

CHAPTER V

NEGOTIATING MODERNITY IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

In an interview, Shashi Deshpande said to Geetha Gangadharan “.....we need to have a world which we should recognize as a place for all of human beings. There are no superior and inferior, we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir that “the fact that we are human, is much more important than our being men and women.” (Indian Communication, 1994)

So the women constitute a half of the species and the novelist shares a lot of their experiences in Indian society. Shashi Deshpande tries to express openly the relationship of man and woman in a society, where men and women acquire their assigned status without dominating each other. It is natural, therefore, to find her novels focused on problems of women. The prime focus is on the quest for self and recognition of existence. All of Shashi Deshpande’s novels comprise a number of women characters who belong mostly to the middle class though do not entirely exclude other classes. They are married, unmarried or widows and generally include three generations. Marriage becomes only another enclosure for women that restrict their movement towards autonomy and self – realization. Her novels present women in changing times reflecting on their struggle to establish their identity and freedom. By presenting women protagonists as progressive and assertive, she

beautifully exposes patriarchal domination and the socio – cultural mindset. She catches attention of the society towards the real demand and the life of women. Her women are sensitive, self conscious, brilliant and creative. Shashi Deshpande embarks upon a journey into the feminine consciousness, depicting the inner world of women. Women in her novels are engaged in an unconscious struggle to release themselves from the stranglehold of a tradition bound society.

In *Roots and Shadows* (1992), we find women characters belonging to three generations. Akka belongs to the first generation. Narmada, Sunanda, Kaki, Sumitra and Kamala belong to the second while Indu, Mini, Lata, Geeta etc. belong to the third. Their stories are indicative of the challenges women face and their responses, varying according to their age and nature. She uses consciousness of the protagonists to question the repressive forces subjugating women in contemporary Indian society.

Akka, the younger sister of Indu's grandfather represents the first generation. Born in a traditional Brahmin family, she was married at twelve to a man past thirty. So at a tender age when she barely understood the meaning of sex, she was subjected to the lust of a fully grown and uncaring man. His often violent sexual advances were unbearable to her.

It was but usual in those days for a rich man to have mistresses and Akka's husband had mistresses. After fifteen or twenty years of their married life, her husband became especially fascinated of a particular mistress. He tried

to give Akka's jewels to that woman. So she had to deposit them in the custody of her father. He could not bring that mistress home as his mother would not permit it and then after her death, he feared Akka's father. But the attachment remained.

However, her life took a sudden turn when her husband, a hefty man had a paralytic stroke which made him helpless and unable to speak. He survived the stroke for about two years. Akka looked after him like an ideal and dutiful wife during the period despite all her traumatic experiences. But that sudden turn in her life enabled her to gain self – esteem and confidence and provided an opportunity to grab freedom and assert herself. She treated her husband kindly and carefully but did not relent when he wanted to see his mistress.

She told him adamantly:

“Listen to me. It's my turn now. I have listened to you long enough. She came here. Twice, she wanted to see you. She cried and begged to be allowed to see you just for a short while. I threw her out. You'll never see her again.” (RS 71)

Thus Akka who was feeble, fragile and timid earlier, mastered the technique of domination.

After her husband's death, Akka returns to her natal home a rich, childless widow. Despite her sex, she plays a new role, the role of a patriarch in the family. As the men in the family were weak, dependent and ineffectual and

lagged far behind her in age, experience and above all, money, she became the prime force holding them together. As Indu recalls, she maintained “an absolute control over her brother’s children. Kaka, even after becoming a grandfather, could be reduced to a red – faced stuttering schoolboy by Akka’s venomous tongue.” (RS 22)

“Venomous tongue” that is how Indu finds it and there are others in the family to hold similar views, though not for the same reason. What they have in common is but the dislike for a person who dominated them all. Akka had her strengths as well as weaknesses and her domination ought to be evaluated in the light of the ends it served. It is but natural for the dominated to be resentful of the person who dominates but it may or may not be detrimental to their interests all the time. It was not easy to hold together people with conflicting interests but Akka was able to do that with her strength and determination. Everybody feared her.

Beneath her sternness, there was something that made them respect her. For one thing she was neither selfish nor mean minded or inconsiderate. That is testified by two persons who knew her better. Old uncle says:

“I never thought Akka would go before me. She was only a few years older. And as strong as a horse.” (RS 29)

And Naramada (Atya) remarks:

“As long as she was with us, we never felt we had no parents. I didn’t feel so orphaned even when Mother died. And because Akka

was there, we were still young. Now, I'm both orphaned and old.”

(RS 30)

As the head of the family, she took decisions which did not please all. That was not unexpected in a family united only in “a readiness to revile others, to misunderstand, to see the worst.” (RS 60)

She was realistic enough to promise money for the dowry and wedding expenses of Mini. But when Hemant failed his first year in college and approached Akka, she did not fail to realize his worth and said, “why do you need a degree? Take up a job and start earning....” (RS 61)

It hurt him but it was the best advice under the circumstances as permitting him second chance to study would have meant sheer wastage of time and money.

Sumitra charges her with partiality for boys—“Akka kept all her softness for boys.” (RS 62)

But the above incident suffices to refute the allegation. As a matter of fact, Sumitra, a mother of three daughters and no son, misrepresents the case. She had demanded twenty thousand for the dowry of her daughter Lata but Akka did not comply. She had refused with a sharp comment:

“What is wrong with you people? Your husband has been earning a good salary all along. Don't tell me you haven't saved up enough for your daughters' marriages! Expenses! Don't talk to me of expenses! If you had spent less on saris and paints for your face and lips and nails.....you wouldn't have to ask others now.” (RS 65)

Harsh words indeed, but not removed from reality which demonstrate her dislike for the cunning parasites. But Akka had traits that made her highly annoying to the young. As long as she lived, Indu “thought she was an interfering old woman.” (RS 159) She appeared “ruthless, dominating, bigoted and inconsiderate” to her. Not only that, she mistook her for “narrow minded”, “thinking only of herself. Never of others.” (RS 22) Naren does not attend Akka’s funeral, because Akka did not like him and he too hated her.

What did they dislike so much in Akka? First of all, Akka was a staunch believer and upholder of the caste norms. Naturally she did not like her nephew’s marriage with a woman who belonged to a different caste. It appeared to Akka that Indu’s mother had trapped “such a quiet boy.” To Indu, however, Akka’s words were “profanation and desecration” as she viewed her parents’ love as “something sacred.” (RS 74-75)

Sticking to her superstitions, she refuses to get herself admitted to a hospital. “She was worried about the kind of people she would come in contact with “god knows what caste the nurses are,” she said. “Or the doctors, I couldn’t drink a drop of water there.” (RS 50)

So she was consistent in her bigotry to the end of her life. Even for the sake of life she would not compromise with her belief, with her orthodoxy. That was naturally disgusting to the enlightened people like Naren and Indu.

Caste is not the only obsession with Akka; she is a product of patriarchy. She has assimilated the value system of patriarchy and attempts to

inculcate the same values in the family. Herself a victim of the system she perpetuates the same to the extent she can. She believes that young girls ought to be submissive, restraint in speech and movement and far from assertive. That is why she is hard with the girls but her intention in it is to prepare them for married life by turning them acceptable to the male. She deems everything else secondary or even immaterial. When Saroja wanted to learn music, Akka put her foot down. She said:

“What—learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like those women? Are we that kind of a family? Isn’t it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a descent family need to know?” (RS 74)

Her strict rules do not permit a young girl to talk with a boy freely. So when Indu is detected talking with a boy in a lone corner of the college library, Akka reprimands her, because “it’s bad enough being talked about.” (RS 68) When Indu defies her and marries Jayant who belongs to a different caste, she disapproves of it the way she had her parent’s marriage: “Such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages.....It is all right for a while.” (RS 18-19)

Akka is but a villain in the eyes of the protagonist Indu. But she is surprised to receive a summon from Akka on the eve of her death. Having left home full of hatred for the family and especially for Akka, she has sworn never

to go back. Akka surprises her even more and disarms her by treating her kindly when at last she comes back after twelve years. But Indu as well as the readers of the novel are intrigued to the utmost to find that Akka has bequeathed all her money to nobody else but Indu, who disliked her and defied her all along. We wonder why. Indu herself offers an explanation of the riddle:

“A family... it’s like any other group. There are the strong and the weak. And the strong have to dominate the weak. It’s inevitable.

And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones. That’s why she put the burden on me.....I have to carry the burden. And to do that, I have to be hard. If I’m soft, I’ll just cave in.” (RS 19)

In the absence of any other explanation, we have to admit it. However, it implies that Akka admired the strength she found in Indu despite differences in education, awareness and social outlook. She realized that only a strong person like Indu could find the best course for a family full of “mean and petty and trivial and despicable people.” Though her obsession with caste remained till the end and she refused to get herself admitted to a hospital on caste grounds, she showed her willingness to make an exception in case of Indu. She wanted to see Indu and her husband (a man of a different caste) together and converse with them. That concession constitutes Akka’s homage to the intelligence and determination of Indu. To sum up, Akka ought to be viewed as a “cohesive force” (RS 159) and “a prop” (RS 70) in the family as Indu realizes at last.

The story of Akka reveals some remarkable facts about the condition of Indian women in the nineteenth century. Child marriage was the norm in those days. Girls were married before they attained puberty. Thus we are informed that Akka “grew up” six months after her marriage and went to her home. As their husbands were often much older and lustful, such marriages subjected girls of tender age to martial rape. To such brides, marriage meant trauma, a punishment. Akka spent every night in her marital home crying and nobody cared to know why. That is why she tells Atya before latter’s consummation of marriage: “Now your punishment begins. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels.” (RS 70)

Even the word ‘punishment’ seems a euphemism if we consider the horrors involved. Rosalind Miles remarks:

“Child marriage all too readily reveals itself as a sophisticated form of female infanticide, for millions of these girls lied from gynaecologic damage or in childbirth every year. As late as 1921, the British Government Official Census of India recorded that 3,20,0000 child brides had died during the previous twelve months.” She concludes her remark with two proverbs - ‘Early to marry and early to die is the motto of Indian women’ and ‘The life of a wife is two monsoons.’ (Miles 1993: 113)

Such marriages have not altogether disappeared. The practice of marrying girls before puberty still continues in certain parts of India. That is

traditional and believed to be sanctioned by religion. But that was not usual in ancient India. There are hymns in the Rig Veda which indicate that people of both sexes married at an age when they were able to choose their spouse and shoulder the responsibilities of the household and the consummation took place immediately after the marriage. Vashistha and Baudhayana in their codes permit marriage of girls three years after puberty. Gautam ordained that a girl was free to choose her spouse three months after attaining puberty. Sushruta, one of the famous authorities of Indian medicine, opined that people of both sexes ought to abstain from marrying until they attain perfect growth which happens at 25 in case of the male and at 16 in case of the female. It was much later (a few centuries before Christ) that the codes of Parashar, Samvarta and Brihadyama threatened the parents with sin if they failed to get their daughters married between 8 and 10. The other thing notable in the story of Akka is the attitude of her mother – in – law:

“...twice she tried to run away....a girl of thirteen. Her mother-in-law...whipped her for that and locked her up for three days. Starved her as well. And then, sent her back to her husband's room. The child....cried and calling to her mother-in-law saying, “Lock me up again, lock me up.” But there was no escape from a husband then.”

(RS 70)

Then, Akka became pregnant even before she was out of her teens. Her immature, undeveloped body failed to give birth to a living child. She had

miscarriages and her mother – in – law blamed her for it and made life hell for her. That is surprising and painful to learn. Her mother – in – law as a woman was expected to lend a sympathetic ear to her, to provide solace to her but she ill – treats her. We wonder why. Some scholars believe her mother – in – law had “turned her expression of aggression “in words,” that is, towards her daughter – in – law.” (RS 70)

I confess, that is not so clear to me. However, such behaviour is reminiscent of the logic of those who defend ragging because they too have suffered at the hands of their seniors. Perhaps Akka’s mother – in – law deemed it quite normal as she too had suffered similarly. But above all, Akka’s mother – in – law was the product of patriarchy, a system which taught women that whatever the circumstances, a wife’s sole duty, nay, even the justification of her very existence consisted in serving the sexual needs of her husband and to assure the continuity of his line by bearing children. She had no choice in respect of sex and reproduction. She could not control her body as marriage turned it into a property of her husband. Besides the social convention, religious sanction too is easily available to the lustful husband. Thus, the Brihadaranyak Upanisad, permits a husband to beat with hand or stick an unwilling wife if he fails to allure her with clothes, ornaments etc. and apply force for sexual intercourse. (Brihad Aranyak Upanishad, VI: 4.7)

Moving on to the third point, when, Akka had been married for more than fifteen or twenty years, her husband took a mistress. “He would have

brought her home but for fear of his mother.” (RS 70) That is, Akka’s mother – in – law had no objection to her son’s extra – marital affairs as long as the mistress remained out of the home. That shows two things. First, the society had as it still has two standards of morality. As for the wife, she had no say in matters vital for her life and health. As for the husband, he could force his will on his wife and take some other women if he felt dissatisfied. Second, hypocrisy reigned supreme in the society as there was no objection in having a mistress, only admitting her inside the home mattered.

The second generation of women in the novel comprises two daughters of Akka’s elder brother and the wives of his four sons. They are but minor characters in the novel and do not have a prominent role in the story. However, they represent majority of the women of their age — neither educated nor very intelligent, bound by all that tradition implied or enjoined and living the life of ordinary mortals.

Narmada (Atya), the eldest child of Akka’s elder brother, is married early according to the custom of the times. Fortunately, her husband is a “decent man.” So her married life is not a punishment as Akka feared. However, she is ill – treated after the death of her husband and therefore, her father brings her home. She is childless, past sixty and dependent on her natal home.

Ever since coming back, she works from morning to night everyday expecting nothing. She does all the household work and still finds “time to give

a hungry child something to eat, soothe a crying child, or relieve a tired, irritable young mother of her burden.” (RS 37)

Fatigue and sad experiences cause headache to her at times but does not blur her vision.

When Indu and her cousins were babies, she bathed them all and never got them mixed up. Indu was her favourite since childhood and remained so even after. When Indu comes to attend the summons of Akka and stays to attend the wedding of Mini (Padmini), she rubs oil into her hair, scrubs her with soapnut powder and pours water on her.

With “her rituals, her fasts and herself deprivations,” she leads the regulated life of a widow. (RS 12)

Yet, she is but a second – class citizen in the kingdom of widows, as the novelist puts it. The orthodox would not eat food cooked by her, as she is not a shaven widow. She could have become one but for the stout resistance of her brother Anant.

She is old – fashioned and believes that women ought to circumbulate the tulsi, stand devotedly in front of it with folded hands and closed eyes and pray for safety and long life of their husbands. Even her widowhood has not shaken her faith. She holds that a wife is fortunate if she does not survive her husband.

Her conservatism is best expressed through her shock at the thought of her nephew Sharad going into the hotel business.

“To her, there are still very few respectable careers. The law, teaching, working in a governmental office, and what to her are the new fangled ones.....medicine and engineering.” (RS 69)

Though her nephew qualifies for none of these, she would not like any other career for him. Eventually though, Indu’s wisdom prevails and Sharad prospers in the hotel business.

Initially, she opposes inter caste marriages but experience teaches her to give up her rigid attitude. This is because she cannot shun dear ones. When her brother Govind marries a woman of a different caste, she does not like it like the rest of the family. But her utmost concern is not the tradition, but the happiness of her brother. So later she remarks: “What difference did it make? She could have made him happy.” (RS 132) Demise of Govind’s wife proves a catalyst to her thought. Had her sister – in – law lived longer, her intelligent brother would not have become a wanderer. Indu too like her father marries inter – caste later. Atya is at that time mentally prepared to ignore the caste if it brings happiness to Indu.

Her softness for Akka is irritating to Indu who is ignorant of a lot of things. Akka was kind to her and permitted her to sleep in her room. She feels both orphaned and old after Akka’s death and remembers her services to the family. At last, she succeeds in removing Indu’s hostility toward the dead woman by telling her Akka’s story.

After Akka, Atya belongs to the trio who have become “just anachronisms” as they are “struggling to survive in increasingly alien, hostile environment,” who are “struggling to keep the fabric of the family intact.” She has something in common with old uncle and Kaka: A lack of the sense of ‘yours’ and ‘mine’. (RS 132)

Atya is characterized by her “undemanding affection.” And if one has to divide people into two categories of the giver and the taker, one must place her among the giver, as Indu puts it.

The idea of selling the parental home to a promoter who wants to build a hotel on that site seems horrible to her. Its destruction means dissolution of the united family which provides security to helpless widows like her. Eventually the house is sold to Shankarappa and Atya feels undone.

Narmada’s youngest sister Sunanda is diametrically opposite to her. She is cunning and manipulative. She got married to the first man who proposed to her at the age of sixteen. She was called lucky for that, she was taught early that “being a female, she could neither assert, nor demand or proclaim” So, adopting herself to her circumstances and environment, she has become “cunning, greedy, devious and unscrupulous.” (RS 32)

Her cunningness, however, does not stand in the way of submitting to superstitions. Thus she believes a wife should not pronounce her husband’s name: “shows disrespect.....They also say it shortens your husband’s life. (RS 51)

Sunanda is not modern like Indu as she herself confesses. Her out-datedness is revealed in her unplanned motherhood. Her husband Vinayak contributes nothing to the family, has no job and no earning and yet she has five children. Having children to her is not “something you should think and plan about. You should just have them.” (RS 137) That makes her a “pure, female animal” as the novelist puts it.

Though she looks helpless and feeble, she is ahead of others in looking after the interests of herself and her children. Even in the crowded house on the occasion of Mini’s marriage, she could manage mattresses, blankets and pillows for all of them; for her and her children. Her self interest causes her to plead against spending money for Mini’s marriage. Mini is her niece and she is well aware of the reasons for Akka’s decision. Yet, she opposes on the ground of the disqualification of the groom and his family:

“If you ask me, Indu, it isn’t worth it, giving all that money to that family.....Instead of spending so much money in that marriage, wouldn’t it be better to spend it on this house.....our father’s house? Her concern is deep, she is “frightened and desolate” as the house provides her a much – needed security but it betrays her utter disregard for Mini as she offers no alternative. (RS 135, 139)

The self – seeking woman does not hesitate to besmear others when it serves her interests. Thus she forgets all Old Uncle has done for the family and charges him of parasitism:

“He doesn’t have to bother about jobs and money. He knows he’ll always get enough to eat and drink in this house.” (RS 55)

That is an outrage on the part of a person who is herself a parasite. Naturally, it arouses “diabolical anger” in Indu.

In the same view, she accuses Kaki (Anant’s wife) of depriving her of the silver her mother had promised for her son, Krishna. As a matter of fact, Sunanda’s mother breathed her last before Krishna’s birth and the promise was but a concoction of greedy Sunanda. Kaki rejected her claim but presented a single silver tumbler to Krishna on his naming day. As Sunanda would have all or nothing, she presented the same to Sharad on his thread ceremony soon after.

Quite characteristic of her crafty nature is her attempt to extract money for her irresponsible husband and twice S.S.C. failed son. Her husband needs some capital to get into partnership with a businessman and her son wants money to start a repairing shop. Akka was intelligent enough to recognize their worth and Indu too does not fail to evaluate them correctly. Needless, she pays no heed to Sunanda.

The characters of Narmada and Sunanda illustrate two aspects of the joint family system. On the positive side, it provides refuge to the weak and the unfortunate like childless widows and old people. It also gives love and care to young ones. On the negative side, it breeds parasites like Sunanda and Vasant who need not bother about the size of the family and the means to support it as they find it easy to exploit others.

Kaki, Sumitra and Kamala — wives of Anant, Madhav and Vinayak are the other women who belong to the same generation. Kaki is the traditional type of woman. As two of her sons, Hemant and Sumant are employed, she is worried about the marriage of her only daughter Mini and the career of her son Sharad. As soon as that is done, she wants to go on pilgrimage: “to Kashi and Badri and what not.” (RS 120)

She is outspoken by nature. She takes to task Sumitra and Madhav Rao for failing to come after Akka’s death and deciding to come for the thirteenth day. She is disgusted with Sunanda’s charge of stealing silver vessels and resents frequent questions about the income from land and mangoes. She does not hesitate to complain to Indu against her father’s long absence from home.

Initially, she has doubts if Indu will agree to pay for Mini’s marriage. So, she entertains rather half – heartedly the idea of Mini’s marriage with Naren as he would not demand dowry. When Naren refuses, she prepares to give her daughter in marriage with the groom selected previously by Akka and spend the money on the marriage instead of maintaining the family house. She dreams of a small house:

“With a small kitchen. A gas to cook on. Shining pots and pans lined on shelves.” (RS 58)

Why is she least concerned about the family house? “Since I came into this house, my lot has been work, work, and yet more work. As long as we are here, there’ll always be parasites. People come and

stay here as if they have a right over this house.....And who has to foot the bill after-words? Us.None of them ever share the work.” (RS 64)

That reads like an epitaph on the joint family system. All trying to reap the benefits of it and few contributing to maintain it has assured its death. The novelist is justified in calling the three who wanted to keep the joint family intact ‘anachronisms’.

Sumitra, Madhav’s wife, is the daughter of a man who was a Civil Surgeon and ended up as Director of Medical Services. Her husband is a top ranking Civil Servant. She is convent educated, speaks English most of the time. She is proud of her privileged position in the society and lives a “different, superior and exclusive” life even in the joint family. She refers to her husband as ‘the saheb’ all the time. She carefully avoids mixing her own clothes with those of others and washes every thing in the house when a guest leaves. It is horrible for her to use public toilets and deems it necessary to tell one and all that she travels first class like her father.

She indulges in platitudes and maintains a show of urbanity. But she is hardly liberal in money matters. Her husband paid taxes for his family house last year but Anant dares not ask him again lest Sumitra “eat him up alive”. (RS 121,181)

Her son Sunil, a third class B.Sc failed to extract from Akka and she bears a grudge against her for that. Then her attempt to get an amount of twenty

thousand for dowry too fails which ends the negotiations for Lata's marriage. She misrepresents her independent minded boy doing his Business Management unnecessarily rebuked by Akka. In case of Lata, she hides the fact that negotiations broke off because of the dowry and claims to have refused the proposal as the groom was not that cultured.

Thus we find that education has not given much positive outlook to her. She is vain, showy, and hypocritical. She talks about things like 'dignity of labour' which she hardly practices. Prosperity has not made her generous. Dowry and other expenses on Mini's wedding appears sheer wastage to her, but she would have spent even more for the wedding of her daughter had Akka conceded. She spends a lot on dress and cosmetics, a fact Akka noticed and resented. As a matter of fact, she represents a section of the well – to – do women who are neither intelligent, nor honest and devoid of any sense of values.

Kamala, Vinayak's wife, has three daughters. Her husband is a licentiate doctor in a small town. She is not as reserved as Sumitra and laughs loudly. However, she is unhappy about the fact that she has only daughters. While her husband is proud of his "bouncing, healthy girls", she is more concerned about their marriage which requires money. She shares with her husband the idea that Anant had "to flatter and fawn" to get money for Mini's wedding. Bitterly she remarks: "Akka kept all her softness for boys." Hardly accurate as a statement of fact, it is indicative of her mentality. First of all, she

deems it her misfortune to have daughters only. Secondly, she wants to shift her financial burden to others.

Then, there is the old woman who helps Kaki in the kitchen. She is a widow who has got her head shaved according to the custom. Her bare skull with its short hair looks “not only indecent, but obscene when bared.” (RS 125) She is needy. She comes to Kaki and helps her for money and one square meal denied to her by her daughter – in – law.

Poverty has affected her conduct and brought disrepute to her. She is believed to have “the sharpest ears and the longest tongue in the town.” (RS 128) Kaki does not like to leave her alone in the kitchen because she may drink some of the buttermilk and carry many things in the folds of her sari.

The old woman belongs to that section of women which is “riddled with ignorance, prejudice and superstition.” (RS 125) Academic distinctions, career, success and money mean nothing to them. To them, marriage and reproduction are the only success a woman is expected to have. So they look down upon the childless women. As Indu is childless, the old woman speaks contemptuously of her.

The old woman is proud of her two names, Ganga and Kavery, “both good and holy names”. The first she got from her grandmother and the second from her mother-in-law. Her pride seems quite wide off the mark as nobody uses those names anymore. Married women are generally known as someone’s daughter – in – law, sister – in – law, mother – in – law or aunt etc. and called

accordingly. So the names become meaningless. But then the poor and the ignorant too need something to console them. Holy names, sons and grandsons etc. serve the purpose.

The third generation of women in the novel comprises Indu, Mini, Lata and Geeta. As the last two are but names in the story, we have to discuss only the first two. Mini as we have noticed earlier is the daughter of Anant while Indu is Govind's daughter. None of the cousins is beautiful. That is the only similarity they share. They differ in intellect, education and temperament.

Tradition brings up girls with an oppressive sexist bias. It teaches two things to them from the very beginning. First of them is that girls are but birds of passage and they have to leave their parental home soon by marriage. The second lesson they learn is that they have to become good housekeepers in order to become eligible as suitable brides and later good wives.

As Mini says to Indu:

“.....ever since we were small, we were told.....,” “you'll be going away one day to your own home.” They said to you and me, never to Hemant or Sumant or Sharaad or Sunil'. (RS 3, 50-51)

So she seriously believes that she has to marry somehow to get a home as the parental home is not hers. Adhering to the lessons taught, she has also acquired the capability to look after a house as she puts it:

“There's only one thing I'm really good at.....looking after a house.” (RS 64)

As for her education, she admits her failure frankly: “I’m no good at studies, I never was. I went to school because – I had to. And then to college, because Akka said I must go. Boys prefer graduates these days, she said, so I went. But I failed and it was a relief to give it up.” (RS 3) That is a shortcoming that makes her dependent and a non – chooser.

She is well aware of the groom Akka has chosen for her. His “coarse features and crude mannerisms”, his failure to pass through the college, his ugliness are no secrets to her. She knows that her guardians have to pay a dowry of rupees ten thousand for the marriage. But as the groom belongs to the same community, owns a lot of property, and has consented to the marriage proposal, the sensible and pragmatic girl finds it pointless to bother about the disqualification of the bridegroom.

“To her it was marriage that mattered, not the man.” She thinks she is “fulfilling her destiny” by getting married. (RS 126)

Mini is a realist and her thinking is based on practical considerations. She is past twenty – four. If girls remain unmarried at such age, people raise questions and even pity them. She is tired of such interrogation. Marriage will give her a husband to look after her and put an end to those questions. That is no mean relief to her. That is why she says:

“I don’t care what kind of a man he is. Once we are married, and he becomes my husband, none of his flaws will matter.” (RS 32)

There is the other consideration too. The entire process of marriage negotiation is tiring and taxing to the patience of both the guardians and the prospective bride. The guardians have to seek grooms and to send the horoscope and wait. If it does not match and is returned, they are disappointed. If it matches, they come to interview the girl. They ask questions; observe her gait, dress, speech and manners etc. The guardians have to feed and attend the guests. Sometimes, someone else in the family wants to see the girl and they have to arrange the meeting again. Sometimes the girl is rejected as not enough and sometimes as too fashionable, sometimes she is found too short or too tall. When it happens time and again, it is but natural for the girl to feel humiliated, to think she has committed a great crime by being born a girl. So she wishes to get married at the earliest in order to save her parents from the agony.

As Mini says to Indu:

“And finally, if everything was fine, there was the dowry....And now, when someone has agreed, can I refuse and make Kaka go through all of it all over again?” (RS 158)

Mini’s marriage like most of the marriages in the country is arranged. Such marriages are not based on love and are far from romantic. They are cold calculations, on expediency. So Indu remarks:

“Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold –

calculated bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue?" (RS 99)

Indu is the protagonist of the novel who discovers through experience her roots (as a woman and a writer) and shadows (as a daughter and a commercial journalist). Intelligent and educated, she is devoid of superstitions and questions traditional behaviour. For example, she does not believe that worshipping the tulsi and praying for longevity increases the life of a woman's husband or pronouncing his name shortens it. "That's just to frighten the women. To keep them in their places." (RS 67)

She questions the established norms and refuses to become a replica of the elderly woman around her. To put it in her own words:

"As a child, they had told me that I must be obedient and uncompromising. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are female. You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way they said, for a female to live and survive.....' I had laughed at them, and sworn I would never pretend to be what I was not." (RS 15,17)

As a modern woman Indu disparages traditional marriages as they are not based on compatibility but religion, caste, community and dowry etc. and leave "human emotions." Women married that way and devoted to their husbands are but an enigma to her. She wonders if they are "martyrs,

heroines, or just stupid fools.” (RS 159) As a mark of protest against the tradition, she marries outside her caste and leaves the house of her father’s family.

Her married life begins with love, but does not sail smoothly. There are problems in her career of journalism and there are problems in her conjugal life. Part of these problems is caused by others while part of them is the product of her fault. For the sake of her husband Jayant who wants to maintain a high standard of living and needs money for the purpose, she has to compromise and “write the kind of things that are acceptable, popular and easily sold.” (RS 14) She is disgusted with flattery and dishonesty but Jayant comes in her way. Problems of her conjugal life are far deeper and agonizing. As Jayant is shocked to find passion in her, she is compelled to pretend passiveness, to deny her womanhood and thereby experience loss of self – esteem.

It is at this critical juncture of life that she is summoned by Akka and returns to her natal house after more than a decade. Akka dies soon after meeting her and leaves her property to Indu. Indu has now to resolve her own problems as well as to fulfil her obligations towards the family. Eventually she succeeds in both respects. Her meeting with Naren proves a catalyst to her to a large extent. Naren is a harsh critic of her writings who exposes the hollowness of her writings mercilessly. That helps her make up her mind about her literary career. Then, Indu has an extra – marital affair with Naren. It proves but an episode in her life as Naren passes away soon. But the affair makes her

conscious of the fact that a woman need not be ashamed of her sexuality and hide it. She realizes her mistake in trying to do, speak, dress and behave the way it pleases Jayant. It amounts to a denial of her identity which is neither pleasing nor honourable.

Once she realizes that it is no use hiding her own feelings or feel ashamed of them, or to behave the way her husband or others like, it becomes easy for her to solve her personal problems. She gains the courage to tell Jayant that she is going to resign from her job and start the kind of writing she always wanted to do. That is, she will not write what is acceptable, popular and easily sold but what comes out of her inner self.

Then, she reveals her strengths and weaknesses to her husband and the result is positive and promising according to her own admission:

“There is an ease in our relationship that was not there before. If my feelings have cooled down to some extent.....I have gained something else in return. I no longer fight my need of him. I am not ashamed of it. I know it does not make me less of a human being.”

(RS 12,13)

Akka has placed her in somewhat peculiar condition by leaving all her money to her. She has remained so hostile to Akka for a long time and despises the family as mean and despicable. Under the circumstances, she can use that money either to enrich herself or give it to strangers. Hatred suggests both of these courses to her but her mind eventually leads her to decide otherwise. She

feels bound by an obligation and to fulfil that she must be hard. So she takes decisions which are not very pleasant to her kith and kin but in practice benefit them. She decides to pay for Mini's wedding and the family house is sold to a promoter. The money obtained from the sale is distributed in a way that enables all to have small houses of their own. Sharad prospers in his hotel business. Atya, the childless widow comes to live with Indu and Jayant and adjusts herself well in course of time. Though nobody favoured the idea of spending money for an outsider like Vithal, Indu recognizes his merit and Vithal is one of the first to benefit from Akka's trust.

The above analysis reveals certain facts about social progress. We have to recognise that resistance to change is generally strong. Women of the second generation are as conservative and superstitious as Akka. At the same time, even the most conservative are compelled to concede to the demands of the age. Thus, Akka cannot shut her eyes to the necessity of sending the girls of the family to college as boys want to marry graduate girls. Govind belonging to the second generation marries inter – caste and Indu, his daughter does likewise. Sumitra is convent educated and proud of her 'culture'. By the third generation we find that adult marriages have replaced child marriages and the girls are striving to assert their choice and confronting the problems of their sexuality. Love marriages and inter – caste marriages are leading them a step ahead but they are also bringing before them new challenges of adjustment with male prejudices and assertion of their own

identity. The novel also shows that women need not blame men for all problems as at least some of them arise from their own silence, deception and self denial practised in pursuit of their goal of becoming the 'ideal Indian woman.'

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1990), Saru's grandmother represents the first generation of women. We do not learn much about her. Her husband disappears all of a sudden and a family legend excuses her with the claim that he has taken Sanyas. This happens only a few years after marriage and she is left helpless with two little daughters. The young woman returns to her natal house. Her father looks after her and her daughters and gets the two daughters married when they attain the marriageable age according to the tradition. She realizes that she is an unwanted burden in that house and does not complain. She blames her own luck for all her sufferings. That is how the deprived, the oppressed and the helpless have ever accepted their fate. The deserted are no exception to that.

Mothers of Saru, Madhav and Sudhir comprise the second generation of women in the novel. Madhav's mother is an old – fashioned woman who wears nine yard saris. She is the wife of a poor Brahmin who cannot afford to buy good clothes. Even if there is some money, she comes last and her husband despises people who take too much interest in clothes. So she remains content with what she gets. A wide gulf separates her husband from her and her children. They dare not discuss anything with him and he prefers to impose his

own will on them. As a result of this communication gap he remains unaware of his son Satish's craze for movies and his threat to run away. And when Satish disappears he holds her responsible for it and punishes her by refusing to eat anything cooked by her. Thus she is deprived of a chance to serve her husband which is believed to be the first duty of a woman according to the tradition. So "Madhav's mother considers it a punishment". (DHNT 56)

To us, the behaviour appears quite irrational and unjust. To a rational being, it is the duty of both the parents to look after and guide their children properly. It cannot be left to the mother alone. Moreover, a man who makes himself inaccessible to his wife and children cannot blame his wife for a mishap. He ought to blame and penalize himself instead.

Sudhir's mother was formerly a plump, placid and motherly woman Saru liked. She had five children of her own but enough affection to spare for Saru, her neighbour's daughter. She chatted with Saru as she combed the latter's hair and plaited them tight. Saru was very fond of her. In her old age, she changed physically and mentally. She had diabetes but refused to diet.

All "the old affection, the interest, the curiosity" was gone. "She lived in her own world of querulous complaints, carrying on a perennial warfare against her son and daughter in law, seeing the world in black and white, she, the wronged, the others, the wrong doers." (DHNT 191)

She is representative of an emotional type of woman who fails to adjust with the reality in old age, who resents the loss of the power and importance they had in the family earlier, who view the young as usurpers. She belongs to the mass of the weak, the lonely, the defeated, the forsaken, the unhappy who has lost all interest in life and considers Saru's mother lucky as she died and got rid of her suffering.

Saru's mother had an unhappy childhood. After her father's desertion, she was brought up along with her sister in her grandfather's house, where she realized they were not accepted but were merely tolerated. That experience affected her personality and made her a silent and dour woman. As she felt unwanted and insecure in childhood, she sought power later to avoid further oppression. Moreover, she accepted the traditional idea of woman's inferiority and the preference for a male child with a bias against the female child. She discriminated between her son and her daughter in their upbringing which aroused Saru's resentment and hostility. She was a typical Indian mother who wanted to prepare her daughter for her in-law's house by making her modest and submissive. As Saru did not like that, she grew bitter.

She was old fashioned. Fond of her son, Dhruva, she pampered him. His birthday was celebrated with zeal but it was only during the haldi – kumkum ceremony that the daughter "became more important than Dhruva."

(DHNT 144)

When Dhruva was drowned accidentally she held Saru responsible for the mishap. Later she shows her preference for male child with her kindness for Madhav, a boy unrelated to her.

As a woman's independence was something beyond her wildest dreams, she opposed Saru's idea of joining a medical college after she passed Inter Science.

"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?" she asks her father. (DHNT 196)

Obviously, marriage mattered more in the life of a woman than education and career from her point of view.

Subscribing to the traditional ideas, it was but natural for her to oppose Saru's resolve to marry a man who did not belong to her caste. Manohar was the son of a cycle – shop keeper and belonged to a lower caste.

"You won't be happy with him. I know you won't. A man of a different caste, different community.....what will you have in common?" she argued. (DHNT 108)

Belonging to the same caste, same community was the only factor that assured success and happiness in married life according to her. She had nothing but distrust for love marriages.

One of the characteristic features of her nature is uncompromising, unforgiving attitude towards her daughter. As Saru defied her, she would not forgive her.

When Prof. Kulkarni attempted reconciliation after Saru's marriage, Kamala said:

"Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless."(DHNT 118)

Even when he was dying, she refused to go to her daughter. She turned down the request of Sudhir's mother with a similar retort:

"What daughter? I have no daughter."(DHNT 117)

She is equally irrational in subscribing to the myth of the self sacrificing martyred woman and destroys herself by her meaningless modesty. Though she was suffering from cancer during her last days, she did not ask her husband to consult a doctor. She had become thin and ate little but kept quiet for long. Even when Sudhir's mother asked her husband to consult a doctor, she resisted. Madhav succeeded in persuading her at last but it was too late. She died at Goregaon.

The third generation in the novel is represented by Sarita (Saru), Smita, Vidya, Nalu etc. Sarita is the protagonist while the rest are minor characters. These minor characters are mentioned in passing but need not be deemed insignificant for that reason. In fact, they reveal the general trend, the way most of the women even today live.

Smita, Vidya and Nalu are Sarita's friends. Vidya had an indescribable passion for theatre before marriage. But she changes after marriage. Her husband and his family disapprove of her acting, directing or anything alike and so she gives up acting to please them. She is sophisticated and remains slim even after she becomes a mother. Thus we find that she sacrifices her career, interest and talent for the sake of peace in her married life.

Smita, a talkative girl introduces Sarita to Maohar in her college days. Later, she marries and becomes Geetanjali or Anju, the names given to her by her husband. As her husband does not like the name Smita and gets very annoyed if someone uses it, she too has accepted the drastic change in her identity. She has surrendered herself so much to her husband that she cannot spare time for her friends as long as he stays with her. As Nalu puts it, she just tags on to him and drifts like a "small boat towed by a larger ship". (DHNT121)

Apparently Smita is a happy wife and mother but she has become dependent on her husband who gives her a meagre sum for her expenses. Thus, when she comes to attend her nephew's thread ceremony, she has just enough to buy a small gift for the boy. She stays at her brother's house with her three children for about a month. So she finds it necessary to buy a sari for her sister – in – law. Her husband, however, is not considerate enough to tolerate her demand for money for such a purpose. So she borrows money from Sarita. She tells her, she will save a bit from household expenses and return the money as

soon as she can. This assertion of the desire to return the money serves to restore her equality with her friend.

She has become bulky after her marriage but her nature has not changed even after the birth of three children. Her habit of "nudging, pinching, giggling and clutching" has remained and "her capacity to invest every remark with a lewd implication" has "become gross vulgarity". (DHNT 168,169)

Sarita does not fail to notice that marriage has not changed her basically or really. Even earlier, she practiced "lying at home about where she went and what she did, getting money from her mother and splashing it in the canteen". (DHNT 45) So the roots of her degradation do not lie in marriage, it has got to be sought in her nature.

Nalu is the other friend of Sarita mentioned in the novel. Unlike Smita and Sarita, she studies Arts in College. She remains a spinster, devoted to her job. She dislikes the custom that empowers husband to change the name given to his wife by her parents. The custom is so common in Maharashtra and women like Smita do not find fault with it but Nalu with an independent mind finds it simply intolerable.

So she tells Smita:

"Well, I refuse to call you Anju or Geetanjali or whatever. To me you are Smita and will always be Smita". (DHNT 62)

Unlike Smita, Nalu has changed physically for the better. She teaches now in the college she studied earlier. She is well – dressed though simple,

dignified and confident. However, she appears overbearing and dramatic with a conviction of her own rightness. Bitterness has replaced her former endearing enthusiasm. She complains about her brother and his family with whom she lives, her students and colleagues, the college authorities, politicians, the government and what not. The case of Nalu shows that the freedom a spinster wins in the society is hardly a guarantee of her satisfaction in personal and social life.

Mrinal, Madhav's younger sister, is the other minor character of the novel. She belongs to a poor family and lives in a village where she cannot expect basic amenities like running water. She has to fetch water, look after the kids and help her mother. Life in a village is monotonous to her. The adolescent girl reads stories of love which bring romantic dreams to her. She dreams some boy will fall in love with her and rescue her out of the village. She is unhappy as her father does not care to know what she wants, though he is in the lookout for a groom for her.

Sarita, the protagonist of the novel experiences gender bias early in her life. Though first born of her parents, she feels hurt as her parents pay more attention to her brother Dhruva. They rejoiced on his birth and celebrated his naming day. His birthdays are always occasions of rituals and rejoicing while her birthday is barely acknowledged. Then, her brother is allowed to move freely but her mother forbids her to go in the sun lest she gets darker and have less chances of getting married. Early in her life, she has to leave her parents'

house after marriage unlike her brother. Thus the natal house is but a temporary resort to a girl child and she is taught to prepare for it early in life. That is what makes her dislike the traditional views and develops rebellious attitude in her.

She reacts to these early experiences in two ways. First of all, her parents' blatant favouritism towards her brother provokes sibling jealousy in her. Though her brother is fond of her and confides his secrets to her, she treats him rather rudely. The boy is afraid of the dark and does not dare to confess it to his mother who asks him to sleep alone in a room. So he crawls into his sister's bed secretly. But his touch is distasteful to her and she seeks to avoid it.

As the girl child is left to the care of her mother and it is not the business of the father to interfere, the mother seeks to teach and enforce social norms which discriminate between boys and girls. Thus she becomes the spokesperson of and almost identified with gender discrimination. Hence, the hostility. The hostility goes to the extent that she says:

“If you're a woman, I don't want to be one”. (DHNT 40)

She resents the fact that a growing up girl is engulfed with a kind of shame and treated as an untouchable during periods.

The mother daughter relation deteriorates further when Dhruva, a boy of seven, dies accidentally and the mother accuses the daughter of killing her brother. Then, their interests collide when Saru decides to study medicine instead of, going for B.Sc. Opposing it vehemently, Saru's mother argues with her father:

“...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 pauper, and will she look after you in your old age?Let her go for a B. Sc.....you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over.” (DHNT 80)

Saru, however, wins the battle as her father agrees to support her financially despite his meagre resources. Saru’s decision to marry Manohar (alias Manu) deals the final blow to the mother – daughter relationship. Manu is a non – Brahmin and his father owns a cycle shop. Saru’s mother strictly adheres to the caste rules and inter caste marriages are an anathema to her. She is averse to love marriages too. She seriously holds that marriages between persons between different castes and communities never succeed. That is why she tells Saru: “I know all these ‘love marriages’. It’s love for a few days, then quarrels all the time”. (DHNT 70) As Saru defies and leaves natal house to marry the man of her choice, her mother declares herself childless, curses Saru and remains biased to her till the end of her life.

Married life is not devoid of problems for Sarita. She has yet to build up her career and her husband, contrary to all aspirations and expectations of the college days, has ended up a lecturer in a third rate college. So she has to live at first at a place which is far from charming: “the corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dank sealed-in odours, women with inquisitive,

unfriendly eyes, men with lascivious stares.” (DHNT 184) Despite all that, love makes her happy.

An MBBS degree does not bring prosperity to her all of a sudden. She advances by degrees, passes MD and gets a consulting room of her own at last with the help of her teacher Boozie. Gradually she wins recognition in society and the standard of living rises. It brings material well – being to the family and it also makes her the main provider in the family. Dependence on her goes to the extent that her husband cannot even think of Sarita stopping her work.

Success brings trouble for Sarita in its train. What makes her inches taller makes her husband inches shorter. Gradually she becomes known as a doctor in the locality, not merely the wife of Manohar. The prosperity which her success brings enables him to enjoy a holiday in Ooty and feel proud of and lucky in being the husband of a doctor. But his vanity is rudely hurt when an interviewer from an women's magazine asks him:

“How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (DHNT 137)

He turns a sadist and attacks her cruelly in the bed at night though behaves like a normal gentleman during the day.

Unlike her grandmother, Sarita cannot endure her misfortune passively. She is rational and not a fatalist being. She knows that human beings play a role in making and unmaking what happens to them and to others around

them. But there are two factors that stand in her way of deciding. First of all, she has got two children besides neighbours around and she cannot quarrel with her husband and create a scene lest they come to know it. Secondly, she suffers from a deep rooted guilt complex which incapacitates her to a large extent.

The guilt complex arises from a feeling that she has not been fair and kind to her brother Dhruva. She exercised absolute dictatorship. While he was "completely loyal", she was "running away from him. Avoiding him." (DHNT 97) Moreover, though she did not kill him, she had taken her to that place on his insistence where he drowned accidentally. Had she not gone there, the accident would not have been taken place, she thinks.

Secondly, she feels she has wronged her mother and she wronged her husband too. She wronged her mother by deserting her and she wronged her husband by hurting his ego, by making him appear shorter in people's eyes by earning more. Her suffering seems expiation for those sins. Despite her education and ability for reasoning, she retains a belief in curses and thinks her mother's curses have brought misery to her. Her agony is multiplied by the fact that she cannot share her feelings with anyone around her.

She has observed a lot about the condition of women in the society (how they are treated and how they behave) which makes her uneasy. She has observed that husbands of successful women like herself care to introduce their wives to their friends and the acquaintance with complacency as if they were a proud possession while they are totally ignored in general. Complacency,

however, does not mean happiness. Male ego generally finds satisfaction and pleasure in inequality, that is, inequality in favour of the husband. She has observed her friends like Smita and Vidya submitting totally to their husbands while Nalu who refuses to submit has remained spinster and grown bitter. Obviously she cannot follow them. Her nature forbids her to surrender but there is something that places her in indecision.

Her profession has brought her in contact with women who destroy themselves by their meaningless modesty confining their complaints to themselves. Such women do not "arouse either her pity or her admiration." (DHNT 29) Neither does she belong to the type of women who are satisfied with motherhood and expect nothing more. If she gives up her practice and becomes dependent on her husband to satisfy his ego, her husband will not accept it as it will affect their standard of living and upset their plans. She considers taking legal measures against her husband for his sadist behaviour. However, she cannot proceed as she has been trying all along to make her marriage a success. As her mother told her the marriage was doomed to fail, she wants to make it a success at any cost. That is why she has been doing all she can to please her husband. That is, however, neither honourable nor easy when the husband turns a sadist.

It is at that juncture that she learns about the death of her mother and decides to go to her father. As she feels isolated and badly in need of advice and mental support from someone reliable, she avails of the opportunity. She

remembers the role her father played when she wanted to study medicine.

Though he was a weak person who left his wife in command most of the time, he helped Sarita against her at that time and that enabled her to pursue her course. So she hopes he may prove helpful to her again.

Her hope is not belied. When she tells him the truth, he advises her to discuss the matter with her husband and do something about it and not leave it as it is. He also suggests that perhaps her husband needs a psychiatric treatment. He makes it clear to her that nothing can be done unless she makes up her mind. Nobody can help her until she gathers strength to take a decision.

He removes her guilt complex too. He tells her that Dhruva's death was an accident and she was not responsible for it. Moreover, she need not feel guilty for deserting her mother because "that is natural. You have to get away from your parents sometime, haven't you?" (DHNT 22)

As soon as she gets rid of her guilt complex, her self confidence is restored and she becomes ready to face her husband. Thus unlike Dhruva who died at seven, she grows up

"to know that the dark holds no terrors. That the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them within us, and like the traitors they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul."
(DHNT 35-36)

That realisation brings strength to her mind and prepares her well to face the hard realities of life.

The Dark Holds No Terror is thus not only a protest against the subordinate position of women in society. It does not end with lashing out on the male vanity which feels offended when women gain prominence at home. It also reveals the weaknesses of the women – their irrational modesty, their adoration of and sole concern with motherhood, their willing submission to their husbands by sacrificing their own interests, etc. Women suffer a lot in our society but Shashi Deshpande thinks they cannot deny their share of the responsibility for those sufferings. They too play a role in upholding social inequality and perpetuating it with their meekness and submission, with their inhibitions and complexes.

It ought to be mentioned here that Shashi Deshpande has stressed the psychological aspect of the social problem, namely, the secondary position of women. But there is also a material aspect of it which is hardly noticed by her. Why does a woman sacrifice her interests to a man? Is it mostly because she is dependent on him? Why does a woman seldom complain about her illness? Mostly because of poverty, mostly because she is not the earner in the family nor is likely to become one and when the resources are meagre, she deems it better to leave them for earners or prospective earners. So removal of poverty and material independence of women are evidently the preconditions of social equality. Psychology cannot take the place of economy, whatever its importance in solving the problems of individuals in some cases.

We find women of several generations in *That Long Silence* (1989) too. Ajji, grandmother of Jaya represents the first one. She is dead long before the story of the novel begins and we get only pieces of information about her. She lived the austere life of a traditional Hindu widow. She had shaved her head, had no possessions but the two saris she wore, sat on the bare ground and slept on a straw mat at night. The bed in her room had no mattress and served as a memorial to her husband after his death. There were two chairs in the room for male guests but they had no cushions and they had "nails that came out to pierce and hurt." (TLS 37-38)

That self – denying woman was the head of the family and controlled all the affairs of the family sitting in her bare room. She called out her sons, daughters and grand children to her room frequently and instructed them. Everybody obeyed her.

Though she was affectionate, she was a stern mother – in – law. She would not ignore Shanta kaki's neglect of her youngest hydro – cephalic son. Jaya suggests that it was not neglect as such, but perhaps she kept away from her son as his sight pained her much. Her youngest son Vasu was her best loved one but he left her and decided to live separate in order to avoid conflict between his mother and his wife.

As a traditional woman, she did not expect arguments, doubts or questions from the young ones, particularly from the girls. Young women ought to be submissive, she thought. Otherwise, they would prove sources of trouble

to their husbands and make their own lives unhappy. Total submission to the husband's will was the key to success in marriage according to her. That is why she told Jaya:

“Look at you – for everything a question, for everything a retort.

What husband can be comfortable with that?” (TLS 34)

The next generation in the novel is represented by Ai, Mohan's mother, Venu (Kusum's mother) and Vanita mami. Venu was the sister of Vanita mami. Venu was the wife of a man "who never worked a day in his life" but smoked, enjoyed movies and begot a number of children (Dilip, Kusum, Shaila etc.). As she was neither educated nor intelligent, she could not think of family planning and left everything to fate. Hers was the mind of a defeated and dejected woman who became gradually removed from the world around her. She seemed quite astonished to see guests in her house. Similarly, she looked at her own children. While she attended to her youngest baby, the rest of her kids ran around wild abandon, unkempt, dirty and unfed. The case of Venu demonstrates how frequent, uncontrolled motherhood tells upon the physical and mental health of women, besides subjecting them to poverty.

Mohan's mother presents even more tragic a figure. Her husband was a cruel, insensitive man who cared little for his wife and children. He came to house late at night and demanded fresh rice and chutney without fail. So she had to cook rice for the second time for him. He would create scenes at the slightest omission on her part. Then she had to bear children time and again.

She had five living children and she had lost four or five. That meant a lot of work. So it affected not only her health but hampered prospects of her having children too. Prema had to stay away from school when Sudha was born. When Prema got married, Vimla had to help her mother in the kitchen though it left no time for studies. Had Vimla complained, her father would have asked her to stop going to school. Mohan's mother suffered all that in silence until she could not. Then she resorted to abortion which ended her life. To Mohan who expects a woman to bear her lot stoically, her mother was tough as a woman in those days.

Rightly does she find instead

"a despair so great that it would not voice itself.....a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender."

(TLS 101)

Indeed it is a travesty of truth to discover virtue in such utter helplessness and to glorify it. Only insensitive people dare do that.

Vanita mami is a passive acceptor in the novel. Her husband Chandu mama aspired to become F.R.C.S. as his mother desired but ended a small town doctor. Chandu mama neglected his wife and had shoddy affairs with all kinds of women. Vanita mami was awkward and incompetent as a housewife. Vanita mami was a loser, a failure all her life. She had no choice in her married life as she was always dominated by her mother – in – law who went to the extent of choosing her saris. When that dominating woman died, Ai replaced her. She

was childless and favoured the unfortunate daughter of her sister (Kusum). Bound to tradition, she got up early in the morning and performed *tulsi puja* and even though her marriage had been a failure, she adhered to the age old notions and said to Jaya: "Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree." (TLS 93 – 94)

Late in her life she became aggressive and revolted against the twenty year long domination of Ai, her sister – in – law. Then, she developed cancer in her uterus but refused to undergo surgical operation. It was a case of not simply false sense of modesty but also of utter despair.

Ai, Vanita's sister – in – law and Jaya's mother belongs to the same generation. Like most of the traditional women, she favours sons. Pampered by her, her younger son Ravi becomes deceitful at an early age. Instead of correcting him, she expected Jaya to "act the protective, loving elder sister with Ravi." (TLS 44) As usual in a patriarchal society, Ai deems it necessary to take special note of the movements of the girl child. Jaya resents it and complains to her elder brother: "She behaves as if she owns me". (TLS 106) That turns Jaya hostile to her mother and the impressions she gives of her mother is highly unfavourable. It, however, seems true that she liked dominating. First she dominated her daughter and then her sister – in – law Vanita until the latter turned a rebel as noticed above.

Jaya finds several faults with her all of which need not be taken seriously. Thus her disparaging remark about "Ai's laughter, gay and girlish,

even after she was made desolate by widowhood" seems unkind and prejudiced. It suggests that Ai's emotions were not deep enough even in relation to her husband. There is hardly anything in the novel to bear out the suggestion. Moreover, it betrays Jaya's adherence to the false patriarchal notion that a widow has no right to laugh, to appear cheerful. We may well explain her laughter as an indication of her high level of endurance and self-control.

Jaya thinks with contempt of "Ai's slapdash ways, and of how she could not even hem properly." She takes her to task as, "She had prepared for none of the duties of a woman's life." (TLS 28) Such thoughts, however, are a product of specific circumstances. Such thoughts came to her when she had perceived the women of Mohan's family as models of perfection and contrasted them to her mother. The perception proves wrong subsequently. Moreover, Jaya contradicts herself by accusing her mother. When her mother had attempted to prepare her for the traditional roles of women, she had protested against "unreasonable demands" and "prying questions." After marriage with Mohan, she herself subscribes to the sexist bias and attempts to become a good conformist.

Ai's opposition to Jaya's marriage with Mohan seems to be one of the factors that affects their relation. As Mohan was good looking, demanded no dowry and the marriage would take her away from the dull life at Ambegaon, Jaya was keen to accept the suggestion of her elder brother, uncles and Chandu mama. But Ai objected to it as Mohan's family seemed "orthodox, old –

fashioned people" who had a "shabby house". Part of it seems true, though not the whole of it. Ai's remarks show she thought highly of her family and found others much below her standard.

Her air of superiority often landed her in self contradiction, rather hypocrisy. She boasted that her children were taught never to scorn any food, but she forgot it conveniently at her sister – in – law Vanita's house:

"...Ai, acting the great lady, sat primly toying with her food. 'Don't eat that stuff', she would hiss at me, 'it's no good'. She herself left most of it on her plate..." (TLS 28)

Similarly hypocritical is her belated adoration for her brother Makarand who was scorned as long as he was alive for choosing the career of a cine actor. But when she inherits his flat, she started spinning a myth. She claims to have recognized the merit of her brother and prodded her husband to help him. That is totally false because Appa "had helped Makarand mama stealthily" (TLS 51)

Had she been prodding to help Makarand, there would be no question of helping him "stealthily".

In her old age, she feels isolated as both her sons left her after their father's death. Then she turns to Jaya and becomes "childishly possessive" of her. That is untimely and unwanted as she had ignored her daughter when the latter needed her love. That too is characteristic of what happens often to not a few women in our society.

Amma is superstitious and believes in portents and omens. While living in Saptagiri, sometimes she heard a confused cry of a bird and became terrified. She "claimed that it was this unnatural sound that had given her a premonition of Appa's death." (TLS 163) Such beliefs are so common in Indian society and even educated people are not entirely free from them.

The third generation comprises of a number of women differing a lot in intellect, education and social status. With their success and failure, prosperity and poverty, brilliance and dullness they symbolize the diversity in Indian society in the latter part of the twentieth century. Jaya, Nayana, Kusum, Jeeja, Mukta, Veena, Sujata, Prema, Sudha and Vimla are the characters to name them.

Nayana, the sweeper, belongs to the lowest stratum of them. Her mother dreamt of a house with electricity and water, shining brass vessels, a silver waist chain, silver anklets etc. The dream did not materialize. Her husband like her fathers and brothers was a waster, good – for – nothing and drunkard. Like her mother – in – law she was pregnant very often. She had four children, two girls and two sons. The sons died while the daughters survived. Then she became pregnant again. Her husband did not help her when her eldest daughter was sick and she had to pawn her silver anklets to provide medical care to her.

When Nayana became pregnant for the fifth time, her husband threatened to throw her out if she had another daughter. She rebuked him for

that boldly but she too had a preference for a male child despite the fact that her father, brothers and husband (the men so close to her) had proved worthless. Her preference was based not on the consideration of merit, but something else. She put it best in her conversation with Jaya:

"Why give birth to a girl, behnji, who'll only suffer because of men all her life? Look at me!" (TLS 180)

Jeeja, the maid servant of Jaya too belongs to the lower stratum of the society. She is a realist, purely professional and single minded. Unlike Nayana, she is not curious. She does her work in silence and perfectly. She needs money and works well to earn it. She has a reputation for reliability which enables her to earn more than other servants. Jaya mistakes her silence for hostility or reluctance but discovers soon the reality.

Jeeja knows it well that endurance is badly needed by people like her for survival. As her husband is a waster, she asks Jaya at the very beginning not to give the whole or part of her salary to her husband. She is rarely absent. Sometimes she is bruised and hurt when she comes to work but she does not complain about her husband's misbehaviour.

Jeeja's husband had a good job and lived in a decent room in a chawl. He lost it during a strike, found refuge in a slum and became a drunkard. So it was not his fault. Nor does she blame him for remarrying as she could bear no children. The second marriage gives him two children, including a son. Jeeja's co – wife dies soon after the birth of the son, and Jeeja brings up her step –

children. After the death of her husband, her step son steps into the shoes of his father. He drinks and beats up his wife while Jeeja shoulders all – the responsibility of Rajaram's wife, Tara and his three children. She introduces her daughter – in – law and her granddaughter to the *batatawada* business so that the family can make a living honourably. She blames her fate instead of any person for his sufferings but that belief does not make her incapable of facing the challenges of life. She confronts them boldly and inspires others to do likewise. She is one of the heroic figures of the working class who remain unsung, unwept and unhonoured all the time. We are relieved to some extent to learn that all of her efforts have not gone in vain. Manda, the daughter of her step son have acquired the ability to read magazines and to comprehend questions put in English to answer them in Marathi.

It is but natural for Jeeja to scold Tara when she curses her husband: "Stop that! Don't forget, he keeps the kumkum on your forehead. What is woman without that?" (TLS 39) A husband even if worthless and troublesome cannot be cursed according to the norms of patriarchy. Merely the fact that the husband is living is supposed to be a great merit to a woman. Jeeja subscribes to those norms.

There is an incident in the novel which reveals the self respect of the poor woman. Her step son is injured and admitted in the hospital. Jaya offers her money but she asks her instead to talk to Dr. Vyasa so that the patient is treated properly. Jaya's evaluation of Jeeja is worth quoting here:

"All those happy womenwere of no use to me. 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." (TLS 22)

That is true about all the women of the well – to – do section of the society, they are relieved of drudgery as other women take the trouble for them.

Mukta is a neighbour of Jaya and a helpful one at that. When Jaya had high fever and delirium, she looks after her with her daughter Nilima and Manda all the night. She expects people to practice what they profess. In this connection she recalls a bitter experience of her childhood. As her father belonged to Hindu Mahasabha, he had to go into hiding to escape the mob fury after the death of Mahatma Gandhi and his shop was looted. All that they did in the name of Gandhi who preached truth and non – violence. So Mukta believes that human nature proves more powerful than the lofty ideals preached and professed by people.

Mukta is a widow. Her husband Arun did not have many friends. He fell out of a train and died. Kamat was one of the few friends he had. After Arun's death, Mukta was at a loss to decide what to do. She had a daughter, Nilima to look after. Her father did not like the idea of her going out to get a job. But Mukta thought otherwise. She deemed it wise to become self reliant even for the sake of her daughter; Kamat encouraged her and so she did her teacher's training and got a job. She is grateful to Kamat for his advice and encouragement.

Her education and experience have given her a sane view of human relations. She does not think it is scandalous on the part of a married woman to attend a lonely man who is already dead or about to die. That is why she takes Jaya to task for leaving Kamat alone at the final moment. A modern woman ought to be more courageous and confident in social relations in her opinion.

Human behaviour is not rational all along. People retain part of irrational behaviour by habit or by submission to traditional norms. That is true about Mukta too. Irrationality in her case consists of fasting. She has more days of fasting than days she takes normal diet. Generally, women resort to self mortification to avoid widowhood. But as she is a widow now, her fasts seem meaningless to Jaya. Even her daughter Nilima finds her fasts “stupid” calls her “horribly old – fashioned” and asks her to give them up.

Vimala, Mohan’s sister differs from her mother as she remains childless. But she is not different in suffering in silence. She has an ovarian tumour with metastases in the lungs. She remains confined to her bed over a month. Her mother – in – law dismisses it as a lot of fuss about 'heavy periods'. Finally, when Mohan and Jaya take her to the hospital, the doctor is incredulous about the patient's silence despite so much suffering. As it is too late, the doctor cannot help and she dies. Vimala's case illustrates the ignorance, prejudice and neglect that surround women's health problems even today. Going to doctors and hospitals is still deemed an aberration by the elderly women and the young

women have to suffer in silence and die. That is monstrous but true for a considerable number of families even today.

Kusum is the other tragic figure in the novel that deserves mention. She is Vanita's sister's daughter. The novelist calls her "a poor, frightened, defeated woman" which describes her aptly. She grows conscious of her femaleness early at the age of thirteen. Both her parents are feckless, hopeless. Her father remains idle, smokes and watches movies while her mother attends her youngest baby and leaves the rest of her kids dirty and unfed. That seals Kusum's fate.

Kusum is married, bears three daughters but loses sanity and is abandoned by her husband. Vanita mami asks Kusum to teach her English, to find a better job for her husband and get her treated by a good doctor. Jaya is concerned about her but their plans do not materialize. Kusum wants to see her children. The youngest of them is nearly ten and with the exception of Lata, they despise Kusum. Still, she goes to her in-laws, stays there for a few days and then throws herself in a well and dies. Nobody cares about her except Vanita mami and Jaya. The case of Kusum shows what drives women to insanity and how cruel the society is to such women.

Kusum is not a creation of the novelist's imagination. Whether at home or at mental asylums, mentally deranged people seldom find sympathetic treatment. They are useless to their relations and even their near and dear ones despise them. Sometimes they are sent to mental hospitals and their family

refuses to get them back even when they regain mental balance. Not long ago newspapers reported the story of an unfortunate man of Murshidabad who committed suicide in despair for the same reason. Then we read about a mental hospital in Kolkata where female patients were kept naked and were not looked after properly. That sounds incredible in the twenty first century but remains true nevertheless.

Jaya, the protagonist of the novel grows up in an environment which is a queer mixture of tradition and modernity. Her father wanted to make her different from other girls who aspired for nothing more than being wives and mothers. She too had dreams of getting higher education and excelling in intellectual achievement. Those dreams did not materialize as her father died when she was just fifteen. But Jaya is no less exposed to traditional beliefs. There are women around her like Vanita mami who asks her to remember that a husband is like a sheltering tree. There are also men like Ramu kaka who bring before her the reality that the present social set – up makes women non entities in the family of their parents on the excuse that they belong to their husband's families. In reality they find no place in the family tree of their husbands either. Living at Saptagiri with her Ajji, she learns that cooking and cleaning up are exclusively female operations. That is why her cousins Veena and Sujata clean up by turn but not the boys Jaanu or Sridhar. It is deemed ludicrous to suggest otherwise.

Her father had sent her along with her brothers to a convent despite his mother's disapproval as learning good English was "going to be more useful to them than being good Brahmins." (TLS 15-16)

Her education gives her command of English but her social background seems to prevail upon her thinking. However, her ability to speak good English attracts Mohan Kulkarni who wants an educated, cultured wife. The marriage takes place smoothly in the conventional way as Mohan comes of a good Brahmin family and he is good looking too. Moreover, as he demands no dowry, Jaya's guardians are relieved of their financial liability. Jaya has an extra reason for marrying Mohan: it will provide her an opportunity to get away from Ambegaon, a place she does not like. It is an arranged marriage, a marriage arranged by Jaya's elder brother. Later, she observes that Mohan's role, his decision has been the main factor, she has only acquiesced.

As customary in some communities, Jaya gets a new name Suhasini from her husband. While Jaya stands for victory, Suhasini means "a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped." Thus the new name is indicative of what Mohan expects from her, the role she has to play. Initially, she is zealous to play that role. As she rates her mother and maternal aunt low and wanting in their performance as house wife and mother, she seeks her models in Mohan's family. She discovers there "how sharply defined a woman's role" is. The women of his family are a revelation to her and she tries to learn what is

womanly and what is unwomanly from them. There she learns that it is unwomanly for a woman to be angry, that she has to suffer in silence, that she has to sacrifice her interest, her hobbies and her career for the sake of her husband and family.

She applies what she has learnt to the extent possible. To please her husband, she decides to conform to his idea of a modern woman and changes her appearance by cutting her hair, wearing dark glasses and getting completely absorbed into the family fold. Her desperate bid to perform the role of a perfect wife and a loving and caring mother relegates her identity to the background. It makes her not an independent woman but a "stereo type of a woman – nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support." (TLS 17) But as Kamat observes, the exercise affects the members of the family too:

"Making others dependent on you. It increases your sense of power. And that's what you really want, all you bloody looking – after – others, caring for others women." (TLS 151)

As the role of women is sharply defined in Mohan's family, Jaya does not bother about what her husband does beyond the threshold of her house. That is not supposed to be the look out of the wife according to tradition. Mohan leaves his first job at the largest steel factory of the country at Lohanagar and she believes it is an outcome of the labour unrest and strike at the plant. Much later she comes to know the truth that "not having enough money" (TLS 17) for a comfortable life is the real cause of his decision. She

remains in the dark about the means he employs to get himself posted at Bombay and to get an accommodation at Churchgate. She is unaware of Mohan's philosophy expressed much later in his own words: "Can anyone live on just a salary?" (TLS 11-12)

In her endeavour to become an ideal wife, Jaya imitates Gandhari:

"I didn't want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have the things we needed.....decent clothes, 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." (TLS 191)

The blind pursuit of the traditional ideal of good wife and good mother destroys her identity. She wants to become a teacher but Mohan does not like it. Then, her creative writing is stifled by her insensitive husband. One of her short stories published in a magazine bags the first prize but Mohan feels hurt by it. That is because the story centres around: "a couple, a man who cannot reach his wife except through her body." (TLS 81)

Mohan assumes it to be a portrayal of his own life. As Jaya does not want to jeopardise her marriage, she stops writing stories after that. Then she resumes writing them again under an assumed name. They are rejected and returned to the address of her sympathetic neighbour Kamat. Discussing the rejected stories with Kamat, she finds they have become impersonal and devoid

of strong feelings. Kamat tells her it is not unbecoming on the part of a woman to be angry or to express her anger in her stories.

His criticism reveals her what is wanting in her writings:

"Share your complexes. And you're a fool if you think I am joking.....beware of this "women are victims" theory of yours. It'll drag you down into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. Take yourself seriously, woman. Don't skulk behind a false name." (TLS 221)

Jaya dare not take a hard decision at that time. Instead she takes the safe course of columnist, writing light things Mohan appreciates and shutting her door firmly on the women screaming for attention. Mohan finds satisfaction in being the husband of a writer, but he has destroyed the potentiality of his wife as a good, meaningful author. The entire fault, however, does not rest with Mohan, she has not cared to resist and assert herself.

"Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe." (TLS 9)

That is the foolish notion she proceeds with for long seventeen years of her married life. That does not prove much helpful to her in social relations. She cannot save her cousin Kusum, she cannot win friends, she fails miserably at times in fulfilling her social obligations and above all she feels lonely. The worst example of her failure comes when she finds Kamat dead in his room lying on the floor and leaves him there and hurries to Churchgate. Kamat as her best friend and critic deserves better treatment, homage from Jaya which she

denies him for the fear of getting involved in some scandal. Thus her attempt to perform the role of a good wife causes her failure as a human being.

Her illusions are shattered at last when Mohan and his friend Agarwal become involved in a corruption case and an enquiry against them begins. At his friend's advice Mohan leaves his officially recorded residence at Churchgate and goes in hiding to the flat at Dadar, Jaya has inherited from her maternal uncle. It is only then that Jaya gets some hints of shady deals of her husband with the excuse that he has done everything for the sake of his family. Jaya suddenly bursts into laughter at his unusual behaviour. That annoys Mohan who goes away to some unannounced destination. As Jaya's two children have gone with a neighbour to spend vacation, Jaya finds herself alone in the flat. That gives her an opportunity to recollect and analyse her past, to discover her strength and weakness and to chalk out her future course of action.

Jaya's first reaction to the changed situation is:

"I know that safety is always unattainable. You're never safe." (TLS 201)

She is even more shattered by the news of the sudden disappearance of her son who has gone for holidaying with family friends. Later she is relieved as she learns about the whereabouts of her son and receives a telegram from Mohan to the effect that all is well. Before they return she is left to herself in the flat and pours out her suppressed feelings, fears and doubts.

Mohan's excuse for all his questionable deeds is that he has done everything for his family. Pondering over it, Jaya remembers the folk tale about the sparrow and the crow and concludes that selfish, cynic behaviour even for the family is not excusable. As for her own role, she realizes that her own role all along has been passive. Time and again, she has associated marriage with the image of "two bullocks yoked together" and concluded that under the circumstances they must move in the same direction because moving in different directions will be painful. The image is no doubt valid regarding the nature of traditional marriage. But it does not follow that the wife must remain passive. Marriage can better mean partnership with both partners sharing the burden (that is, the responsibilities) equally and consulting the other. Male arrogance may prove an arrogance in the way but it need not become an excuse for unquestioning submission. Silence cannot save women from disaster and they are partly to blame for it as their silence prolongs and deepens their sufferings. That is why Kamat rejects 'the women are the victims' theory. Thus she realizes she cannot evade responsibility for the mishap that has befallen her family.

The other thing that her reflections bring to her mind is the personality of an individual in an integrated whole. It cannot be reduced to pieces, some to be suppressed and some to be played up. Jaya commits a blunder when she tries to suppress her social being, her individuality and to confine herself to the role

of Mohan's wife and the mother of their two children. That dispels her misgivings and restores her confidence.

So she declares at last:

"I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible." (TLS 30,137)

Obviously, her married life is now destined to change as she has resolved to gain her real identity, become more than a wife and mother, namely, a social being, an individual having her own desire and her own choice and a creative writer. She is conscious of the difficulty she will face now in adjusting with her husband but she is not much perturbed about it. As she puts it:

"We don't change overnight.....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." (TLS 130)

What the novel highlights is that education is now becoming available to a section of women but it does not change their way of thinking automatically. Despite education, they do not shed their prejudices easily. Mohan, the engineer deems it below the dignity of a man to cook even at the hour of dire necessity. Jaya, the writer leaves no stones unturned to prove herself a good wife as demanded by tradition. Only the hard blow of the circumstances can compel them to think anew and behave in a new way.

Secondly, it emphasizes that men and women distort their identities when they ignore their social obligations and creative impulses in the name of family demands. It also shows that they get nowhere by self pitying. They have to take recourse to self examination and to become bold enough to resist undesirable pressures.

The earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande present before us the suffering of women across the generations and their desperate bid to settle things within the sphere of family. The lead women characters in these novels find themselves trapped in the claws of patriarchy, traditionality and social inhibitions. The desperate attempt of self – assertion on their part sometimes makes their lives terror – stricken. The denial to accept a given structured social life brings problems both in their family life and social life. A life with freedom, happiness, meaningfulness and creativity is a coveted dream of these female protagonists but the dream of such a life always eludes them and leaves them in the desert of barren reality.