believed that non-violent movement best suited to women who are by nature non-violent. Women have the courage to self-sacrifice which makes them superior to men. He suggested that women were used to 'passive resistance'

in their daily lives which would effectively help them to participate in movements like non-violence and non-cooperation led by him. He envisioned the role of women in transforming the reform movement into a revolutionary one. He declared himself, as 'uncompromising in the matter of women's rights'. He proclaimed that women should be treated as human beings with equal right for self-development. Thus Gandhi facilitated women's cause and inspired their participation in the political affairs. The result was massive entry of women in Satyagraha in 1930. He wanted women's education so that they can become ideal women and carry forward the image of Sita having all the qualities of chastity, purity, endurance and courage.

Jawaharlal Nehru's view on the position of woman was radical. His view on the status of women is markedly different from Mahatma Gandhi. For he incorporated the need of economic independence to women's emancipation:

Freedom depends on economic conditions even more than political, and if a woman is not economically free and self-earning, she will have to depend on her husband or someone else and dependants are never free (Luthra 1976: 5).

He emphasised that economic bondage was at the root of women's suffering. He wanted complete transformation of Indian society. Being progressive in attitude he wanted that Indian women must educate themselves so that they can be in keeping with the changing conditions of society.

I must confess to you that I am intensely dissatisfied with the lot of the Indian woman today. We hear a good deal about Sita and Savitri. They are revered names in India and rightly so, but I have a feeling that these echoes from the past are raised chiefly to hide our present deficiencies and prevent us from attacking the root cause of women's degradation in India today (Speech at Allahabad, 31 March 1928).

Nehru denounced that woman should have education only to be trained to be a good wife. He hated the ideas of woman's accepting marriage as profession. He wanted that women should get education to be able to pursue her dreams. He wanted women to be in equal pace with men.

I wonder if any of you here have read Ibsen's 'Doll's House', if so, you will perhaps appreciate the word 'doll' when I use it in this connection. The future of

India cannot consist of dolls and playthings and if you make half the population of a country the mere plaything of the other half, an encumbrance on others, how will you ever make progress? Therefore, I say that you must face the problem, boldly and attack the roots of evil (Speech at Allahabad, 31 March 1928).

Nehru enthusiastically appreciated women's participation in nationalist struggle. But Nehru could recognize that women had to fight not only imperialism but also patriarchy. He wanted that women should acquire the quality to get freedom from any bondage. He envisioned that India can never prosper until its women are free citizens without any domination by men. For this he wanted women to take active role to achieve freedom. As he said:

I should like to remind the women present here that no group, no community, no country, has ever got rid of its disabilities by the generosity of the oppressor. India will not be free until we are strong enough to force our will on England and the women of India will not attain their full rights by the mere generosity of the men of India. They will have to fight for them and force their will on the men folk before they can succeed (*Jawaharlal Nehru*, Speech at Allahabad, 31 March 1928).

During the nationalist agitation against imperialism Indian women started participating in political movements. They stepped out of home and became active in the outside world. This was possible because of the expansion of women's education envisioned by the social reformers. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 which allowed women to be its members. Women like Annie Besant, the leader of Home Rule Movement and Sarojini Naidu, the first Indian woman to be elected president of the congress made much contribution to raise the status of woman. Naidu helped to build The Women's Indian Association and was the nucleus of the All India Women's Conference held in 1926. The National Council of Women was formed in 1925 to promote the cause of women. By this time women education spread drastically giving vent to a new lease of life for women. Modern education and urbanization helped to shape the emancipated women. Women writers and social reformers came forward as guiding stars to inspire their fellow sisters who still did not come under the purview of education due to poverty and social taboos. Toru Dutt (1856-77), Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Swarnakumari Devi (1855-1932), Kamini Roy (1864-1933), Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), to name a few.

are some who contributed in the literary field and worked for the restoration of fallen, suffering and destitute women of their time.

Women's participation in Social Reform Movement and Nationalist struggle obviously helped to gain momentum in them. But little had been won by women to free themselves from the confines of family and home. Women did not raise their voice to bring revolutionary changes in their lives. With female education, abolition of certain social evils and mobilization of women for political movements, an 'illusion of change' was created while in reality women remained in perpetual bondage of family and society. Vina Majumdar opines:

... the woman's roles within the family as wives, daughters and mothers were re-emphasized or extended to be in tune with the requirements of the family in a changing society (Majumdar 1976: 63).

Mies also pointed out that women conformed to the prevalent ideology of the time and remained satisfied with limited space granted to them by the male leader:

To draw women into the political struggle is a tactical necessity of any anti-colonial or national liberation struggle. But it depends on the strategic goals of such movement whether the patriarchal family is protected as the basic social unit or not. The fact that the women themselves accepted their limited tactical function within the independence movement made them excellent instruments in the struggle. But they did not work out a strategy for their own liberation struggle for their own interests. By subordinating these goals to the national cause they conformed to the traditional *Pativrata* or *Sati* ideal of the self-sacrificing women (Mies 1980: 121).

From the above discussion it is presumed that though women did not show any militancy to achieve more liberty, they did play an active part in the struggle against imperialism. This shows just another aspect of Indian women who have displayed considerable courage to achieve national freedom. The women who participated in the national movement talked of that experience as the best period of their lives. But after the nationalist movement's struggle was called off, the women returned to their previous traditional lives. Thus their gains were temporary and were achieved only to be lost:

But often the women claim that some residual progress remains. The narrative of women's 'progress' is read as three steps forward and two steps backward, a slow and imperceptible advance (Rajan 1980: 141).

The absence of questions regarding the position of women in society could be located towards the close of the nineteenth century. It was not that the women's question had been resolved. Though nationalism and the women question were closely related, the relation between them must have been problematical to the nationalists. Nationalism tried to defend everything traditional and glorified India's past. The renaissance reformers were highly selective in their acceptance of liberal ideas from Europe. Sumit Sarkar points out that on the question of the social position of women there was fundamental absence in every phase of any significant autonomous struggle by women themselves to change relations within or outside family. He points out that concern with the social condition of women was less an ideological preference for liberalism and more an expression of certain 'acute problems of interpersonal adjustments within the family' (Sarkar 1985: 157-72). The nationalist ideology built its resolution around a separation of 'the domain of culture into two spheres – the material and the spiritual' (Chatterjee 1999: 119). To overcome European domination in the material spheres colonized people needed to learn the superior techniques of this sphere. But imitation of western aspect of life was not welcome. In fact, Indian nationalists only wanted to imitate material aspect of life for they stressed that in the spiritual domain East was superior to the West. Without losing the true identity Indian Nationalists wanted to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of Indian culture and make compromises in the requirements of a modern material life. With this the concepts of *ghar & bahir* (the home and the world) became strong. The world came to represent the external domain of the material life whereas home represented our spiritual self, our true identity. The women became the representation of home which must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material sphere. The national struggle tried to protect, preserve and strengthen this domain in order keep national culture intact. The imitation of and the adaptation to the western norms was a necessity in the outside world. At home such adaptation was considered to be annihilating one's own identity.

The literature on women in this period was concerned with the theme of the threatened westernization of Bengali women. Suggestions were made that westernized woman was fond of useless luxury and did not care for the home. Under the peculiar condition of

colonial rule the very institutions of home and family were challenged. Women were expected not to become essentially westernized. 'There would have to be a marked *difference* in the degree and manner of westernization of women, as distinct from men, in the modern world of the nation' (Sangari and Vaid 1986: 243). By this central principle nationalism resolved the women's question. In the rapidly changing situation in parity with the dichotomies of home/world modern woman started to shape themselves. The result was that she was subjected to a new type of patriarchy.

Attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the mark of woman's newly acquired freedom. This was the central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question (Sangari and Vaid 1986: 245).

The new Indian women aimed at cultural refinement which would establish their cultural superiority over both the western woman and the preceding generation of women and the women of the lower classes of their land who could not get access to education. Education became the tool to inculcate in women the typical 'bourgeois' virtues which would ensure their 'femininity'. The adulation of women as goddess or as mother was also emphasized in the era of nationalism. The new woman was said to have the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity, etc. It is in this sphere that nationalism considered itself not to be dominated and sovereign. The nationalists firmly believed that in this sphere the nation was acting on its own without the guidance and intervention of the imperial power. The nationalists did not want to make the women's question an issue of political negotiation with the colonial state. That is why in the late nineteenth century there was disappearance of the issue of 'female emancipation' from public agenda of nationalist agitation. The lives of middle class women changed most rapidly during the nationalist agitation outside the arena of political agitation. Thus during colonized India the image of a refined, recast and regenerated woman was created whom every woman should follow. Women too carried forward the legacy of patriarchal ideology in newer forms and shapes. Kundamala Devi's appeal (1870) to her own folk testifies to this:

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If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to *mem-sahib* like behaviour. That is not becoming a Bengali housewife. See how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman. And see how if God had not

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appointed us to this place in the home, how unhappy a place this world would be! (Quoted in Chatterjee 1989: 247)

The construction of the image of Indian woman was thus complete. It can be elaborated in the words of Rajeswari Sunder Rajan:

... in the colonial encounter the Hindu 'good wife' is constructed as patriarchy's feminine ideal: she is offered simultaneously as a model and as a signifier of absolute cultural otherness, both exemplary and inimitable. She is also, as Spivak points out; both indispensable (the justification for the imperialist project itself) and eminently dispensable (the sacrifice offered to an emergent western feminist individualism) (Rajan 1980: 47-48).

It is pertinent to note here that the relationship between feminism and nationalism in India is distinctively different from the West. Aparna Basu's comments on Indian feminism and nationalism are relevant to discuss the characteristic feature of women's movement in India:

In India, feminism and nationalism were closely inter-linked. As the nationalist movement gained momentum, the goal of independence became the only concern for both men and women. The cause was Indian; the goal India's freedom. The women's movement in India had none of the man-woman antagonism characteristic of women's movements in the West (Basu 1976: 40).

Women's movement in India

At this point it is necessary to have a look at the women's movement in India. The formation of All India Women's Conference in 1927 was instrumental in bringing about some reforms for women like Dissolution of the Muslim Marriage Act 1939 in India. In its first session held at Poona from 5-8 January 1927, its President Maharani Gackwad of Baroda, stressed that they assembled to discuss things which were 'essential for the education and the general well-being of the future mothers of the race' (Chaudhuri 2004, 118). The unique nature of Indian womanhood was emphasised in her address. AIWC goaded women in the direction of achieving ideal womanhood. It also discussed whether women should participate in Indian politics or altogether refrain from it. However, education was 'perceived a kind of panacea for solving problems of women, family and society' (Chaudhuri 2004: 118). In the first AIWC the separation of education for men

and women was stressed in view of development of womanhood. It was deemed that for the education of girls in India teaching in the ideals of motherhood was necessary. In the second AIWC 1928, the need of women's participation for reformation of women's education was reiterated as until then whatever had been done for the education of women had been done by men. In the third AIWC, dissatisfaction was shown over the pre-defined conception of women's role. In the same session Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya expressed the need of wide and comprehensive women's movement encompassing all problems of women. AIWC Constitution enshrined in Article II defined its aims and objectives as not to engage in party politics. The realm of politics and the realm of women's welfare seemed to be mutually exclusive and antithetical. But from the fourth session onwards the necessity of participation in the politics was felt in order to bring social reforms for women. Gradually the voice in support of participation in politics grew louder.

At the eleventh session Margaret Cousins's presidential address was in favour of political participation.

...Can the Indian man or woman be free if India be a slave? ... How can we remain dumb about national freedom, the very basis of all great reforms?
(Eleventh Session of the AIWC 23-27 December 1936, p.31)

Rajkumary Amrit Kaur in her presidential address at the twelfth session of AIWC asserted:

Life is an indomitable whole and we cannot separate social and educational reform from political and economic reform any more than we can separate women from men (Twelfth Session of the AIWC 28-31 December 1937, p.29).

At the Seventeenth session Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in her presidential speech stated that:

To a subject people politics is its very life breath. To deny that urge is to deny life (Seventeenth Session of the AIWC 7-10 April 1944, p.24).

At the Eighteenth session of the Conference the Resolution on fundamental Rights of 1931 was reiterated.

Thus AIWC came to the stance that national liberation was a pre-condition for bringing women's liberation. The dominant discourse on women of the time was characterised by its desire:

...to distinguish the more strident nature of women's demands in the West from the legitimate yet proper character of the Indian movement; emphasise the spiritual superiority of Indian woman; the non-antagonistic relationship between Indian men and women based on mutual acceptance of sex roles; the positive contribution of women in lending a higher tone to public life and finally the imperative need for women to take up women's and children's issues to help progress of Indian society (Chaudhuri 2004: 126).

The distinct traces of 'Victorian notions' of women as home-makers, custodian of morality culture are clearly visible here.

After independence, when the nation had acquired political sovereignty, it became legitimate to embody the ideas of reform in legislative enactments about marriage rules, property rights, suffrage, equal pay, equality of opportunity etc. (Sangari and Vaid 1986). Indian constitution has provided women equal rights with men. Astonishingly during this period there is disappearance of the women's question from the public arena. Indeed the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1974) enquired about the 'historical and ideological dimensions of women's role and status on the women's question, initiated during the freedom struggle faded out of the public arena' (Majumdar 2001). Now the question is whether the silence of the first two decades after independence is due to the complete disappearance of the fight for women's rights. Maitrayee Chaudhuri studies the period of the disappearance of women question:

... as a period marked by: *one*, development concerns and attempts by the state to implement some of the feminist visions articulated in documents such as 'Role of Women in a Planned Economy' and the Constitution generally; *two*, by a turnabout of the state wedded at once to socialist and feminist rhetoric and constitutive of social classes whose interest ran counter to these stated aims? Even a textual analysis of the first Five Year Plan document reveals the ruptures, and history bears out the rest (Chaudhuri 1996). The inevitable cracks began to appear in the Sixties. It probably became easier two decades after independence

to question a state that had appropriated to itself the goodwill and struggle of an entire nation (Chaudhuri 2004: XVII - XVIII).

By the mid-sixties it had become apparent that Government had failed to deliver anything substantial for women in India. A large number of questions about women-family, work distribute, male-female relationship had been raised by different women organisations. The decade of seventies saw women in mass movements in large numbers. The 'Total Revolution' of crisis-ridden Bihar and Chipko movement in the Garhwal Himalaya occurred in the seventies. A number of mass movements from this period contributed greatly to the discussion of the question of women subordination. In 1973 Government of India appointed a National Commission to furnish reports on the status of women. Its report was furnished in 1975 as *Towards Equality*. Jashodhara Bagchi, Chairperson, West Bengal Commission for Women opines in her introduction to *The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal* that:

The last three decades have been especially significant for developments within the women's movement all over India. Starting with the interventions in the Mathura Rape Case which led to the united struggle of women in India, demanding and achieving reform in the rape law, the publication of *Towards Equality*, the launching of the Indian Association of women's studies in the early eighties, the founding of the national and state commissions for women in the early nineties, down to the Supreme Court guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace in 1997. This was also the period, in which the Government of India, in 1993 ratified the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), accepted by the UN in 1979. Autonomous women's groups, committed to gender justice came into existence in this phase (Bagchi 2005: 14).

The period 1975-85 had been officially declared as the UN decade for women. Various groups and voluntary agencies have come forward to facilitate women's access to education and their participation in social activities in order to advance them in social strata. In 1977 *Manushi*, a journal about women and society was started by a group of women in Delhi. It has become a living documentary of the various aspects of women's movement in India. Subsequently, *Saheli* was formed as a centre for women's resource, documentation and legal aid. After seventies many similar urban groups appeared in

Calcutta, Bangalore, Pune and elsewhere. Many of these groups have felt that political parties and mass organisations are not doing justice to the women question. The result is that the women question is generating intense debate. It is definite that in order to fight exploitation of patriarchy and achieve emancipation women will have to continue to fight men.

A plethora of writings decoding Indian women's mythic image has emerged after the 70s. Among the steady stream of collections of essays on women, some have become trendsetters. *Recasting women* by Sangari and Vaid published in 1989 by the feminist press Kali for Women pioneered new ways of perceiving women. *Women Writing in India* edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita in 1990 reinstated women's voices through their own writings. The filmy and fictional representation of women so far projected them as benevolent, sacrificing and self-effacing – almost raised to the image of super women. Searching for the real woman and presenting the real picture of women have become a recurring theme in the creative writing by women. The legal enactments and welfare measures have certainly proposed women to be equal to men. But the reality is different. A majority of Indian women cannot come under the purview of such legalities and welfare measures. Moreover the age-old traditions and orthodox customs are so ingrained in Indian society that the female is still now considered inferior to the male though they have established their worth equally with men. The traditional role of Indian women has been reasonably questioned in the fictional projections of Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Hariharan and so on. These women novelists delineate the experiences of women at different levels. Among them Deshpande's protagonists (all women) resemble the modern emergent new woman more graphically. In a sense, they are the embodiments of present-day Indian women – some convent-educated, working and economically independent, some educated but still accepting marriage as profession and the plots in the process cover working class women to orthodox, conservative women. The simple experiences of human life especially of woman's life were not paid heed to so earnestly earlier. The bare truths of women's lives in relationships had never been so well expressed in creative writing in English in India. The portrayal of women in the works of male novelists cannot escape the charge of being partial. The problems and dilemmas of women when they come out of women's hands are sure to be more realistic and true.

Deshpande and other Women Novelists

Twentieth Century in India has witnessed the emergence of a constellation of women novelists. Shashi Deshpande is one of the most luminous stars among them to reveal the inner experiences of women. Other members of this constellation are Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Gita Hariharan to name a few, who have also significantly contributed to focus on the various experiences of women. Most of the women novelists writing in English project woman as the central figure and reveal the predicaments of woman in patriarchy. The world of women – their reactions and responses, problems and perceptions, emotional and psychological upheavals, hopes and frustrations - is delineated by them with insightful and poignant understanding. The entanglement of women in violent and vicious circumstances, their neurotic reactions in facing the existential crisis, their responses to sexual and sensual pleasures are portrayed in life-size pictures. As a major Indian English novelist Deshpande has unfolded the realm of silence - an extremely marginalised territory of women. Probing into the conjugal relationship as well as other social relationships she delves deep into human psyche, especially women psyche. Therefore all her protagonists are women who have come to assert their individuality through inner and outer conflicts. The changing status of women with increasing education and employment is certainly at war with the age-old traditional image of women in India. As a result the middle class working women in course of their lives confront the crisis arising out of her demanded roles and the affirmation of her individuality. How this crisis is being handled by the emergent new women in Deshpande's novels is what leaves one gasping for breath. Deshpande's novels have become indeed, a manifesto of Indian womanhood for her exceptional way of telling the stories of women with ease and accuracy. Every Indian woman seems to identify herself with the characters' feelings and experiences in the patriarchal society in some way or other. Deshpande thus unravels the hearts of Indian women through the fabric of her intricate designs. And in this she is markedly different from her contemporary women writers. Let us now consider how Deshpande's women are different from other women novelists' women characters.

One of the most outstanding women novelists, Kamala Markandaya came up with novels like *Nectar in a Sieve* (1994), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), and *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977). Her women range from peasant woman (*Nectar in a sieve*), to the urban poor (*A Handful of Rice*), to the highest circles of princely life (*The Golden Honeycomb*). Her

novels show conflicts between tradition and modernity or between East and West. Unlike Deshpande, her tragedies emerge from politics, economics and even from spiritual realities. Being an Indian woman married to an Englishman her scenes shift from India to England and America. She also includes characters from foreign lands. Markandaya is not a radical feminist voicing male female imbalance in the society. Rather she portrays relationships at different levels. Her women are generally conformists and traditionalists. She has shown feminine sensibility in depicting the consciousness of the women. Her heroines possess considerable strength to face the calamities of life. They are wise enough to compromise and adjust with the situations e.g. Rukmini (*Nectar in a Sieve*). They stick to Indian ethos and retain their individuality. Markandaya interrogates the contemporary attitudes to men, women and marriage. Acutely aware of the gender difference in Indian society Markandaya shows how Indian women grow to become traditional.

Anita Desai has created hyper sensitive women like Maya in *Cry, The peacock*, Manisha in *Voices in the City*, who are alienated from their husbands as they are unable to correlate with each other. Desai sets her heroines in the contemporary urban Indian background. They are westernised, educated women with freedom of making choices. Her women confront the fundamental problems of modern life. They make 'the journey within' while they counteract the turmoil in the outside world and face existential crisis as they are thrown into a hostile environment. The penetrating agonies of existence impair their ability to adjust. Desai tries to plunge in the unexplored parts of women psychology. Her characters are capable of introspection and do not surrender their individual selves to anyone. They have their own ideals of marriage and wifehood. They long for love and unison of two hearts which to them are panacea for the ills of life. They are very much sensitive and refuse to compromise and surrender. They are fragile introverts and are unable to accept the perspective of their partners and become thereby victims of emotional traumas and isolation. They swim against the current in their quest for meaning and value of life. An in-depth analysis of her novels shows that her characters are frustrated and are emotionally dependents. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* tries to find out a saviour in a male quite unlike Deshpande's novels. Anita Desai does not delineate only man women relationship. She portrays woman as a wife, mother, daughter, sister and above all as human beings. Anita Desai herself is of the opinion that:

Writing is to me a process of discovering the truth - the truth that is nine-tenths of the iceberg that lies submerged beneath the one-tenth visible portion we call reality, writing is my way of plunging to the depths and exploring this underlying truth... My novels are no reflection of Indian society, politics, or character (Quoted in Mehrotra 2003: 227).

Ruth Praver Jhabvala has six novels in her credit – *To whom She will* (1955), *The Nature of passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) and *A Backward Place* (1965). She has portrayed women who covet modernity for the sake of fashion. She has exposed the real intentions of these women, who embraced modernity for convenience but not out of conviction. As her women are modern they refuse to conform. In her attempt to open up the hearts of these women Jhabvala uses sympathetic sarcasm instead of any bitterness. Jhabvala has portrayed trapped married women who either wriggle in pain in relationships or break loose to live separate lives. *The Householder* presents the tensions between the couple Prem and Indu. The newly married couple starts with the rudimentary cross-fire but in course of time overcome the irritations of not having enough money and the presence of a mother-in-law. They realise that such obstacles can be overcome with the passage of time. Prem finally qualifies to be a householder when his mother leaves to join her daughter. *A Backward Place* is about Judy who tries her best to sustain her husband and children. Judi's husband Bal is handsome and full of plans with fruitless results. Judi at last submits to her fate. In *To Whom She Will*, both Prema's and Tarla's marriages are failures. Prema's marriage to Suri is not marriage of souls and hence destined to fall apart, while Prema turns to sweets and sentimental novelettes. Tarla in *To Whom She Will* and Mrs. Kaul in *A Backward Place* turn to Ladies' Committees and in Cultural Dais respectively to overcome the shortcomings of their marriages. While Jhabvala's *The Widow* presents Durga, a young rich widow, struggling against her fate and accepting her lot in life to live a humble life, her Peggy in *The Aliens* and Cathy in *The Young Couple* are trapped beings fallen in uncongenial situation after marriage. Girls like Judy and Peggy marry Indian husbands out of love but find it difficult to adjust in their household with its inhabitants. Her women are powerless to break loose from their lots. Jhabvala has shown how women suffer in domestic life because of the individual's failure to reach out to each other. Unlike those of Deshpande her women are made to submit like animals like cows. They do not emerge as human beings with distinct identities. Moreover, Jhabvala

herself declared that she should not be considered as an Indian writer but rather 'as one of those European writers who have written about India.' Certainly she has delineated characters as an outside observer, a fact in sharp contrast with Deshpande who has delineated lived experiences.

Nayantara Sahgal, second of the three daughters of Vijaylakshmi Pandit (Nehru's sister) and R. S. Pandit (a Sanskrit scholar and lawyer), has combined the personal and the political in her novels. She has come up with the richest section of Indian society, but she is concerned with the rich cultural heritage of India. She has presented women who face challenges in life in their search for self-fulfilment. She has shown women to have virtue, innocence, purity and integrity. Her women protest against the denial of freedom to women by orthodox and outdated social constructs. Sahgal wants women not only to have social and economic freedom but also to reach a mental and emotional stage in order to recognise their true selves. According to Sahgal women need to defy the old and established conventions at the same time as they should recognize their individuality and refuse to tolerate any form of injustice. Women should not be treated as 'sex object' and 'glamour girl' fed by false dreams and fake promises. Rather they should be treated as honoured partners of men. Sahgal wanted to introduce a kind of new marital morality which would be based on mutual trust and respect free from any narrowness like selfishness or self-centredness. Her conviction for marital morality came from her own personal experience. The shattering experience of divorce made her reveal the predicament of women flouting the social conventions. She has tried to show how in a free country like India women are subjected to the moral and social pressures that cripple their freedom. Sahgal's intense indignation towards the false prejudices and social norms and customs is vented out in her novels. In Sahgal's works personal man-woman relationship is juxtaposed with the impersonal world of politics. Her humanistic approach is reflected in her works as Jasbir Jain observes that there is genuine concern for human values and human beings. Themes like the entrapment of women in conventional marriages (*Rich like Us*), extra-marital affairs (*Storm in Chandigarh*) have been used by Sahgal against the political backseat of the novels to explore women's predicament. Like Deshpande's, Sahgal's women believe in the purity of heart and not the chastity of the body (Deshpande's Indu in *Roots and Shadows*). The humanist in Sahgal believes that women should live being free from all kinds of inhibitions and taboos. She claimed that:

Perhaps both in India and the permissive West, the deciding factor before we act or judge the action of others should be the aesthetics of a particular situation. Is it guided by love and aspiration or greed or gluttony? Is there truth and beauty in it, or only desire for gain? (Sahgal "Adultery in Life and Literature", The Sunday Standard, 28th Sept 1975)

She has characterised her women as 'strivers and aspirers towards compassionate world.' Restoration of women's respect and honour is both Deshpande's and Sahgal's preoccupation. But unlike Deshpande whose plots are day-to-day life of women in domestic spheres, Sahgal sketches on the canvas of the political sphere.

From the above discussion it is clear that Deshpande stands distinct from some of the contemporary women writers. The subject matter of Deshpande's novels can be best described in the words of Jasbir Jain:

The stories question the whole notion of patriarchal authority, of the subjugation of a woman's life to her sexual functions, the guilt which society induces in them when they demand freedom or think of their own emotional and intellectual needs. Women feel a constant need to contest the hostile environment both within and outside the home. They are viewed primarily as service givers (Jain 2005: 16).

Deshpande's intervention is distinct in the sense that all her heroines are projected against the backdrop of domestic scenes. Her treatment of women is unusual for her poignant insight into the domestic life of women held in complex relationships. The way women come to interact in life with different relationships has been graphically represented. All of them are married and find themselves stifled in the domain of patriarchy both before and after marriage. They are victims of social constraints but they are bold at heart. Their indomitable spirit makes them understand the real nature of things. Though they have long suffered and tolerated the pain inflicted upon them, they are not failures in life. They are able to overcome every hurdle of life. They gather the power to face the world and are resolved to find a niche for themselves. Though long deprived of the rightful position and though they had neglected their call of the heart, at last they gather the courage needed to face the reality. Deshpande's conviction in the strength within the woman is shown through her characters. Every person's need for the nourishment of the creative soul is also a recurring idea in her novels. A person can enjoy supreme solace only when she is

in pursuit of her creativity. Thus almost all her protagonists are seen to have taken refuge in writing which would provide them with fulfilment in life and nourishment of soul.

CHAPTER – II

GENDER DISCRIMINATION: THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

Women's oppression is largely inflicted by the overarching factor of gender. Almost every woman has experienced the feeling of being mistreated, assaulted or discriminated against because of her gender. Every woman finds herself in solidarity with other women for their shared oppression resulting from gender discrimination. From time immemorial gender relation is the root cause of woman's repression and suppression. Gender relation envisages a complex set of social process. People are born with sex but acquire gender. Due to biological factors there is division of sexes. Unlike gender it is not an event of human history.

Gender is not innate or given rather it is constructed by human beings (men).

Gender is the cultural definition of behaviour defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles. It is a costume, a mask, straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dances (Lerner 1986: 239).

In the name of eulogizing a woman, different roles are created for women in whom they must fit. At different stages of life a woman performs her ascribed roles of life and at the end becomes a non-entity. Kumkum Sangari has aptly pointed out:

female-ness is not an essential quality. It is constantly made, and redistributed; one has to be able to see the formation of female-ness in each and every form at a given moment or in later interpretations, and see what it is composed of, what its social correlates are, what its ideological potentials are, what its freedoms may be (Sangari 1991: 57).

Our society being patriarchal and gender oriented, the position of women here is an unequal one. Ideologies and taboos of society impose gender on a child after birth. The male child is teased for behaving like girls whereas a female child is admonished for behaving like boys. They are imposed with set patterns of code of conduct which shape them into the desired roles. Patriarchy only upholds male dominance over women in our

society. It wants woman to play her gendered role in the name of motherhood and for the sake of family peace. Gendered role has become habit of women so much so that women too want other women to abide by the expected code of conduct for women. Patriarchy has so ingrained gender in the woman's psyche that even women become female-patriarchs supporting dominance and oppression.

...the law texts which present the place of women in a patriarchal universe, emphasize the women's accessibility to the male,... and her obligation to increase the lineage. The blessings showered by old women to brides (like Dudho nahao, Putao phalo i.e., may you bathe in milk and bear sons) are blessings showered by "*female patriarchs*" for old women may often speak on behalf of men. In fact, if women did not internalize the voices of men and speak like patriarchs themselves, the social order would not be maintained. Coercion and force can never ensure the authority of the rule as an internal voice. (Das 1985 : 13)

Patriarchy transmutes a woman to be docile, frail, timid and emotional. It leads a woman to become almost an object or a thing in the hands of patriarchs. Beauvoir views:

... humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.... She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other. (Beauvoir 1984 : 16)

According to Partha N. Mukherji:

....broadly three processes can be identified with respect to the evolution of the position of women in India in the past. In the spheres of *structural elaboration*, *sex differentiation* gradually but inevitably evolved in a manner such that societal roles which were linked with production, governance and ecclesiastics became more or less exclusive domain of the male sex. Concurrently, the *biological capacity* of the female to reproduce the human species and ensure its survival, led to her being assigned roles which progressively tied her down to the home and withdrew her from the wider economic political and religious arenas of social participation. Paralleling these two processes took place the progressive

elaboration of an *ideology* which rationalized it by means of customs, rituals and religious or social prescriptions. *The present predicament of women in India, therefore arises from the major contradiction between structural inequalities between men and women and cultural rationalizations of them.* (Mukherji 1986 : 8)

This unequal position of male and female in India is poignantly foregrounded by Shashi Deshpande in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The discriminating socio-cultural values, the ingrained ideologies, attitudes and social practices which cripple the personality of a girl child are highlighted in the novel. The protagonist of the novel, Sarita or Saru is a sentient, a strong individual who objects to being held back because of her gender. Saru tried to create her life on her own terms which is an act of survival and resistance in patriarchy. She epitomizes the struggle for the liberation of the self from the shackles of gender injustice which is rampantly present in the society.

Saru suffers from gender discrimination right from her birth. Saru wanted fair treatment along with her brother from childhood but she was denied of that since the birth of her brother. A birth like any other creation should be an event of jubilation. But Saru is being told by her mother about her birth quite in the opposite direction.

‘It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible.’ And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains. (169)

From her mother’s words it is quite clear that she being a female was unwanted. Saru represents thousands of girl children who are unwanted. Being unwanted in a family left a deep scar on Saru which somehow led her to accept the assault without protest. She had inside her the fear of rejection and of being unwanted. This is how a girl child is shaped into woman who fears protest only to show that everything is normal in life. Being an elder sister Saru ruled over her brother Dhruva but it was finally he who won over her. He had his revenges which brought him moments of triumph, of cruel gloating. He got the knowledge that he could do anything he wanted with their mother. He knew it too that even their father would come out of his shell for him.

It is clear that Saru’s parents treated them unequally. They favoured their son always. Even her father maintained a distance with her. He had conversations with Dhruva. He used to take him out on the bike with him perching him in front of him on the small seat specially set there on the bar. Saru had consoled herself that it may be the result of the old

fashioned attitude that the daughters are their mothers' business. But Saru was never welcome by her mother too. As she says:

But my mother had nothing for me, either. Whose business was I then? (105)

Saru was introduced to the traditional 'dos' and 'don'ts' set down for the female by her mother. Her mother had asked her not to go out in the sun though there was no reserve for Dhruva.

Don't go out in the Sun. You'll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don't. We have to get you married.

I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can't

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy. (45)

Saru is told very steadfastly how she is different from a boy. Every year on the day of haldi-kumkums the daughter used to become more important than Dhruva. It was a ritual for the daughters who could apply attar with tiny attar-drenched swabs of cotton to the backs of women's hand, sprinkle rose-water over them and distribute flowers. Saru's mother took every care that Dhruva being boy does not participate in it. He was not spared as a child.

And Dhruva crying...Let me. I want to. Ai, look, she won't let me.

Sss, Dhruva, let that alone. It's not for you. That's for girls.

So there!

Putting out her tongue, making a face at him. Triumphant

Exultant.

So there! Not for you. Only for girls. (57)

Not only her mother but the likes of her mother e.g. Maikaki has also tried to make her understand the purpose of a girl's life. She had teased her that if she prepared chappatis

every, the palms and fingers of her hands would become so soft that her husband will never let them go.

Everything in a girl's life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male. (163)

Saru's entry into the beautiful world of womanhood was embittered by her mother. Saru's mother, being guided by menstrual taboos, had been naïve to guide her daughter beautifully in this regard. Rather her dictates made Saru humiliated. She was prohibited from entering the kitchen or the puja room during her periods; she was made to sleep on a straw mat covered with a thin sheet. She was given drink and food in special cup and plate and was served from a distance. All these enraged the adolescent girl who was treated as pollution. She wanted to scream and rage war against her mother so much more for the fact that put her in the same class as her mother.

If you're a woman, I don't want to be one,... (62)

Bigger jolt came in Saru's life with the death of the brother. Instead of getting more importance for being the only surviving daughter, her tortures increased in leaps and bounds. For no reason her mother stick to the fact that Saru was the cause of her brother's death. She accused her time and again without thinking of its terrible effects on a child's psychology. The dead seemed to matter to her parents more than the alive. The household changed drastically. There were no more celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi, no more *haldi kumkums*, no celebration on Saru's birthday. Her parents started fasting on "Dhruva's birthday. Her mother retired in her shell of self-inflicted punishment never attending any ceremony. Her mother couldn't restrain herself from saying Saru.

...why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he's dead? (191)

This accusation haunted Saru so much that even she blamed herself for her brother's drowning.

If only I hadn't gone there that day...

If only he hadn't come with me...

If only I hadn't left him alone... (184)

Thus Saru is tortured after Dhruva's death. Saru has seen her mother's cruelty to other women also which had intensified her hatred towards her. Once a neighbour had been

telling her mother about a woman who had been ill-treated by the in-laws in a grotesque manner. She had been tied to a peg in the cattle shed for ten years and fed on scraps like dog. Finally after ten years of this tortuous life, the woman had died. This cruel story of a woman would leave a cold feeling on anybody. But Saru's mother had reacted:

But how do we know what she had done to be treated that way? May be, she deserved what she got! (87)

Saru's mother and the in-laws of the woman are the perpetrators of torture on young brides. This is the fate of most of the Indian brides who are inflicted inhuman tortures by the in-laws. Saru had hated her mother with a fierce hatred for the cruel and merciless judgment. Saru, a sensitive girl had made up her mind to be a doctor and show her that she too can achieve something in life like any boy. She had worked hard for it and ultimately had secured enough marks to get admission in a medical college in Bombay. When she revealed her mind to her father, he had agreed but her mother opposed it vehemently. The conversations between Saru and her parents are as follows:-

'But she's a girl'

Yes, I'm a girl. But it's more than that. I'm not Dhruva.

'Well, plenty of girls go in for medicine now.'

'Yes, but they're girls whose father have lots of money. You don't belong to that class. And don't forget, medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? Make yourself a pauper, and will she look after you in your old age? Medicine! Five, six, seven.... god knows how many years. Let her go for a B. sc... you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over. (144)

Her mother's reaction reduced Saru into a responsibility only. She had thought:

'Is that all I am, a responsibility?' (144)

But Saru had finally won. With her father's help she asserted her will which had earlier seemed impossible. Saru could pursue medicine which was her dream.

Saru goes to do medicine in Bombay and falls madly in love with Manu. A girl who was hungry for love and affection responded to Manu's love promptly. Saru had thought

How could I be anyone's beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without. (66)

Saru who never got unconditional love from her parents wanted fulfillment through Manu's love for her. But when she breaks the news of her love to her parents once again she faces cruel opposition from her mother. Her mother, a representative of traditional, orthodox society, does not want her daughter to get married to a person of lower caste:

What caste is he?

I don't know

A Brahmin?

Of course, not.

Then, cruelly... his father keeps a cycle shop.

Oh, so they are low-caste people are they? (96)

Being a member ^{of} social hierarchy, her mother could not approve the marriage. But Saru recognized romantic love above caste as the only valid basis for marriage—a radical notion which is the result of her education. So she does not hesitate to defy her parents to settle with Manu. But her mother had warned her:

I know all these 'love marriages'. It's love for a few days, then quarrels all the time. Don't come crying to us then. (69)

Saru's mother was adamantly against the marriage. When Manu's teacher Prof. Kulkarni had approached her for reconciliation, she had reacted even more viciously.

Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless. (196)

She did not stop here only; she had cursed Saru as no mother should do.

I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me. (197)

When Prof. Kulkarni related all these to Saru, that had only increased her grief for no daughter expects such treatment from her mother. Saru also comes to know about her mother's hatred for all the doctors as her own daughter was a doctor. She refused even

before her death to go to Saru or to any other doctor. Maikaki had narrated to Saru how even before her death she spat venom for Saru.

What daughter? I have no daughter (109)

Thus Saru was snipped off happiness all the time. Such words from a mother's end leave disastrous effect on anyone's mind.

Saru's ordeal does not stop with the maltreatment at parental home. Saru had defied her parents for her love for Manu. The early years of their love and marriage had been an exalting one but then some kind of incurable disease attacked her marriage. She became a victim once again due to the unequal status of men and women in the society. Saru was completely engrossed by the romantic love of Manu who had once claimed:

I long to believe in immortality. If I am destined to be happy with you here....
how short is the longest life. (65)

Saru too seemed to have found her soul mate in him. She was so happy that she turned down Manu's proposal of trying to reconcile with her parents.

But very soon Saru becomes a victim of female sexuality and its social control (here her husband's control over her body). Marital bliss eluded for Saru as soon as her husband turns maniac, and inflicts tortures on her in the dark of their bedroom. Her happiness became evanescent and unreal after the equation did not match for them. Earlier he had been the young man and Saru his bride. But after Saru became the doctor, she was the lady doctor and he was her husband. Everyone in their locality nodded, smiled, and greeted Saru for being the doctor whereas her husband was ignored completely. Frustration started smoldering in Manu. Saru puts the situation of their relation as:

$a + b$ they told us in mathematics is equal to $b + a$. But here $a + b$ was not, definitely not equal to $b + a$. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible. (42)

Their marriage was caught in the vortex of a whirlpool on the day when a girl who had come to interview Saru asked Manu:

How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well?
(36)

This flare of question had just inflamed the volcanic frustration of Manu which erupted at night as 'monstrous invasion' of her body. He became a stranger at night. The face above her seemed to be the face of a stranger. It was blank, set and rigid; it was a face she had never seen. A man she did not know. Saru at first lulled herself into believing that it was just a nightmare and wanted to forget it. But it had happened to her again and yet again. Manu and Saru had gone for shopping for a suitcase and a few other things that they needed for going to Ooty. They met a colleague of Manu and his wife who having come to know about their outing suddenly became jealous and said about their poor situation for which they cannot afford Matheran even. The wife had taunted the man saying tartly if he had married a doctor he would ^{have} gone to Ooty too. That night Manu became a stranger again. But the very next morning he was a changed man. Saru was taken aback by the marital fraud for Manu behaved completely sane during the day time. He even appeared to be a loving and caring husband. He had said Saru looked very tired and strained. She needed to take things easy and relax. He would take the children off her hands and she should relax so that no more dark circles should appear under her eyes. Saru should have spoken to him the very first day. Her middleclass inhibition to keep things alright made her not to speak.

And each time it happens and I don't speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. May be one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death. (96)

She accepts her fate at the same time is unable to continue like that. Saru being a female (for she is expected to be timid and accepting her lot) accepts her monstrous onslaught but a man in her stead would have never accepted such sexual assault (for his ego as a male who knows to dominate would have emerged to restore him.) Saru, a devoted wife thought of quitting her work. She reasoned out that perhaps the torture was there for she was something more than his wife that he has become so. If she could go back to her earlier state where she is nothing but his wife he might change. She even imagined herself in the image of just a wife and mother.

I saw myself, the end of my sari tucked into my waist, hair tied into a neat knot, smiling at them all as I served them all as I served them. And all of them smiled back at me. A mother in an ad, in a movie, dressed in a crisply starched, ironed

sari. Wife and mother loving and beloved. A picture of grace, harmony and happiness. Could I not achieve that? (80)

Finally she gathers courage to say him that she wants to quit her job. But there also she could not exercise her free will. Her husband curtly said that to maintain the social status she needs to move on. There can be no going back. They have to go on. She is once again dominated by the will of her husband. But fortunately that night he behaved sanely. But again the nightmares started gnawing her bit by bit- until she leaves for her parental home in the pretext of visiting her father after her mother's death.

If Saru's life is divided into two phases before and after her marriage, in both of these phases she is victimised due to her gender. And so is the society where woman is discriminated against. If we look at the world that Saru inhabits we see both Saru and other women are mistreated by the indifferent society. Saru for being sentient and sensitive is very much aware of the unequal position of women. Once Manu's friend Vidya, an incipient women's libber said some words which return to Saru almost verbatim as if they had been said for one day the words would have some relevance to her life. Vidya had said that Shakespeare presented a limited vision of life for his is a typical man's view of life to see the man at the centre, the woman always on the periphery. She had further said that it is not just their roles. It is the way he made the woman's personality to merge into the stronger colours of a man's personality. Hamlet, Lear, Othello were clearly different from Ophelia, Cordelia, Desdemona. The women were poor, feeble shadows. And when there was a conflict or a climax the woman always recedes into the background. He disposed of Lady Macbeth though she starts off very splendidly. But the positiveness and action proved too much for the poor female and hence she bows out. On Manu's joke she had asked him where he would like Sarita to be if he writes a play. Saru has said she would be down among the audience applauding all of them. On this Vidya reacted.

'See that you stay there,' Vidya said with a mock sternness. 'Or else, Manu won't like it.' (156)

The popular discourses from ancient time represent women at the periphery which is but a reverberation of the voice of the gendered society. Another incident comes vividly to Saru's mind. Once she had gone to a family for tea. The wife came silently, unobtrusively like a shadow to serve them and went out the same way. The husband's conversation was

not least disturbed by her presence as if she did not exist. He never introduced her to them and even they ignored her too. They ate and sipped the tea as if some waiter provided them the food & the drink. When Saru went to take her leave of her and smiled at her, she did not respond and her face was expressionless. She had successfully effaced her person and had fallen in with her husband's desire.

I looked down at her feet and saw that there was no shadow for some reason, the words came to my mind... If I cast no shadow, I do not exist. (159)

This is the condition of a larger section of women. Saru met her college mate Padma on her way back from hospital. After talking to him they came to know that they both visit the same hospital. For Padma's special efforts they started meeting each other regularly. It had almost become a habit with Saru when one day she refused his offer of lunch. Padma could not accept the answer and banging the door of the car walked away. Another day he came with the offer of a cup of coffee. On listening to Saru's denial he pestered on for listening Saru's yes. The way he uttered her name panicked Sarita.

There was still that little-girl-scared-of-men-and-rape inside my sophisticated exterior, panicking at the thought of a man being interested in me. (131)

This fear of Sarita is the fear of every woman in the society. Every woman carries within herself this fear for the society is unable to ensure her security.

Saru comes to meet her friends Smita and Nalu when she is in her parental home. Smita, her childhood friend opened to Saru another side of a woman's oppression. When Saru exchanged addresses with them, Saru frowned that Smita had written her name as Geetanjali. On questioning her she came to know that her husband had given her that name and he calls her Anju. Saru could not find any reason in it. The drastic change of identity, changing both the names that identified one for so many years, how then one would know oneself.

Though it seemed to Saru somewhat queer actually this is the fate in store for so many women - complete effacement of the self after marriage.

Saru came in close contact with the women of her neighborhood during her visit to parental home. Very soon she came to know the whole range of them their myriad complaints and varying symptoms. She found they have borne silently all the indignities of a woman's life-backache, headache, burning feet, an itch because they felt ashamed to tell someone about these things.

Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them.
(107)

They seemed to Saru as stupid silly martyrs, idiotic heroines. They seemed to destroy themselves doing their tasks for meaningless modesty. She could not either pity or admire them for their unconscious, unmeaning heroism, born out of the myth of the self sacrificing martyred woman. Saru treated and prescribed for them and thought even to stay there as a do-gooder in the village. But she knew that in order to change her life to that extent, she needed some impetus from outside to force her into it.

She remembered having read somewhere, in a magazine may be, of Betty Friedan saying that it was easier for her to start the women's lib movement than to change her own personal life. (107)

This is so with the life of women. Again she listens from Madhab how his father punishes his mother by not taking the food she cooks. Madhab has said that he did not eat anything she cooks. Listening to it Saru remembered of the woman in the Sanskrit story of her school text. The woman did not disturb her husband's sleep even to save her child from the fire. It was said that on seeing the woman's blessedness, Agni himself came and saved the child. Saru thought of the writer of the story. Obviously the writer would be some man. The story told all women for all time that their duty to their husband comes first. And women, poor fools, believed in the story. The result was that even today women like Madhab's mother consider it a punishment if not able to serve the husband. Saru herself was not out of these social taboos. When her father failed to give her support as she desired after listening to her lot, Saru blamed her love-marriage for it.

If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? (218)

She thought of the girl who had come back as a result of a disastrous marriage. The care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded was lacking in Saru's case. For in that case the burden of failure hanged on the parents too. But Saru was to carry the whole burden for hers was a love-marriage.

Saru's life, her mother's life and likewise the lives of women represent that they have no room of their own. Indian women are so groomed from childhood that they even desire death before their husbands'. Saru's mother used to worship the 'tulsi' so that she can die

before her husband. And she had died before her husband. It was all what all women prayed to the tulsī for. Thinking of her own life and her mother's life she thought of Virginia Woolf's famous phrase 'room of her own'.

She immediately related the phrase to her own life and thought... my mother had no room of her own. She retreated into the kitchen to dress up, she sat in this dingy room to comb her hair and apply her *kumkum*, she slept in her bed like any overnight guest in a strange place. And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing 'a room of our own'. (136)

She had also thought of her father who being a man led different life.

He had always been so much a man, the master of the house', not be bothered by any of the trivials of daily routine. (20)

Having seen all these discriminations, Saru had burst out in front of Nalu's students when she was asked to talk on medicine as a profession for women.

Listen, girls, she would say, whatever you do, you won't be happy, not really, until you get married and have children. That's what they tell us. And we have to believe them because no one has proved it wrong till now. But if you want to be happily married, there's one thing you have to remember. Have you girls seen an old fashioned couple walking together? Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? That's important, very important, because it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he's an MA, you should be a BA. If he's 5' 4" tall you shouldn't be more than 5' 3" tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it isn't worth it. He'll suffer, you'll suffer and so will the children. Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That's nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales till in your favour, god help you, both of you. (137)

Saru had also referred to about Gita, Draupadi and Shakuntala. For ages they are considered to be epitomes of womanhood. In fact they were dominated by the males in different ways.

If Draupadi had been economically independent, if Sita had had an independent identity, you think their stories would have been different? No, these are things that have been voluntarily surrendered, consciously abandoned, because that is the only way to survive. And what in the long run, matters more than survival?
(137)

She also told the girls how Shankuntala after being rejected by the king was advised by the ascetics to stay on nevertheless in the harem of the king or as the king's slave for he was after all her husband. And when she had tried to follow them back home one of them had cautioned her.

...What, wanton girl, do you desire independence? (138)

So it is very clear that the ancient prescription was that a woman can never desire independence.

Saru has known and seen all these and as human beings have immense potentiality for growth, she too has grown up gradually. She now knows that a female cannot be whittled down and destroyed by domination.

She can be dominated, she can submit, and yet hold something of herself in reserve. (85)

She now knows that there is no escape from going on.

Therefore the only thing is to go on as if it is real, knowing all the while it is only an illusion. (220)

She knows that everyone in the world is alone still life has to go on for that is the only way in life.

All right, so I'm alone. But so's everyone else. Human beings... they're going to fail you. But because there's just us, because there's no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk. (220)

She is now ready to assert her individuality and confront the reality and not run away from it as she had done by coming back to her parental home.

My life is my own.....somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right. (220)

It is the way of life. Every woman should liberate herself from the shackles of unnecessary fear and traditional taboos. In order to manifest one's individuality, a woman should exercise her free will for she has immense potentiality with which she can assert her individuality and realise her dreams. Discontented with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman Saru becomes non conformist and finally wins the race due to her inner strength. Due to the discriminations faced by her both before and after marriage, Saru became disappointed, humiliated and shocked. It took away her breath, her hope, her faith in herself, and her faith in the world. But she regained her self-esteem and could look upright when she made inner-journey into her soul. The process is hard but she has achieved it ultimately.

You are your own refuge:

There is no other refuge.

This refuge is hard to achieve.

- The Dhammapada

CHAPTER - III

ASSERTION OF SELF: *THAT LONG SILENCE*

The domestic life of the woman is a daily sacrifice of self to a thousand insignificant trifles. - Lenin

In *That Long Silence*, we have the protagonist Jaya speaking in the same tune when she describes how domestic trifles had kept her busy:

...gadgets that had to be kept in order, the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curios that had to be kept spotless and dust-free, and those clothes. God, all those never-ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again.(25)

These are the things that a wife does throughout her life in almost every household of India. Jaya is but a representative of millions of women leading the same life style. Perhaps for this reason Shashi Deshpande is of the opinion about *That Long Silence* that it is almost entirely a woman's novel. It is a book about the silencing of one-half of humanity. She devoted a lifetime of introspection into the novel. It is also the one closest to her personally; the thinking and ideas in the novel are closest to her own.

Jaya is every woman. Both Jaya's experiences and her sensitiveness towards other women's experiences reveal the whole gamut of women's experiences. Jaya who shows that the subaltern can also speak out asserts her individuality at the end. If Mohan, her husband is antithesis of her life. Kamat, the do-gooder friend of Jaya is thesis for her life. She resolves the conflict between thesis and antithesis and finally follows the right track.

Jaya had been a pampered daughter of her father who shaped her life to make her different from others:

'You're going to be different from the others, Jaya,'... (136)

She had gone to English school and had dreamt of getting the Chatfield Prize or the Ellis Prize to go to Oxford after her graduation. She was named Jaya by her father –Jaya for victory. Untimely death of her father made her a burden in the family. Her brother had wanted her off his hands. He had wanted to be free of his responsibility for an unmarried

younger sister. So that he could go ahead with his own plans. When the proposal of marriage came for Jaya, she could not say what actually she wanted. Girls actually search for love and loving man. Like most of the girls it had been a vague and nebulous search of which she was not certain. But Mohan knew what he wanted: 'An educated, cultured wife.' When girls grow into young women they realize that it was actually marriage not love that was waiting for them. For women this game of waiting 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. (30)

Similarly Jaya started waiting ever since she got married. On marriage there came prize advices from the elders. Vanitamami advised Jaya with her pithy unforgettable maxim: 'A husband is like a sheltering tree.'

Dada had said her 'Be good to Mohan, Jaya,' (138). But nobody had said what one should do when a marriage was over. So Jaya made wifehood her profession and invested her whole attention on Mohan and later on the children also. The women of Mohan's family had said on the post-wedding ceremonial game:

The one who finds the coin first rules the other at home. (6)

Jaya had found the coin but later understood it means nothing really. Their relationship had been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that they had even snipped off bits of themselves to keep the scales on an even keel. She had viewed them as:

A pair of bullocks yoked together (7)

Jaya's name was also changed by her husband. From marriage she got the name Suhasini, implying the tender, loving, forever caring and smiling woman. Jaya, the name had been her identity for so many years. No one can accept this sudden change of identity. But Jaya had been Suhasini as well distinct from Jaya by being a soft, placid, motherly woman. She was a woman who lovingly nurtured her family. She was a woman who coped.

As a result she passed her days in the thought of what she should make for breakfast/lunch/tea/dinner? That had been the *leit motif* of her life.

Jaya remained unaware when the process of change had set in and she had become a stereotype of woman:

I'm scared of cockroaches, lizards, nervous about electrical gadgets, hopeless at technical matter, lazy about accounting...almost the stereotype of a woman: nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support. But what puzzles me is this: how did I get this way? I'm sure I wasn't always like this. I can remember a time when I was not so full of fears, when the unknown, when darkness and insects did not terrify me so. When did the process of change begin? (76)

After marriage Jaya started living as Mohan's wife and as Rahul's and Rati's mother. Not herself. It was true that she was a wife and a mother but she was something more-she had been a writer also. But she had cut off that self in order to please her husband. She was a budding writer but she left her writing career because of Mohan. Jaya had won a prize for a story that she had sent for a contest. Mohan had come home accusingly. He had wondered how she could write that story which revealed them. He had added:

They will all know now, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us, they will think I am this kind of a man, they will think I *am* this man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write these things, how could you write such ugly things, how will you face people after this? (143-144)

Jaya then had understood that Mohan was not angry but hurt as if she had wounded him. Jaya had realized that it hadn't mattered to Mohan that Jaya had written a good story- a story about a couple, a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body. For Mohan it had mattered that people might think the couple was them, that the man was him. For him she had been no writer, only an exhibitionist.

Jaya's argument to herself for leaving her writing career was that Mohan instead of forbidding her to write had shown his hurt and she had not been able to counter that and she had relinquished them instead. All those stories that had been taking shape in her could not be written because she had been scared - scared of hurting Mohan. She was afraid of jeopardizing the only career she had i.e. her marriage. Jaya had seen Mohan talking of family responsibility. On seeing women and children squatting in the street Mohan had said to Jaya:

Imagine, Jaya, people like us in that situation! (5)

He had also said:

Imagine putting your family in such a situation. It seems totally irresponsible to me. (6)

The irony is that he himself puts his family in such a situation. Jaya was stunned and remained silent on hearing about Mohan's business malpractice. Mistaking her silence for accusation, Mohan had reacted vehemently:

I did it for you, for you and the children? (10)

With this Jaya's 'career as a wife was in jeopardy.' (15) Mohan had taken for granted that Jaya might have different plans and asked her to move with him to their Dadar flat:

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)

Mohan had once advised Jaya how to remain safe in troubled times:

Don't you know it's better to come in and close the doors and windows at such a time? This time it was tear gas, next time it could be real bullets. Whenever you see crowds, or even a procession, just come in with children and close the doors – that's always safer. (55)

Same Mohan made Jaya feel: 'I know that safety is always unattainable. You're never safe'. (17)

How Jaya had once boasted that she knew Mohan better than he knew himself. It was because he had been her profession, her career and her means of livelihood. She had tried to pattern herself after the women of Mohan's family. So when something was not done well, or on time, a button missing, or a meal cooked badly, or too delayed, she had cringed in guilt. And when she had been praised for anything, she'd been so ridiculously pleased. She almost wagged her tail, like a dog that's been patted by its master.

Kamat had timely warned Jaya saying:

Don't try to act the martyr now. It's all your fault, You really enjoy it, don't you? (84)

He had been right to say that Jaya had been making others dependent on her. It increases her sense of power. He also said that that's what she really wanted. She was like all those bloody looking-after-others, caring-far-others women.

Jaya had compromised 'not for me, for my children'(113). In this way she solaced herself. But actually she was silenced both by Mohan and the deep-rooted belief-system in her mind ingrained by society. When once Jaya had got into a temper Mohan was not pleased for to him anger made a woman 'unwomanly' (83). He had said her that his mother never raised her voice against his father, however badly he behaved to her.

Ajji too had taught her not to displease her husband in any way.

Look at you- for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that? (27)

Jaya had indeed learnt to slip into silence. If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, Jaya was an ideal wife too. She bandaged her eyes tightly. She didn't want to know anything. It was enough for her that they moved to Bombay, that they could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that she could have the things they needed- decent cloth, a fridge, a gas connection, travelling first class. And, there was enough for Mohan to send home to his father - for Sudha's fees, Vasant's clothes and Sudha's marriage.

Jaya had been very careful not to hurt Mohan's feelings even in bed. So after each act of sex to Mohan's question 'have I hurt you?'(98) She had answered 'No'.

I'd often wondered, what if I say 'yes'? What will that do to him? But I knew I would never say it. I could not. Even if I could no longer call it love, the emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit of being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him, that made cruelty to him impossible. (98)

Jaya had always taken care not to disturb Mohan in any way. So after an act of sex when in an awful moment Jaya had realized that she was alone she had cried silently and despairingly. She was scared that she would wake Mohan up, trying desperately to calm herself.

Jaya had carried Rahul into the Kitchen when he used to wake up at night so that Mohan could sleep peacefully. Mohan used to be irritable when Rahul, never a contended, placid

baby, woke up and cried. So that she had carried Rahul into the kitchen when he woke up at night, and sat there, shutting the door behind her.

Enduring so much Jaya had learnt to be silent. Shashi Deshpande herself analyses the meaning of silence when she says that one learns a lot of tricks to get by in a relationship. Silence is one of them. A woman is never found criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage their relationship.

But the card-house of Jaya is blown by the stormy wind of Mohan's malpractice and his accusation that he did it for her and the children. For the first time in Dadar flat Jaya had been free to introspect. Suddenly she had realized that the pursuit of happiness is like a meaningless, unending exercise. It is like a puppy chasing its tail in vain.

Jaya had earlier thought:

The relation of man to woman is the most natural of one person to another. (158)

But now she realised that it's not natural but rather it is based on 'only treachery, only deceit, only betrayal.' (158)

Jaya and Mohan's ways of looking at things were different. Mohan talked of his mother saying she was tough. Women in those days were tough.

Their attitudes differed:

He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I was despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon, silence and surrender. (36)

The same had been with Jaya who retreated into silence making it a kind of weapon. In the first months of Jaya's pregnancy when she could not bear the smell of oil and spices she had asked him 'why don't you do the cooking today?' (81) He could not think of cooking even if his wife was sick. He had not changed even after passing years with Jaya. So when Jaya had gone to their Churchgate flat to collect the mail and came late, she had found that he had not thought to save her trouble by making any preparations for dinner.

Day after day Jaya had cleared up after each meal. She used to get respite from the drudgery only by her servants. As she said:

This drudgery was something I'd forgotten since Sadu came to us as a live-in servant. (80)

Elsewhere she says:

It was Jeeja and her like I needed; it was these women who saved me from the hell of drudgery: Any little freedom I had depended on them. (52)

But with Kamat it was different.

He hadn't seemed to mind being found doing something that was to me unwomanly. On the contrary, he had been proud of his cooking ability, he had bragged about it (152)

To him it was very natural. He had asked Jaya if she had noticed how the women make the men totally dependent and helpless in practical, everyday living by doing everything for them.

Jaya had stared at him with unself-consciousness. His idea of sex was also radically different. He said he didn't want to concede to any woman power over him. But he admitted that in the field of sex he conceded the power to women.

Mohan could not accept when Jaya had written the story of the couple. For him how Jaya could reveal themselves to people. For Kamat it was very easy to talk about sex. Until Jaya met Kamat she had seen men to put on a different face, a different tone, a false smile when they spoke to her.

But this man...it had been a revelation to me that two people, a man and a woman, could talk this way. With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself – Jaya. There had been an ease in our relationship I had never known in any other. There had been nothing I could not say to him. And he too... (153)

Kamat had become so much friendly with Jaya that she confided in him. She told him things that she should never been able to speak of, not to Dada, not to Mohan. She had been talking about her parents to him.

Mohan had proposed Jaya to write:

“Middles”-‘light, humorous pieces about the travails of a middle-class housewife. Nothing serious...oh no, nothing serious.’ (149)

Thus ‘Seeta’ had been borne by Jaya whom Mohan had loved and so had the editor. For Jaya Seeta had been the means through which she had shut the door, firmly, on all those other women who had invaded her being, screaming for attention. They were the women she had known whom she could not write about, because they might-it was just possible-resemble Mohan’s mother, or aunt, or her mother or aunt. ‘Seeta’ was safer. She didn’t have to come out of the safe hole she’d crawled into to write about ‘Seeta’. She could stay there, warm and snug.

Unlike Mohan Kamat had hated Seeta:

Don’t saddle me with the burden of having fathered thatthat obnoxious creation of yours. (149)

He had warned her to beware of her ‘women are the victims’ theory. He had said it would drag her down into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. She should take herself seriously. She should not sulk behind a false name. Rather she should work if she wanted others to take her seriously. He said scribbling now and then would take her nowhere.

While anger was quite unwomanly to Mohan, Kamat had suggested to use anger in her story. He wondered that there was no anger in her stories. There wasn’t even a personal view or a personal vision. He pointed out that her story was too restrained which should not be. She should spew out her anger in her writing. She should not hold in her anger. Until then Jaya had thought or made to believe that a woman can never be angry. She can only be neurotic, hysterical and frustrated. There was no room for anger in her life. There was no room for despair either. There was only order and routine like one day she has to change the sheets; another day she has to scrub the bathroom; yet another day she has to clean the fridge.

Thus Kamat had been a guiding star for Jaya’s writing career as well as a catalyst to make her understand the calling of her heart. In spite of Jaya’s every care to nourish her relationship with Mohan, he has not spared her to raise his finger of accusation at her. He claimed that since the day he told her what Agarwal had said to him, she had been totally indifferent. He also added that she had always been that way. Mohan attacked her for falling into the C.E.’s clutches. In order to get Type C Quarters for Jaya, he had become a

prey at the C.E.'s hand. Jaya had thought it had happened naturally. Mohan accused Jaya that she did not care how all that happened. She had been selfish to look after her own needs. Beyond that nothing mattered to her. But Mohan was saying partial truth. It was Mohan who had been too ambitious; Jaya had just acquiesced with him. She had even cut her hair when Mohan had wanted it:

'cut your hair, up to here' 'like Mehra's wife.' (196)

She was her normal self but he had wanted her in different way:

Buy yourself a couple of good saris, (61)

He had said:

Don't wear those shabby things, even at home. And why don't you make yourself a nice housecoat-you know, like the one the M.D.'s daughter wears. (61)

Jaya had obeyed him in every respect only to hear that Jaya remained unconcerned after what happened to Mohan. While Mohan had been going through hell and had been worried to death since Agarwal warned him about what was likely to happen. Jaya seemed not to bother about it. Mohan even brought insignificant things to hurt her. But it was not the truth for Jaya. Mohan was her husband 'around whose needs and desires my own life revolved.'(24) She had been caring about him all the time. He was wrong for the habit of caring cannot be abandoned or misplaced. Rather it is very hard to get rid of. So each accusation had only bewildered Jaya. When Mohan accused 'you've never cared for me' (124) Jay wondered:

Then what have I been doing, living with him all these years? (124)

Though Jaya's feelings for him had had their beginning in the act of sex, it had grown like a monster child over the years. She had lived in a constant panic that Mohan would die. She had clung to him at night, feeling with relief the warmth of his body, stroking his chest, letting her palms move with his even leap breaths. The thought of living without him had twisted her insides. His death had seemed to her the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made her feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down her cheeks. If he had been a little late coming home, she had been sure he was dead. By the time he returned, she had, in her imagination, shaped her life to a desolate widowhood.

Widowhood which all Hindu women fears and fasts like Mukta though she had forfeited its purpose:

..., the purpose of all Hindu women's fasts- the avoidance of widowhood. (67)

Jaya remembers Kamlakaki who had been frantic after Laxmankaka's death.

How will I live without him, Jaya, how will I live? She had cried out to me when I had gone to see her after Laxmankaka's death, her hands clutching mine in a painful grip. (132)

Jeeja, Jaya's servant had uttered a similar cry on Rajaram's hospitalization. Thinking about her daughter-in-law she had said:

And that girl, let her have her *kumkum* on her forehead. What is a woman without that? Her husband may be a drunkard, but as long as he is alive, no one will dare cast an eye on her. If he dies... she is young and foolish... (160)

It was Jeeja who had reminded Jaya her position, when she had asked Jaya to talk to Dr. Vyas for Rajaram's better treatment. She had said that Jaya should just talk to the doctor and he would remember her. He will listen to her for her husband is a big officer and she was his wife.

The words had reverberated in her ears:

You are his wife... (161)

Once as a child Jaya had visited Bombay. On her visit Jaya had written her name in the beach, taking infinite care over the writing. She was just stunned. There was just blankness; the sea had crashed everything leaving no trace of her name. She'd been astonished to see nothing there. Jaya's profession was similarly about to be engulfed by time's fell hand. Dr. Vyas too reminded Jaya how she was known to people. He had said he would be expecting her call. Jaya had reflected that even Dr. Vyas had asked her to visit them with her husband. She wondered what he meant by that. Was it impossible for her to relate to the world without Mohan?

This is precisely what happens with Indian women. They are known by their husband's identity. Change of surname and even the name testify this. Ramukaka's family tree shows how women are obliterated at the parental home's family saga. Ramukaka had

shown Jaya the family tree where he had gone back to nearly two hundred years. Seeing only men there Jaya had inquisitively exclaimed that she was not there in that family tree.

Ramukaka irritatingly had answered:

How can you be here? You don't belong to this family! you're married. You're now part of Mohan's family. You have no place here. (143).

Mohan too was of the same opinion that her Ramukaka was right. He said that she belonged to Mohan's family after marriage.

But Jaya had seen that not only she and the girls of the family but also all the women married into the family had been blotted out. She'd wanted to ask Ramukaka, if she shouldn't belong to that family, what about the Kaki's and Ai? They married into that family, but still they were not there. She found that Aiji, who single-handedly kept the family together, too wasn't there.

The fact is that women are taken as non-entity only to be used as commodity deprived of their true place in family and society. Jaya had read somewhere an account of how baby girls were killed a century or so back. They were buried alive, crushed to death in the same room where they were born. Immediately after a fire was lit on that spot-to sanctify that place. It was done perhaps to ensure death. Comparing her painful agonies over the years with their death, Jaya had thought that she had been unable to get those agonies out of her mind. She wondered whether the swift ending of the agony once and for all wasn't more merciful than the prolonging of it for years and years.

Jaya recalls Nayana's wisdom in craving for a male child. Nayana did not want to give birth to a girl as the girl would have to suffer because of men all her life.

Being alone in the Dadar flat Jaya had shivered at the consequences if Mohan deserts her. Jaya had likewise left Kusum in that flat while Kusum had cried to Jaya not to leave her there. She earnestly requested her to stay with her.

Jaya had left her in the care of Jeeja and had gone back to her husband and children leaving Kusum behind. Thinking of her desolate condition Jaya now thought that people do not have to wait for another life for their punishment. It was all reserved for them right then and there. An act of retribution-they followed each other naturally and inevitably. Dasarath killed an innocent young boy whose parents died crying out for their son. And,

years, later, Dasarath died too, calling out for his son, 'Rama, Rama.' (128) Jaya thought that escape is never possible for people, however, we fight to flout it.

Similarly Jaya could not escape the inquisitive eyes of her neighbours. While they stayed in their Dadar flat it was taken naturally by others, Nilima's grandmother had questioned why they had come there. The woman also hinted that after Kamat's death she had thought Jaya would not go there.

Jaya then realized:

Now, with my eyes open, I found out that the world had been looking at me all the while. (65)

Jaya, a failed wife finally talks of her failure with Mukta, she wishes to believe in rebirth. To her rebirth gives one a chance to redeem the failures of this life. But Mukta makes it clear that being born again is in itself a failure. The real goal or the success remains in not to be born at all. Jaya discusses with her about Mohan's dishonesty but finds Mukta was not listening to her. She questioned why Jaya had left Kamat dying alone. She said she could have stayed. She also asked if it was because she was frightened of what anyone especially of what Mohan would say. But Mohan didn't know anything of it. While writing stumbling over the words, Jaya suddenly realised-it was not Mohan but marriage that had made her circumspect. Jaya was very much scared to harm her marriage.

Jaya's turmoil of married life had been further aggravated by her son Rahul's escapade. But the storm is pacified when Rahul returns with his uncle Vasant and a telegram comes from Mohan:

All well returning Friday morning (189)

By this time Jaya had found herself looking as a girl child, with her hands thrust in the pockets of her dress. She was excited to find the unexpected resources within herself. Now she thought of beginning with the child. All these years Jaya had been scared of breaking through the veneer of a happy family. Once the creativity is active in Jaya, she gathers courage to look at things differently. She found that the panic was gone. She had thought that she was Mohan's wife and cut off the bits of herself that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now she knew that kind of a fragmentation was not possible. The child, hands in pockets, had been with her through the years. She was still with her.

Her outlook now changes:

Two bullocks yoked together- that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I; Now I reject that image. It's wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I've always thought-there's only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices? (191-192)

Jaya remembers that she had seen the Sanskrit words 'Yatecchsi tatha Kuru'-in her father diary. Ramukaka had told her that the line was from *Bhagwadgita*:

With this line, after all those millions of world of instruction, Krishna confers humanness on Arjuna. 'I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire.' (192)

The meaning opens the knot for Jaya. She finds the answer to Jeeja's question.

With whom shall I be angry?

With myself, of course? (192)

Now Jaya knows:

If I have to plug that 'hole in the heart', I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us. While studying Sanskrit drama, I'd learnt with a sense of outrage that its rigid rules did not permit women characters to speak Sanskrit. They had to use Prakrit-language that had sounded to my ears like a baby's lisp. The anger I'd felt then comes back to me when I realize what I've been doing all these years. I have been speaking Prakrit myself. (193)

And the novel ends with Jaya's words:

It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible, And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. (193)

The novel is about breaking silence and asserting Jaya's individuality. Silence can never settle dispute whereas dialogues can. But in Indian milieu lots of women are silenced and

most of them do not find any impetus to break the silence when they are forced to remain so. The epigraph at the beginning of the novel acquiesces with the theme of the novel:

If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy-the weight of that long silence of one-half the world.
Elizabeth Robins, in a speech to the WWSL, 1907

The world has always tried to suppress one half of humanity. Now it's the responsibility of women like Jaya to come out of their exile. The novel reminds Bhikaiji Cama's words in Egypt:

I see here the representatives of only half the population of Egypt. May I ask where is the other half? Sons of Egypt? where are the daughters of Egypt? Where are your mothers and sisters, your wives and daughters?

- *Bhikaiji Cama of India*, at a meeting of the Egyptian National Congress at Brussels in 1910 (Kaur 1985: 102).

CHAPTER - IV

INTERROGATING THE ORTHODOX TRADITION: *ROOTS AND SHADOWS*

Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* represents how one's inheritance of roots and shadows of the past claim the person even after s/he denies them. Indu, the protagonist revolts against all orthodoxy and grows out to be a modern woman with considerable English education. But finally she finds herself in the same line with Akka, her surrogate mother, the domineering arbitrator of patriarchy. For in spite of her education and modern temperament she is forced to decide everyone's future in the family. Thus in the novel two categories i.e. tradition and modernity are invoked and contested in the personality of Indu. Indu herself also goes through a sea-change and matures into a confident woman in the process. The binary oppositions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' and all contradictions oozing out of them are finally resolved as Indu emerges victorious with illuminated insight and full of strength to face 'come what may'.

Indu, a married journalist, is influenced by her husband Jayant's material pursuit of happiness. Indu who has a writer's instinct in herself feels stifled as she compromises to write for the system's profit. The strangulation of free writing is intolerable for her but her husband persuades her to go on doing the job for he believes that one person cannot do much against the whole system. Any attempt on the part of an individual is but making futile gestures. They need the money in life as they have a long way to go.

Indu like a faithful wife had obeyed him. She had quietly gone back to work. She has done the work hating it and as a result she hated herself. Each day she woke up with the thought that she can't go on. She felt trapped, seeing herself endlessly chained to the long shadowy and dusty road that lay ahead of her. Naren was right to comment that Indu maintained a family shown in the advertisements slides. He said she sounded like those families in the advertisement slides – 'Happy, smiling, healthy and in colour' (25). For Indu told him in order to please Jayant and to make marriage successful she had concentrated on insignificant things. She had perfectly matched the emerging new woman elucidated by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan in her essay *Real and Imagined Women*:

The woman portrayed in these advertisements is attractive, educated, hardworking, and socially aware. (131)

So Indu had tried to decorate her real self with so many insignificant attributes going against the call of her true self.

The best places, whether you go out to eat or to cut your hair. Freshly laundered clothes twice a day. Clothes ... yes, we have to keep up with the latest trends ... (25)

Indu had changed herself so much that she was running after money and fame. Her soul cried out to Naren when she expressed the vacuity of her so-called happy life. She sighed they don't have friends but they have the right contacts and they know people whom one should know.

For Indu life became meaningful when she had met Jayant. Like any other Indian girl she too had been waiting to meet the person of her life with great expectations. Then one day she met Jayant and she thought she had found the purpose of her life. The day she had met him it seemed that a burden, the weight of uncertainty had fallen off her. She had felt absoluteness and a certainty instead. She had known that it was this man that she was waiting for. Indu soon realizes that she like any other Indian woman had wrong opinion about marriage and romanticism. As she later ponders over it while thinking about Mini. She thinks that the picture of marriage not only for Mini but for most of the brides in this country had always been false. Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, marriage was after all nothing but two persons, brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce only for the generations to continue.

Indu remembers the day when she had met Jayant. Like any other traditional girl she had woven the dream of perfect happiness. Indu's love, care and dependence on Jayant was so much that her every movement she was in thought of him.

When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him. And I can't blame him. It's not he who has pressurised me into this. It's the way I want it to be. And one day I had thought... isn't there anything I want at all? (49)

In this game of pleasing, she gradually became what she never was. She even resorted to lies in order to please and be a true Indian wife. She had found in herself an immense capacity for deception. She had learnt to reveal to Jayant only what he wanted to see. She said to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. She hid her responses and emotions. She had almost become like fluid with no shape and form of her own. She too thought in this way to be the ideal woman. She became a woman who sheds her 'I', and one who loses her identity in her husband's. She devoted herself completely to the task of becoming an ideal wife. For this she also decided that for her there should be only one man. She should be essentially monogamous: For me, it's one man and one man only. (81)

Such was her devotion that she thought that she can never be complete in herself. Until she had met Jayant she had not known it that there was somewhere outside her, a part of her without which she remained incomplete. Then she met Jayant and lost her ability to be alone.

This is the truth about her relationship. The dependent syndrome in her snatched her capacity to be alone. But every person is essentially alone. This is the truth of life. The individual self does matter a lot as relations with others matter. Indu tried to cage herself and wanted to done a 'self' of Jayant's liking. But soon she realizes the utter vacuity and callousness of such type of dependence. She finds that they are two individuals whose vibrations do not match. They do not sing in the same tune. It was not that Jayant and Indu did not care for each other. It was more like they were on different levels. He chooses his level and Indu tries to choose the one he would like her to be on. It anyhow humiliates her.

In spite of this humiliation Indu goes on with Jayant. Indu had even thought of blessed sexual happiness along with Jayant. When Jayant had touched her she had "burgeoned into a flower of exquisite felicity." (83) Her responses to him were very natural, so much beyond her and outside her. But there was a small crack in their otherwise perfect relation. Jayant was very passionate and ready but sitting up suddenly he denied having sex if Indu had taken the initiative. This crack gradually grew into a chasm. Gradually Indu discovered that it shocked him to find passion in her. It puts him off. When Indu takes the initiative, he turns away from her. Indu who was so passionate in loving Jayant was thus made to grope in the dark for fulfilment. As a result she learnt not to show off her real self:

A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately and is ashamed of it. (83)

Indu found the big fracture between her romantic ideals and practical realities. She could understand now that between the ideal and the reality there remains an unfathomable distance. On the contrary Jayant could never accept refusal from Indu. So even if Indu did not want, she pretended. She thought of Jayant and knew how unbearable he was. She feared to shatter him with withdrawal.

Indu knew whatever was going between them was not acceptable. She had found that Jayant had reached her body but not her soul which is never fair:

Jayant and I at the end of one of our moments of love-making. And I, aghast at my total self abandonment, had cried out. 'It's not fair.' And Jayant, staring at me in bland astonishment, moving off me without asking me why I had said that and what it meant. (127)

Thus they remained lying as two straight lines never fated to merge into one. Indu resorted to surrendering to him in order to avoid any conflict. She came to realize now that she did not do it for love as she had been telling herself. She did it to avoid any conflict. She was now an adept in the game of hiding the real feelings and emotions:

Do I not, with Jayant, hide my real emotions and urges and shelter behind a facade of caring-but-not-so-terribly-much? (130)

Perhaps all these pretensions, all these desires to satisfy the husband a woman associate her bodily desires with guilt and shame. This was same with Indu. It seemed to her that some ancient guilt still lies in her. She wondered how that makes people, even today to associate bodily desires with guilt and shame. Indu had once thought that her chasing for an alter ego was complete with Jayant. She had felt that in marrying him she had become complete. Earlier she had felt incomplete not only as a woman, but also as a person. In Jayant she had thought she had found the other part of her whole self. She had thought they had total understanding and perfect communication between them. But soon she had realized that her ideal of perfect communication was a hoax. She had realized that it was an illusion. She had felt cheated. But then again she had thought if perfect understanding can ever exist.

In spite of knowing that it is a vain search to have perfect understanding, she suffered. She suffered for she cared for her husband too much which in itself is a punishment as Old Uncle told her:

To care for anyone too much... It's all pain. A punishment. (107)

Even when Indu was in her home, she could not leave thinking of Jayant. Jayant was physically absent but reminded her of his existence in her life through sending a letter. The material hankering was clearly visible in his words. He had asked her to shake the dust of her place off and to return to him. He wanted to make their plans together which needed them together. These words clearly show his total callousness for his wife's feelings. In uttering these words he almost sounded like Shankarappa for whom Indu had thought:

How could a man be so insensitive to another's feelings? (185)

For Jayant's insensitiveness Indu had even thought of leaving him to stay alone and be just herself. That is the only way in which she can be herself- her whole self again. But she thought her dissatisfaction might have arisen from her too much expectation from Jayant. She remembers one of her friends saying:

You expect too much and you're bound to be disappointed. And so I'm grading my expectations down. Each month, each day, I expect less and less and less from him. (55)

Perhaps this was the answer for a healthy relationship. If we don't expect our chance of disappointment also scales down. Otherwise two human beings living under the same roof can never reach out to one another. It will always be a trap for individuals.

A trap? Or a cage? Maybe the comic strip version of marriage ... a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other ... Isn't so wrong after all. And it's not a joke, but a tragedy. But what animal would cage itself? (61)

Indu too felt stifled in the cage of the institution of marriage which outwardly seemed to be a happy union. So on Old Uncle's query if Indu was happy with him, Indu had answered that if he wanted to mean if her husband was the right person for her he was. But she sighs that marriage makes one so dependent. She too has become very dependent though she did not know about men.

It was old Uncle who made her understand that to be dependent is unavoidable and inevitable in a relationship. He has told that the whole world is made up of interdependent parts. So Indu is not an exception. Talking to Old Uncle she seemed to get meaning not only for herself but for everyone in the world. Indu had earlier thought how it was possible that one would give one's all expecting nothing in return. Old Uncle made her think that if all the bacteria in the world were to die, the rest of life would be unable to exist. He told her that people can't escape attachment. For it is the law of life. She can never protect herself against love. Indu could understand that being a human being it was almost impossible to reach the stage of no passions, no emotions – an unruffled placidity. Indu was given immense understanding as Old Uncle said to her. She understood that in spite of the hurt, the suffering, the humiliations in a relationship one goes on getting involved. That is the human predicament. Indu could understand that however much she wanted to escape her lot with Jayant it was almost impossible, for that's the coward's way.

Indu is an amalgamation of tradition and modernity. This is the reason that she is the emergent new woman. She has the qualities to overthrow orthodox traditions. It is, therefore, very important to trace out Indu's cause for surrendering to Jayant and later to Naren for sexual satisfaction. Indu a rebel at heart leaves her ancestral home but carries within herself the traditions of the house. So even after becoming independent economically, she submits to Jayant and is disillusioned of her romantic concept of marriage. She comes back home only to bathe in the light of knowledge. Here she interacts with her past and gains insightful knowledge. She even commits adultery but feels no guilt for it. As if this adultery was necessary for her to understand Jayant and above all to understand herself. Her writer's instinct which was so long stifled, finds new lease of life. She finds or rather discovers herself in the new light. She thinks:

There was nothing I couldn't do. Words, phrases, sentences, fell out of nowhere into my mind and arranged themselves with a beautiful precision, like ballet dancers. And I was filled with an exalted sense of confidence within myself.
(154)

In order to understand Indu's motives, her interactions with the past must be studied very minutely. Indu was brought up in the austere protocols propagated by her mother-surrogate Akka, who single-handedly ruled her father's house after coming back there as

a widow. Indu was at the mercy of ruthless, dominating bigot and inconsiderate Akka. Akka did not go to the hospital because she did not know the caste of the nurses and the doctors. She thought she could not drink a drop of water in the hospital. Akka did not accept Indu's marriage for she married outside of her caste. She believed that such marriages never work. For as they are from different castes, their languages are different, it can not last long. Such was the orthodox culture of Akka who believed in religion above human emotions. Indu remembers the concept of woman envisaged to her in that house. She had been told that a woman's life contained no choices. And all her life, especially in that house, she had seen the truth of that conception. The women there had no choice but to submit and accept. And Indu had wondered if the women were born without wills, or if their wills got atrophied through a lifetime of disuse. Indu had just done the same in her own life. She too had surrendered her will in the will of Jayant. Akka was such bigotry that she did not permit Indu's mother to learn music. She disapproved the fact that she had to learn music from a strange man. She had to sit and sing in front of strangers like '*those women*'. She disapproved because of family honour. She thought it was enough for her to sing one or two devotional songs and one or two *aarti* songs. She thought a girl from a decent family should not need anything more. Akka's words were like oracle in the family. No one ever dared to contradict her. So after Indu's mother's death no one talked of her in the family. Indu had lost her mother at birth. There was nothing unique about losing one's mother at birth. But a child often losing its mother gets some idea of her from others, from photo, from conversations. But to Indu no one had ever spoken of her mother or even mentioned her name. For her it had been a total blank. This blankness had left deep mark on her. And however incredible it may sound Indu had not even known of her mother's existence until Naren had said to her once, boastfully that his mother died by drowning. So did his father. He then asked her how her mother died. The mark was so deep that after being motherless Indu quailed at the thought of becoming a mother for fear of being disillusioned. Indu's father had shown utter hardness in leaving a fifteen-day-old motherless girl in the care of the family he hated and despised. He had only come to see her when she was more than a year old. So early in her childhood she did not get the love and affection of her parents. Being a traditional family the women had earnestly disapproved the fathers in the female role of caring for the child. It may be one reason for her father's detachment. Indu had even thought that as she was a female child, her father could do so. It was the tradition in their family that girls were left to their mothers. The daughter was exclusively the mother's

business. Certainly Indu was deprived of the care that a child should get. Indu was chiefly in the care of Akka and Atya – the two widows in the family. Akka was stern and strict for her while Atya fell in the category of givers. Even Atya never crossed the line chalked out by Akka. So the teachings that went in to the girl children in the family were that being a female they have to submit, surrender or give in. There is no other choice. As Mini puts it ever since they were small they were told that they'll be going away one day to their own home. They said it to Indu and Mini, never to Hemant or Sumant or Sharad or Sunil. Indu had seen the position of women in her home. From morning to night their sole duty was to ensure that cooking, feeding and taking care of the children and men were done in time. They patiently did the chores and never thought of reversing the duty. They were so shaped and moulded that for them the other way was anarchy. It was not that the female members like Akka, Atya, and Kaki wanted the girls to be submissive and meek. The males too had the same opinion. Kaka had once commented in a mood of anger:

Women and children should know their places. (48)

Once taunted by Sunanda Atya for being intelligent Indu had thought if being clever was a disgrace. She had sobbed out her hurt to old Uncle. He had made her understand what people want from women. He had said that for woman intelligence is always a burden. He declared that men like women not to think. The women in Indu's house patiently cleared up the mess with their bare hands after each meal. And women like Indu's Kaki used to take food in the same dirty plate their husbands had eaten in earlier. Indu wondered if they were martyrs, heroines, or just stupid fools. As a child Indu used to watch the woman piously circumambulating the *tulsi*, standing devoutly in front of it folding hands and closing eyes. Out of curiosity she had asked Atya what was that for. Atya had told Indu that if one prays to *tulsi*, she will keep a woman's husband safe. To Atya good fortune meant that a wife should not survive her husband as she had. But to grown up Indu good fortune means many more things. But she too is pinioned to the ancient belief and culture. So she always longed that Jayant should be with her always - all the time and forever. So basically she is not different from Atya. So in thinking like this Indu too is a traditional woman who in spite of modern education and independence has not stepped much forward. The tradition is injected in her. So if she does not think of her as stern Brahmin, she has evolved her own class:

We Indians can never get away from caste. If we've rejected the old ones, we've embraced new ones. Do I think of myself as a Brahmin? Rarely, if ever. But I'm the educated, intelligent, urban, middle class. We have our own rules, our own pattern, to which I adhere as scrupulously as Atya and Kaki observe their fasts and pujas. (58)

Indu on coming back home also meets women who had seen her as a small child. Indu knew what mattered to them was that Indu was a childless woman. This is the society which wants women to have babies as soon as they are married. So Kaku, the old woman spoke to her contemptuously. Indu knew that those women had their own standards for judging others. They do not think of Indu or her academic distinctions, her career, her success, her money. None of these things would impress them.

This type of women was proud of having their names changed by their husbands after their marriage. Indu was brought up amidst them and somehow or other their way of thing was there in her too. Otherwise why could she not think of her existence without Jayant.

Even after growing up Indu could not accept her womanhood gracefully. This is reflected in her writing too. Naren had told her about her writing that had he not known who the writer was, he would have thought it was a man. Indu remembers what went wrong about her womanhood. The knowledge of her womanhood had been thrust on her the day she had grown up:

'You're a woman now,' Kaki had told me, 'you can have babies yourself.'

I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, baldly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I, who had had all the child's unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it.

'And don't forget', she had cried. 'for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything.' (79)

So such had been her introduction to the beautiful world of woman. She was given the concept that she was unclean. She had also been a victim of child abuse. Home, within the boundaries of which a girl child is supposed to be safe, had been unsafe for Indu. At

the age of fifteen when she was learning to ride the bicycle, she had accepted her uncle's help. She had accepted the help gladly until she had felt his '*helping hands*' giving her the age old messages of male to female. At fifteen she was woman enough to have that instinctive knowledge of male hunger. But she was child enough to panic with the knowledge of being the object of it. She had avoided him ever since.

Amidst all these bizarre experience, Indu was fated to be different and successful. For it credit goes to her father who admitted her to an English School in order to make her different from others. So he had instructed that she must have to go to an English School.

Her father had asserted himself by claiming her for going to an English School Indu's vision had broadened and she had the strength to oppose even the domineering Akka. Akka had once scolded her for standing alone in the corner of the library while talking to a boy. She had made it clear how she deviated from the family tradition, for no girl from the family has been ever talked about. But Indu had gathered courage to withstand Akka's wrong allegations.

It was as if I had been accumulating. 'I won'ts' since my birth. Now it had become a mountain of a negation, giving me an immense strength to withstand.
(74)

She had shocked Akka by saying that she was not ashamed of as she had done nothing wrong. But Akka too had her weapon:

I don't know where you get it from. Your father was such a quiet boy.' - she had eyed me with her shrewd, calculating look - 'until your mother trapped him.'
(74)

Indu had always venerated the sacred love between her parents who had the courage to break the insurmountable barriers of caste and lived intensely blessed life together. Akka's word had been for Indu profanation and desecration. The same day she had written to father and made her plans for leaving.

Thus Indu left her home with immense hatred for it. The hatred was so deep that when Akka made her the heir to her property, she sensed something ill in it. She thought Akka did not spare her even when she was dead and had her last laugh on her. So talking to Naren she spat venom for Akka. She viciously said how she wished to poison her. The

rebel was always alive in Indu but it needed the necessary impetus. Indu was denied sexual happiness with Jayant for he could not accept a passionate wife. She had always wanted involvement not detachment. When Naren had touched her, she had felt as if she had found out 'one more piece of the jigsaw puzzle.'

On returning from Naren's home Indu had seen a great change in her:

The same trees, with the same crows cawing their silly souls, if they had any, out. And yet it all looked different. The change was in me. Suddenly I understood all those poets and writers who had gushed about the grass being greener, the sky bluer, and the flowers more beautiful ... all because of love.
(88)

And finally when she had sex with Naren it made her feel blessed. She had thanked Naren for it. Even after sex outside marriage, her conscience was not pricked for she had committed no crime. After this act she found herself with immense potentialities. No more she would have to take male's point of view and deny her femaleness.

Her sexual instinct had remained unsatisfied until she had met Naren. There was ease and comfort between them even after their act of adultery. For Naren too it was like performing some rite with solemnity and earnestness. As both of them had been true to their sexual instinct without any pretension, it did not appear to them as crime. It rather enriched Indu to face the world with boldness and certainty which was earlier lacking in her. They had done that for motives of their own:

Can I tell you, Old Uncle, how we made use of each other? Can I tell you we made love? Not for love, nor lust either, but for motives of our own. He ... ? To get back at the family? At me? And I? To get back at Jayant?' (179)

It was as if she got the answer of all her questions. She now knew that it was foolish to hanker for perfect happiness. Old Uncle's words that the whole world is made up of interdependent things also seemed to bear meanings. Finally after deciding to make a Trust out of Akka's property she was to go back home. Naren too was dead. With his death, Indu was overcome with grief and loneliness:

It was a sense of the utter loneliness of the human spirit that overwhelmed me as I saw Naren lying there, detached, remote and far removed from us and all our emotions. (176)

Indu's father had also sensed that something was wrong with her. He sounded like a knell when he asked her:

And when are you going back to Jayant, Indu? (163)

Indu knew her father well. It was her father's flashes of shrewdness which belied his apparent naiveté. Indu had tried to sound certain of herself and said that she would leave perhaps within a week.

Gradually interacting with her past, bathing in the blessed sea of sexual fulfilment and through introspection Indu came out with the solutions. Indu had decided to go back to Jayant and wanted to see if her 'home could stand the scorching touch of honesty.' (187) She had made up her mind not to tell Jayant about Naren and herself. For she thought it was not important:

That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. But there were other things I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing. That I would not, could not enrich myself with Akka's money. That I would, on the other hand, pay for Mini's wedding. (187)

So far she was in her shell where she reduced herself day by day to a non-entity. In the process in the name of love and submission she was alienated from Jayant which is never an answer:

Alienation, I know now, is not the answer. On the contrary, too much of it and we can die of a terrible loneliness of the spirit. 'I am alone'... they seem to me to be the most poignant words in any language.' (10)

When Indu had first revealed to Jayant about her plans that she would give up her job and devote herself to writing, Jayant had been furious and unbelieving. But Indu could show her firmness and anger to make him understand that he can no longer influence her. It was her fault earlier for not revealing either her strength or weakness to him. But when she opened herself to Jayant they had better chance of happiness. There is an ease in their

relationship that was not there earlier. Indu is illuminated with knowledge and understanding. She no more fantasises to achieve complete happiness with Jayant. She thought of the cries that had filled her earlier. She wanted to be loved, she wanted to be happy. The cries are now silenced not because she is satisfied, or yet hopeless, but because such demands now seem to her futile exercise. Neither love nor happiness come to people for the asking. But they can sneak up on anyone when one least expects them. Indu remembered how one day she came away tired, dishevelled and almost in tears from her writing thinking if her writing would remain still-born. It was Jayant who comforted her. Jayant had said putting his arms comfortingly around Indu that he would publish that. And Atya brought her a cup of tea. Indu never knew happiness was made up of such little things. It was Jayant to comfort her after Old Uncle's death. She had spoken to him about Old Uncle that he was one of the pillars of their house. Jayant had comforted her with something very revealing. He had said that such things happen. He had said that Indu herself was a pillar. Indu had got new perception. She now believes that it is not the dead who need our loyalty, but the living.

It is for his reason that she broke her promise to Naren. He had made her promise not to help Vithal but he was the first to benefit from Akka's Trust. Realisation dawned on her as she remembered Old Uncle's words:

The whole world is made up of interdependent parts. Why not you? (14)

She now knows that everything in the world is connected with each other so freedom has to be always relative:

'All things are connected.' Yes, they are. Which is why no one can be completely free. Freedom has to be relative (14)

Indu had thought twice in her life that she was free. First when she had left home as a young girl. And the second time when again she left the family after Naren's death to return to Jayant. Both times she found out that she was wrong in her pursuit of freedom:

New bonds replace the old, that is all. (14)

Indu thought of her childhood days when on reversing the rigid pattern of serving food she had met with catastrophic result. On trying to evade the rules Old Uncle had made her understand the importance of rules in one's life. So that life can have both dignity

and grace. One can always find streaks of freedom within these rules. The words returned to Indu loaded with meaning:

To fulfil one's obligations, to discharge one's responsibilities ... can one not find freedom within this circle? (15)

With all this understandings Indu finally resorts to writing for that is the only thing she can do. It is writing which can give her peace and satisfaction. The creative self had so long been suppressed. Now with maturity she can put her mind in black and white with confidence.

CHAPTER - V

SEXUAL ASSAULTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE MARRIAGE: *THE BINDING VINE*

The novel *The Binding Vine* can be said to be Shashi Deshpande's intervention into women's experience of sexual violence. Sexual violence is an intrinsic part of women's lives irrespective of class, caste, community or race. The patriarchal power structures existing in the society which are supposed to protect women's honour are but perpetrators of this violence. Rape is a crime of violence on women and it is often used by men as power of domination. As rape is exercised as power of domination, it becomes the root cause of women's subordination. Men use rape as one of the ways to dominate to which women are made to submit due to anatomical structure. Man violets woman's body and soul with the heinous act of rape. Rape which is a form of sexual violence is carried by force imposing a power relation between men and women.

Literally, rape is the forcible penetration of the female body by the male sexual organ in the expression of male sexual domination and hence of patriarchy itself (Rajan 1980: 77).

Rape in which one is forced to have sexual intercourse is the very serious crime among the sexual assaults. It is serious violation of women's freedom and their state. Feminist interventions in the position of women have taken up this subject of assault on women. Popular discourses have also ventured to show how this traumatic experience can change the lives of women. This is therefore the subject of many a novelist who want to make society aware of this crime. Shashi Deshpande is just one of them to foreground this assault through her novel. But her uniqueness lies in the fact that she catches attention how one can become the victim of rape even within the sanctity of marriage. How people take it for granted that after marriage couple have only consensual sex. Seldom people think that a man just takes a licence of marriage for raping a woman. For in so called social marriages women are raped by their husbands. As they have no say on their lives they stay with their rapist husbands and gradually give in thinking of the family's welfare and social custom. Women are shaped and moulded in such a way that they are bound to accept such sexual violence. The nightmarish assault of women's body and soul becomes

women's lived experience and they silently bear the scratches due to their utter helplessness. Economic dependence, lack of education, social customs force women to accept everything and anything. Sexual assault whether within marriage or outside marriage leaves deep scar in the victim's body, mind and soul. The experience is almost like annihilation of the being- the aftermath only leaves the person in skeleton. The victim may lead the life but that life becomes 'life in death'. When such is the consequence if the body is ravaged the law should be stricter and society should be more cautious to protect the persona of women. Instead the law and society remain callous in the face of such crisis. Rape and sexual violence against women have been strongly articulated in novel *Binding Vine* by Deshpande. Deshpande also brings out the inhuman treatment of the rape victim by the protectors of law and order.

In *Binding Vine* Deshpande presents two stories of rape victims-one that of Kalpana and the other of Mira through the protagonist Urmī's reflection on them. The two stories are interwoven in order to help Urmī to come out of mental trauma after losing her girl child who was just a year old. Urmī who is trying to come to terms with life after her dear daughter's death suddenly finds herself listening to Shakutai whose daughter Kalpana is raped and reading Mira's poetry who was sexually assaulted by her husband.

- what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too (63)

Both the stories question the notion of patriarchal authority which subjugates women due to her sexuality. The stories also show how society induces them to retreat into silence snipping off their demands of freedom and to think of their own emotional and intellectual needs. Women are exposed to hostile environment both within and outside the home where they may be sexually abused at anytime. Urmī's sensibility is hurt when she finds that Kalpana is on the verge^{of} death and Mira too died at a young age both due to their sexuality. Urmī who wanted a blessed life for her own daughter cannot accept that daughters face such fate at the primes of their lives. She knows the pain of a mother losing her daughter untimely. She herself had wanted for her daughter a long, graceful life as every mother wants. She could not thank God for she had her baby for a whole year. It wasn't enough for her. She wanted her for her whole lifetime and she wanted a full life for her daughter.

Urmila had found Shakutai, Kalpana's mother to go into pieces at Kalpana's plight. Shakutai too had wanted a generous life for Kalpana. She wanted her to have all she never had-education, a good life, a good marriage, respect from others.

Mira's mother too had perhaps thought of a blessed life for her through marriage. But Mira was rather unhappy for being sexually abused by her husband. In Mira's diary entry she had written of an incident when astrologer had visited their home to read their horoscopes. Only her mother's horoscope was not read. When Mira had enquired if she did not want to know her future, she had said:

What's there in my life apart from all of you? If I know all of you are well and happy, I'm happy too. (101)

Urmila finds herself in solidarity with these women when she thinks of why she had to face her unfortunate destiny of losing her daughter. She had read Mira's diary where Mira asks the same question and finds Shakutai repeating the same.

How clear it comes to me across the years, her cry of rage and anguish. 'why does this have to happen to me?' why did it have to happen to my daughter? Shakutai asked me. Why? My own question comes back to me – Why? (67)

Perhaps this solidarity made Urmila to stand by Shakutai in her difficult times and to be determined to publish Mira's poetry. These two steps were perhaps the best tribute to her daughter. The realisation had dawned on her where she was conversing with Akka. Akka told her:

You can't hold on to your grief that way, you have to let it go. Only then our dead stay with us. (155)

Urmila had the same feeling of serenity after immersing her father's ashes – the feeling as if her father was there with them even after death. She thought Akka was right that our dead are always with us.

Death cannot blot our life. Anu will always be with me. The link between us stays vibrant, alive. A kind of comforting warmth suffuses me at the thought, thawing the chill that has been with me since Anu died. (155)

It was at that point that Urmila decides to publish Mira's poetry to resurrect Mira, her husband Kishore's dead mother.

Suddenly I decide. I will tell Akka about Mira, about my dream, no, it is no longer just a dream, it is a plan, to resurrect Mira, to let her voice be heard. (155)

Mira was a promising poet who was forced into a marriage at the age of 18 against her will. She was more than an average woman who did not seek to be a subdued woman like her mother.

*To make myself in your image
was never the goal I sought* (124)

Elsewhere she is seen asking her mother:

Why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despise of your own?
(126)

Perhaps for this she wrote poetry but she never showed them to anyone fearing others would laugh. The poems lay in her trunk until Urmila and Akka read them. Her husband married her with single-minded obsession for her. He was aggressive and desired to possess and control her life and in the process subdued her.

- a man who tried to possess another human being against her will. (83)

Mira's intense dislike for her husband's sexual advances runs all through her writing:

It runs through all her writing – a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married. (63)

She feared the coming of the first night which is reflected in her poetry.

*But tell me, friend, did laxmi too
twist brocade tassels round her fingers
and tremble, fearing the coming
of the dark – clouded, engulfing night?* (66)

Her diary entry shows her displeasure more accurately. Her husband could never reach to her soul. She wrote that she gave him the facts, nothing more, never her feelings. He came to know what she was doing and he used to get angry with her. She didn't mind his

anger, it made him leave her to herself, and it was bliss for her when he did that. But he used to come back after being remorseful, repentant. He used to hold her close. he used to babble. And so again it used to begin. He used to request her in the name of love.

'please,' he says, 'Please, I love you.' And over and over again until he has done, 'I love you.' Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror and wonder, what is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can't he leave me alone? (67)

Thus Mira and her husband stood on the two poles-miles apart. They were two straight lines who would never meet.

*Fixed forever in our places,
face to face the two of us,
like Siva and his nodding Bull. (82)*

Urmi assumes from her poetry and diary entry that it was perhaps her mother who told her 'never to say no'.

*Don't tread paths barred to you
obey, never utter a 'no';
submit and your life will be
a paradise, she said and blessed me. (83)*

At marriage she was given a different identity altogether. This shift of her identity which was meant to demolish her earlier self saddened her only to resolve that they cannot change her.

*A glittering ring gliding on the rice
carefully traced a name 'Nirmala'.
Who is this? None but I,
My name hence, bestowed upon me.*

*Nirmala, they call, I stand statue-still.
Do you build the new without razing the old?*

A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold

can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (101)

With marriage Mira found herself cloistered in a home, living with a man she could not love and surrounded by people she had nothing in common with.

Perhaps it was her writing that made her life worth living. It was at night she wrote poetry stealthily only after the man had slept for certainly she did not have a study room of her own. Whatever she wrote, she did it, late at night, after the man had gone to bed. So her husband had no knowledge of her poetic excellence.

Her path of writing had not been smooth enough. Once she had met the prominent poet Venu who discriminated her for being a poetess. She was hurt but that could not stop her indomitable spirit to write.

It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men. (127)

Benu reminds one of Robert Southey who commented rudely on Charlotte Bronte that literature cannot be the business of a women's life, and it ought not to be.

In spite of her mother's advice she found her will rising up against him:

no, growing painfully within

Like a monster child was born. (83)

Despite of her unwillingness he forced himself on her and it was out of this wedlock that Urmi's husband Kishore was born. Mira survives the fear and humiliation of her rape by her husband and emerged happy when she felt the life within her. It was a period of peace and contentment to live each day and to feel the child growing within her.

Tiny fish swimming in the ocean of my womb

my body thrills to you;

churning the ocean, shaking distant shores

you will emerge one day.

*Lightning flashed through the front door
and I was who was stone quivered.
Bridging the two worlds, you awaken in me
A desire for life.*

*Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;
But how escape this cord
this binding vine of love? Fear lies coiled within
this womb-piercing joy.*

*Smiling and joyful, Karna tore off his armour,
his body trailed blood,
Will that courage be mine when, demided,
I stand naked and bare? (136-137)*

Mira was enthralled by the movement in her womb. But she never wanted the child to be a daughter to repeat the story.

*I feel the quickening in my womb,
he moves – why do I call the child he? (149)*

Urmila reflects why Mira did not want to bear a daughter. It is because Mira was frightened of bearing the constant burden of fear for her daughter as well?

The happiness of bearing the child filled Mira with the desire to live. As every living cell desires to multiply as written in the *Upanisads* :

Sokamayata bahusyam prajayeya iti.(134)

So perhaps Mira at last found the spring of life which she was seeking so long.

*Standing still I searched,
Stretching out my arms,*

*Sinking deep into the earth,
Like the banyan roots,
Seeking the spring of life. (151)*

Mira's story thus is the story of so many women in India who at last find peace when they enter motherhood. But before that their lives are one of domination of sexual power.

The position of Mira who represents most of the Indian wives can be aptly understood through the words of V. Geetha as focused in the book '*Gender*.'

... the experience of marriage becomes central to female sexual discovery, and after this proves to be traumatic. This is not only because many young brides are unformed about sexual love, but because it binds them to a relationship they can not easily refute. For, intimacies, especially sexual and erotic ones, can be imagined, experienced and rendered legitimate only within marriage. This, in turn, means that no bride can afford to desert her marriage, even if it proves to be abusive, because in her sense of it such a desertion connotes a betrayal of her own body, its sexual trust and intimacy.

Such knowledge of her sexuality allows the young bride very few options: she dare not desire in ways that may subvert the sanctity of her marriage bed. Further, she cannot, must not, voice but her displeasure or hurt over her husband's sexual behaviour. Above all, she has to live with the burden of a bound sexuality. This knowledge of herself and the multiple material burdens that wifedom thrusts on her together make the young bride's life harsh, painful and sad. Of course, no woman accepts her position as such-there are bound to be negotiations, subtle threats, refusals on her part as well. But the point is the logic of the male gaze works such that destined to marry, she cannot escape her sexual fate (Geetha 2002: 121).

Thus a submissive role is assigned to the wife through the violation of her body. Worst of all is that this act of violation remains hushed up in most of the cases. Mira spoke of it in her privacy through her poetry. What her daughter-in-law wants is to publish them for her. It would help others to voice forth their domination. The revelation would be appalling but would render universal appeal for women who suffer in marriage-bed and remain silent.

Deshpande takes into account another case of rape victim in her narrative. Kalpana, a young girl of eighteen living in a Bombay Chawl had been mercilessly raped and left to struggle between life and death. Urmila meets her mother on her visit to her sister-in-law Vanna in the hospital. The mother had become almost hysterical with shock when she listens that her daughter had been raped. Urmila extended emotional support to Shakutai in her crisis and came to know the whole story of Kalpana. Being a mother of a daughter Urmila knew what it meant for a mother to see her daughter in death bed. Urmila becomes very close to Shakutai and at last fights for Kalpana's cause.

Shakutai, a deserted wife had wanted her children a better life than her own. She had dreamt for Kalpana a happy life. She wanted her to have all that she never had- education, a good life, a good marriage, and respect from others.

But Shakutai was aware of the hard, unscrupulous world outside though she remained unaware of the insecurity inside the family ties. Ever since Kalpana grew up, she had to live with that fear. But Kalpana did not pay heed to her mother's worries.

Kalpana was young at heart; she had her dreams about her life. She had been earning also to be independent enough. Urmila had tried to read Kalpana's dreams as she heard about her.

Kalpana was – is – young, at an age when her existence is still a miracle to her. And therefore she walked out of that ramshackle building with gaily painted nails and lips, brightly coloured clothes and sleek, shining hair, loudly proclaiming the miracle of that existence. (149)

Though all young people do like this her uneducated mother thought that it was unwise for her to be so. Shakutai like many other women believe that women should not flaunt themselves. They think that would arouse male desire. Therefore it is women who should restrict their movements. They never think that it is never healthy for society that its men should be protected even when they are at fault. Sometimes even after the abuse women are scolded or rebuffed for arousing male desire by flaunting and beautifying themselves.

Women who do disclose abuses are often advised to restrict their movements or adapt their clothes so as to avoid tempting men to attack them. This puts the blame entirely on women, projecting them as sexual objects who arouse male

desire. It also ignores the fact that many rapes take place by people they trust and are often an assertion of male authority (Bagchi 2005: 121).

She had even warned Kalpana about the worst consequence but Kalpana snubbed her.

I warned Kalpana, but she would never listen to me. "I'm not afraid of anyone," she used to say. That's why this happened to her.... women must know fear? (148)

Kalpana had no fear in heart and loudly proclaimed her desire to be different from her mother.

I'll never live like you,... (178)

But destiny had something else in store for her. She was brutally raped and left to die on the road side at the prime of her life. The doctor examining her gives the details of the brutality of her rape.

You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her thighs – he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips – bitten and chewed. (88)

Urmila too is intensely shocked at the sight of the gory picture of the rape victim. It was a pain which a woman could not bear. There was a very ugly sense of being a voyeur. It was hard to stare at the girl. She was so slight that her body scarcely raised the coarse hospital blanket that covered her. Her face was discoloured in patches, the lips, dark and swollen, parted as she breathed. Her arms, symmetrically arranged outside the covers, one strapped down for the IV tube, were pathetically thin. The wrists were as small as a child's. There were little nicks on her forearms – healing scars of the cuts her glass bangles must have made. After the traumatic experience of rape Kalpana slipped into coma. She lost her consciousness and was fighting death. She was *'Not dead, not alive.'*(61) Shakutai,her mother thinks of her marriage in the hope that she would recover. She earnestly asks the doctor not to make police report. The question of family honour surely disturbs her. She thinks she would never be able to hold up her head again. No one marry the girl after such an incident. She turns to the Doctor requesting him not to tell the police.

Though the doctor tries to make her understand why it should be reported, she still thinks of the girl's honour. The question of girl's chastity at the time of marriage is what plays a vital role in Indian marriages. So Shakutai is concerned and trying to hide the fact of her girl being raped. In countries like India where a women's virginity plays a great role in marriage, unmarried raped girls' family do not want it to be public. The family thinks that if a girl's honour is lost, nothing is left. The girl wouldn't have to do anything wrong, people will always point a finger at her. Shakutai is just voicing forth the society at large. The society always points the finger at the girls even though she is raped and is in no way at fault. While the girl is stigmatised the man lives with impunity. It seems utterly callous to know that even the sympathy of people does not go with the girl when she is so horribly wronged. Obviously in this situation the parents suffer beyond imagination. Like many cases of rape, Kalpana was raped by the person whom her mother had trusted. Kalpana was raped by none other than her uncle (husband of mother's sister). It was finally disclosed to Shakutai by her sister when due to fear of police enquiry her husband had sought her help and asked her to lie to the police. It was obviously traumatic for Kalpana's aunt to accept that her dear cousin was raped by her husband. She could not bear the pain and revealed everything to her sister before committing suicide. Shakutai who could never imagine his name as the rapist even in her wildest dream reveals to Urmila the shocking news.

Her husband...Prabhakar, he... he did it to my Kalpana, my Sulu's husband.... it was he ... (188)

Gradually Shakutai reveals everything to Urmila and expresses her shock for remaining a naive about Kalpana's abuse by her brother-in-law. The picture of child abuse comes forward as Kalpana had been eyed as a sexual object by that man since her childhood. Sulu, Shakutai's sister says he was always mad about Kalpana. When Kalpana had gone to live with them he tried to abuse her. She was only a child then, she was fourteen when he tried his hand on her. He was such a rogue that he thought he could do what he wanted with a mere a child. That's why she ran away from there and refused to go back. But she didn't tell anything to Shakutai. She wondered why she did not understand then. She had trusted them beyond doubt. She should have known, at least she should have guessed. Shakutai could not sense the intentions of Prabhakar for she took him for a loving uncle who called her "My beauty". She thought him to be affectionate in whose care she even had sent her daughter. Kalpana's case reminds one of Taslima Nasreen who too was

raped by her own uncle of which she talks in 'Lajja'. Girls become vulnerable at the very hands of their protectors. This is the shoddy truth. Indian sentiments are such that the oppressor often goes scot free. Shakutai rues the fact to have destroyed her own daughter because of her sheer ignorance. She is in a fix if she should disclose the name to the police.

Should I tell the police? What should I do? (194)

For she thinks it is useless for her to know if the culprit is punished or not for she has already destroyed her daughter's future.

What's the use now? Kalpana's destroyed, we destroyed her, Sulu and I. (194)

Shakutai loses her dear sister too. Sulu commits suicide after she comes to know who Kalpana's offender is. Sulu must have been remorseful for she had earlier silenced Kalpana not to tell of the abuse that her husband had tried on her. Kalpana, a mere child was perhaps scared and didn't refer to it to her own mother even. Sulu revealed everything to Shakutai the day before the day she committed suicide. She told her that so long she kept everything to herself. She never told her sister about her troubles even about Kalpana. She hushed up the fact that he'd tried to put his hands on Kalpana. She had warned Kalpana not to tell anything about it either to Shakutai or anyone else. Sulu asked Kalpana to keep silence in the fear of harming her married life. Sulu might have been deserted by her husband if his notoriety was disclosed. Kalpana, a young girl kept silent in fear. Kalpana also kept silence because both Sulu and her mother wanted to marry her to Prabhakar, Sulu's husband. Sulu had wanted that to appease her husband, she must silence both Kalpana and herself.

Get me Kalpana, he kept telling her, and you can stay on here, I don't mind. She came to me and I thought it was her idea, that's what she told me. I have no children, she said. If Kalpu marries him, she can be mistress of the house, she doesn't have to do anything, I'll do all the work, everything. I thought, what's wrong? At least he's not a drunkard, or a wife-beater or a waster like my husband. I thought, maybe this is the best thing for her... (193)

It may be that Kalpana feared she might be forced to marry her attacker if she opened her mouth against him. This fear might have existed in Kalpana's mind even after she was raped by her uncle. She slipped into coma as a result of the traumatic sexual assault. It

was perhaps better for her to slip into coma than to marry the attacker. Who knows if everything remained fine she would have to marry Prabhakar whom she hated and was in love with a young boy. So rape annihilated Kalpana's both mental and physical persona and forced her to move into the vegetative state.

Women who are the victims of sexual violence are often reluctant to report the crime to members of the family, police or other authorities due to personal trauma attached to the incidents. In countries like India honour, unmarried women who report a rape may be forced to marry their attacker. (Bagchi 2005: 121)

Shakutai is at a loss at what her destiny has brought to her. She asks Urmil frantically:

Why does God give us daughters? (150)

This question has shaken Urmil's cord of sympathy. She has lost her own daughter but now she wants to help Shakutai in her fight against destiny. She cries out to Vanna when she gets the news of Kalpana's transfer to a suburban hospital for lack of bed.

Not a terrible thing for the girl to die? You think the mother can do it that way?
You know nothing about it, you shouldn't talk. (167)

By saying '*you know nothing about it.*' Urmil implies the pain of losing one's daughter. This is one pocket of suffering that she and Shakutai share while Vanna does not. Urmil is now frantic to keep Kalpana in that hospital so that her mother can visit her easily. And by chance she meets her college friend Malcolm, the journalist in the hospital premises who too was looking for some eye-catching media news. Urmil exploits that chance. Kalpana becomes the breaking news of every news paper. Women organisations upheld her cause. Kalpana became an issue and her case stormed Assembly. The Govt ordered an investigation into Kalpana's case. Finally it was assured that Kalpana won't be transferred.

Urmil's interaction with Shakutai and Mira's poetry help her to come out of her personal trauma caused by her daughter's death. Life changes for her too. She comes to realise the vitals of life which keep people go on even after disaster. The onward process of life would go on even after destruction and disaster which might hinder the process for the time being. Both the stories of Kalpana and Mira made Urmil enlightened. After Sulu's

death Urmila had gone to Shakutai. Shakutai had confided in Urmila all her secrets. She had cried and babbled frantically almost all through the night. In the morning Urmila wakes up to find herself on the chair. At night Shakutai had covered her with a soft, soap-smelling cotton sari. Urmila finds that Shakutai had already started her daily chores.

She is sitting by the stove, her face gaunt and shadowed under the unshaded bulb. (196)

Urmila finally heads for home but a realisation dawns her.

It seems surprising, when I come out of that room of grief and suffering, to find the world outside unchanged. (196)

The world is unchanged and even Shakutai who had been so disturbed throughout the night is sitting by the stove to come back to normalcy. In the morning Urmi found her getting on with her chores. One can neither opt out, nor lay it down - the burden of belonging to the human race. She thinks that there's only one way out of that *Chakravyuha*. Abhimanyu had to die. There was no other way he could have got out.

When Urmila reaches home she is also entangled in the daily chores.

I race through my chores in the next one hour – cooking, getting ready for college, looking through my timetable, my notes, preparing Kartik's lunchbox. This is how life is for most of us, most of the time: we are absorbed in the daily routine of living. The main urge is always to survive. (203)

Urmila thinks of Mira's life. Mira who could never accept her husband went on living and found meaning in life when she discovered the spring of life in her womb. Mira too had realised that life is for living and she should live it in spite of the adversity. Mira had said:

Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be. (203)

Urmila realises that we cannot escape the miseries of life. Life may become hard and painful but we have to overcome every hurdle. She cannot undo the events that have already happened. There is no way back in life we always have to walk straightway

forward. Neither can we leap into future. We have to bear the torments of life and emerge out of it winning the adversaries. She thinks:

There can be no vaulting over time. We have to walk every step of the way, however difficult or painful it is; we can avoid nothing. (9)

Urmila emerges out of the pain when she listens to the call of her conscience. She has met Kalpana and read Mira's poetry. She wants to bring out justice for Kalpana and wants to make public Mira's poetry. Mira's voice had so long been silenced similarly Kalpana's case would be hushed if Urmila does not intervene.

Both Mira's and Kalpana's story ignites in Urmila's consciousness - the need of resistance for gendered oppression.

After Anu died, the voice stopped. Then I saw Kalpana. I met Shakutai. I read Mira's diary, her poems. And I've begun to think yes, I've managed, but I've been lucky, that's all. While these women.... You understand what I'm saying. Vanna? They never had a chance. It's not fair, it's not fair at all. And we can't go on pushing it - what happened to them - under the carpet forever because we're afraid of disgrace. (174)

She feels for both of them and ventures to publish Mira's poetry and catch the attention of the media to secure a bed in the hospital for Kalpana. The entire narrative thus revolves round the two rape victims and becomes a discourse of resistance towards sexual violence on women. Both Mira and Kalpana are symbolic. Mira is symbolic of thousands of women who are victims of sexual assault within the sanctity of marriage. And Kalpana is symbolic of all those young underprivileged girls who remain insecure and vulnerable at the hands of oppressive patriarchy. For men rape is the weapon of fulfilling both desire and domination while it drastically changes the life and soul of the victim. A raped woman's self is totally annihilated because of 'physically subjugation, concretion of will and psychological humiliation.' Textual strategies of representation of this sexual violence make the culpable society at large to think of this very enigma. A discourse of rape is a suitable platform for expressing women's vulnerability. The experiences of sexual violence expressed in these discourses show the personal trauma attached with the incident of rape. The intervention of Shashi Deshpande obviously would help to create awareness in the society. The most important point that Deshpande brings forward is that

most of the cases of rape go unreported. Married women raped by their husbands do not report it and bear the brunt of it throughout their lives. Unmarried girls fear to report as they are scared of being stigmatised and they also fear to be thrown out of society with changed situation women might have become a bit courageous to report it at present. But certainly this type of intervention is the need of the day to make women aware of their rights and thus empower them.

CHAPTER - VI

REALISING AND UNDERSTANDING THE FACE OF RELATIONS: A MATTER OF TIME

A Matter of Time exposes the readers to understand the reasons of a wife's silence, speech and action to go on with life after being deserted by her husband for no palpable reason. Sumi like thousands of women in India is deserted by her husband. While in most of the cases women are subjected to various types of violence. Sumi is not a victim in that sense. But Sumi's card house is blown away and her soul is violated when her husband walks on her and their daughters without producing sufficient reason. In case of being a victim of physical violence women generally do not protest in the hope of being united with her husband for the welfare of the children. Different social pressures - fear, family-honour etc. also do not let them protest. Due to age old tradition of considering the husband a sheltering tree, women try to save them by keeping silence. Therefore, silence signifies subjectivity of the women who do not have any alternative but to submit. But Deshpande uses silence to show Sumi's strength.

Sumi chooses to be silent but not in the hope of being united with her husband. She understands that there is no point in placing her case in the court of law. She rather invests her time and energy to empower herself by getting a job. The point is economic empowerment can only save a woman in time of any crisis in her life. The novel showcases three generations of women- Sumi, her mother Kalyani and her grandmother Manorama - all standing in solidarity, silenced by various societal pressures. Sumi's daughter Aru, a present day young woman, becomes vocal against her father's step but is frustrated finding no way out. Manorama and Kalyani accept their fate and mould themselves according to the need of the males in their lives. Sumi goes a step forward, she accepts her fate as it comes but recognizes the need of the moment and proceeds forward with her life. She is not stalemated or cursing her lot as her mother. She goes on with her life to make a better future for herself and her daughters. Sumi had lived a life of a home maker after her marriage. In spite of having sufficient education and a creative soul she confined herself within the home for the welfare of the family. Even though she is an urban, educated, new woman, she submits to tradition. She tries to become ideal

wife and mother and thus submerges herself in so-called marital bliss. But her happiness deludes her. Soon she realizes that the ambience of happiness that had been created was deceptive and impermanent. The irony is that her husband has no grudge against her. She is not mal-handled either. Yet she is deserted without any reason. Deshpande has not taken any of the domestic violence as the cause for Gopal's desertion of Sumi. She has shown how a wife can be deserted without any reason also. The strategic representation gives importance on that what becomes the condition of a deserted wife. The home maker is suddenly left at her own to run the household. The concern for money becomes one of the urgent factors to be dealt with to go on with life. Sumi is a classic stoic who does not bear any grudge against her husband. Her stoic acceptance of the fact exhibits her strength not weakness. She is truly a new woman completely unlike her mother and grandmother who blamed their fate and submitted. Sumi is not swept away by emotion; she is courageous enough to fight the crisis in her life. Sumi had taken her marriage as a profession-it was her sole economic refuge. As she was solely dependant on her husband she could not exercise her freedom and was habituated to lead a life of a dependant. Had she been economically free she could have dealt with the crisis in a better way. The dependence syndrome in her was so much that she loved to live a life of dependent. Her home was her life and soul. She made her home beautiful, took all responsibilities of her family and restrained her movement in the world at large. Thus she isolated herself from the world and made her home her whole existence. Her husband Gopal never encouraged her to take a job either. But he leaves her without arranging economic security for her and her daughters. Had their marriage been an association of perfect comradeship with no dependence on one another, their children would not have felt like refugees in their maternal grandparents' home. They could have continued to stay in their home if they could afford it. Sumi's elder daughter even accused her mother that she did not care about his having left them.

I want my home back, I want my father back.... (21)

Like her daughters others were also surprised by Sumi's placid reaction. Sumi did not make any furor of the fact of being deserted. She was dawned by a new realization that she can not spare time for all this. Sumi had made it clear to Devi on being asked why she does not talk about it.

And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don't know why and maybe he doesn't really know, either? And that I'm angry and humiliated and confused...? (107)

Sumi too protects her husband like any other Indian woman by saying that Gopal does not really know why he deserted them. But to Sumi the reason for desertion bears no significance. She stresses on the fact that she has to move forward regardless of what has happened in her life. When Gopal had told her of his plan she could not react. She was watching T.V. where the clown was singing:

jeena yahan, marna yahan. (9)

She was puzzled to find the meaning of the words. What she deciphered as the meaning of the words perhaps became her guiding force:

That this world is all we have and therefore there is nowhere else for us to go?
That we have to live here and die here? Or does it mean: *this* is what we have,
this area of action is enough for us, we live here and die here, we need no more?
(9)

Sumi is no escapist. She is down to earth and very much practical. She was deeply in love with Gopal and after being married played the role of a devoted wife. She had been earnest in her every role. So she knows the duties of a mother. The welfare of the children is her prime motto. Sumi can recognize the call of the moment all the time. After being left alone Sumi is trying to adjust with her loneliness as she had once tried to share her time with Gopal after marriage. She knows that time is the best healer and she has to cope up with the situation. It takes time to get used to sharing one's life with another person. She has to get used to being alone. It would be unfair on Sumi's part to say that Gopal's absence has left no mark in her life. Obviously Sumi has become totally alone without her husband on whom she depended so much. She was habituated to lead the life of a wife. Her life pivoted round Gopal. The earnestness of wifeness is seen when she thinks of the vast emptiness that his absence has left. She can't find her bearings and there are no markers any more to show which way she should go. The desertion has left her awe-struck. She wants to ask Gopal what made him to walk out on his family in this age of acquisition and possession. She remembers Gopal's words and wonders at his decision.

I remember this so clearly, it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life? Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (27)

Gopal left his family-the only possession he had but Sumi has greater understanding. She has taken Gopal's words seriously and cannot leave the family she has nurtured so long. Sumi and Gopal had once argued about the meaning of the word '*sa-hriday*'. Gopal had told that there is no word in English to fit the concept as English is a practical language. He had told that '*sa-hriday*' means oneness which is an impossible concept. He had pulled Sumi close to himself and asked her to listen the heart's beating. And he had concluded that they can never beat in such unison that they can produce only one sound.

At first these unexpected quirks in Gopal fascinated Sumi. But gradually she ceased to be amused by them. And now she realizes that they were the potential hints that he would someday walk out on her and her children. Sumi and Gopal were die-hard lovers. When they were married, their happiness too was complete. Sumi remembers the words she had once read in the book on Gopal's table. The words aptly describe their relationship:

*What could my mother be
to yours? What kin is my father
to yours anyway? And how
did you and I meet ever?(112)*

Sumi could not control her tears rolling out violently by the intensity of her feelings for Gopal. Sumi's marriage of twenty years had made her life complete. But suddenly the blow came from Gopal which ruined the family. Gopal has made their life tragic by his absence. Sumi who felt so complete in life realized that the bliss is for the moment. One cannot be certain when tragedy befalls in one's life. The happiness is almost like a bubble which can burst at the slightest prick. Even after the tragedy in her life they waited with hope that Gopal might come back. Sumi could not share with her daughters how she felt. She could not open her heart to them. Instead she feared if her daughters blamed her for it. It was her constant torment if her daughters accuse her for what has Gopal done. If they think that it was Sumi's fault that the break up came. This is another effect of Gopal's walking out. Sumi is anxious to know how her daughters' felt about it. This is another kind of punishment if her daughters account Sumi for their father's decision.

Gopal has inflicted pain on Sumi without any fault on her part. Still Sumi never wants to make him accountable for what he has done. Gopal's words best describe how Sumi felt regarding his Walking out:

But when Sumi came, it was not to call me to account; in fact, she seemed distracted, only half aware of me, blown in by some violent feelings I had no clue to. I could only sense her distress; something had happened, but she did not, perhaps she could not, share it with me. (85)

Sumi visits Gopal in his new residence i.e. Shankar's house. She looks around the room with a feeling of *déjà vu*. Like Gopal she too connects the room with their outhouse where Gopal lived before marriage. She remembers Gopal singing the Purandaradasa song:

*...like a bird that flies in
perches in the courtyard
and then flies away
the very same instant.
So should one live. (84)*

Sumi found the similarity in his way of living between the outhouse and Gopal's new residence. Sumi wonders if Gopal still sings the song and if so how does he feel at that time:

What does he think of when he comes to the lines, 'like children at play/who build a mud house and then/tiring of the game/destroy it and go away'? Does he think of himself? (84)

Then she finally meets him. She finds that Gopal has gone on living without her and the children. She becomes conscious of the actuality of their separation. Sumi realizes that Gopal's life has moved on in its own space apart from them as has her life. She realizes that their lives diverged and they now move separately. They cannot merge their ways. But Sumi had shared a happy marital life with Gopal. She knows that love is required in life. It provides the vital sustenance to one and enables one to hold positive outlook to life. Love brings fulfilment in life and makes one's life complete. Sumi is a wise person who wants that everyone should experience the bliss of love. Sumi wants her daughters to

be complete in life. She is disturbed by the thought that Aru has been stormed by her father's action. Sumi understands that it is hard for Aru to accept the fact that they are deserted by their father. A teenager who is about to start her life is made insecure by her estranged father. Sumi is worried for Aru's future.

She has been disturbed by the fact that Aru has started to see her mother as a victim. She has begun to see not only her mother but every woman as a victim and a betrayer in every man. Sumi did not want her to live and start her life with that kind of a generalization. Sumi thinks it is unwholesome for her daughter. Sumi can reach out to her daughter's psyche. She knows her daughter wants to bring back the life that they had lived together with their father. She does not want that they should set sail in life without their father's existence. Sumi knows Aru is trying hard to steer her mother and sisters through the tumultuous passage of change. Aru just can not let go the matter that their father can evade his responsibility so easily. She is keen to bring back the past family life back. Sumi understands that Aru is trying to proclaim not her father but a situation of which her father is a part. But she can never get it back. She wants her to learn it herself. Sumi like the wise mother wants her daughter to learn the lessons of life. At the same time Sumi cannot think that her daughter should have any negative idea about love and marriage. Sumi is worried about her daughter's future. She is anxious and puzzled. Sumi knows that marriage too is important. Aru has to learn that love may be brief and unsatisfactory, even tragic but it is necessary. She has to realize that without that kind of a comradeship some part of people's life withers and dies. Sumi who is suddenly cut off from her family life does not possess any grudge against her husband. Neither does she want to present love and marriage as insignificant. Even after standing in the critical juncture of life she is bold enough. She can evaluate things as they should be. Her marriage did not work for life long. It was only for twenty years. Yet she is happy with whatever she got. She does not want her daughters to be scared of the nuptial knot. That is why she does not want her daughter to look at marriage and love sceptically. Sumi is loaded with responsibility now. She has to look after her daughters at the same time she has to keep her psycho-physical balance intact. For when a wife is deserted people raise finger towards the wife. Wife is always thought to be the offender even if she is innocent. Sumi is not an exception. She too has to come across the untoward words for no fault of her. Gopal's student Shankar's mother may be said to be the representative of the inquisitive outside world. Shankar's mother is representative of tradition which always wants women to submit. Sumi like

other women had led the life of a creeper. In patriarchal society often the women want that women should cling to her husband even when he disowns her. So as an elderly woman Shankar's mother advises her to go back to her husband.

Go back to your husband, he's a good man. If you've done wrong, he'll forgive you. And if he has-women shouldn't have any pride. (161)

Sumi had nothing to answer because she knows this is how the world is. She has to face all this. Unlike her mother she does not believe in fate either. Her mother Kalyani too is deserted by her husband though they live in the same house. Her mother who looks after her father's well-being leads a lonely life without her husband's care and affection. It seems to Sumi that her mother's story is repeated in her life. Kalyani who is so deprived by her husband has turned to fate as the guiding force in life. She worships Ganapati to protect them. Sumi retorts when Kalyani prays to Ganapati for their protection and well-being:

He doesn't do such a good job of looking after the women in the family, does he? (115)

Kalyani seems to be stunned by her daughter's reaction and adds:

What can even the gods do against our destinies. (116)

Sumi finds her mother's logic queer that even the gods cannot fight human destiny. But Sumi later thinks that her mother is right for the idol is after-all a picture, a piece of stone only. Kalyani who has suffered in life does not want the same fate for her daughter. She is obviously worried about the future of her three granddaughters. So she wants Ganapati to protect them. Sumi too falls in the same class as her mother when Gopal deserts her. She finds the similarity queer and wonders at the fate of the women in her family. When she comes to the realization that the idol is a piece of stone after all, she knows she has to shape everything in life to make her life smooth. Like her mother her relatives are too anxious and worried about Sumi and her daughters' future. Her father too wants to help though he seems to be aloof from the family activity. This is how life is when a wife is suddenly deserted. She becomes the hot news among the family, friends and relatives. At the same time she is the object of sympathy. But Sumi wants none. She wants to remake and reshape her life. She doesn't want to take help from anyone. Sumi needs money to run the family. She is back in her father's home but she does not like it. Soon she wants

to have a home for herself and her daughters. She knows the family sentiment; she knows the family's adoration for a male child. She feels to be an intruder in her parents' house. The idea has come to her from her childhood that '*The male child belongs*'. (71) So she finally declares to her father that she is not going to stay there for long.

'I have no right to be here,' Sumi says to her father. 'I feel a parasite.' (71)

Sumi cannot accept that she has to depend on her parents whereas she does not belong there. She makes it clear to her father that she is not going to take help from anyone:

There's Ramesh ready to give me money, and Devi and Premi, of course. And now you're asking me if I need any money. It's so easy for me to take it from all of you, to go on living here free, sponging on you. (71)

Sumi cannot accept help from anyone not even from her own father. She hates to be an object of sympathy. Due to her high self esteem she talks of being a parasite in her father's home. But her father assures her that:

Don't talk nonsense. This is your home. You belong here. (71)

Sumi is also reminded by her father how he wanted her to be independent. He wanted her to be a distinguished lawyer perhaps a judge and fulfil the ambition he had given up. Sumi is now in need to be independent but the seed of independence was sown by her father. She had not obeyed her father and walked out on everything when she married Gopal. But now she is going to do the same as her father had once wanted:

I'm looking for a job, Baba. I have some money right now, but I'll need a job soon. (72)

So she is now frantically searching for job to meet up family expenses. The transition in Sumi is notable. Sumi who had once left out the dreams of future in the arms of Gopal is back on the track; life has brought her in a critical juncture and made her realize the importance of economic independence. Her husband has failed her and made her subject to shame and disgrace. Now she has to revive her whole strata. She is intelligent and sharp but she has drawbacks too. She doesn't have any experience and then there is her age which is against her. But she has to win anyhow. She searches for job earnestly and finds one which is a source of great relief to her. Her daughters point out that with Sumi's accepting the job their family life would be over. Her daughters hoped that if their father

returned they would get back their family life. But they have not thought that Sumi might not accept him. Sumi makes her daughters understand that their family life would have been over anyway. After their daughters' departure with marriage it was certain to be over. The only difference is that Gopal and Sumi would have been together. But now Sumi has to lead her life all alone after her daughters' departure. Sumi becomes emotional and impulsively adds:

This is the first thing in my life I think that I've got for myself. I was sure I wouldn't get it, there's my age, it's against me, and I have no experience at all. But one of the members of the Board saw my play.... (231)

Aru was taken aback when she came to know about the play written by Sumi. Sumi tells her that she has written the play '*The Gardener's Son*' for the school. She tells Aru that she had written the play for children. She reveals with excitement that she is planning to write another play. Sumi has discovered her creative self. She knows that writing can give her immense pleasure. So long she never thought of it. But the success of the play at school has given Sumi the required confidence. Sumi has recognized the creative soul in her who can do so much. Sumi tells Aru the exhilarating experience of creative writing.

It feels so good, you can't imagine! I've been so lazy all my life. And now suddenly I want to do so many things. (231)

Aru noticed her mother's face sparking with radiance when she spoke. Aru tries to point out how everything has changed in their lives. Sumi who has gone through so much pain and suffering made her daughters accept the change in life.

One day is never exactly like another, each moment is different. When you think of it, we are always on the brink of uncertainty. (231)

Sumi showed extraordinary strength of mind when she spoke these words. She wants her daughters to accept the change in life i.e. to fight with any challenge that may crop up in their lives. Sumi herself has accepted what has come in her way. She seems to have great understanding about the relationships in life. Though she depended on her husband so much, she did not play the role of a doting and nagging wife. She understands and respects the individual's right to take decision in life. She has tried to respect her husband's action and so she did not try to restrain him from doing so. The challenge that

came in front of Sumi made her bold and confident. So long Sumi did not know the outside world. She was confined within the four walls. But an individual irrespective of gender should know both the home and the world. With Gopal's desertion of Sumi, she comes out of the stupor. She tries hard to stand on own feet. She can no longer depend on anybody not even on her parents. So in spite of assurance of monetary help from her father, she wants to earn her own living. She finds out a job for herself and at the same time she is able to discover her creative self. The personality of Sumi takes proper shape after getting the jolt from her husband. The blow was necessary for her for it made her understand how any relationship can fail us without any sufficient cause also. We should be prepared to face any consequence from any relationship. Sumi remained satisfied in her marital life for twenty years suppressing her other potentialities. Perhaps she did injustice when she did not pay heed to her inner capacities. She broke her father's dreams when she married Gopal ignoring her father's wish to make her a distinguished lawyer. The irony is that this need to be economically independent as her father had wanted her to make later becomes very much important in her life. From this Sumi learns the lesson that everything in life should be given the due attention. Any imbalance in life may prove to be fatal. Sumi is very much cautious of her duties towards her daughters. She has seen her mother and grandmother to suffer due to patriarchal dominance. She too is the victim of patriarchy who falls prey to her husband's whims. Her husband had wanted to be free evading his duties. But it is Sumi who becomes really free from everything. Sumi becomes '*Runamukta*', free of all human debts with her death. Sumi goes to the region of everlasting peace and happiness. Sumi ultimately wins because she had the guts to face any challenge. Gopal who had wanted to escape responsibility is left uttering '*My daughters have only me*' Sumi is victorious because she ultimately made Gopal realize that he owes three daughters and towards them he has the foremost duty.

The novel focuses on the point how Sumi is made to realize and understand her relationship with her husband. Sumi moves from bondage (confinement as a wife) to freedom (finding economic independence); from life (entanglement with this Maya world) to death (the abode of God). And in this Journey her relationship with her husband plays a vital role. Sumi respects her husband's decision to be free from the family responsibility. She accepts her lot but this acceptance gave her immense scope to introspect and understand her own self. She found out that in order to fulfil her motherly responsibility, she must have money for her daughters. When she gets the job another prospect crops up in her life i.e. the pursuance of her inner talent latent so long. She

discovers her flare for writing and wonders at the appreciation that her work brings. The appreciation makes her more confident to pursue creative writing in Dramatics. In doing so she feels immense pleasure and happiness. Sumi is the optimistic who understood her husband's motif and did not waste time in teaching him a lesson in the court of law. She realises the utter failure of human relationship that may come up with no cause and without any intimation. This crisis in husband wife relationship makes her wiser. Her perspective becomes broader and deeper. She is able to work in totality about some incident. So she is able to take bold steps for materialising her dreams and to build her daughters' future. So many implied things and undiscovered pockets in her maternal home got cleared when she came back to stay with her parents. In a year she learns so many lessons which helped her to unfold different facets of relationships. The unravelling of Sumi's merit as a creative writer is possible only because of the crisis in her relationship with her husband. She may seem to be a typical traditional woman who in order to safeguard her husband does not take the help of law. But she is modern woman in the sense that she realises very clearly what she should do in order to proceed in life. She doesn't waste her time in trying to bring justice in their relationship. Rather she tries to do justice with her own self. So long she had neglected her true self but now she is able to recognise the real Sumi:

Whenever she looks into the mirror, which for so good-looking a woman she rarely does, she thinks: This is the real me. (71)

Her relationship with her own self also becomes vivid in the process. The novel therefore presents its protagonist Sumi understanding and realising the different aspects of different relationships.

CHAPTER - VII

PROBLEMATISING IDENTITY CRISIS: A SMALL REMEDIES

In *Small Remedies* two plots run side by side. Deshpande here problematizes identity crisis of Madhu, who resorts to writing in order to heal a personal tragedy and that of Savitribai Indorekar, a prominent singer. The novel places two mothers who have lost their only child and are alive to move on with their lives. Savitribai has lost her only daughter Munni but there is no apparent mark of that loss in her life. She is totally absorbed in her life of music. She bothers little about anything in the world rather than her music whereas Madhu who has lost her only son Adit in a bomb blast finds life meaningless as the vital cord of her life is cut. The novel encompasses other women too—each upholding a particular attitude in life; So we have Leela—the non-conformist Hindu wife who ends up marrying a Christian married man; Lata—the independent working woman leading her married life in a different way; Rekha, a Hindu girl marrying Tony, a Christian and having so much positive attitude to life. Hasina, a Muslim girl, student of Savitribai, who shuns marriage to pursue music. The galaxy of women represent in the novel myriad different experiences of life. Each one grapples to establish her own identity. They are different facets of womanhood which are combined to make the novel forceful. Thus the novel presents bold women who have deviated from stereotype role playing and have made their own niche. Each woman by virtue of her own right can inspire thousands of other women who grapple with for establishing identity. They can be pioneers to thousands stifled women struggling to conform day and night. Through them Deshpande has shown that the subaltern can also speak out. Deshpande very subtly and delicately has shown these women's struggle for identity. They ultimately emerge victorious after reconciling the conflicts of life.

In this novel Deshpande has placed two mothers side by side. While Madhu, Savitribai's biographer finds it hard to lead the life after her son's death, Savitribai seems to be unperturbed by the loss of her daughter. Madhu represents Indian mothers who sacrifice everything for the welfare of children. The sensitivity of a mother is aptly presented through the character of Madhu. Her pain at the loss of her only son is poignantly

described. Though the novel seems to revolve round Savitribai it actually resolves Madhu's conflicts of life and makes her ready to face the world after her son's death. The novel can be studied as a journey of Madhu's life from childhood to middle age. Categorically Madhu also symbolises Indian motherhood. She is a modern woman professional but essentially a mother. This is how life is with Indian women. Her life is but glorification of motherhood. Her life revolves round her son making her life all the more meaningful and beautiful. She seems to be the happiest woman in the world. Motherhood brought in her life completeness. The fulfilment that motherhood brought to Madhu made her capable of multitasking. She never knew tiredness. She was full of energy and could go on like that for the welfare of the baby. But her happiness seemed to be caged in a glass jar which soon came to pieces. Madhu, a dedicated wife and mother never had thought of the evanescent nature of her happiness. Madhu's husband Som was also a fond indulgent father but Madhu was completely besotted. Theirs was a complete family, a complete unit of society- father, mother and the child. There was no place for unhappiness. Madhu was basking in her husband's love and in the radiance of motherhood.

Madhu was a motherless daughter of a doctor who spent her days in the company of males -- her father and Babu, their live-in servant. Madhu came to know about female friendship when Munni came to stay there as her neighbour. Madhu played with Munni, Savitribai's daughter and came to know about Savitribai's estrangement with Ghulam Saab, a Muslim. Madhu listened to Munni's disapproval of Ghulam Saab as her father and her claim about her father's stay in Pune. Madhu thus had considerable knowledge about Savitribai's household from Munni. Soon Munni and her family left Necmgaon and Madhu had no farther connection with them. Madhu very soon became fatherless with the sudden demise of her father. She came to stay with Leela, her maternal aunt after her father's death. Leela, a passionate communist is married to Joe, a doctor by profession and radical humanist. Both of them become the guiding stars in Madhu's life. Joe and Leela help Madhu to blossom into a complete human being. Joe introduces her to the world of Brontes and creates in her a taste for literature. Leela shields her with the necessary strength of life-a quiet strength that emanates from her own personality. Madhu though orphaned at an early stage of life is thus protected by two very powerful individualists. Madhu grows up in Leela and Joe's care and graduates from their house. It is here that she meets Som, a student of Joe and falls in love with him. Som and Madhu

earlier had been friends when Som courted Neelam. But soon they became kindred souls and got married. Madhu's happiness knew no bounds when her son Adit was born. After her son's birth she became a full member of the society. Suddenly she found that after his birth everyone mattered to her. But above all she learns the magic of the family circle of father, mother and the child. To her it was the beginning of the world, the Gangotri of humanity. She was complete; she did not know any fatigue. She was tireless with full of energy for shopping, cooking and cleaning. Madhu kept their pictures all over the house. Her albums were crammed with pictures of Adit, with his relations and friends. It seemed as if she tried to capture it and keep its record. Her son Adit was the single most important factor in her life. Madhu saw her son growing up and took pleasure to look after him. She had discovered that:

Mother love is one of the great wonders of this world, (184)

But gradually Adit becomes evasive. Madhu learns that her son slips away unobtrusively and tells her about it only after coming back home. Madhu was so obsessed with her son that she could not easily take that with growth Adit would naturally behave different. But gradually she learnt to accept Adit's growing self. The three of them had reached 'a plateau of better understanding' when suddenly their world is devastated.

Madhu had once gone at the opening ceremony of Rekha's gallery. There she was halted by a painting of a woman which seemed to her very familiar. Madhu tried to remember where she had seen the woman. On looking at the title of the painting 'The Mistress', Madhu remembered Munni's words:

Your father goes to a woman at night, he sleeps with her, you know that? (238)

On seeing the catalogue bearing the name of the painters Madhu read the words: 'He died young, he committed suicide...' (238)

Within a second Madhu could make out all the connections. It was clear to her who the man was and why he committed suicide. And in that moment Madhu's life changed forever. For on that day though she came back in the uplifted mood after good company and drink, she had the nightmare at night, which made their lives nightmare. When Madhu woke up, she could not help revealing the facts she had lost with time. She spoke to Som about the horror of the man's death by hanging but she mentioned also that the man slept with her when she was only fifteen. As soon as Som hears it, his world comes

disoriented. He wants the entire truth about it. Som cannot accept the fact that Madhu was a participant in that act of sex. He could have borne that she had been raped or forced to act. He can accept that she was a victim. Som could not believe her and went rigid with disbelief and anger:

But it's the single act of sex that Som holds on to, it's this fact that he can't let go of, as if it's been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, an intact hymen - these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter. I know this when I see his face, when I feel the hurting grip of his hand, when he says, 'Tell me, go on, go on'. (262)

But there was nothing more that she could tell Som. The centrality of her father's death dwarfed the rest of the events of which that was only a part. But Som thinks that Madhu is holding back and his anger grows. Madhu understands that Som is hurt as he had thought she was a virgin at the time of marriage. Her involvement in that act of sex is hard for Som to accept. Som wants the truth and in his demand he ruins their relationship.

He dismisses the truth of our life together, of our love, our friendship, our life as parents of a beloved son. What he wants is something separate and distinct from these things something which is, though he refuses to recognise this, a minute part of a whole. To him, that part is the whole. (255)

For Som, Madhu became a completely different person for that something which happened years ago. Som changed and became a distraught man. He can no longer trust Madhu. No relationship can survive if the trust is gone. So it had been with Madhu and Adit. They kept on fighting with each others. They tried to keep Adit out of it. But in fact Adit even wanted to know what was wrong with his father. He seemed frightened and appealed to Madhu for reassurance that everything was all right. Madhu tried to reassure him with lies. But that did not go for long. Adit came in between Som and Madhu when they were in their wildest fight. Adit's face was anguished and panicked. Either Som or Madhu cried out to him to go away.

'Go away Adit'? was it Som, or was it I? Whose voice was it that drove him away, that sent him to his death? (298)

Madhu waited for Adit two days and two nights but he never returned. Finally Som and Madhu came to know that their son was killed in the bomb blast. The result of their fight

brought the finality of their son's death. Som and Madhu changed forever after meeting their son's death. Madhu had drowned herself in her identity as Aditya's mother for nearly eighteen years. But suddenly everything was wiped out. She longed for amnesia so that she could reach a state of virginal blankness. But she could not do it. The impressions of the past remain intact in her. In the months since her son's death, she had been disturbed by one thought:

...how does one live with the knowledge of a child's death? (155)

Children help the parents to reconcile with the passing of time, to their aging and mortality. Madhu's soul is tearing apart with the knowledge that she has to live without her dear son. She is confronted with the utter futility of her life without her son in every moment.

Madhu thus is confronted with the greatest tragedy of life - the loss of her son. But somehow for this loss she holds responsible the fight between her and Som. They had fought over something that happened years ago. Madhu, otherwise a happy woman with husband and son came across the crisis of her life as she lets loose her heart to her husband about a single act of sex that her husband could not let go. For him purity and chastity mattered over everything else. Som wanted the truth as he thought it was not revealed to him. But Madhu could not present herself as victim. In his search Som seemed to dismiss the truth of their life together. Their love, their friendship and their life as parents of a beloved son did not matter to him anymore. He wanted something separate and distinct from what he had got. What is a minute part of a whole had become the whole for him. But this Som is the same person who had a love-relationship with Neelam before marriage. Madhu was then just a friend. After he breaks away with Neelam, he marries Madhu. His relationship with Neelam becomes insignificant to him for he had told Madhu everything about Neelam before marriage. Som claims that he kept nothing hidden from Madhu. He wonders how Madhu could conceal such a thing from him. But it is Som's nature; it is part of him that he can share everything with Madhu. But Madhu could not share that because her memory denied it. She had no intention of hiding that. But Som accuses her with disbelief. He even imagines that almost all Madhu's male acquaintances were her lovers. Worst of all is - he names Tony as her lover. He does not stop there. Though he makes love to her there is a kind of desperation and concealed

violence in his approach. Madhu waited for it to end. Both of them are locked in a silent, fearful struggle that seemed to destroy them:

We are like two travellers embarked on a terrible journey rocketing at a dangerous speed, on the verge of going out of control, yet unable to stop, unable to help ourselves. (258)

Yet Madhu's only comfort was that her son Adit was out of it, he knows nothing. During day time Madhu and Som tried to behave as if everything was all right. But at night when Adit was ensconced in his room, Som tried to bring out the truth from Madhu. They embarked in their savage fight thinking that Adit was safe whereas they were just ruining him. Adit unable to accept the violence going between his parent went out of home and fell a pray to religious fanaticism. When Adit died life becomes meaningless for Madhu. She could not make out how people go on living with the knowledge of their child's death. Madhu almost becomes frantic after her son's death. She sits by the telephone to hear his voice. She even goes out to search for him. But ultimately Madhu is convinced that she can not find her son for he is dead. But with the event of her son's death Som and Madhu's ways depart.

Madhu is then approached by Chandru to write Savitribai's biography. She had a brief experience of writing for city view. She is convinced by him to take up the project. Madhu finally decides for it and lands in Neemgaon to meet Savitribai. Here she is hosted by Hari and his wife Lata. Madhu who was striving hard to deal with her son's death, is amazed to see Savitribai who is unscrupulous about losing her only daughter. Savitribai is the doyen of Gwalior Gharana music who has achieved name and fame in music. Savitribai's rise is meteoric. She was a daughter-in-law of an affluent Hindu Brahmin family where women cannot think of outside world and pursuing music. But Savitribai became an exception when her father-in-law permitted her to practice music. She had pledged to him through a letter to be permitted to learn music. Her lessons began when her father-in-law engaged a middle aged woman to teach her music. Her music lesson started in a small unused first floor room of the house facing the back courtyard. All the sounds of cleaning vessels and washing clothes came flowed into the room disturbing them. But in that room Bai entered into a different world removed from the tradition bound life of food, cooking, rituals, festivals, pregnancy and children – the life of a house wife. Bai did not learn much from this teacher but she came to learn breathing exercises

from this teacher. After some time a tabla player was introduced in Bai's class. At this point Ghulam Saab entered her life. Later she developed a relationship with this tabla player, a Muslim. But being a married Hindu woman to have a relationship with a Muslim man was height of criminality. For her father-in-law had permitted her to learn music out of sheer good will. There must have been comments and criticism for his decision. But Bai did not take all this in her consideration when she developed her relationship with the man. Certainly an unconquerable emotion must have brought them together. But she abandoned the same man later in her life. Madhu wondered to know that Bai had left her baby, scarcely a year old behind when she eloped with Ghulam Saab. Surely Bai is a worldly woman who left even her baby and used the man for achieving her goals and later dumped him. Thus Bai seems to be a calculating and ambitious woman.

Bai never speaks of her daughter Munni whom she deliberately neglected for the sake of her career. Madhu wondered how Bai could negate her own daughter. She has successfully turned her back on her past and her child. Perhaps she thought in order to achieve success and fame she must deny her daughter and her lover. Bai as an artist was in search of her genius and her destiny. She was a woman with a child but in order to establish her artist's self she denied herself as a wife and mother. But obviously the artist was born out of the woman. Bai successfully obliterated her past and moved on. She was certainly a different woman. She deviated from the paths of a mother. She wanted to devote herself for the life of music. All other things in her life took a backseat. Her ambition was triggered when she heard Kashinath Buwa during a Ganapati festival in Pune. Bai could attend the programme because it was held at the home of a family friend. She attended it with a group of women for whom it was just a break from the humdrum insipid life. But for Bai it was something of a great significance. She had been waiting for it all along. After she heard him sing, she knew she would never be the same again. She waited patiently for a year. She met him when she went to Bombay to attend a family function. But he denied taking her as his disciple. To him Bai was another woman from an affluent family trying to have some excitement into her life from music. She did not give in. She visited him almost every day in order to persuade him. But her approaches only brought despair. She was finally accepted by Guruji as his student when he shifted to Bhavanipur after his illness. Bai came to learn music from Guruji at Bhavanipur but she did not start in Guruji's establishment. She stayed in Bhavanipur town in a ramshackle

house. She used to travel by the local shuttle train to get to Guruji's place and she had to walk two-mile through the fields to reach there. She led in Bhavanipur a sheltered life but both her childhood and married life had been part of large family. She had the added burden for being a married Hindu woman living with a Muslim partner. And she faced greater alienation for the language too was unknown her. These are the ordeals that she had to undertake in order to learn music.

Thus Savitribai epitomises cruel professional woman who puts professional gain above family concerns. She is the emblem of ambition and courage. In order to fulfil her dream she left no stone unturned.

The contrapuntal attitudes of Savitribai and Madhu regarding raising a child - are but dilemmas of modern Indian woman. It gives the message that every woman breaking the tradition faces this juncture-in which there are children and home on the one hand and name, fame and call of the world on the other hand. Certainly Savitribai who put her own daughter into oblivion cannot be the role model. Madhu on the other hand is epitome of love, care and affection. She represents ideal motherhood. It is Madhu with whom the women of India will identify themselves. For Madhu a child's birth is like resurrection for a woman.

A child's birth is a rebirth for a woman, it's like becoming part of the world again. The first time you emerge through someone else's pain and blood: this time, it's your own. (88)

Madhu who lost her son is confronted with the truth of futility of life without children. But Bai does not seem to have any compunction for not having her own daughter. Madhu has no clue as to how Bai lived with the knowledge of her child's death. To Madhu the world does not make sense without them. A mother does not have any place without children. But Bai is leading her life and nothing has changed in her life though she has lost her daughter. Madhu wonders if Bai has found the secret of living without the memory of the child. Madhu as Savitribai's biographer is trying to negotiate her way between the woman who has denied his daughter and the dazzlingly beautiful singer with her lover. Madhu has to fill in the gaps and pauses in order to recreate Bai's life. For Bai does not open up the vital clues to her life. The desire for a child is an important part of humankind:

A child is a beginning, a renewal, a continuation, an assertion of immortality.
(168)

But Bai seems to be far removed from it. Her music is the medium through which she wants to reach immortality. But she had given her child the name 'Indorekar'-it is the name she had adopted as a singer. It seemed to be her attempt to make the child her own-not the child of her marriage or adulterous love. But Munni hankered for the name that Bai had left behind. There might have happened something that made her to deny her daughter whom she had so loved. But Bai should have changed after her daughter's death. But her hostility continued. Death did not disarm her. She never gave recognition to her daughter which her daughter hankered for. As a biographer Madhu has to find out the reasons for Bai's rejection of her daughter. Bai thus appears to be a cruel mother who only thinks of her reputation as a singer. Bai who had been in single-minded pursuit of music could not be a loving and caring mother. Madhu on other hand is the reverse of Savitribai. Her interaction with Savitribai reveals the worldly woman. But Madhu's disapproval of her attitude sends the author's message. However a person excels in life, she should not negate the basic emotions of life which keeps the humanity's progress.

Madhu's confrontation with another strong woman Leela has moulded her life. Leela is a giver in life. Leela was the 'black sheep of the family'. She broke the convention when she remarried. Moreover, she married a Christian. Thus certainly she was a rebel in a wholly conventional and tradition-bound family. The most commendable thing about her was her years of teaching and her role in the trade unions, her activities among the factory workers. Leela who did not have her own children was the affectionate mother to her step-children and Madhu too. Madhu a motherless girl got the warmth of mother's affection from Leela. After her father's death, Madhu woke up at nights horrified by the nightmares. It was Leela who protected her from all the torturing demons and brought her back to the sane, waking world. Leela and Madhu stayed in Leela's room in Maruti Chawl after her father's death. It was from there that her father's body was taken for cremation. Leela leaving Joe and her home stayed with Madhu in that Chawl for supporting her. But Leela was very much nervous about Madhu's stay in that Chawl. She was worried about her vulnerability for it was the breeding ground for the TB bacillus and Madhu was not armoured with the needed immunity. So Joe finally takes the decision and both of them go to Joe's house in Bandra. There Madhu faces the hatred of Leela's step daughter Paula. Paula and Madhu had to share a room in which Paula began her

tirades on Madhu. She used to abuse her with filthy words and even called her step mother Leela all sorts of names. She used to keep the bath room and toilet seat dirty. So Madhu had to clear them before bath. Madhu thus abused by Paula at nights, decided to shift to hostel though it was vacation. She did not tell Leela anything but quietly shifted to the hostel before the college opened. But Leela must have understood something. Years later when Madhu conveyed to Leela what was wrong between her and Paula, Leela thanked her for not disclosing to her anything at that time. And she burst into laughter thinking how Joe had expected that Madhu's company would do Paula good. Paula who so rudely misbehaved with Madhu unleashed her tirades against Leela too. But Leela was the wise woman who tolerated her because of love. Leela had arranged special permission so that Madhu could shift to hostel early. She used to visit her almost every day. Leela was very much caring and affectionate to Madhu. So she tried to spend her time with Madhu by visiting her regularly. Leela was very much disappointed when Madhu had expressed her refusal to go on with her studies after graduation. Leela wistfully had spoken to her about her own lack of education. She had her dreams for Madhu. She had told how she hoped that Madhu would study more. As Madhu's father's money was almost over, Madhu wanted to earn money and be independent. Joe was not at all happy when Madhu took a job with Hamid Bhai's magazine City Views. But even at that time Leela understood Madhu's needs. She was reconciled and accepted Madhu's desire to be independent financially. After Madhu accepts the job, Leela sensing that she won't stay at Joe's home and so she had offered Madhu her Maruti Chawl home. But Madhu wanted privacy which was not possible there for one of the rooms had been an office for Leela's various activities. Leela had been generous to offer Madhu her shelter. But Madhu had been offered by Hamid Bhai a room adjacent to his office and home. Madhu's happiness knew no bounds when she got a shelter of her own. Leela did not object to her shifting to that place. Leela had initially denied marrying Joe for Paula's opposition. She knew Joe loved her daughter very much so she did not want to hurt Paula. Joe waited for her fifteen years. Leela finally gave in thinking that it was not right to deprive Joe and herself of happiness 'because of a spoilt brat' (180). After fifteen years Joe could marry her. In these years he had written letters to her in simple English. All the letters beamed of love and passion. Joe who believed that 'Love is an adult emotion' must have uttered these words out of his feelings for Leela. Joe and Leela, two middle aged people were true lovers. That is why they could radiate love and happiness to others. Tony, Leela's step son, describes both Joe and Leela as incomparable to anyone.

Leela respected Madhu's desire for independence. In her life Leela herself wanted not to be fettered. So when Joe died Leela shifted to her room in Maruti Chawl the day after his death. Leela tolerated many things in life when Leela went back to stay in Maruti Chawl, it was no longer the same. New people have replaced the old ones who kept their door closed. People troubled Leela asking her why she does not stay with her rich daughter. Only Shantabai, her old companion comes back to stay with her. She lets Madhu know that it is not safe for Leela to stay there for there are knocks at the door at night. When the door is opened there is no one. People are trying to frighten Leela so that they can occupy the room for soon the Chawls will be demolished and an enormous compensation would be given to the tenants. Once Madhu notices how the grocer neglects Leela when she went to the shop to buy things for herself. The man neglects Leela in order to attend a pair of giggly young girls and an impatient young man. When finally he gave her the things he asked her to move aside. Madhu was filled with rage and asked Leela why she doesn't send Shantabai to buy those things. Leela had her own reason. She answered that there would have only the difference that the man would have been rude to Shantabai. She further added that as long as her limbs were strong it is better to do her works by herself. Madhu and Tony finally made her to shift to a small place in Dadar. There was just a room and a kitchen but there was a balcony too which was a treat to her. Leela made her own surrounding there with women who came to watch T.V. It is in this room that Leela breathes her last.

Leela's whole life was a teaching to Madhu. Leela has a great share in making Madhu a strong willed woman with the capacity to shower pure love on her husband and son. Without Leela Madhu could not have been what she is. Madhu was lucky to have an aunt like this who made her bold and beautiful, gave her vital strength and induced goodness in her heart. For Madhu these things became assets of life so that she easily becomes a loving wife and a caring mother.

While writing the biography of Savitribai, Madhu stays with Lata and Hari. Hari is a distant relation to Madhu. She stays there for almost a year. Staying in that house Madhu gets enough scope to be on her own. As a result she interacts with herself and introspects the past. Hari is Madhu's maternal aunt's grandson. Therefore they share family history. They talk of Leela. Hari's wife Lata too becomes friendly with her. She reveals to her so many things about her own family. Both Hari and Lata take care of Madhu and ensure her privacy. It is here that Madhu is conflict-ridden when she recoils from the electrified

copper boiler. She wonders why she was afraid. Was she afraid of dying? She has thought that when one loses everything, there remains no more fear. But she finds that:

But when all is gone, there's still life itself, life pursuing its own ends of survival, of growth. Ultimately it's the body that dictates to us, coercing us into its purposes of living and growing. Survival is all, survival is what matters above everything. (201)

Madhu is alive and is going on even after losing her son. But Madhu is punishing herself by remaining away from Som. She deliberately wants to be away from him. But it is Tony who wants them together. Tony comes to visit her and finds her in a distraught condition. He knows Som and Madhu well. Tony asks why Madhu does not call him there. He understands that something has gone wrong between them. And it is their son who can only make them together. Tony says to Madhu:

You need to be together. You've lost Adit, but that's a loss you share.(211)

Tony makes her understand that by sharing the loss with Som Madhu can relive the past. What Madhu and Som are doing is not fair to either of them and not fair to their dead son Adit too. Madhu has watched Bai also carefully during her stay. She had been looking at the fact how Bai maintains silence about her daughter Munni. Sometimes it seemed to her Bai's forgetting is the result of a disease-induced amnesia. At other times it seemed to her a deliberate cruel forgetting. Madhu has also thought that perhaps it's only indifference that has made Bai forget her daughter. Bai has worn the armour of indifference. For if someone doesn't care she is not hurt, while Bai has deliberately ignored and neglected her daughter, Madhu is in sharp contrast with her. Her every thought and action revolves round her son. When he was alive, he was everything for Madhu and even when he is dead, Madhu constantly remembers him in every thought and action. Madhu receives a letter from Som where he wants her back home. They should be together at their son's death anniversary. But Madhu finds more meanings in the letter. She understands that they need to be together, they need to mourn their son together. They need to face the fact of his death and their continuing life together. That is the only way to heal their wounds, only Som and she can bring Adit back into their lives by sharing memories. Between two of them, they can recreate him, they can invoke his presence and make his existence real. And in this process they can wash away the darkness and ugliness not only of Adit's death but of what happened between them.

It's not just living Children who need to be free, the dead clamour for release as well. (323)

After Madhu's father's death Joe had said to her:

It hasn't gone anywhere, your life with your father is still there, it'll never go away. (324)

These words had bought healing effect on Madhu. Suddenly she could orient herself after the disruption of her entire life with her father's death. Joe's words come to Madhu and she understands that her life with her son is intact. The memory is enough to recreating Adit:

As long as there is memory, there's always the possibility of retrieval, as long as there is memory, loss is never total. (324)

Thus at the end we find Madhu resolving her conflicts and returning to her husband. In this novel we find Madhu as a distraught mother. She is a mother whose happiness lies with her son's happiness. She is happy to be identified as Aditya's mother. Motherhood has made her life blessed. Her identity as a mother is snuffed off by her son's death. But gradually she understands that she has to be fair with her son. She should bring him back to life by sharing his memories with his father. When this understanding comes to her she is relieved. She decides to go back to her husband only with the hope of recreating her son's life with them.

CONCLUSION

The position of women in India can be aptly described by the words of Kumari Jayawardena:

The status of women in India has varied in different historical periods and in the different regions of the country, and has also been subject to differentiation according to class, religion and ethnicity. The general situation, however, was one of suppression and domination within the bounds of a patriarchal system. Whether the woman in question belonged to a peasant family and was compelled to drudgery in the field and home or to a high-caste family and living a life of leisure, she was the victim of a set of values that demanded implicit obedience to male domination, and of many other social practices that circumscribed her life (Jayawardena 1986: 78).

The status of women in India has not undergone any sea change from the point of view of domination. With the passage of time women are able to acquire education and economic independence. But they are regulated by the patriarchal norms and taboos. Kumkum Sangary and Sudesh Vaid have pointed out in the introduction to a collection of essays that 'womanhood is often part of an asserted or desired not an actual, cultural continuity.' Jasbir Jain points out the general situation of women all over the world:

Equality, in meaningful terms, in terms of greater freedom and more space for women is a global need. Degrees of oppression may differ, kinds may also differ subject to the difference in other factors: but gender discrimination persists almost in all societies (Jain 2005: 15).

Amidst this discrimination a new brand of woman has emerged in contemporary India. In the contemporary discourse of women in India a significant mode of interpellation and projection can be perceived in the construction of this 'new Indian' woman (Rajan 1993: 30).

Deshpande's intervention and contribution in the continuing discourse significantly helps locating contemporary Indian woman's image. The conditions of a woman's life in almost all the three stages of life (childhood, adulthood and womanhood) are picturesque

in her novels though the condition in old age is only insinuated instead of detailed representation. The moments in the lives of the characters are the moments of every woman's life. The novels show Deshpande's deep concern about the marginalised existence of women in Indian society. She strove hard to give women their due and her sympathy went with them. She did not know of feminist movements when she wrote the novels, yet they speak of the need for women's emancipation. She represented the women's lives as they are and showed how they are in need of being free from the shackles of social barriers for women. Her protagonists appear to be stereotypes but in course of the myriad experiences of life, they realise their full worth and emerge as individuals with distinct identities. The idealisations of role models or daughterhood, wifehood and motherhood are challenged to show that women are more than wife, mother or daughter. The myth surrounding women as symbols of sacrifice is questioned. Women too desire to shake off the shackles of convention, tradition and custom and want to project their true selves. The six novels show the conflicts to which modern Indian women are exposed to because of their taking up new social roles socially not provided to them up to now. Her novels have definitely contributed much 'towards strengthening the self-consciousness of Indian middleclass women and towards building up a new ideology on the position of women in society...' (Mies 1980: 37). Deshpande's novels register the suffering of women caused by the oppression of men. Yet Deshpande is not against man as such. Her women are seen to be separated from their husbands in course of their lives. But they finally are united with their husbands. They believe in the happiness and fulfilment in a world shared by both the sexes. Her cry is for the recognition of woman's self. A woman should be viewed as equal partner in marriage. Her needs and feelings should be taken care of. She should be valued as an individual. Deshpande shows how the existing system of unequal position of women continues to bring suffering to women. She envisions a world where women are given her rightful position. Like some of her Western counterparts, Deshpande also traverses the territory Palmer maps as specific to women novelists: 'Writers [women] of fiction...take a microscopic unit of society (one particular sexual relationship, one particular family) and use it as spy-hole into a wide network of social, cultural and political changes' (Palmer 1989: 45).

Deshpande's novels uphold the ideology which has core tenets like:

1. Women matter as much as men do.
2. Women have the right to determine their lives.

3. Women's experiences matter.
4. Women have the right to tell the truth about their experiences.
5. Women deserve more than what they are getting from respect to representation (Heywood 2005).

There are some aspects in Deshpande's novels which remained beyond the scope of this study. In order to understand Deshpande's creative oeuvre her narrative style must be taken into consideration. Deshpande's narrative mode is best described by herself in her conversation with Gita Viswanath on 3rd June 2003:

It's not simple and it's not straightforward. I have a non-chronological narrative. I have to work extremely hard, it doesn't come to me in a linear fashion. I work through a person's memory. There is a person's narrative and the story comes through her memory. I have to put together a chaotic mass of material. It's neither simple nor straightforward as far as I am concerned. But in a way, it's realism. It is not magic realism. I don't see any reason why I should write excepting the way it comes to me. I have never felt the least desire to write any other way except the way I want to write (Naik 2005: 231).

The pattern of narrative in her novels is almost what Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence* thinks about her writing:

All this I've written - it's like one of those multicoloured patchwork quilts the *Kakis* made for any new baby in the family. So many bits and pieces- a crazy conglomeration of shapes, sizes and colours put together. (188)

The narrative mode in *That Long Silence* is like an interior monologue where the protagonist looks back in life down memory lane. It resembles the stream of consciousness technique employed by Virginia Woolf or Dorothy Richardson. Jaya, the protagonist recollects her past life and tries to locate where she went wrong. Deshpande's another novel *A Matter of Time* is also an example of interior monologue. In this novel the memories are delivered through interior monologue. Sumi's anguished self is revealed through her monologues. Sumi's first person narrative of the past and the narrator's observation upon the set of events unfold the plot gradually. The perceptions of different characters like Aru, Gopal, Kalyani are also presented. The revelation of the psychological state, the emotional state and the practical considerations for the different

characters' actions could not have been possible without the help of the monologues. In *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* too the same method has been employed. Events do not appear chronologically rather they appear thematically. In *Roots and Shadows* the past and present is interwoven through the protagonist Indu's consciousness. She returns to the big house after a gap of ten years and in the process journeys back to her past life. In her interaction between the past and present Indu's personality matures significantly. The narrative in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* shifts from first person to the third person. In an interview with Lakshmi Holmstorm Deshpande reveals how she succeeded to employ this technique:

The present is in the third person and the past is in the first person. I was doing it throughout in the first. But that's often a perspective I use in my short stories. I wanted to be more objective. Yet I really needed to distance myself from the narrative in the present, otherwise it was going to be far too intense. And then I read an American novel by Lisa Alther where she uses this method. And the minute I came across her novel I thought-let me admit it freely-Oh god, this is how I am going to do my novel (Interview: Deshpande 1993: 23-24).

The narrative in this novel gracefully shifts from present to past and back to present. Meenakshi Mukherjee is of the opinion that the intricate web woven by Deshpande in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is possible 'through the superimposition of the past over the present, through dreams, nightmares, flashback, introspection and simple straightforward third person narration' (Mukherjee 1981: 31). In *Small Remedies* we find Deshpande to take the help of biography. She has beautifully succeeded to employ the device of biography within a biography. In it we find that the narrator Madhu attempts to write the biography of Savitribai Indorekar and in the process reveals her own self. In this novel several other characters like Leela, Joe, Munki etc are revealed. Madhu here finds the process of writing the biography tough for she had to depend upon Savitribai's version of truth which was distorted. In order to squeeze the truth, Madhu had to connect the disjointed material that Savitribai had provided about herself. Another powerful character in the novel is Leela whose life is also depicted through Madhu's vision. The narrative mode of *The Binding Vine* differs from the other novels. The three different stories of three different women of different class, age and education emerge in the novel interlocked by the first person narrator Urmi. We get to know the narrator, her long deceased mother-in-law, Mira and a rape victim Kalpana. Other women are also revealed

by Urmi like her present mother-in-law, Kalpana's mother Shakutai, Urmi's sister-in-law cum friend Vanna. Urmi's observations and perceptions at the different course of things are best narrated in the first person.

Deshpande has deliberately chosen to write in English instead of her regional language. To her English is yet another Indian language in which she can express herself best. Deshpande admits that rituals, religious practices, certain terms and phrases are very evocative in regional languages and become difficult to convey when one wants to try the same in English: 'I keep saying there are certain problems about writing in English. There are certain aspects of our life which are a bit hard to put into English' (Naik 2005: 231).

She generously admits this problem but she has her own strategy to express her mind. According to her a good writer can innovate his own way in order to overcome this problem. So in her own logical and rational way she weaves the plots to complete her patchwork quilt depicting Indian women's experiences. She has not resorted to fashionable magic realism instead she writes in realistic mode. She has taken the help of poetry and diary in *The Binding Vine* to recreate Mira's life. This method also contributed to her narrative to give it realistic appearance.

Deshpande's works are seen constantly progressing towards maturity. Her heroines grow up in a world rooted in Indian myth and tradition. As Deshpande has probed deeper in familial life she has been able to portray the realistic picture of her heroines. Her heroines are not perturbed by the political upheavals of the time like Sahgal's women. Nor are they westernised. Whether her characters live in small town or move to city they are very much grounded and rooted to tradition. Many of the characters in her novels like Kalyani, Akka, Atya sincerely carry forward the mythic tradition of India. Deshpande deconstructs these mythic traditions of Indian past through her heroines. Her heroines question the myths and traditions. They are unable to bow down in front of the glorified mythic culture. This is the characteristic of modern women in India who abstain from submitting to tradition. But what is more poignantly shown is the dilemma and inner conflict with which they are confronted. The women, who have grown up with the traditions and myths, gather courage to dismantle them. The tradition of myth that Indian families carry is seen in *A Matter of Time*. When Kalyani and Goda speak of Vithalrao and Manorama's marriage, their voices carry the ring of people retelling myths, of troubadours singing of

love, of storytellers relating the wondrous things that happened in the past. Sumi, overhearing them, thinks of Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhavam*.

Just so the poet sing of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, making of it a magical, awe-filled story, yet one that falls within the realm of belief because it sings of love, of the love of a man and a woman. And you think - this is how it must have happened. (118)

In the same novel Sumi questions God's hand in human predicament when she finds Kalyani praying to Ganapati to protect them.

He doesn't do such a good job of looking after the women in the family, does he? (115)

Deshpande shows how powerful are these mythic patterns which contribute a lot in a person's upbringing. But her characters are not upholders of tradition and myths. They are torch-bearers who can show the road to emancipation from the mythic image of women. In her narrative strategy myths are evoked only to show how they are becoming insignificant in the lives of urban educated women and hence to all women. The myths carried down through the ages are primarily created by male propagators and hence become negative force in a woman's life. But myth can become an energising force by firing one's imagination, and as such become the bedrock of ideology. What women need to do is to relocate the positive mythic culture of women often suppressed by patriarchs. This energising mythic tradition can be relocated in the oral traditions like folk songs of women. Scholars, theorists, feminists and creative writers need to endeavour to relocate the positive mythic traditions of women. For the Indian mythic mode does not provide women the strategy for liberation from male and colonialist hegemonies. The mythic image of woman so far presented in the Indian literature was that of the *Pativrata* tradition of Sita, Savitri and Draupadi- the silent, suffering, sacrificing wife, mother and daughter. Dorothy Spencer recognises this phenomenon and comments:

It seems clear that in woman as wife we are dealing with a literary tradition. Sita, Savitri, Shakuntala.....At any rate, they exemplify the ideal and thus express society's values... that "a husband is a woman's god- how Sita submitted to Rama; she followed him into the wilderness and afterwards when he banished

her, she turned and went without one word, though she was innocent (Shirwadkar 1979: 49).

But if the present trend of novel writing is examined it is found that writers like Deshpande are engaged to deconstruct the negative myth making of the image of women. The women's withdrawal from the mythic culture provides them impetus for self-transformation and self-discovery. It is also a forward step in the direction of rewriting Indian womanhood. In the postcolonial period the history writing by male has been challenged in order to incorporate gender in it. Similarly the mythic patterns can be adequately contested in order to show how male politics used it to eulogise the image of women. The need of contesting negative myth is urgent as the demonic power of myth can only subvert women and present a dwarfed picture of women in comparison to men. Such is the power of myth.

In the critical moments of man's political and social life, myth regains its old strength. It was always lurking in the background, waiting for its hour and its opportunity. This hour comes if the other binding forces of our social life, for one reason or another, lose their influence; if they can no longer counterbalance the demonic power of myth (Cassirer 1979: 246-47).

The demonic power of myth creates an attitude in the society to view women confined by the regulations of male domination. Women are attributed with such qualities which often become fatalistic for them. The age old mythic tradition in Indian society has been successfully making women its prey. The mystic and magical qualities of myth have often kept women baffled and influenced them to follow myth in the name of protecting honour of family, society and nation. Sometimes women too endorsed their mythic image in order to avoid the harsh realities and to remain in the world of fantasy and romance in the name of satisfying the spiritual and cultural need. To escape in the mythic realm means the negation of the real and substantial. Mythic image of women has always been promoted in order to promote the cultural superiority of the nation. When women are kept within the periphery of mythical realm they are in stasis for any kind of progress is negated there. The mythical image of women was upheld during colonial regime. The same tradition was carried after independence until the intervention of the writers who wanted to put gender in the study of history. Significantly creative writers like Deshpande have also questioned this mythic image of woman. Deshpande's realistic mode of writing

is obviously a step forward to decode the mythic presentation of women. Her endeavour to present the true picture of a woman's life may become empowering to women to bring change and achievement in their life. In spite of the deconstruction of negative mythic image, Deshpande has made use of India's mythic heritage. Frequent analogy from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are scattered in her novels.

Deshpande is often blamed to create stereotype women who are seen to revolve in the same sphere. Her protagonists all belong to the urban middleclass. The names of the protagonists are all familiar names. Their short and commonplace names imply that they are very ordinary women whom we interact in our day to day life. They represent the mass of women who are ignored for their commonality. They are all brought up amidst discrimination at home and in society. All of them do crave for love as they do not get sufficient love and care in childhood. These women hanker for love and care in married life. They all split up from their husbands only to unite after maturing with time. They either return to their paternal home or stay alone to introspect and analyse the scheme of events. Their husbands who disrupt their world are also seen to mature with time. The women are seen to resort to writing to realise their true self. Deshpande makes them write instead of engaging them to some other modes of creativity. The women are seen to have a very sensitive mind and soul. They react to the events at home and outside. In their behaviour with others they are modest. They are not guided by any whims and moods. They carry out their responsibility as daughter, wife and mother with utmost sincerity. The past lives of the characters are important to them. Time and again they take a backward journey to make sense of their lives. The struggle to achieve one's own identity has been shown in each novel. In each novel the stress is on the character's assertion of the self. The characters are finally shown to carve a niche for themselves. Deshpande's novels seem to present the protagonists' journey from childhood to wifehood.

Yet amidst these repetitive similarities Deshpande's unique presentation of the plot and characters make her a novelist of considerable strength and verve. The following part of my study shows how the charge of stereotype presentation can well be refuted as her novel deal with multifarious themes and characters.

Deshpande's heroines are urban educated middleclass women. But it is not so that she deliberately chooses to focus on the middleclass women. In the writing process her women emerge to belong to that class. She strongly asserts that she only wants to tell

about the human feelings of women. But as she herself belongs to that class she knows these women best. Therefore her women resemble her class of women. But a close scrutiny of her novels shows that they encompass women belonging to other strata of life. Her protagonists may be tagged to be urban educated middle class women but they interact with women of different upbringing.

Her novels clearly show that the urban educated women are able to become professionals when women of the lower classes come to serve them. Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a doctor by profession. She often comes late and cannot do all the household chores. She depends on Janakibai to ensure the smooth running of the household. Even when Saru returns late at night she finds everything ready for her:

Janakibai had, as usual, kept clean clothes ready for me. (79)

Then there is Rekha in *The Binding Vine* who serves the college teacher Urmi. Rekha consoles her even in time of emotional crisis.

‘Feeling better?’ Rekha asks me when I come out. She doesn’t wait for my reply, but I notice she’s got everything ready for me in the kitchen today. (202)

In *The Binding Vine*, Shakutai, a woman abandoned by her husband strains day and night to meet her ends. Shakutai is representative of thousands of working class women toiling day and night to look after the children. Her husband has taken another wife and does not even give the maintenance of the children. The physical fatigue and mental trauma of this woman at her dear daughter’s plight are presented graphically. Her daughter Kalpana has become a victim of rape and slipped into coma. Both the mother and daughter represent the victims of domestic violence.

Another servant woman’s plight has been focused in the novel *That Long Silence*. Jeeja wants Sumi to help her in order to save her son even though he has taken another wife. Her point is that he has to live to keep the *sindoor* of her daughter-in-law intact:

And that girl, let her have her *kumkum* on her forehead. What is a woman without that? Her husband may be a drunkard, but as long as he is alive, no one will dare cast an eye on her. If he dies...she is young and foolish (160)

Widows appear in her novels frequently. They give us a glimpse into the lifestyles of widows. In *Roots and Shadows* while Akka is a domineering bigot, Atya leads a life of

giver. This contrast of characters only enhances our understanding of the lives of Indian widows. Akka losing everything in her life had become a tool in the patriarchal machinery. She wants to perpetuate women's subdued role by inflicting her tirades over them. She bossed in her maternal home where Indu had grown up. Akka wanted the women of the house to conform to patriarchy. Indu's revolt against tradition was not welcome by Akka though she had herself led a very sheltered life in her in-laws' house. It is quite unnatural that a woman who herself had suffered in life should drag other women into that life. But Akka could not take the off the beat road. She led life in conformity with the tradition and wanted the same for other women in the house. She could never approve Indu's father's marriage with Indu's mother. She had thought that Indu's mother had entrapped him. She had prohibited Indu's mother from learning singing in the pretext that it was alright if a woman could sing one or two *aarti* songs. She could never approve a woman's learning music in the company of the males. When Indu married on her own she was not welcome at home. Akka could not approve any love marriage which she believed was sure to fail. But this is the same Akka who ultimately made Indu the heir of her property. May be she had acknowledged Indu's will power and judicious nature with which she only could do justice to all the members of the family. On the other hand there was Atya who had tolerated everything in life. She had known Akka quite closely and had deeper knowledge of Akka's life. She knew how Akka too had been tortured by her husband who had a keep in his life. Yet Akka had served him in his last days. Atya was with her in those days and had observed Akka's strength of mind. When her husband had wanted to see that woman in his last days Akka had not let that woman to enter. Akka had returned home after her husband's demise. After her return as a wealthy widow she had single-handedly ruled the house. Her transformation from a timid wife to a bossy widow is certainly awe-inspiring. But a probe into her inner mind would reveal that a woman in the traditional patriarchal world becomes another machinery to keep the wheel of tradition moving. Deshpande's novels abound with such kind of women who want others to submit. This may be a peculiar state of mind where one woman who did not get the preferences of life prohibits others from availing those. Shankar's mother in *A Matter of Time* suggests Sumi to return to her husband even though he deserted her for no fault of her. In *That Long Silence*, Nilima's grandmother had always found Jaya's ways to be strange and queer.

Deshpande has presented complex relationship between mother and daughter. Most of her women like Indu, Saru, Mira revolted against their mothers who wanted them to lead a subdued life. The mothers in her novels are seen to be against their daughters' progressive steps. Indu's surrogate mother Akka and Saru's mother were against their love-marriage. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru's mother had always been against Saru's breaking the tradition and become a doctor and marry out of caste. Saru's mother cursed her to be unhappy.

... I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me. (197)

Mira's mother in *The Binding Vine* wanted her to shape herself in her mother's image. Her mother wanted her to marry while she wanted to continue her study. As a result Mira was married off with a man who could never reach out to her soul. Mira never wanted to follow her mother's path. In the same novel Shakutai is seen to opposing her daughter's ways. When Kalpana was raped her mother blamed her for it.

The other set of mothers are seen to be bestowed with motherly care and concern. Urmil's mother is sympathetic towards her. Even her mother-in-law turns out to be a caring woman. Sumi's mother Kalyani becomes the sheltering tree to Sumi and her daughters after she returned to her parental home.

Deshpande's protagonists are all seen to engage themselves in writing to overcome personal trauma. What is hinted is that women need to step out of their shell and fulfil their dreams. Creativity may become a woman's zone where she can be only herself beyond being a daughter, wife or mother. Deshpande's heroines are seen to overcome the personal crisis when they give space to their creative self. Creation (in her novels - writing) becomes means of liberation to heal the wounds of drab domestic life. Deshpande hints at women's need of nurturing their creativity. Creativity can bring solace to women who otherwise remain stifled. Deshpande herself had said in her interview with Vanmala Viswanatha: 'Having a life outside the family is very important for women.' All her protagonists- Indu, Saru, Jaya, Sumi, Urmila, Madhu all are seen to be working.

Deshpande is often said to be a writer writing about women. She, however, denies the charge saying she writes about human relations. Therefore her novels portray men also. In order to present human relationships Deshpande says:

Marriage is a more complicated relationship because it is not a blood tie. Also there is the physicality of sex. And there are enormous demands made on each other and it is that which interests me....The parent-child relationship is equally important for me. This is again a very deep and complex relationship. But yet, marriage is important for me and so is the family. I am interested in the family, not just marriage. These are the two relationships one is generally concerned with (Naik 2005: 229).

As marriage and parent-child relationship are important for her, male characters do appear in her novels. The partners of her female protagonists are portrayed through which we have a glimpse into the male psyche. In the scheme of events of her novels, the male characters do play a significant role. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru's husband Manu is a budding poet who is compared with Shelly. Saru and Manu had tied the knot out of love. But the sadist in Manu woke up when he found his wife to become professionally more successful and earning more money. Such is male ego which cannot eschew the fact that a woman may draw respect out of her own achievements and not by being someone's wife. Manu had arisen from working class background whose father kept a cycle shop. When he became frustrated with his writing he had taken a job of a lecturer in a third rate college. Their otherwise happy married life was stormed when people saluted his wife for being the doctor; his colleague taunted him that he could not afford a tour as his wife was not a doctor and finally a girl enquired about his feeling when his wife earns not only the butter but bread as well. Manu, the maniac started torturing his wife in the dark hours of their bedroom. In the same novel we see Saru's relationship with her father. It was her father who made it possible for her to pursue medicine for her mother was all against it. Saru's Baba was pragmatic in letting her pursue her dream and not forcing her into marriage as her mother had wanted to wash off their responsibility. The father- daughter relation here is easy. The filial love which Saru again experiences after returning to her parental home helps her to gather courage to face life.

Jaya comes to question her happy married life in *That Long Silence* after her husband Mohan goes hiding for business malpractice. In this novel we find another character Kamat who inspires Jaya to write her mind. Both the male characters are important in the novel for they help the plot to unfold.

In *A Matter of Time* we have two strong male characters. Here also one is Sumi's husband Gopal and the other is her father Shripati. While Gopal gives Sumi immeasurable pain by deserting her, her father gives her shelter and protection. Gopal's point of view for deserting his wife and daughters for no palpable reason is revealed in the novel. The dilemma of the man in taking such a decision is brought to justice in the novel. Gopal's inner conflict is clear in the following lines:

Perhaps they were right. Thus does your past come back to confront you, thus does it claim you. It's a fool's game trying to escape my past, how will my children ever be free of me? I thought I had snapped the thread when I walked out, I thought there was nothing left to connect us, but...

Yes, what about my children? (218)

Sumi's father Shripati supported her in her abysmal hopelessness. He had wanted to extend his financial help when Sumi needed money and supported her in every possible way.

And in the meantime, if you need money, ask me. Look upon it as a loan if you want. Don't let pride come in your way. (72)

The other novels too present male characters who play significant role in the lives of the protagonists. However, Deshpande's male characters are not static. They too mature with time. In *Roots and Shadows* we find Jayant comforting Indu saying he would publish her work if she finds no publisher. Whereas this is the same Jayant who had earlier prohibited her from pursuing the kind of writing she had always wanted to. Manu in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* comes to take Saru from her parental home to go back to their previous life. Mohan in *That Long Silence* is seen to post a telegram that says:

All well returning Friday morning (189)

Family is the microscope for Deshpande through which she peeps into the society at large. She takes the micro picture of society to understand life. Therefore her novels are

not set at the backdrop of any big event. She defiantly uses Erica Jong's words about all stories being stories of families as the epigraph to *Moving On*. She says that her novels are about women who try to understand themselves, their history, their roles and their place in the society and above all their relationships with others. To her, her novels are always explorations; each time in the process of writing, she finds herself confronted by discoveries which make her rethink the ideas she started off with.

As family is important to Deshpande she has explored the man-woman relationship. When this relationship was experimented certainly female sexuality came into question. Deshpande's bold treatment of female sexuality gave her characters the scope to express their sexual craving. Indu had physical closeness with Naren and thought of not telling about it to her husband. She thought that her act of sex out of marriage had nothing to do with her married life.

That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together. (187)

Though her infidelity does not match with Indian ethos such is the turn of events sometimes. Jaya in *That Long Silence* had come in close contact with Kamat. She enjoyed his physical warmth and closeness. Kamat was a man in her life who inspired to write her mind. But Mohan, her husband knew nothing about Jaya's promiscuity.

Deshpande's writing came both out of her anger and confusion. She had found that something was wrong with the world and therefore with her world. It was hard for her to make sense of what was wrong. There was only confusion and anger. But gradually she could make out the reason behind her confusion and anger:

It was only much later that I was able to connect my anger to the sense of denigration I was made to feel about being a female, about the roles that my gender identity seemed to have locked me into, roles which I often chafed against. Worst of all was the idea that this gender identity and the roles that came with it, seemed to deny my intellectual self, a self that was as important to me as my emotional self. It was out of this turmoil and disturbance that my writing was born (Naik 2005: 24).

The anger and confusion of the writer is found in her female protagonists too. In fact every woman faces this turmoil within herself. When she writes about women she only

wants to present them as they are. But gender plays a significant role in their lives. With gender come the discriminations which bind women in patriarchal conventions.

In her mission to present life of women Deshpande shows the strength and weakness of women. She leads her women to progress from immaturity to maturity, from ignorance to knowledge and from weakness to strength and confidence. Her women become worldly wise as they contest and question their roles in family and society. Deshpande has not followed any feminist theory to propagate her ideas. She has just upheld the basic Indian life of women. The women who live in patriarchy are obvious subject to dominations. Subjugation of women is definite to surface in one's writing when the lives of women are portrayed.

One important trend in her novels is that her man and woman unite at the end (except in *A Matter of Time* where the protagonist dies). They do not take any radical decision like divorce. They are rooted in Indian culture and beliefs. Though they question the obsolete customs and beliefs, they too contribute in the India's continuing culture. They are witnesses to change and flux in Indian life and culture. They have evolved their own culture but that is based on India's past history and culture. According to the need of the time and space they have modified the past version in new folder. So the union at the end of her novels signifies that life gets meaning in facing the challenge and not escaping from it. Her protagonists value family and children. They are just one step ahead of their preceding generation of women. They are working women while their mothers remained only home makers. So Deshpande's women are basically home makers who have just another life outside their home. By creating working women she has stressed the need of women to have a life outside family and home. Her women try to balance between home and the world. To strike the right balance they are under continuous pressure and stress often inflicted by guilt and indignation. Her women present the true picture of urban Indian working women struggling to keep the balance between home and the world. Ibsen's Nora had stretched her wings beyond home and hearth to fly in the sky freely. She opened the door for millions of stifled women across the world. Women began to question their place in home and society. Indian women writers too have created the same ambience in their writings. Deshpande specifically has shown how women can achieve emancipation by having confidence in themselves.

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