

SHASHI DESHPANDE'S WOMEN CHARACTERS: ARE THEY
'EMPOWERED WOMEN?' OR DO THEY DEFINE A MASK OF
'TRANQUIL FEMINITY?' OR 'CREATIVE FEMINITY?'

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BY

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CERTIFICATE

As required under the provision of the Goa University Ordinance OB 9.9.(ii), I hereby certify that the Thesis titled "*Shashi Deshpande's Women Characters – Are they 'Empowered Women?' or Do they define a Mask of 'Tranquil Femininity?' or 'Creative Femininity?'*" submitted by *Mrs. Cidalia Bodade* for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the record of her own work done under my guidance and further that it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship, or other similar titles to her.

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DECLARATION

As required under the Goa University Ordinance OB 9.9.(ii), I, *Cidalia Bodade*, hereby declare that the Thesis titled "*Shashi Deshpande's Women Characters – Are they 'Empowered Women?' or Do they define a Mask of 'Tranquil Femininity?' or 'Creative Femininity?'*" is the outcome of my own research undertaken, under the supervision of Dr. Ashok Joshi (Retd. Professor and Dean of the Arts Faculty, Goa University), in an attempt to find new insights into the chosen area of study. All the bibliographic, critical and biographical sources used in the course of this work have been duly acknowledged in the Thesis. This work has not previously formed the basis of any award of Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or other similar titles to me.

Date: 9th March 2006.

Cidalia Bodade

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For my parents,

The late **DR. JAIME ALMEIDA** *and late* **MRS. MARILIA B.X. ALMEIDA**

CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN IN INDIA AND WOMEN WRITERS IN INDIA

1.1 INTRODUCTION

*AN INSIGHT INTO THE WOMEN'S PSYCHE WITH RELATION TO
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN*

What piece of work is woman!

In form, in moving, how express and admirable!

In action how like an angel.

In apprehension how like a God!¹

And at the same time it is also said.

Frailty – thy name is woman.²

The problem of the status of women involves equality between men and women. The women, throughout the world have been considered the second sex – the inferior sex. Equality and status are closely associated with power. Changing status involves the sharing of power on equal footing with men in decision making and its implementation at informal and formal levels. The societal value framework plays an important role in determining the changing status of power equations, and, hence, the status of women involves the distribution and redistribution of power. Further half of the world's population is female and two thirds of the working force consists of women. In India, the situation is broadly the same. Shashi Deshpande is

regarded both as a contemporary novelist and a writer dealing with women's problems in her works.

This study is focused on the women characters in Shashi Deshpande's novels. Hence, references are made in this chapter to the world situation and the Indian situation regarding women. The remaining chapters will focus on the women characters in Shashi Deshpande's novels namely – Saru, Indu, Jaya, Urmila, Sumi and Madhu.

Also, an attempt was done to distinguish between two kinds of language: father language and mother language. A woman is not accepted on her terms by the patriarchal structure anywhere. If she wants to be accepted anywhere, she has to know the rules of the game that we have to play, then she has to use what is called 'The Father Language.' The Father Language is the language that is expository pertaining particularly to scientific discourse and involves talking down to and does not seek any particular response. If you speak the father language, you get absorbed into the patriarchy, no matter what your sex is. ³

Mother language, on the other hand, is a language which seeks a response. However, mother language can also make use of the head and does not exclude the intellect.

The discourse that distances one from the speaker uses the Father language, and the discourse that binds one to the speaker and involves the other person uses the mother language. Mother language sheds the trappings of intellectual authority. It is the Gynocritics that have considered the divide between the father language and the mother language.⁴

During the last two or three decades the term 'Woman Studies' has become popular. It deals with studies dealing with women. In the Indian situation if we go back to Vedic period we find that the status of a woman was equal to that of a man. After the Vedic period, a flat position for women in society was presented. After independence, we notice a certain improvement in the status of women. Today, we are critically analyzing the position of women. Questions are being raised regarding a woman's position in every walk of life. Actions are being proposed to change and improve the situations and solve the problems that are being faced by women.

1.2 FEMINIST APPROACH

To understand women characters in Shashi Deshpande's novels we will first see what the feminist approach consists in. According to Neera Dessai the four feminist perspectives regarding women are: (1) Liberal Feminism, (2) Radical Feminism, (3) Socialistic Feminism, and (4) Eco-Feminism.⁵

Liberal Feminism is more popular in European countries and South East Asian countries including India. Here the feminists do not emphasize a complete equality between men and women. They only recommend that whenever any injustice is done, it has to be reported. Women must have freedom, but not complete freedom to have her own way of life. Liberal feminism emphasizes the unique identity of women. Women should not lose their unique identity and should be proud of it. In certain respects discrimination between sexes has to be maintained and in other respects it has to be done away with. ⁶

Radical feminism states that the male dominated family system and the institution of marriage are the fundamental considerations for all the problems connected with women. The attitudes of the males and females in the family support the attitude of male domination in society. Radical feminists believe that there should be no marriages. Men and women should remain liberated and they can have sex with whoever they want. Radical feminism is a firebrand feminism.

Socialistic feminists demanded that women should be paid for the work that they do within the family. Women, who work as housewives, should also be paid. In the Marxian theory household work has no economic value. It is not considered as labour, but as an essential part of family life. But the socialist feminists believe that women should be paid for the household work and their activity should be considered a proper economic activity.

Eco-feminism tends to view the woman in the context of the environment. The logic behind this idea is that a woman relates to the environment more than her male counterpart. It asks us not only to look at the urbanized or the trained woman trimmed by society, but at women who relate more naturally to the environment. This approach perceives the issues pertaining to women, related particularly to the human relationship with nature.

In the Indian situation we find that the culture that created a Sita and a Gandhari has denied any other existence to a woman except as a daughter/sister, a wife/daughter-in-law, and a mother/mother-in-law. The Hindu Society has denied woman the possibility of being a "SHE," a person capable of achieving individuation. She is a non-person and as described in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*: "Women should not be." Man's relationship with woman is most often the bond that exists between a master and a slave. Woman is an object and she is essential to man because "it is in seeking to be made whole through her that man hopes to attain self-realization." It is in such a culture, in recent times, that voices of dissent are heard. ⁷

One of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not an appendage of man. A woman is not the "other"; She is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation. ⁸

Some feminist writings say that there must have been a time in the cradle of humanity when there were no different issues for men and women. Over the movement of civilization, issues have tended to be different for women and women never remained at the centre of anything. They became marginalized. Man has remained at the centre for many centuries.

Male dominance has three basic ingredients: (1) Control of female labor, (2) Control over female sexuality, and (3) Control over female fertility. It is women alone who are caught in the interface between production for the needs of human existence and reproduction of new human beings themselves.⁹ This has been the universal situation about women.

1.3.1 INDIAN SITUATION

In India, we have a situation in which there is a rapid growth of population and mass unemployment of varying degrees. Coupled with this general economic problem there are demands for dowry, violence against women and a general devaluation of a woman through various forms of exploitation. Brides are burnt for non-fulfillment of dowry, and female foeticide is on the increase to satisfy the preference for a son. Hence, women are underdeveloped in India.

Many women are in agriculture and in the unorganized sectors. There is also a lot of female migration due to marriage, or in search of work due to widowhood, or due to

desertion and destitution. Rural women face adjustment problems when they migrate to cities. Problems like the deterioration of their social status, and the perpetual insecurity in a squatter settlement are important considerations in determining the social status of women in India.

In the patriarchal Indian social structure one observes five expressions: (1) Women workers are treated unequally, (2) There is less endowment for women, (3) Women are subordinated through violence, (4) Media's negative portrayal of women, and (5) The support systems for women sometimes prove to be traps for women.¹⁰

Women do stereotyped jobs such as school teachers, typists, clerks, telephone operators, midwives and ayahs. While married women have a low social status and security, unmarried women are vulnerable at the place of work, and have to take extra care to ward off advances by men. Sometimes in the absence of sons, some daughters stay unmarried to support their old parents.¹¹

1.3.2 STATUS OF WOMEN

According to Feminists the improvement of the status of women requires a change in the attitudes and roles of both men and women. Women's development and empowerment should not only be viewed as an issue in social development but should be seen as an essential component in every dimension of development.

Equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and co-operation among all states should be the basis for the improvement of the status of women.

1.3.3 WOMEN IN INDIA

There were distinct stages of rise and fall in the status of women in the Indian context. It is stated that in the Vedic period women participated in all the fields like men and took active part in every sphere of human life. Woman was man's friend, his co-worker and never his inferior, she had enjoyed the property rights and had access to the property of her father and husband, she struggled against the political as well as social problems freely with man. Women went to the Gurukula to receive education and married only after getting education. During the Vedic period, women occupied a high position in society and used to move about freely in society. It is stated that women had equal rights with men in selecting the life partner in marriage. Marriage was well established in the Vedic period, as a social and religious institution and a necessity. It prevented sexual immorality to a great extent.¹²

In the middle ages, women's social status deteriorated considerably. The son came to be considered more important in the family compared to the daughter because religiously and economically the former was thought more useful. Not only does the son perform funeral rites necessary for salvation, but he is also a potential wage earner and the support of his parents in their old age; he is an economic asset

whereas the daughter had no economic importance. Instead she takes money away from the family in the form of dowry during her marriage.

In recent times education, particularly formal education, played a very significant role regarding the social status of women. Education is a major avenue of upward social mobility. "Education is the key that opens the door to life which is essentially social in character."¹³

The sanctity of a Hindu marriage is well known. Marriage is a sacrament with the Hindus and the religious knot is tied once for ever. Attempt was never made to untie the knot, even when it proved to be most oppressive. The manner in which the minds of young persons are made ready before the event of marriage and are kept tuned thereafter is a guarantee for the uninterrupted happiness of the married couple.

1.3.4 THE INDIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Indian social structure, its strength and stability is clearly and unequivocally vested in the family. For women, the greatest accomplishment is motherhood. Everything prior to marriage is preparation; everything after motherhood is reward for fulfilling her destined role.

Whether Jain, Buddhist or Hindu, *Dharma* is a conspicuous plinth on which the entire structure of society is built. You destroy it, therefore, at your own risk – *Dharma* has been described as a very pregnant word: it has meanings at several different levels, though the overall impact of the word gives Hindus the injunction to follow a religion-oriented way of life. This underlying body of ethical behaviour, related to the continuity of the universe as a recognized scientific reality, applied to married life, gives woman as the *sahakarini* or worldly protector of her husband's life and the one who holds things together, a meaning that is very different than the rights of women demanded as human justice in many parts of the world. What is a far more dominant theme in the life of Indian women is a form of endurance that is hard to define. Yet which exists and is manifest again and again in the lives of simple women, often with no formal education, yet whose basic spirit retains a fire, firmness and unclouded determination in the face of the worst odds. ¹⁴

When Hindu women marry and become mothers, it is tacitly understood that to be really fulfilled they must bear sons. Spread like cream in hot milk is the belief that a family with sons is a family uniquely blessed. With a son, the continuity and safe-keeping of the father's soul is assured.

Women still glorify male children above female and with sex determination it could represent the most profound revolution in a system of family life that has survived intact for over five thousand years.

Marriage is probably the most unreliable of human institutions from the viewpoint of the individual, unless it is firmly anchored in values other than love. Sexual attraction is all too often mistaken for love. Those who marry befuddled by such attraction generally break up later. But there is another kind of attraction, also based upon instinctive response, as opposed to the purely sexual, which brings two people together which to the observer often makes no sense at all. This has often been called the attraction of the opposites and in India is termed “an old karmic bond.”¹⁵

Hence it is in the institution of marriage that one can find comfort and security during old age. In the Indian society and context the institution of marriage will live on. Most Indian women are not rebels but they learn to cope with the harsh realities of life and male domination.

Gandhi once addressing a group said, “women are not *abala*...weaker sex. You can change the face of the country today. You must have the courage to use the great strength to suffer without inflicting suffering and to resist wrong so that you would break but not bend.” Another time he said, “God has blessed woman with the strength of faith in a measure that is not given to man. So long as we cannot dispel the ignorance which makes women put male offspring above female, it won't be well with us.”¹⁶ Mahatma Gandhi has aptly seen the Indian situation and has seen the solutions of the problem.

1.3.5 WOMEN IN INDIA AND EDUCATION

There are various reports which throw light on the position of Women's education during the last two hundred years. Neera Desai has presented a very useful picture of this. The position of female education during the 19th century was very bad. "It was an age when the mass of people were steeped in complete illiteracy. Education was restricted even among boys only to a smaller section. Education among girls was still more meager." ¹⁷

Gandhiji's philosophy was that a woman has a right to education. Education, according to him, develops and sharpens one's intellect and it increases one's capacity for doing well. Though men and women are regarded as equals, in actual practice when it comes to the question of giving education to the girls, there is a tendency among the parents to prefer a boy's education to that of a girl's. The illiterate mother in particular has very little chances to realize that she should guarantee better education to her daughter at least. ¹⁸

The National Committee on the Status of Women observes that the Constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto 14 years has remained unfulfilled till now. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls. ¹⁹

The Indian society is undergoing a basic metamorphosis. The achievement of independence has in some ways quickened the process of westernization which began to cut at the root of the traditional value system of the Indian society. This process of change was further accelerated by the introduction of new technology and scientific innovations. Industrialization, which was a concomitant of technological innovations, brought about sweeping changes into the way of life and the traditional social order in India.

The social changes have not left the woman untouched. The traditional position the woman enjoyed in society, the roles she was expected to perform, and the status she carried in her family and the society have all been affected by these factors influencing social change.

1.3.6 SOCIAL REFORMS AND JOBS

In India, specific activities to enhance the status of women were initiated in the 19th century, and we can call it 'reform movement.' The 19th century saw reforms in all fields including women's role. In the nationalist movement, women acted as vehicles for National Independence. There was no specific attention given to change the status of women. With the blossoming autonomous women's groups, things started changing.²⁰

A process of transformation has begun in the field of women's social status. Three major trends are discernible in this process of transformation. First, in the social-economic sphere, the continuing absorption of women into the work force has continued. Further access to higher education is expanding the boundaries of women's social roles which result in an increased sharing of responsibility within the family, more continuous employment in jobs, lower fertility patterns and greater participation in social and political activities. Second, science and technology in relation to birth control and reduction in their drudgery will minimize the present imbalance in capacity for personal decision and action between the sexes. Third, the present redefinition of moral and psychological assumption that a single parent family as the only legitimate form of sexual cohabitation is likely to continue. These three emerging trends in the Indian society are likely to generate specific and continuing courses of action, particularly on the part of organized women's group, governments, and large private corporate organizations. The extension of equal treatment to women and equal consideration would go a long way in ensuring equal social justice, the struggle for which has been a basic theme of political and social movements for the past several centuries. For a long time yet, this goal will best be achieved by organized women action.²¹

Social values of the people change with changes in the economic structure and ideology. The Committee on the status of women in India observes that patterns of Women's activity are greatly affected by social attitudes and institutions, which

stem from the social ideology concerning the status of women. These may differ according to the stage of economic development.²²

On the one hand, women had been kept out of the occupational activity as a bread earner and on the other hand, on the pretext of the biological ground, she has been compelled to become a wife and mother. The responsibility of child rearing has always been allocated to the woman. Margaret Polatnick argued that child rearing “is no sacred fate of nature, but a social policy which supports male domination in the society and in the family.”²³ Men, as the subordinate group, don’t want child-rearing responsibility, so they assign it to women. Slowly the working woman has taken over part of the bread-winning activity but the man has not as yet taken over the child rearing activity.

The social reforms and the economic developments are gradually changing the man-woman relationship and the fixed nature of roles assigned to them by prevalent social structure.

1.4 WOMEN WRITERS IN INDIA

Education has brought in an important change in the social status of women and has offered them job opportunities in new fields. From time immemorial, Indian women, have been showing their worth in each and every discipline of knowledge. Gargi and Ansuya in scriptures, Sita and Rani Durgavati, Rajia Begum and Noorjahan in history and Ruth Parawer Jhabvala and Arundhati Roy, Manju

This 'Great Event' in the very onset of the creation contains the germ of disparity between man and woman. Man boasts and brags, domineers and dominates over women only because woman has come out from man, she being one of the ribs of man. In Hindu religion, the social stature of women is not certain, sometimes upgraded and sometimes degraded.

In modern time, women have shown their mettle in every field. If we dive deep into the history of Indian authors in English, we come to the conclusion that Indian women have shown their worth both qualitatively and quantitatively and are displaying their worth even today without any full stop.

The history of Indian women novelists in English begins with Toru Dutt who died at the early age of 21 at a younger age than John Keats of the Romantic School of poetry. Both her novels- *Bianca* and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* deal with the autobiographical projections of the novelist- the experience, sweet and sour, she gathered in her very short life. The agony and catharsis arising out of sisterly love and bereavement in these two novels are very beautifully projected. Though the characters are Spanish and French, yet the delineation is entirely Indian, full of love and affection, sincerity and purity, which characterize the core of an ideal Indian woman. The autobiographical note of the novels reminds us of John Keats's later poetry, which is richly influenced by the poet's carking cares and corroding anxieties he faced due to his failure in love and the ultimate death of his brother.

Cornelia Sorabji, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Santha Rama Rau, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Geeta Mehta, Rama Mehta, Arundhati Roy, Shobha De, Bharati Mukherjee, Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapoor are some famous women writers, but many other women novelists have left their indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

Cornelia Sorabji

Cornelia Sorabji, a Parsi Christian, is a great figure in the realm of novels. She is mainly famous for her three important works- *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *Sun-Babies in the Child Life of India* (1904) and *Between the Twilight* (1908). She reveals in her novels the various moods and vestures going in under the 'purdah'- the ecstasy, tragedy, comedy and many more things which are unnoticed even by a feminist philosopher. She seems to satirize the hypocrisy and domineerings in a male dominated societal framework. To her, women are no longer an object of pleasure but a reservoir of all the healthy values of life. Her realistic and miserable picture of the Indian women is really superb and it reminds us of what Plato, the classicist, holds:

We shall have to train the women also, then in both kinds of skill, and train them for war as well and treat them in the same way as the men.²⁶

In short, 'Purdah,' which plays a very important role in an average Indian woman's life in both Muslim and Hindu communities, though more conservatively observed in the Muslim than in the Hindu community, is the core of Sorabji novels.

Kamala Markandaya

After the Second World War the Indian women novelists seem to have taken a different route, a new vision. In this period, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding personalities in the field of social and artistic novels. Kamala Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* made her a lovable writer of great fiction in both theme and technique, matter and manner. So far as the vision and vesture of this novel is concerned, she is very close to Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* and K.S. Venkata Ramani's *Murugan the Tiller*. The novel deals with a realistic picture of the Indian villagers, their customs and cultures, rites and traditions. The villagers or the down trodden have to work night and day in their field to earn their living. They try their best to churn nectar from the mother earth. But the irony lies in it that the churned out nectar is bound to be placed in the sieve. Rukmini, the narrator heroine has to face so many ups and downs, 'fret and fever' of life like her husband's infidelity, her daughter's sacrificial going to the streets to save the family from hunger and starvation; the premature death of the child Kuti, the ejection from the kiths and kins, so on and so forth. Here the piteous plight of Rukmini reminds us of Elizabeth Jane in Thomas Hardy's famous novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Ammu, the forsaken lady in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. But while Ammu transgresses the age-old norms of societal

morality and develops her weakness to Velutha, an untouchable, Rukmini is never seen doing this. She, like an average ideal village woman, worships her husband like God. She says: "It was my husband who woke me up- my husband, whom I call Nathan, for that was his name although in all the years of our marriage I never called him that, for it is not meant for a woman to address her husband except as husband."²⁷

But in spite of many unbearable and undeserved suffering faced by the heroine, the novel does not tend to be pessimistic or fatalistic as we generally see in Thomas Hardy. The last portion of the novel reveals that Rukmini finds peace at last.

Kamala Markandaya's *Nowhere Man* depicts the East-West encounter suffused with racial discrimination. The stoical attitude of Srinivas, his death while saving Fred who wanted to destroy him: the racial madness and the existential dilemma have been well stated in the novel. The harmony and the tolerance – the only solution to the ills of racial tensions have been analytically and objectively dealt within the work. Kamala Markandaya's tragic vision of the world gets expressed in the novel.

Kamala Markandaya's other novel which earned popularity all over India and abroad is *Some Inner Fury*. It shows the protagonist Mira's recollection of the past, her emotions, passions and ecstasies. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar holds the view: *Some Inner Fury* is a tragedy engineered by politics, even as *Nectar in a Sieve* is a tragedy

engineered by economics; and in both novels the chief characters transcend the bludgeonings of economic or political mischance and assert the unconquerable spirit of humanity.²⁸

A Silence of Desire, the third novel by Kamala Markandaya, has neither to do with economics as in *Nectar in a Sieve* nor to do with politics as in *Some Inner Fury*, it unfolds the layers of spiritual reality and mystic vision of India. It is the story of Dandekar, a government servant, who gets tortures and sufferance because of his wife, Sarojini whose attitude is just opposite of her husband. She is suffering from a tumour and so she goes to seek a spiritual solace from the "Swamy." Dandekar doubts the 'faith-cure' belief of a Swami. Thus, through these two characters- the husband and the wife, Kamala Markandaya the novelist, presents an age-long confrontation between mind and soul, between intellect and emotion, between science and poetry.

The Coffer Dams (1969) by Kamala Markandaya is a fine blending of art and truth, feeling and form. It shows a new style entirely original suffused with 'oblique and convoluted expression.' It is the story of the British engineers who construct a river-dam in independent India. It portrays a very fine picture of the Indo-British encounter resulting in despair and disappointments.

The Nowhere Man deals with the theme of the anti-immigrant wave of the sixties, which engulfs the life of Srinivas, an old Indian widower and a Londoner, who is

persecuted mercilessly by a number of fanatics. In this novel the image of disease is very suggestive. The disease 'leprosy' suggests the protagonist's sense of isolation and disintegration.

The other novels which Markandaya has to her credit are *A Handful of Rice*; *Two Virgins*; *The Golden Honeycomb*; *Possession*.²⁹ Kamala Markandaya is undoubtedly an important woman novelist in recent times.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, the contemporary of Kamala Markandaya has also left a mark in the history of women novelists in English. It is, indeed, a complex task to decide whether R.P. Jhabvala belongs to India or Germany, insider or outsider. She was born of Polish parents in Germany and got her education in England but married an Indian and lived in India more than twenty four years. Most of her writings deal with the various shades of Indianness, apart from many other things. If we read her novels minutely, we come to the conclusion that in spite of her claim as an European, her novels in comparison with E.M. Forster and Kipling reveal much longer and greater involvement in Indian society, which compels a reader to consider her an Indian.

The novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala ring the note of two things- urban middle class Indian life tinged with domestic problems of an average joint Hindu family and an ironic study of the confrontation between occidental and oriental attitudes.

Her first novel; *To Whom She Will* presents a very beautiful picture of the Indian society- its rites and customs, taste and temperament and above all, marriage and love with an element of illicit relationships. This novel also deals with a truthful portrayal of the fatal consequences arising out of partition which uprooted millions of people. The novelist gives a fine picture of the piteous conditions of a large number of refugees in New Delhi who came to settle there after partition:

They had lost almost everything; their houses, their business, many of their valuables, all had to be left behind. It was complete disaster, absolute ruin; if it had happened to one man alone it would have been unbearable. But there is consolation in numbers and there were hundreds of thousands of them. Their relatives, their friends, their neighbors, all were ruined with them, all had to start life afresh: there was no individual disgrace attached to this ruin: it was spiritually bearable (*To Whom She Will*).³⁰

It is to be noted that R.P. Jhabvala focused most of her attention on the upper class North Indians where people are indolent, sensuous, violently emotional. The novelist doesn't like to write about only one or two persons. She is in favour of writing the corporate life of two or three families. Her novels are generally saturated with the

drab realities of day to day life so much so that they tend to be repetitive. But her repetitions are always full of colour and beauty.

The Nature of Passion deals with a modern young girl, Nimmi, who wants to discard the age-old customs and rites, myths and tradition. She fights for the cause of woman's emancipation. She attends club regularly, plays tennis, keeps bob-cut hair, and attends lectures on English Romantic Poets. But on the other hand, her community is dead against all her western activities. Through Nimmi, the novelist, wants to satirize these silly youngsters who have false pretensions to modernism and independence. The youngsters should always bear in their mind that their sentiments, emancipations, individuality, anti-traditional responses, mental processes are all conditioned by a social structure of parental affection.

Both *Esmond in India* and *A Backward Place* ring the note of east-west encounter. *Esmond in India* tells the story of Esmond Stillwood, an Englishman, who marries Gulab, the beautiful Indian girl. But the marriage fails due to the different nature in both the characters- Esmond is selfish and mean, Gulab is rough and unsophisticated.

In *A Backward Place*, Judy, an English girl, marries an Indian actor Bal. But this marriage also does not succeed because of their different mentality.

The Householder is a domestic comedy which shows Jhabvala's acute perception of remote village life-the conflicts between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law- the one with domineering accusations and the other with taciturn enmity. The novel revolves round the life of Prem, a sensitive young man and a teacher who is absolutely surprised by the strange city and also by an early marriage.³¹

The novel which matters most in the literary career of R.P. Jhabvala is *Heat and Dust* which won the prestigious Booker Prize in 1975. It deals with the sad and moving story of two English women, the victims of this country. The narrative technique of the novel is equally important. It moves backward and forward from 1923 to the present with ease and felicity. It reminds of *The God of Small Things*, a novel by Arundhati Roy. The narrator of the novel is unnamed up to the end. Through diary and journal, the novelist speaks of the past and the present. It has what T.S. Eliot means by his famous phrase 'historical sense' and 'tradition'. The story tells us how Olivia and her husband Douglas come to India. Olivia falls in amorous spells of Nawab and consequently she manages to elope with him. This leads to the pregnancy and later on, abortion of Olivia. She is given a cottage in the hills near the Nawab's palace. She earns the title of the mistress of the Nawab.

The other woman who has to suffer a lot without any rhyme or reason was the invisible narrator herself. She develops her weakness for Chid, an Englishman turned Hindu. She helps him night and day during his sickness. This sympathy turns into sexuality between them. The narrator, consequently becomes pregnant,

but unlike Olivia, she doesn't get herself aborted. She is a lady of strong hope and patience. So, she joins an Ashram and there suffers quietly. Thus, both the ladies become the silent sufferer destroyed by the 'heat.'

The portrayal of India in *Heat and Dust* is somewhat strange in the sense that Jhabvala who always thought herself foreigner is seldom seen appreciating the cultural heritage and spiritual significance of this country. Nissim Ezekiel in his famous article "*Distorting Mirror*" views that Jhabvala has made the country stranger in her imagination overheated by hatred. As a matter of fact, if we judge her works, we come to the conclusion that her early works are richly devoted to India and she can be seen loving this country. But later on, she becomes blunt and cold to this strange land. She observes:

I suppose it could be put down to my change of attitude towards India. I lived every thing during my first years here- really loved it and was wildly excited by it and never wanted to go away from here. But later that changed, I saw a lot I didn't like. I'll go further: a lot that horrified me.³²

Nayantara Sahgal

Nayantara Sahgal, in her many textured novel, *Rich Like Us* (1985), winner of the coveted Sahitya Akademy award and Sinclair Prize, portrays the hopes, ambitions,

failures and frustrations of the people in the Indian sub-continent. It is a novel whose action dates back to the period of India's National Emergency during 1974-75. Nayantara Sahgal, niece of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and daughter of Vijjalaxmi Pandit, is a novelist dealing with politics. She is also known as a successful political columnist for different newspapers. Her writing is generally characterized by simplicity and boldness. Her writing is also famous as it keeps in touch with the latest political ups and downs with a tinge of western liberalism. Her novels truthfully mirror the contemporary Indian political theme. She herself declared that all her novels "more or less reflect the political era we are passing through."³³ Her attitude in the novels is like that of Nehru, that is, co-mingled with the western outlook. Unlike the political writers, she never professes any specific political ideology or favours any political creed or political movement. Her novels only portray the contemporary incidents and political realities saturated with artistic colour and objectivity. All her major characters of the novel are centripetally drawn towards the vortex of politics. But besides politics, her fiction also focuses on Indian woman's search for sexual freedom and self realization.

Her first novel, *A Time to Be Happy* has references to Congress activities and the events of 1942. The structure and pattern of the novel seem to be somewhat loose. *This time of Morning* is a purely political novel which deals with what happens in the corridors of power, in the drawing rooms of the political figures. Some of the characters of the novel are so beautifully and symbolically portrayed that they are equated with the contemporary political personalities. The portrait of Kalyan Sinha

has the resemblance to V.K. Krishna Menon. In *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), we see the aftermath of the division of Punjab into the two states of Punjab and Haryana.

The Day in Shadow (1971) is richly inspired by the political movement of the society. Though the main theme of the novel is politics, yet the problems of divorce and disintegration of the marriage in a typical Indian setting is also beautifully dealt with. *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977) points out the Naxalite movement and student unrest and, above all, the aftermath of Nehru's death. Very often in her novels there is no gap between the private world and the political world; both the worlds are reciprocally treated and actions and characters commingle.

Anita Desai

Anita Desai (1937) is satisfied to dive deep into the inner working of the protagonists and brings into the hidden depths of human psyche. Her fictional world is just like an iceberg hidden and partly visible; it is overcast by mist and fog, half revealed and half concealed. Her inner voyage of characters in the novels is greatly influenced by Virginia Woolf.³⁴

Anita Desai deals with the mind and the soul of a character, his inner workings and hidden and silent thoughts rather than his outer appearances. Her main business as a fiction writer is to expose the truth. In this sense she is very near to great writers like Dostoevsky, Proust, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Henry James. In order to capture the prismatic quality of life in her fictions, she uses the stream of

consciousness method and interior monologue which become coincident with consciousness.³⁵

Cry, the Peacock is a tragic story of Maya who is haunted by the astrological prediction of the death of either wife or husband. In other words, she is the victim of fate and providence, that is, an uncannily oppressive sense of fatality. To crown the effect, she has no children and thus this leads to Maya's isolation. She is so much segregated by society and astrological dilemma that in a fit of insane fury, she kills her own husband.

In *The Voices in the City* the scene shifts from Delhi to Calcutta. Here the Maya-Gautam duo is re-enacted in the form of Monisha –Jiban marriage. Monisha has to undergo unbearable tyranny and injustice, insult and abuse in her husband's dwelling. In the long run, she commits suicide. Nirode, the brother of Monisha and Amla her sister, are also in Calcutta and all of them have to fight against the rigid conventions of the middle class life. Amla is shocked and heart-broken when her love is rejected.

Bye-Bye Blackbird is a symbolic novel in which Anita Desai presents the East-West encounter. It is an irony that the British characters in the novel seem to be more realized than the Indian protagonist. *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, as the title suggests, shows the tragic inner reality of Sita, the main character, who is stifled by

the cruelty and callousness of urban life. Fed up with the burden of children, she runs away to a small island, and persuades her husband to return.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai presents the psychology of two different women characters- Nanda, an unsentimental old widow leading a segregated life like a recluse in a segregated hill hut, and Raka, a shy, gentle and lovely school girl by nature and instincts. The tragedy begins when Illa Das, Nanda's bosom friend and a social worker, is raped and strangled. This incident so powerfully overcasts its dark shadow on Nanda Kaul that she makes up her mind to lead a life of a saint in the lap of a lonely place, far from the din and bustle of city life. The imagery of the book has reached the height of Shakespearean tragedies where metaphor plays a significant role in the plot and structure of the plays.

In *The Clear Light of Day*, Vimala's attitude is somewhat similar to that of Nanda in the sense that she also preferred to live in a decaying house surrounded by a neglected garden containing a dark and mysterious well. The beauty of the book lies in the poetic and psychological portrayal of the hidden depth of the protagonist who is haunted by numerous nostalgic events of the past.

In her fiction, Anita Desai has heralded a new era in the realm of the psychological portrayal of the character. She herself observes:

My novels don't have themes- at least not till they are finished, published or read, do I see any theme. While writing I follow flashes of insides, I veer away from or even fight any thing that threatens to distort or destroy this inside, and somehow come to the end and look back to see the pattern of footprints on the sand.³⁶

Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca* stirs the myth of Odysseus's journey and his Ithaca. It stirs creative imagination across time and space. In Desai's novel, the myth receives a fresh treatment and acquires newer significances. Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* gives an objective observation of the crucial problem of the feeling of alienation. The characters like Adit, Sarah and Dev suffer from restlessness, attraction-detraction, attachment-detachment. Sarah feels attached to India even before going there, but she feels restless at the thought of leaving England. On the other hand, Jasbir-Mala, Summer-Bella have no such problem. They acclimatize themselves to the English life without any inner pinch. Anita Desai effectively shows the theme of identity crisis. Many a times her characters travel through a world of fantasy in order to come to terms with the reality of the situation.

Shobha De

Shobha De is a modern novelist who is famous for portraying the sexual mania of the commercial world. In narration of incident she is very frank and straight

forward. Like Anita Desai, she has the gift of exploring the subdued depths of women psychology. In 1988, she shot into literary limelight with her first novel, *Socialite Evening*, which is Lawerencian in expression. Her other works are *Starry Nights*, *Sisters*, *Sultry Days*, *Strange Obsession*, *Snapshots*, *Second Thoughts*, *Shooting from the Hips*, *Small Betrayals*, *Surviving Men* and *Speed Post*. She believes that a man's personality can be judged in a true perspective only when one goes into his interior more than his exterior behaviour. Today we see that sex which is the root of all our energy, plays a very vital role in a man's life. Perhaps this is why most of the novels of De analyze the various aspects of sex, a great urge of human beings. This in turn appeals to most of the readers of modern scientific and commercial world where a large section of people are wildly hungry for power, wealth and sex.

It is to be noted that Shobha De, like D.H. Lawrence, has openly discussed sex in most of her works. But they are not easily termed as pornographic works. Her books have some fine images and symbols, words and phrases which make it attractive to the connoisseur of art. In art, it is not the matter that matters but manner that matters. Moreover, Freud, a great psychologist, has expounded a highly revolutionary theory of sex. So, now sex is not a taboo but part and parcel of life.

In Shobha De's *Sisters: Not a Junk but a Novel*, though there are some sexy nude painting passages verging to soft pornographic ones, are realistic flashes of the

momentary passion of sex-starved men and women in the commercial business world.

A study of Shobha De's novels shows the novelist's perceptive portrayal of the secret depths of the human psyche; her accurate characterization; her saucy, racy and captivating style which invokes vivid images and compels the reader to identify himself or herself with the characters and situations. In short, Shobha De has tried her best to expose the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern society in which a hapless and forsaken woman longs for pleasure and wants to fly freely in the sky of freedom. Though she has been severely criticized by some critics on moral ground, we should not forget that whatever she has penned down are all fine pieces of poetic and metaphoric exactitude which haunts our mind long after reading.

Manju Kapur

Manju Kapur, the author of *Difficult Daughters*, succeeded in winning the famous Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the Eurasia region. Manju Kapur is presently a professor of English in Delhi University.

The novel is autobiographical like Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. It presents a woman who considers marriage as the journey's end of her life. It is about the three generations of women with the emphasis on the protagonist's mother. It presents the picture of Amritsar and Lahore between 1937 and 1947. It is

the story of Virmati, the protagonist who is sandwiched between the duty towards her family and her illicit love for a married professor.

About the book *Difficult Daughters*, she observes: “Nothing is planned in a big way, but eventually things may take a grand shape. Writing this novel was not very difficult for me, but it took eight long years before the book finally saw the light of the day.”³⁷

Dr. Indira Bhatt, in her scholarly article, *Marriage- the Summum Bonum of Woman's Life* deals with the problem of marriage and love in Manju Kapoor's *Difficult Daughters*. She opines that the woman in a male dominated societal framework, tries to move out of the caged existence and asserts the individual self. But she never wishes to break up the family ties.

Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy's debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, the winner of Booker Prize, has registered a tremendous sale all over the world. The book has been translated into more than 40 languages in the world. Earlier V.S. Naipaul had bagged this Prize in 1972 for *In a Free State*; Ruth Praver Jhabvala got it in 1975 for *Heat and Dust*; Salman Rushdie was given the Booker Prize in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*. However all the above authors are only of Indian origin. But Arundhati Roy has got the credit of being the first entirely home grown Indian to have this prestigious prize. Unlike other Indian novelists, Roy is born, educated and brought up in India.

The God of Small Things is somewhat autobiographical in nature. It deals with a pale reflection of the haunts of Roy's own childhood on the limpid backwaters and the society she lived with caste prejudices. In this novel, Kerala, the most educated state with many different castes and classes, has been beautifully represented. The whole story revolves round the village, Ayemenem near Kottayam. In theme, the book peeps into the life of Keralite society, their rites and customs, traditions and patriarchal domination; a caste ridden mentality of a certain section of people whom Roy terms as 'Laltain,' the fatal consequences arising out of divorce; the child psychology; the naked exposure of the malpractices of Marxism and Police administration; the persecution of the untouchable, the 'Mombatti' and so on. In style, the book is moulded in such a way that it gives a jerk and jolt to an average reader. She has the credit to invent a new style- a style that turns and twists language to conform to the feeling particularly the jolly and jocund mood of the twins; a style that has paradoxical coinages, ungrammatical constructions, unconventional rhythm, bizarre phrases, uninvited capitalizations and so on. In both matter and manner, feeling and form, the novel leads us into the realm of a new style- a style that turns and twists language to conform to the feeling. It reminds us of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Faulkner, Virginia Woolf and Salman Rushdie. It has what T.S. Eliot means by his famous phrase "Objective Correlative" or "Emotional Equivalent."

Arudhathi Roy's second book *The End of Imagination*, though short but revolutionary, deals with the author's strong revolt against nuclearization in India

and abroad; her mild satire on the arrogance and dominance of politics and, above all, the drawbacks of nuclear arms and ammunitions. In tone and temper, this short book reminds us of *Countdown*, a recently published book by Amitav Ghosh on the same theme. Here the thought-provoking observation of Arudhathi Roy clearly shows that she is not in favour of war and killing. She seems to be a great follower of Mahatma Gandhi who believed in the theory of truth and non-violence.³⁸

Rama Kundu in her essay, *The God of Small Things: As a Confessional Novel* analyses the plight of a woman in an entirely aversed society. It also points out the tyranny and injustice, insult and abuse the untouchable of India have to tolerate sometimes with cause and sometimes without any cause.

Vimla Raina

Vimla Raina is known for her best selling novel, *Ambrapali*, a historical novel which presents the history of Vaishali. Ambrapali in history was the first woman to be admitted in the fold of Lord Buddha.

Rama Mehta

Rama Mehta's first novel *Inside the Haveli* (1977) has to her credit the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979. It deals with the confrontation between culture and civilization, between city and village. It shows how, Geeta a modern Mumbai girl has to lead a secluded life under the purdah in the Haveli. *Inside the Haveli* gives a lively and vivid picture of the traditional life, particularly of women in the

haveli. She points out how a modern girl of Mumbai has to live under the haveli as a daughter-in-law, thereby causing ripples of conflict and tensions in the suffocating and stagnating life of tradition.

As this thesis is going to deal with Shashi Deshpande's novels, she has only been mentioned here in this chapter and is dealt with at length in the next chapters.

It is wonderful the way Indian writers are using English, exploring its possibilities, adapting it for their own use. It started with Rushdie, who is a magician with words and the contemporary women novelists have continued this trend.

This is not a complete survey but a modest one. It is hoped that a brief reference to women novelists' achievement will help understand Shashi Deshpande's novels and the women characters in her novels better. Women novelists and writers have given a certain treatment to women and the background has been prepared by these women novelists, hence they have been referred to. In the past few years the social context has been changing rapidly and there is an obvious correspondence between the characters in the novels and the changing social context. The social developments are reflected clearly in creative writing. A writer writes in a social context and a certain tradition.

This brief survey of Indian women novelists in English clearly shows that women have made their permanent mark in the field of English fictions. They are conferred

not only national but international awards also. In most of their writings they have tried their best to free the female mentality from the age-long control of male domination. Today whatever political, social, cultural and individual awareness we see in women, is partly a result of these fiction writers who heralded a new consciousness in the realm of traditional thinking.

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CHAPTER- II

Life, Works and Shashi Deshpande as a Novelist

2.1 Introduction

2.2.1 Shashi Deshpande's Life and Personality

2.2.2 Shashi Deshpande's reputation as a novelist

2.2.3 Shashi Deshpande's Position

2.3 The Works of Shashi Deshpande

2.4.1 Shashi Deshpande's novels

2.4.2 Roots and Shadows

2.4.3 The Dark Holds No Terrors

2.4.4 That Long Silence

2.4.5 The Binding Vine

2.4.6 A Matter of Time

2.4.7 Small Remedies

2.5 Conclusion

CHAPTER- II

LIFE, WORKS AND SCOPE OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AS A NOVELIST

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to find out if Shashi Deshpande's women characters are really empowered women or if they are just wearing a mask of tranquility. The study aims to find out if Shashi Deshpande's women really assert themselves or somewhere in their assertion process conform to endurance. The study wishes to find out if compromise is the key word in Shashi Deshpande's heroines' vocabulary.

For the purpose of this study, six of her novels have been considered, but the thrust of this research is on three of her major novels viz., *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*. These three novels have won awards and have been translated into a number of foreign languages. In this thesis an attempt is, therefore, made to study Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists, as portrayed by her in her novels, with a view to understand and appreciate their trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. It critically analyses their response to the emerging situation in life so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society. Without probing deeply into the novelist's conviction of what would serve as the ideal panacea for the different kinds of challenges, the study considers the problems of her characters which have had to

contend with the given situations. *Come up and Be Dead* and *If I Die Today*, two detective serials of Shashi Deshpande which have been expanded and published as novels are not included for study as the very nature of their themes seems at variance with the topic chosen for this thesis.

Shashi Deshpande's stories are about a woman: her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common run of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, the middle-class women themselves are enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, marital discord and male chauvinism.

Indeed, Shashi Deshpande's chief thematic concern is with a woman's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, her effort to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and most of all as a human being. And accordingly in her novels the operative sensibility is distinctly female and modern.

Shashi Deshpande feels embarrassed to be called a woman writer and she is not very enthusiastic about the label feminist. She considers herself as a feminist in personal life but not a feminist writer. "I write as a writer but am identified as a woman writer. I am nothing more than a novelist and a short-story writer but people seek more glorified titles to elevate you to stardom." "If critics and reviewers insist on calling me a woman writer, then 'man' should be prefixed to male writers as well."

"Women writers are expected to write for women's magazines and be read by women readers only. Males generally do not want to read women writers."¹

Such statements flowed in abundance, perhaps personifying her womanhood. It made a lot of sense particularly in the run-up to the International Women's Day celebrations.

With much ease Shashi Deshpande debunked myths that overwhelm the Indian intelligentsia. The prickly issues of language and writing, the widening divide between the non-resident Indian authors writing in English and the writers writing in English in India, the importance of readers and a writer's obligation to self-censorship, globalization of literature and the impact of feminism on marginalized women - the rich repertoire of debatable points that have always troubled her and continue to do so.

She laments the divide between writers as a group on the basis of caste, gender and language and this, she says, prevents writers from playing a meaningful role in society and their inability to take on and write on public issues. But the free-spirited Shashi Deshpande is only making her voice more distinctive with every new publication. Writing from the margin is also written with felicity to evoke emotions.²

However much she may deny the influence of feminism in her novels, it is the core of her novels. And it becomes quite obvious, that the women she has created are feminists, even if she is not one.

Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, Shashi Deshpande's protagonist finds herself enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, loves and hates, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression, and marital discord and male chauvinism.

2.2.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S LIFE AND PERSONALITY

Shashi Deshpande was born in 1938 in Dharwad, India. She is the second daughter of the renowned dramatist and Sanskrit scholar, Shriranga. At the age of fifteen, she went to Mumbai where she graduated in Economics. She then moved to Bangalore, where she gained a degree in Law. The early years of her marriage were largely given over to the care of her two young sons, but she took a course in journalism and for a time worked on a magazine. Her writing career only began in earnest in 1970. Deshpande began her writing with short stories which later developed into writing novels. Her first collection of short stories *The Legacy* published in 1972 had been prescribed for graduate students in Columbia University.

I never decided that I was going to become a writer, it was never a conscious decision. I got married, I had no definite career, I had two children. I was restless with being just a housewife and mother, I was looking for a job. Then we were in England for a year, my husband was a doctor. I was very isolated there because he was at work all day and I had these two children and no friends, so then we returned and he said 'why don't you write about our year there?'. Then I joined a

journalism course. I loved writing, I felt at home with it...so I think in one way I stumbled into it but I really think of it this way as writing was something which was waiting for me along the line and then I reached that point, and then I knew what my life was going to be about.³ —

Shashi Deshpande now lives in Bangalore with her pathologist husband and has completed her M.A. in English Literature. She is regarded as one of the most accomplished contemporary Indian women writers in English. Her output is by no means inconsiderable – Eight novels viz., *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980); *If I Die Today*; *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983); *Roots and Shadows* (1986); *That Long Silence* (1987); *The Binding Vine* (1993); *A Matter of Time* (1996) and *Small Remedies* (2000). Shashi Deshpande has written four volumes of short stories, viz., *The Legacy* (1978); *The Miracle* (1986); *It was Dark* (1986), and *It was the Nightingale* (1986), and books for children too.

Literature was a common fare at her home from her early childhood as her father Adya Rangacharya was an eminent playwright, author and scholar of Sanskrit and Kannada languages. She started her literary career in England by writing short pieces on her stay there, moved on to writing short stories which were published in leading Indian magazines. In 1978, *The Legacy*, the first collection of short stories was published in India. Since then, she has brought out four other collections of short stories, has written six novels, two crime novels, which makes it altogether

eight novels and four books for children. Her work has been translated into various Indian and European languages.

Deshpande is gifted with an inborn literary bent of mind which matured with her experiences in life. Even her graduation in Economics and Law did not seem to have much impact on her writing. Though she is the daughter of Sriranga, the famous Kannada playwright, who is known as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre, yet she never got any guidance from him in this field. She regrets the fact of being detached from her father. In response to a question of Vanamala Vishwanatha, she says:

If I should criticize him, I should say he was somewhat detached from us...never guided us. May be if he had directed us at an early age, I could have done better. He never did that. ⁴

Not many readers of Shashi Deshpande may be aware that her first experiments in writing fiction started with the short story. Over the years, she has published about a hundred stories in literary journals, magazines and newspapers, in between writing her immensely popular novels which are now read all over the world, and taught in universities wherever Indian writing has an audience. Shashi Deshpande is at her best, writing with subtlety and a rare sensitivity about men and women trapped in relationships and situations often not of their making. Some of her themes are: The wife of a successful politician who must look to a long-lost past in order to keep up the pretence of contentment; a little girl who cannot comprehend

why the very fact of her being born is a curse; a young man whose fantasy of love drives him to murder; a newly-wed couple with dramatically differing views on what it means to get to know each other—every one of the characters here is delineated with lucidity and compassion. Written over the past three decades, the stories provide an insight into often forgotten aspects of human feelings and relationships, weaving a magical web of emotions that is testimony to the unusual depth and range of Shashi Deshpande's writing.⁵

Whether she writes short stories or novels, Deshpande writes mainly about "everyday India. A society in which we breathe, a culture to which we belong. Her major concerns emerge from our own environment, from our immediate world, holding up mirrors to our own lives."⁶ She does not simplify India but presents India as it is to her readers. Deshpande herself says, "They (my novels) are just about Indian people and the complexities of our lives."⁷ Thus her works, particularly novels, demand undivided attention from the readers, demand that they understand the world that is being presented to them without any embellishment.

Even though her writing is very Indian in its framework, the themes honour no borders. True she writes mainly about women, but it is the human being that lurks behind her characters. And that human being is often a lonely one though not one who is alone. There are myriad facets to loneliness in life, and Deshpande has explored many of these facets in her short story collection, *The Intrusion and Other Stories* published in 1993 by Penguin. (Currently this is the only collection that is available in print. The Writer's Workshop is to reissue a collection soon)

All within her fragile frame, Shashi Deshpande is a profusion of creativity. Amorphous thoughts and thought-provoking issues, a defying captivity of simple but powerful words with which she strings an effortless prose while writing or speaking is a lesson in learning for all those who come in contact with her.

At a "meet the author" programme organized by the Study Centre for Indian Literature in English & Translation (SCILET) at the American College where she came for the launch of her latest collection of essays titled *Writing from the Margin*, her talk was firmly entrenched in the social realities of daily lives triggering off a barrage of questions from the audience at the end of it. With an unflinching enthusiasm she regaled the audience - majority of whom were her ardent readers too - sharing her troubles and confidentialities, fears and hope, experience and prerogatives.

What she penned down as points, ideas, corrections on the big margin over the decades, she herself never realized would some day get converted into a book with much pushing and prodding by her pathologist husband and a good friend, who teaches English literature in a Delhi college.

"These two people are responsible both for the shortcomings and the highs of the compilation," she said nonchalantly, there again unveiling her ability to speak out her mind. "That is what real empowerment is all about - lack of fear and equality in any relationship," she said, when asked why the protagonist in each of her eight novels so far were the middle class urban working women caught between personal

crisis and compulsions, responsibilities and obligations. And how they all internalized a distorted self-image and finally returned with a new attitude.

"Women are reluctant to talk about themselves. I am not bold either but I am privileged because I do what I want to do, writing fiction and exploring human relationships is my lifeline"⁸, she asserted, further underlining her refusal to play by the global rules.

Writing as a politically aware woman makes her uncomfortable but never stops her from articulating on contentious matters like gender, caste, feminism or marginalisation. But she admitted that she was tired of the hostility against Indian English.

"Imagine India in English" - she suddenly stirs you to make one understand that "the language you write in does not bear upon the quality of writing." In fact, language resonates with one's own regional flavour and cultural experience. Though some critics like to call Indian literature a great "linguistic mess", Shashi Deshpande described it as a celebration of mother tongues but at the same time the language of creativity need not necessarily be one's mother tongue. True that the West looks for Indian literary works that are "exotic" but Indian writers writing in English need not alienate themselves by writing in the vernacular.

Her novel *That Long Silence* received the Sahitya Akademi award. Two of her other novels, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *Roots and Shadows* have also received major awards. *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, was released in India on the 16th of March,

2000. We will deal with six novels of Shashi Deshpande in detail in the next part of the study.

2.2.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S REPUTATION AS AN ARTIST

Shashi Deshpande is known for creating women characters who are contemporary. Deshpande's women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination, first as daughters and later as wives. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them, and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that limit their capability and existence as a wife. Fettered to their roles in the family, they question the subordinate status ordained to them by society. Her works have drawn great critical attention and acclaim for her sensitive and realistic representation of the Indian middle-class women. Her sincere concern for women and their oppressive lot is reflected strongly in all her novels and stories.

Dieter Riemenschneider in *The Story Must Be Told* tries to show that Shashi Deshpande takes us into realms of the female psyche which no writer of the previous generation had dared put into words as candidly. He further affirms that Deshpande's finely honed sensibility infuses the delicate interplay of human relationships with a realistic ambience which serves to crystallize our thoughts, and all at once we see in her a natural extension of our own cognitive parameters.⁹

What really sets Shashi Deshpande apart is that her writings hold a universal appeal that clearly emanates from her rootedness in everyday India. She has

steadfastly refused to compromise in order to suit the global market, never exoticising India, never 'presenting' it – as she puts it -, and certainly by not playing to the gallery. She is often compared to regional language writers - firmly entrenched in our social realities and grappling with our issues.

One agrees with R.K. Dhawan's remarks that in this era of verbal acrobatics and pretty packaging, her clear lucid prose is starkly real and refreshing. Everything is said as it should be, not a superfluous word to be found anywhere. The aesthetics of her writing is informed by the depth of her content, articulating her thoughts and ideas, transforming the very act of reading into a sharing experience. Readers encounter an intimacy, a kind of secret bonding with her, as if she were speaking to them alone.

Each of Shashi Deshpande's novels is special and offers food for thought on human relationships and emotions. Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears and feelings experienced by humans, by women. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind. Recognizing oneself in her characters, one does not feel lonely in the world anymore. Reading her novels and stories is thus an immensely satisfying experience, as reading becomes a healing process.

Shashi Deshpande says that all her novels always begin in a moment of crisis. Most of them go on unquestioningly until they are shaken out of the rut by something catastrophic or disastrous. Suddenly all that you have taken for granted becomes doubtful, everything falls apart. You begin then to question everything. And it is

through this questioning, through this thinking that you move on, pick up your life once again. But you are never the same after this. This is true of all human beings, not just women. Her protagonists being women, one of the things they question is the fact of their being females, what it has done to them. But they are also probing the human condition, the human predicament. In this thinking process, humans do discover their own potential.

Shashi Deshpande believes that women have a great strength. All humans do. Actually women have reserves we are often unaware of. But for the woman the situation is made more complex by the fact that they have been told they are weak, they are made to believe in their weakness. And often they learn to hide their own strength, because a woman's strength seems to weaken a man. She says that women are the main support of the family, though the male is the titular head. Women are better at dealing with emotional traumas. This is because women, unlike men, have never had to suppress their emotional selves, they are more open about these problems - both in articulating them and understanding them.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt very minutely and delicately with the problems of middle-class educated women. She always had in her mind people from the real India to write about, but as she proceeded, spontaneously and involuntarily, woman became the focus of her writings. When interviewed by Vanamala Vishwanatha, Shashi Deshpande makes it clear by saying: "It all starts with people. For example, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* came to me when I saw a couple."¹⁰

She is uniquely Indian and her use of Marathi words very evidently presents the customs and traditions of the people belonging to Maharashtra and Karnataka. For example, words such as *Kaka*, *Kaki*, *Atya*, *Dada*, and so on, are essentially Marathi words and might be a bit difficult to grasp by the readers who do not know the language.

Shashi Deshpande cares more for literary qualities of her creative works. Her language is transparent. It does not draw attention to itself, nor does it come in the way.¹¹ She is basically Indian and writes for the Indians.

She states that if you try to make everything easy for everyone, then, you end up belonging nowhere. So, I've left it at that- characters in their novels, without providing glosses for the western readers...Also literature can be appreciated even without understanding every word of it – one can still respond to the core of it.¹²

2.2.3 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S POSITION

Shashi Deshpande was still unknown to many until her novel *That Long Silence* got published by the Virago Feminist Press, London. She says:

It's meaningless that people know me as a person and not know what I've written. I feel publicity is not a good thing for a writer. It detracts you from your work. You become more interested in yourself as a person than as a writer. I'd rather be known for my books than for myself.¹³

She writes about the need to write: “I realize that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It’s one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing.”¹⁴

She does not see males as the cause of all troubles as some feminists do, she deals with the inner mind of women. Education and experience in foreign countries sets women writers apart from traditional Indian women. The traditional Indian women suffer, submit and adjust themselves to the circumstances. The women novelists like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala have, in their novels, portrayed this aspect of women’s life without having the first hand experience of it. Shashi Deshpande has projected this aspect of Indian women with more sensitivity and instinctive understanding as she belongs to this category. Unlike other women writers, she is born and brought up on this soil, gained her education in India itself and wrote about India. The projection of the woman’s world in her novels is more authentic, credible and realistic. She knows what Indian women feel. Shashi Deshpande does not want to be categorized with other Indian writers writing in English. She has a unique place among the novelists writing in English.¹⁵ She declares that she is just like any other regional writer but her medium of writing happens to be English, as it is the only language she knows well. Explaining her position, Shashi Deshpande says:

I’m isolated – I’m not part of any movement and not conscious of readers to impress. To get wider recognition here and abroad, you have to be in the university and places

like that with the right contacts. I'm an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home. None of these things are within my reach. This has, I believe, done me good. It has given me great freedom. I'm happy with this anonymity. Once you get publicity-conscious, your writing becomes affected. I'm truly happy with this freedom.¹⁶

Shashi Deshpande believes that a writer gives to society a mirror image of itself, so has she tried to do in her creative writing. Vanamala Vishwanatha points out that the author has presented in her works "a typical, middle-class housewife's life...." The urge to find oneself, to create a space for oneself to grow on one's own, that seems to be the major preoccupation. That's every woman's problem as well. That's where Shashi Deshpande has touched a chord.¹⁷

The study tries to understand and perceive the real dilemma of middle-class educated women in her novels. Deshpande has not tried to make her women characters stronger than they are in real life. Rather she has exposed their transitional state, as pinpointed by Dr. Promilla Kapur. The educated women demand more sexual freedom and independence but are not very sure about what they should do with the same, which leads them to a bitter confusion, anxiety and tension. Their psychology is still wedded – to tradition. They have started recognizing the need for change, but at the same time they continue to cling to the old values as they have been brought up with them. The picture of such women has found place in Shashi Deshpande's novels:

My characters take their own ways. I've heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are.¹⁸

It is not that Shashi Deshpande has deliberately made women the focus in all her novels. She, in fact, wanted to portray the whole society in her writings; but somehow, as the characters took shape, the women characters turned out to be the protagonists. That is the world she knows more closely. The reason may be that being a woman, she felt more for the women characters, could understand the mundane reality, the complex structure of man-woman relationship better. But Deshpande believes that everybody should live within the relationships:¹⁹ She says:

It's needed. It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this or no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree with is the idealization of motherhood – the false and sentimental notes that accompany it.²⁰

The main themes that have found expression in Shashi Deshpande's novels are: inner conflict and search for identity, parent-child relationship, and concept of marriage and sex. Above all, the theme of silence rooted in the complex relationship between man and woman holds a great fascination for Shashi Deshpande as she deals with the inner working of the female psyche in her works.²¹

2.3 THE WORKS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Roots and Shadows won for the author the Thirumathi Rangammal Prize for the best novel written and published in India for the year 1982-83. Her collection of short stories, *The Legacy*, has had the single distinction of being used as text-book in Columbia University for a course in Modern Literature. And almost all her books have been well received by the reading public, though seldom acclaimed by academics, or anthologized. For her, writing is a vocation, not a profession, and so she seems to have been untouched by the reception accorded to her work.²²

Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. Shashi Deshpande uses irony in the majority of her stories and novels to satirize the morals and manners of our society although she is not an ironist. She employs situational, attitudinal and verbal irony to telling effect. Her language is simple, direct and terse; close to the speaking voice. Sometimes, instead of full and long sentences, she uses words elliptically and minimally and this makes for force.

Six of her major novels, *Roots and Shadows* to *Small Remedies* in the chronological order are chosen for this thesis. The focus in these novels is on heroines or the major women characters. Her heroines are sensitive to the changing times and situations, they revolt against the traditions in their search for freedom. They succeed in

achieving self-identity and independence and choose their partners in life to live with in pursuance of their felt need to lead a family life. They establish the role that they play in the family – a daughter, a wife, a mother and also a career woman. Standing at cross-roads of tradition they do seek a change, but within the cultural norms so as to enable themselves to live with dignity and self-respect.

Indu, the protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*, her first novel, emerges successfully as a woman of determination and does not yield to the dictates of the patriarchal society. She exemplifies a woman in the transitional period that is torn between age-old traditions and individual views. It records how she defies the worn-out traditions, pushes aside all her fears about her imagined inadequacies and asserts herself as an individual.

Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, seeks freedom without impinging on her obligations and responsibilities and achieves harmony in life. It shows how she undergoes a trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life and how boldly she stands up to the situation and audaciously accepts the challenges of her own protégé.

Jaya of *That Long Silence* gradually emerges as a confident individual fully in control of herself and refuses to be led by nose. A stereotyped housewife initially nervous and needing male help and support all the time, she understands that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and

work out her own strategy. It also shows how with this new confidence Jaya becomes emancipated without rejecting outright the cultural and social background.

Urmila of *The Binding Vine* is depicted as an advanced version over the earlier women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's novels as she goes a step further and helps the poor and the downtrodden. She fights for another woman's cause while the others have fought their own battles. It shows how she exhibits her interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils.

Sumi, a deserted wife in *A Matter of Time* is dauntless in her adversity –she evolves herself from utter desolation and bitterness linked up with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. It records how with courage, dignity, responsibility and independent spirit, even after desertion by her husband, she has reached a stage of self sufficiency and self-fulfillment.

Madhu in *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, writes the biography of Savitribai, Indorekar, the aging doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her genius. She has led the most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by a society that practices double standards – one for men and the other for women. Even as a child she was a victim of gross discrimination. Besides, Madhu narrates her own life story and also those of her aunt Leela and Savitribai's daughter, Munni.

A close analysis of her novels leaves no doubt about her genuine concern for women. Her protagonists are acutely aware of their smothered and fettered existence in an orthodox male-dominated society.

2.4.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

Shashi Deshpande's six novels have been critically analysed with a view to understand and appreciate the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity and the responses to the emerging situations in life in the contemporary society. Different kinds of challenges faced by her characters are studied in detail here. The novels have been analysed individually and commented upon in detail.

2.4.2 ROOTS AND SHADOWS

The woman protagonist in *Roots and Shadows*²³ is the new woman Indu. Indu, an educated young woman, is highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent and complete in herself. She brushes aside all the age-old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society. As a motherless child, she was tended by the members of the joint family who never denied her any amount of care and affection. Old Uncle, Kaka, Atya and other family members always cushioned her position in the family. But now she finds the dominant Akka, a senior member and a mother surrogate in the novel, and even the family to be a hindrance in achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. Indu develops an aversion to the

natural biological functions of the female as mother and has apathy towards bearing a child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her.

Defying the traditional role she is expected to play, Indu seeks fulfillment in education and a career. She works as a journalist for a woman's magazine but gives it up out of disgust for writing only about women and their problems and starts working for another magazine.

Indu recollects that she has surrendered herself to her husband Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict. She resorts to deception by putting up a façade of a happy married life which, as she feels, has taken its toll on her personality.

Indu sprang out of the claustrophobic world with courage. She was free. But often to be free is to be lonely. But there is always the beacon light of love. And love leads to the certainty of marriage. But marriage invariably takes you back to the world of women, of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self-abnegation. To love another and to retain yourself intact – is that possible? To assert yourself and not to be aggressive, to escape domination and not to dominate?...Oh yes, you can't escape the shadows. The clearer the light, the darker the shadows. They follow you everywhere. Such were the feelings and thoughts going through the minds of Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists.²⁴

According to Shashi Deshpande, Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, and many women in her other novels had their roots in the same place. Shashi Deshpande herself says:

Life as I saw it in a small town as a child, as a growing girl. Life as I saw it in Mumbai as a woman. And I saw it, the sharp, clean line dividing the world of men from the world of women. As a child I could cross over easily from one world into the other. Often I was the bridge. But as I grew up, I realized the bridge wasn't there any more. I had ceased to be one myself. I was trapped into a world of my own. But, still, for some reason, outside the claustrophobic world of women.²⁵

Indu, motherless and with an absentee father, didn't belong. She was an outsider because of this, so was Shashi Deshpande because of an agnostic father who had broken from orthodoxy and family. But the women all came to Shashi Deshpande. She watched them from a distance.²⁶

The girl who burnt herself because her mother said she had shamed the family by talking to a boy in public. The clever girl taken out of school because she got engaged and 'they' didn't want her to study any more.

The ugly girl with huge feet and hands and a humble fixed smile listening to her mother telling mine "he has approved, but..." The smile wavering at the "but," falling off. All these women came to Shashi Deshpande from the society that she watched from a distance.

“The childless widow, the deserted wife, the scheming woman.

I saw these again with Indu. And now, the knowledge shaped itself into words, ideas...The vulnerability of women. The power of women. The deviousness of women. The helplessness of women. The courage of women.

And the thought – was it mine or Indu’s? – I won’t belong to that world, I won’t be like them, my God, I don’t want to be like them.”²⁷

In *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande portrays an independent woman from contemporary society defying traditional roles and holding her womanhood responsible for closing many adventurous doors to her. This woman Indu came to Shashi Deshpande from the society in which Shashi Deshpande lived.

2.4.3 THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*²⁸ undergoes a similar trauma like Indu in *Roots and Shadows*. She confronts reality and in the end realises that the dark she feared really holds no terrors. Saru is a ‘two-in-one woman.’ A doctor in the day time and a trapped animal at night. She wants to be free and have an identity of her own. She longs to break away from the rigid traditional norms. She hates her parental home, yet the novel begins with Saru visiting her father after a gap of fifteen years. On hearing through a friend about her mother’s death a month ago, Saru wants to visit her father’s house from where she had left as a young woman. Defying her parents to marry the man Manohar (known as diminutive Manu, a name no doubt carrying overtones of the legendary patriarchal law-giver who saw the world from a male

centered perspective) whom she loved. She now returned to it as a well-established doctor and a mother of two children more out of an urge to escape from the hell of life she is passing through. She appears to be confused, hopeless, dull almost thoughtless and a recluse.

Years on Sarita still remembers her mother's bitter words uttered when as a little girl she was unable to save her younger brother from drowning. Now, her mother is dead and Sarita returns to the family home, ostensibly to take care of her father, but in reality to escape the nightmarish brutality her husband inflicts on her every night. In the quiet of her old father's company Sarita reflects on the events of her life: her stultifying small town childhood, her domineering mother, her marriage to the charismatic young poet Manohar (who turns vicious when he realizes his career is going nowhere and that his wife has overtaken him professionally), her children...As she struggles with her emotions and anxieties, Sarita gradually realizes that there is more to life than dependency on marriage, parents and other such institutions – and she resolves to use her new found truths to make a better life for herself. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a tremendously powerful portrayal of one woman's fight to survive in a world that offers no easy outs.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has childhood scars. She hates her mother to such an extent that she says, "If you're a woman, I don't want to be one." Saru's mother shows gender difference in her treatment of her son Dhruva and daughter.

“He’s different. He’s a boy” – these words establish the traditional Indian mother against whom Saru has to rebel all her life.

The childhood experience of watching her brother sink into water and die gives her a sense of guilt that she is responsible for the death of her brother. It is enhanced by her mother’s words, “You killed your brother...why didn’t you die?” which drive Saru to hate her mother.

Saru rebels against her mother by going to Mumbai to study medicine. The hostel life is a kind of “rebirth” into a totally different world where you don’t have to stay outside for “those three days, you are no longer an ‘untouchable’; you can even talk about it;” When Saru falls in love with Manohar, a boy from a lower caste, again she defies the authority of her mother.

Saru’s marriage is a means to get away from her mother and her home. The departure of the heroine from the mother is the first step towards autonomy; for, the mother is the first pedagogue of the restrictions on the woman. Marriage, the promised end in a traditional society, in feminist fiction becomes only another enclosure that restricts the movement towards autonomy and self-realization.²⁹

There are recurrent images of enclosure in *Roots and Shadows* as well as in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Indu constantly speaks of the dark room where so many women had given birth. Saru is reminded of a room whose doors are closed

whenever she looks at her daughter, Renu. Saru, even when she comes back home, “felt herself enclosed.”

When she enters into her room, she finds male clothes hanging on the wall and realizes that she has no room of her own. The feeling of being enclosed is associated with the mother’s house and the protagonist wants to escape from the enclosure, as revealed in Indu’s dreams. The image of the enclosed walls suggests the suffocation these women undergo not only in their parental homes but the homes they have chosen as refuge.³⁰

The novel is presented in four parts and even in the first part, all the important issues – bitterness towards the mother, insecurity of Manu, Saru’s relationship with Manu and children, Dhruva’s death – are touched upon. The rest of the three parts elaborate Saru’s introspection of and her reaction to different issues touched upon in the first part.

Shashi Deshpande works with a dubious world that falls between reality and unreality. The truth behind Saru being the murderess of Dhruva, Manu being the predator and Saru the prey is a matter that lies in this realm between reality and unreality. The italicized description of Saru’s traumatic but dream-like experience when she slowly recognizes the predator to be her own husband defines the dubious area better. It also lays all the cards on the table, takes away the element of shock and the reader is left with nothing to anticipate about the monstrous problem. The

second part too begins with a dream suggestive of the uncertainty of the destination and the inability to know what lies in store as she drifts by. In the course of Part IV there is a reference to another dream that evokes the road image again with “something, somebody awful, frightening” at the end. But she has no way out and has to proceed. The dream suggests the definite need to proceed and confront whatever is at the end.

Though the novel deals with an uncertain situation, Shashi Deshpande makes use of effective concrete images to drive home the reality and gravity of the problem. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* presents the inner drama of Saru that has a lot to do with the past. Hence narration is introspective sliding across the past and the present through effective “quick cuts.” Occasionally, Shashi Deshpande sidetracks into a bit of philosophizing on human life, grief, happiness, pain, man’s aloneness and so on, and these digressions make the novel a bit too wordy. She never leaves anything unsaid to evoke rich suggestions. Some Indian elements like the son’s importance in the family, girls getting importance only during haldi-kumkums, a woman possessed by Devi, find a natural place in the novel that deals with a woman’s status and the dichotomy within her personality.

2.4.4 THAT LONG SILENCE

*That Long Silence*³¹, this Sahitya Academy award-winning novel tells a haunting tale of how Jaya, who is disillusioned with her marriage and her life, rediscovers herself.

Who is Jaya? She is Mohan's wife. She is Rahul's and Rati's mother. She was a writer who had given up serious writing, and had taken up writing a weekly column on Seeta, a plump, good-humoured, pea brained but shrewd and devious woman. Deshpande's Jaya was a woman who did not ask questions, because she had learnt early in her life that when women ask questions - particularly questions like, "Why, why this injustice?" they would simply hang heavily around in the air, refusing to go away, causing eyebrows around her to raise at her audacity in asking such questions. Jaya was related to mad Kusum who had killed herself by jumping into a well, and had died not by drowning but of broken neck as there was no water in the well. Jaya was sure of her sanity as long as Kusum had lived, because if Kusum was mad, then Jaya must have been "normal". After Kusum's suicide, Jaya does not know any more who she is. Is she just Mohan's wife who had fragmented herself, who had cut off the bits that had refused to be Mohan's wife? (15-16)

Is she like the sparrow in the bedtime story of the wise sparrow and the foolish crow, which she had heard as a kid? That story goes like this: There was a foolish crow who built his house of dung, and a wise sparrow who built hers of wax.... And when it rained, the house of wax stood firm, while the crow's house was washed away. And so the story goes on, the foolish credulous crow standing out there in the rain, begging to be let in, while Sister Sparrow spins out her excuses...till finally she says, "Come in, you're all wet aren't you, poor fellow?" And she points to the pan on which she has just made the chapatties. "Warm yourself there," she says. And the silly crow hops on to it and is burnt to death.

Deshpande uses this story to paint vividly how the life of a woman like Jaya is. She says that their life's basis can be summarized as, "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out of the rest of the world, and you're safe." For all outside appearances hers was a happy family, her husband was in a top position, they had two children - one boy and one girl - and she was yet another wife and mother whose life centered around her family and her home - nothing more. (15-16)

Jaya's character in this novel is a magnificent creation. Deshpande has portrayed brilliantly the loneliness of a woman living silently in a cage called marriage. Like a film running in reverse, the story of Jaya is unfolded for the readers. It is a film in which blame cannot be pointed at any single character for the despair that seeps through the many layers of the story. If at all there is any blame, it is collective in nature, and all the characters - Jaya's mother, father, uncles, aunts, grand mothers, husband, children, and most significantly Jaya herself - are responsible for the silence that pervades Jaya's life. The reason why this novel is like a breath of fresh air among writings with similar theme is its ending. Contrary to expectation, Jaya, armed with her new knowledge, does not turn her back to her marriage. Instead, she marches ahead with renewed vigour to breathe new life into it. According to Jaya discovering one's self does not mean to stand aloof from the rest of the world. Deshpande says through this novel that the solution to problems within relationships does not lie in walking away from them, but rather in rebuilding the relationships in such a way as to give little place for problems to crop up.

2.4.5 THE BINDING VINE

*The Binding Vine*³² was published in India by Penguin in 1992 (republished in 1998), and nearly a decade later it is published in USA by the Feminist Press.

The Binding Vine is the story of Urmi. Urmi the mother who has just lost her baby daughter, Urmi the childhood friend (and sister-in-law) of Vanaa, Urmi the daughter of the beautiful Inni and grand daughter of the beloved Baiajji and Urmi the one comforting light in the life of Shakutai.

The narrator in *The Binding Vine* is the clever, sharp – tongued Urmi, grieving over the death of her baby daughter and surrounded by, but rebuffing, the care of her mother and her childhood friend, Vanaa. Instead, she becomes caught up in the discovery of her long-dead mother – in –law’s poetry, written when she was a young woman subjected to rape in her marriage; and in Kalpana, a young woman hanging between life and death in a hospital ward, also the victim of rape. Yet in this web of loss and despair are the glimmerings of hope. Shashi Deshpande explores with compassion the redemptive powers of love.

The novel begins just after Anu's, Urmi's baby girl's death. Everybody around Urmi tries to help her, yet nobody knows how to. Vanaa, who has been her closest friend, stays at her side constantly, reminding her of many incidences from their common past, hoping to get Urmi out of her despair. It is not that Vanaa thinks that reminding Urmi of her courage when she fell off a bicycle will now give her courage

to face Anu's loss. Vanaa too is desperate, and wants to help Urmi. In fact it is through Vanaa's reminiscing about Mira that Urmi's healing process begins. Urmi gets Mira's poems out of the trunk, which had sat for decades in the attic, gathering dust, and starts reading them. It is while reading these poems written by a college going teenager Mira, who was married off to a man whom she could not love, that Urmi realises the various facets of pain that many a woman has to bear. Very often silently. Mostly without having any option.³³

The healing process which begins by reading Mira's poems continues when Urmi accidentally meets Shakutai in the hospital where Vanaa works as a medical social worker. Shakutai's eldest daughter Kalpana has been brought to the hospital after she was brutally beaten up and raped. Urmi feels compelled to help Shakutai, to listen to her, to keep her company. During the long wait in which Kalpana lies in coma, Urmi makes a bold, modern, and a very humanistic statement in that she tries to convince Shakutai that it was not Kalpana who did anything wrong, it is not that she invited trouble upon herself by dressing up, by painting her lips and nails, but it is Kalpana who is terribly wronged. For a long time Urmi herself does not understand her need to come and sit with Shakutai, whose world is so very different from her own.

It is when Shakutai asks her repeatedly, 'What shall I do, Urmila?' - mirroring her own anguished cry of how she would survive Anu's death -, that Urmi thinks of the awesome courage of the few who tried to find an answer to such questions. She thinks that detachment, love, brotherhood, non-violence - they're just words. We

are absorbed in the daily routine of living, that the main urge is always to survive. And as Mira once wrote: "Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me, I am terrified by the thought of dying, of ceasing to be" the main urge human beings have is always to survive, and in surviving one looks for the spring of life, one constantly searches for love, for support from other human beings.³⁴

As much as *The Binding Vine* is the story of Urmi, it is also the story of Mira, and of Shakutai. Mira is the binding vine between Urmi and Vanaa. Vanaa's father's first wife, she died giving birth to Kishore, Urmi's husband. Writing poetry was for Mira not only a way of finding solace in her life but also a way of protesting against the way society works. When during the marriage, her name is changed to Nirmala, a protest arises in Mira at the loss of her identity.

And then again Mira is the symbol of the relationship between daughters and mothers, all over the world. She has one question she desperately wanted to ask her mother, a question she never asked: "Mother, why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?"³⁵

Then we have a sub-plot in the novel. Shakutai, an attendant at a school, is raising her three children all alone. Her elder daughter Kalpana has been raped, brutally beaten up, and is lying in coma in the hospital. Shakutai is torn between her motherly feelings for Kalpana, and at the same time is afraid of the dishonour this incident would bring to the family. Once she says, 'She was a good girl, I swear to you, my Kalpana was a good girl.' At other times she talks as if the girl is to blame for what happened to her. (That) it is her fault, that she was stubborn, she was self-

willed, she dressed up, she painted her lips and nails and so this happened to her. Shakuntal mirrors millions of women in India who are torn between genuine love for their children and at the same time are ruled by the ever present scepter of family honour.

Urmila draws society's attention to her protest, and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. Urmila is seen, at the end of the novel, recollecting the bonds of love that provide the "Springs of Life" (203) for human survival. She is not a rebel against the system because she believes that things are gradually improving though at a slow pace.

For example, with just four lines of Mira's poetry,

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too

twist brocade tassels round her fingers

and tremble, fearing the coming

of the dark-clouded, engulfing night?³⁶

Deshpande does not just open up a rich world of Indian traditions and mythology but she also shows the anguish felt by an unwilling wife who knows what the coming of the night inevitably brings for her.

Similar to her other early novels, the world Deshpande depicts here is mainly a women's world. It is not that men are totally absent, but their presence is primarily

felt by the power they wield over their wives, their daughters. It is a world in which women suffer numerous kinds of losses, and have to learn to cope with these losses.

The Binding Vine occupies a special niche amongst Deshpande's works. It is the only novel in which the author has used poems - beautiful ones - to tell a story of marital discordance, to paint a picture of traditions in India, and to raise a voice of protest against the ways of the society.³⁷

The Binding Vine is a book in which Deshpande opens up new worlds, erects bridges between modern and ancient India, with few lines of poetry.³⁸

2.4.6 A MATTER OF TIME

Women's lives in India, their problems, and the domestic sphere have been consuming themes of most of Deshpande's work. *A Matter of Time*, first published in India in 1996, re-emphasizes Deshpande's passion for these issues as she weaves a simple, ingenuous tale of the contradictions of male ambivalence and cruelty, female stoicism and shame, and human desire and desertion.

Set in present-day Karnataka, *A Matter of Time*³⁹ explores the intricate relationships within an extended family, encompassing three generations of men and women. At the heart of the novel is eighteen-year-old Aru, struggling to understand her father's 'desertion' and her mother's 'indifference', and in the course of a few turbulent months, forging entirely unexpected relationships that are destined to change the course of her life...⁴⁰

Sumi the main woman character of the novel is different from the women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's earlier novels. Sumi is gradually emancipating herself as a new and independent woman who has evolved from utter desolation and bitterness linked with invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and family responsibilities. Gopal's desertion makes her experience the trauma of a deserted wife and the anguish of an isolated partner.

When Gopal walks out on her for reasons even he cannot articulate, Sumi returns with their three daughters, Aru, Charu and Seema, to the shelter of the Big House, where her parents, Kalyani and Shripati, live in a strange silence: they have not spoken to each other in the last thirty-five years. As the mystery of this long silence is unravelled, a horrifying story of loss and agony is laid bare, a story that seems to be repeating itself in Sumi's life...

The lives of three generations of women living in their family home, "the Big House," seem to be ruled by similar patterns of destiny. In fact, destiny is the word of choice of one of the central characters, the grandmother with a loving heart whose sharp tongue masks the pain of past scandals and secrets. Deshpande crafts a suspenseful story about why Kalyani was forced into an arranged marriage with her maternal uncle Shripati, and about the tragedy that led Shripati to desert his wife. Shripati returns to live in an isolated room in the Big House, but ceases talking to Kalyani. No wonder, then, thirty-five years later, Kalyani is devastated by another man's desertion-this time that of her son-in-law, Gopal, who walks out on her

daughter, Sumi, and away from a much-coveted job to find an answer to life's emptiness.⁴¹

This inexplicable act sets in motion a process of change, a fulfillment of destiny, and an unravelling of age-old secrets harboured by the extended family. Sumi returns to the Big House with her three daughters, just as her mother, Kalyani, had done with her own daughters years before. The Big House, the only enduring witness of the ever-turning wheel of karma, is always ready to enfold the "victims" in its cavernous bosom.

Although Deshpande's description of the gardens of the Big House is sensuous, she shies away from letting her characters examine their intimate relationships with each other. They are more comfortable solving psychological conundrums than unravelling the sexual tensions that lurk, underscoring the taboo nature of the subjects of sex and the sensuous in modern Indian society. *A Matter of Time*, instead, dwells on the seeming vagaries of destiny, or time. Melodrama often interrupts the commonplace, and Deshpande's heroines find ways to support each other in the shifting sands of pain and pleasure, and to re-establish their dominance over domestic terrain. They do not remain victims, despite their unquestioning acceptance of male flight from the family. And the men are transformed from betrayers into objects of self-pity, trapped in a morass of human flaws and psychic distress.⁴²

Most of Deshpande's heroines, even as they overcome familial obstacles, rarely stray out of the domestic arena. For a while, Sumi seems to be succeeding in gaining a small degree of personal independence. She starts teaching, writes a play that earns plaudits, and even learns to drive a scooter, in a land where few women are seen in the driver's seat. But how far will Sumi's destiny allow her to go? And is it just a matter of time before another generation of women repeats the family history? Deshpande, one of India's critically acclaimed, award-winning writers, deftly lets her characters alternate between the first-person voice when delineating the present, to the third-person narrative when outlining the past. The story is enriched by mythological analogies and words and idioms from the Indian languages of Kannada and Marathi.

Does man's destiny change when he engages in a bewildering search for life's meaning? Can a woman's ambivalent attempt to clear self-doubt transform her destiny? Shashi Deshpande raises these age-old questions in her book *A Matter of Time* about women whose lives are dominated by the shame and guilt caused by the actions of their spouses.

2.4.7 SMALL REMEDIES

Small Remedies is another great novel Shashi Deshpande has written since *That Long Silence* for which she won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1988. Each of her novels is special and offers food for thought on human relationships and emotions. Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears

and feelings experienced by humans, by women. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind. Recognizing oneself in her characters, one does not feel lonely in the world anymore. Reading her novels and stories is thus an immensely satisfying experience, as reading becomes a healing process.⁴³

*Small Remedies*⁴⁴ is the story of Madhu, a lonely daughter, a sensitive and capable woman, a very vulnerable wife and mother. It is the story of Madhu, who, faced the terrible vacuum caused by the death of Adit, her only son, sets out on a long and lonely journey in her attempt to come to terms with her loss. Madhu's healing process occurs when she is confronted with the lives of two other women, both brave in their own ways. One is, Savitribai Indorekar, a star singer of the Gwalior gharana, a singer who wrote headlines not only through her music but also through the way she lived her life. The other one is Leela, Madhu's aunt, with whom she had spent her youth and adulthood.⁴⁵

Accepting the offer made by Chandru, a family friend, Madhu takes a brave step out of her desperate situation, and comes to Bhavanipur to write the biography of Savitribai. In talking to Savitribai, she hopes to forget her despair and anguish. She knew Savitribai from her childhood, when the musician had moved into the house next door, with her lover and tabalaji, Ghulam Saab, and their only daughter, Munni. Savitribai, a daughter-in-law from a respected and conservative brahmin family, had given up that life to learn music to devote herself to this art. That Munni rejects the name given to her by her parents and calls herself Meenakshi is just symptomatic of her rejection of the life led by her parents and her yearning for

respectability. Madhu and Munni become friends. Munni enchants and rules Madhu. Later Munni succeeds in breaking the umbilical cord, returns to her grand parents' family, and finally gets a new identity as Shailaja Joshi. Much later when Madhu meets Munni in Mumbai in a bus, Munni does not want to recognize her, and does not want to be recognized as Munni. She had obviously tried to make a clean break from her past. Madhu is perplexed when she is confronted with the fact that it was not just the daughter who denies the mother, the mother too has forgotten about her only daughter, at least apparently. Listening to Bai, Madhu wonders how one can reject one's own child, and one's own mother. She realizes that "Bai lost her daughter, but her life moved on. Even today, sick, old, dying, childless, when everything seems to have ended for her, she's not wholly bereft."

Madhu realized the special sort of woman her aunt Leela was on listening to Hari and Lata, Hari's wife, with whom she is staying in Bhavanipur. Madhu knows that Leela was the black sheep of the family. A widow who remarried. And, what was worse, infinitely worse, married a Christian man, Joe. But she thinks of Leela mainly as a kind and loving aunt, "who took me into her home (after my father died) and was always with me after that." Hari (whose grand mother was one of Leela's sisters) thinks of Leela as an extraordinary woman, as a woman who participated in the '42 Quit India movement, who went underground, who was responsible for many daring deeds. Now Madhu understands that both Savitribai Indorekar, and Leela had tried to break out of the shackles, but they paid the price for their attempts to break out.⁴⁶

It is trying to unravel the mystery of who the real Savitribai Indorekar is - is she just the star musician, is she the brave brahmin woman who dared to leave her traditional home and go after her dreams? Is she the unfortunate mother who rejected her own daughter and was rejected by the same? Madhu understands that truth is something beyond the words by which one tries to portray it. Her attempt at writing the biography tells her how little the idea of truth is connected with words, how much of it lies in our connections to the unseen world, and that whether we know it or not, we are always conscious of. It is then that she understands how wrong it was of her to tell Som, her husband, what had happened to her as a fifteen year old girl, when an uncontrollable impulse had made her body respond to the comforting hug of a friend of her father. Sharing the memory of this one incident in which she had sex with a man who was old enough to be her father, an incident which drove the man to hang himself, Madhu realises what a blow she had given to Som's image of her as a chaste and untouched person. And she sees her loving, generous and kind husband turn into a savage, haunted and haunting one. It was one such endless scene between them when Som was punishing her (or was it Madhu herself who was punishing herself) that Adit walks into the room trying to find out what was happening between his parents. On being told, "Go away, Adit", he goes away, never to return. It was the time in which Mumbai was rocked with religious violence. A bomb placed in a bus blows up Adit and Munni to smithereens. The pages describing the uncertainty of where her son is, the waiting for him through the violence ridden days, Madhu's search for him on the crowded streets of

the city even when Som tries to tell her that Adit is dead, and her final acceptance of the inevitable truth are some of the most poignant scenes in Indian literature.⁴⁷

Madhu's wound starts healing finally, when she meets a young family celebrating a upanayanam ceremony in a very simple manner in the Bhavani temple in Bhavanipur, and later when in the same temple she listens to an all night music performance by Hasina. On being asked by the mother to bless the small boy, Madhu thinks:

May you live long. But what blessing can contend against our mortality? Mustard seeds to protect us from evil, blessings to confer long life - nothing works. And yet we go on. Simple remedies? No, they're desperate remedies and we go on with them because, in truth, there is nothing else.⁴⁸

'Sukhi bhava'', she says, finally, to the child. It is as if she realises that all the remedies one thinks of using are too tiny, minutely small, when confronted with the enormous size of the diseases they are supposed to cure and to heal.

The healing process is accentuated when Hasina, Bai's student for the past fifteen years and her lone companion, gives a concert in the temple in Bhavanipur. Returning home after the concert Madhu finds a letter from Som waiting for her. Som has said, "Come home. We need to be together at this time." Madhu knows that this is how it should be. That she should be with Som, that they have to recreate

their son, to invoke his presence and make his existence real. Because, it's not just living children who need to be free, the dead clamour for release as well. Madhu then understands that memory, capricious and unreliable though it is, ultimately carries its own truth within it. That as long as there is memory, there's always the possibility of retrieval, as long as there is memory, loss is never total. It is a great and definite step towards the healing process.⁴⁹

It is not only in these details, in these meditative moments which heal that *Small Remedies* carries the unmistakable stamp of being the work of Shashi Deshpande. Like Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Madhu also leaves the home in which she has lived since her marriage, and tries to solve her problems on her own. Similar to the earlier novels *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, here also it is death that draws the final stroke. It reveals the vulnerability of human existence, of human relationships. That final blow comes in a sense as a release from a cozy and foggy existence, and sets Madhu on the search for answers to her eternal questions. It is also the first step towards realizing that any healing process has to start within one's own self, that no keeping of Ganeshas in niches, no waving of clenched fists holding mustard seeds, no muttering of incantations can help to heal the wound, to ward off the evil. The speciality of Deshpande's philosophy is that though each individual has to solve his problems on his own, it does not mean that he has to reject all relationships in life. Her protagonists need to be on their own to come to terms with life, but once they have achieved that, they return to their normal life, fortified by their newly found wisdom. Madhu also returns at the end to her husband, Som.⁵⁰

There is also a tension in the book, the kind to which one is accustomed to when reading Deshpande. The plot is never revealed at once, and more questions are posed than answered. This lends such tautness to the story line that one can hardly put down the book without finishing it, neither can one read it at a stretch, as there is so much to understand, to digest, to savour.

It is the hallmark of Deshpande's characters that whatever happens in their lives, her protagonists do not lose hope, and learn to survive finally. Against all odds, suffering and pain seem to be the necessary steps one has to take so as to be able to develop one's self, one's individuality. Deshpande's women are no stereotypes, no exotic, dusky Indian women, but they are individuals who have been baptized in fire.

With total control over her unwieldy material, she weaves a fabric of intricate design in this novel in which music forms the organizing strand. At the centre of the sprawling narrative is a woman called Madhu Saptarishi engaged in writing the biography of the singer Savitribai Indorekar, a living legend of the Gwalior gharana.

However, there is a recurring motif in many of her books - death as a factor which finally liberates, or in general, darkness of the unknown which finally transforms itself into light. This liberation comes from within. It was so with Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Urmi in *The Binding Vine*, and it is also true of Madhu in *Small Remedies*. It is as if all of these characters needed a

strong kick to be shaken out of their placid existences to discover the stuff they were actually made of.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists also change a lot when they marry, losing part of their identity and self-confidence. This happened in the case of all her main protagonists like Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Urmi in *The Binding Vine*, Madhu in *Small Remedies* and Sumi in *A Matter of Time*. But all of them end up becoming complete human beings. In other words, her main characters have an incredible inner strength. None of them give up, none of them are failures at the end. These characters are particularly impressive because they contradict the popular saying that women are weak.

The basic point which all the women protagonists share needs to be highlighted: they all are ultimately appendages to men. Though in the beginning, they question the social mores, yet due to their emotional pull towards the traditions, they finally try their best to conform to their roles.⁵¹

2.5 CONCLUSION

The basic theme around which the plots of Shashi Deshpande's novels revolve is a middle-class educated woman caught between the modern trends and the traditional practices. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu, a young ambitious girl, working for women's magazines, is confused about her concept of love, marriage, career and her own life. She marries for love but is herself not sure whether it is real love or just an attempt to show the elder people how correct she was in taking a decision for herself. The

novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* analyzes the complex relationship between a successful doctor, Sarita (Saru), and her professionally frustrated and irritated husband. Just because the wife has a better job, there is a very obvious tension between them, that subsequently leads them to separate from each other. In the novel *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist, is so much confused about the whole set up and the happenings around that she finds no other way but silence as her means of communication.

In the later three novels, *The Binding Vine*, *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*, Shashi Deshpande gives an insight into the middle class Indian women who feel oppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal influence and socialization. Here she tries to provide new ideals for better man-woman relationship, and bring about a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. She tries to show through the characters of Sumi in *A Matter of Time* and Urmi in *The Binding Vine*; and the characters of Madhu, Savitribai Indorekar and aunt Leela in *Small Remedies* that modernity is the assertion of the independent individual identity. After having passively played out their socially ordained roles her protagonists move out of their cocooned cloistered selves to assert their individuality as women with empowerment.

In these novels, it is notable that the men characters are not very expressive. Perhaps Shashi Deshpande wanted to highlight the problems of women more than the attitude of the men folk. These men keep silent about the issues and, at the same time, they expect submissiveness from their spouses. Without mentioning and

discussing the matters, they take for granted that the women will follow them. For example, in *That Long Silence*, Mohan, Jaya's husband, takes it for granted that Jaya is going to follow his decision. When caught in malpractice, he makes the wife and children responsible for it, showing that he cares for them so much that he went out of his way to get things done: "I've always put you and the children first." (12) Mohan explains to assume Jaya's company with him but he never looks into her demands and neither does she communicate anything directly to Mohan and hence there always remains a gap between husband and wife and silence prevails in the house.⁵²

The narration, in all the novels, shifts from present to the past covering the whole life span of the protagonists. All the time they are brooding over their fate, questioning themselves what they really are and ultimately trying to adapt themselves to the surroundings. The novels end with an optimistic note with the hope of some positive action in the future. For example, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* waits for her husband to come to take her back and start their life afresh; Indu in *Roots and Shadows* plans to go back to her husband and tell him everything about herself, and Jaya in *That Long Silence* interprets Mohan's letter in positive terms and hopes for the better.⁵³

The six women protagonists – Indu, Saru, Jaya, Urmila, Sumi and Madhu – find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by the society and attempt to assert their individuality.

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CHAPTER – III

Women Characters in The Early Novels of Shashi

Deshpande

- 3.1 Shashi Deshpande's Early Novels
 - 3.2.1 Roots and Shadows
 - 3.2.2 The Character of Indu in *Roots and Shadows*
 - 3.2.3 The Image of Woman in *Roots and Shadows*
 - 3.3.1 The Dark Holds No Terrors
 - 3.3.2 The Character of Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*
 - 3.3.3 The Image of Woman in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*
 - 3.4.1 That Long Silence
 - 3.4.2 The Character of Jaya in *That Long Silence*
 - 3.4.3 The Image of Woman in *That Long Silence*
- 3.5 Her Early Novels: Comment

CHAPTER- III

WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

3.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S EARLY NOVELS

Shashi Deshpande has written eight novels and four collections of short stories. This chapter deals with her earlier novels and studies women's issues in these novels. Trapped between tradition and modernity, we find her women protagonists undergoing great mental trauma in their quest for identity before they affirm themselves in these novels.

Roots and Shadows, her first novel, depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male dominated and tradition-bound society. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel, is all about male ego wherein the male refuses to play a second fiddle role in marriage. *That Long Silence*, her third novel, is about self-doubts and fears which Jaya undergoes till she affirms herself.

A detailed study of these three novels will throw more light on their nature.

3.2.1 ROOTS AND SHADOWS

Roots and Shadows, Shashi Deshpande's first full length novel, is about the struggle of the protagonist Indu who is a representative of the educated middle-class. It describes her assertion of her individuality to achieve freedom leading to her confrontation with her family and the male-dominated society. Feeling smothered in an oppressive male-dominated and tradition-bound society, she attempts to explore her inner self to assert her individuality. It tells about Indu's painful self-analysis. Many other themes form part of the novel like the theme of bohemianism and the sorry state of women.

Indu returns to her ancestral home after a gap of eleven years, which is occasioned by her cousin Mini's marriage. She leaves home at the age of eighteen to marry the man she loves. She returns on being summoned by Akka, the domineering matriarch, as Akka is on her deathbed. Akka has made her sole heiress to her property which the others resent. Deshpande presents with vivid details a large Maharashtrian Brahmin household, and the myriad women characters, their greed, jealousy, hopes, fears, disappointments, and their anguish.

Among the myriad women characters is the old tyrannical matriarch Akka. She is rich and childless, and decides to stay in her brother's house after her husband's death where she wields absolute control with her venomous tongue. It reduces Indu's grandfather Kaka into a tongue-tied, submissive character.

Akka, representative of the old order, is so obsessed with untouchability that she refuses to move into a hospital for fear of getting polluted by the touch of nurses belonging to other castes. She is also very particular about how a girl should conduct herself in society.

However Indu cannot break herself free from the clutches of tradition and realizes that despite her education and exposure, she was no different from the women that circumambulated the tulsi plant to increase their husbands' life span. Even her husband who is apparently an educated modern man is a typical Indian husband for whom she has to remain passive and submissive.

All along Indu has been playing the role of wife to perfection to keep Jayant happy and satisfied. Despite her reluctance, she has to continue the frustrating job of writing for the magazine just to keep Jayant satisfied. She tells Jayant about her disillusionment with a social worker who was given an award who says: "That's life! What can one person do against the whole system! We need the money, don't we? Don't forget we have a long way to go." (19) Thus, she continues to write what suits the magazine and not her own conscience. She compromises against her conscience with the values of a hypocrite society where success is counted sweetest. Had Akka not called her, she wouldn't have had time enough to think about her identity and selfhood, which she had effaced just to prove that her marriage was a success. Her realization is manifest in her private conversation with Naren her cousin to whom she bares all.

Indu, who had considered herself smart, educated, independent and clever, comes to the painful conclusion that she was no better than her Kakis and Atyas.

Several other incidents in the novel prove Indu's poignant awareness of the inequality all Indian women had to reconcile with under compulsion. The drudgery of performing the countless household chores makes their life miserable.

She was indoctrinated to play the role of a meek and submissive daughter, wife, and mother. She tells Naren: "As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl they had told me I must be meek and submissive," because "you are a female."(174) The beautiful world of womanhood is thrust upon her brutally and gracelessly, when she is told, "You're a woman now...You can have babies yourself."(87) She begins to hate herself as "for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything."(87)

She is painfully aware that she is not different from the women at home. All the time she misses Jayant and wants him to be beside her. She feels miserable and incomplete in Jayant's absence. Jayant who hates any display of passion on Indu's part denies her even the most basic sexual need in marriage. Even in the privacy of their bedroom, she is not let to shed her inhibitions. She tells Naren: "Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly and says, 'no, not now', when I had taken the initiative."(91) Being so snubbed by Jayant she feels humiliated and disillusioned. In a choked voice, she tells Naren: "When I'm like that he turns away

from me. I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive. I am still dead."(92) So her lot is not much different from the other household women. Like them she too has becomes "still and dead."

She rebels to become complete and independent, but painfully realizes that she is neither of the two. She thinks, "This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete myself."(34) Deshpande has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of Indian women. The one is representative of Narmada, Kamala Kaki, Sumitra Kaki, Atya, and Sunanda Atya; and the other is represented by Indu. Indu's academic achievement, economic independence and her independent attitude mean nothing to the women of older generation, as their only aim in life was "to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren."(128) Indu tries to follow her own conscience but fails miserably under combined pressure of the tradition-bound society and the fear born of stigma attached to such an independent attitude and existence.

In Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* much critical controversy has been raised about the author's motives regarding the incestuous relation between Indu and her cousin, Naren. It is Naren to whom she tells every little detail of her married life and he makes her take the most daring step of surrendering herself to him not once but twice in the novel. She indulges in the act with much wild abandon and cherishes it later without any guilt consciousness.

She resolves not to disclose this to Jayant as she thinks it had nothing to do with him. This assertion of her self has sparked off contradictory remarks from the reviewers.¹

A man takes sexual liberties with impunity and a woman indulging in the same is looked upon with shock and branded an adulteress. Deshpande probably is trying to shake the readers out of their complacency by thrusting in their face the double standards being practiced in a patriarchal social setup.

Deshpande also highlights the problems that middle-class families encounter in their search for suitable grooms for their daughters. The case here is of Padmini, another character in the novel. Like Padmini, for the other Indian girls also, it is marriage that matters and not the man. The search for a man is so difficult that parents become anxious and desperate and at one nod from the man settle the marriage. Indu wonders about Padmini's acceptance of a man who was no match for her.²

Deshpande raises the seminal issue of an arranged marriage if it was any good. Indu reflects Deshpande's views that an arranged marriage was nothing "but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue?"(3)

Here, the novelist exposes the hypocrisy and double standards prevalent in society. The easily available man like Naren is not considered a suitable match, instead they

pay a handsome dowry for one who has nothing but his family's social status. Shashi Deshpande does not make any sweeping anti-dowry statements but raises the issue subtly to be pondered over by the readers.

Indu's experiences teach her that one should listen to the voice of one's conscience and be faithful to it. Freedom within marriage is possible if one dares to do what one believes is right and tenaciously follow it. This alone can bring harmony and fulfillment in life.

Indu decides to go back to Jayant with the hope that she would do what she thinks correct and not be dishonest to her inner self.

3.2.2 THE CHARACTER OF INDU IN ROOTS AND SHADOWS

Indu, a central character in *Roots and Shadows* shares the fate of Sisyphus. Her crime is the revelation of long hidden inner world of women in general and Indian women in particular. Her suffering is deeper and deadlier than Sisyphus's as he was to roll up only one stone, while she is rolling up many, that is, the ideal of independence and completeness, the concepts of self, sin, love, the ideal of detachment and freedom.

The writer has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian society. To the first orthodox group a female could "neither assert, demand nor proclaim,"

and an ideal woman is one who “sheds her ‘I’, who loses her identity in her husband’s.” According to this group, a woman has to “adapt herself to her circumstances and environment.” Against this age-old set up of woman’s life is placed the new one represented by Indu. She views and reviews the concepts of self, sin, faith, love and other values. She has visions and revisions of her ideal of detachment and freedom and tries to achieve them. She tries to see and listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But in all her efforts she fails miserably either due to the impact of the sanskar or fear and timidity or all these together.³

Indu is educated and highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent and complete in her self, but then she finds Akka and the family to be a hindrance in attaining independence and completeness. Akka doesn’t allow her to meet the boy in the lone corner of the library and speaks ill of her mother. Indu leaves the house and later marries Jayant, a man of her own choice. Thus she leaves one house and enters another to have independence, completeness and joy. But soon she realizes the futility of her search.

Although she is different from other orthodox women she also wishes that Jayant should be with her forever. Only her reasons for thinking so are different. She had also aspired to assert her ‘I’. But after marriage it occurs to her that whatever she was doing, like, looking in the mirror, dressing, undressing, she was doing for Jayant. The paradox is that she is not happy with Jayant, but she cannot live without him. She has achieved completeness with Jayant, but she does not want it.

At one point in the novel when Naren tries to make love with her, she declares: "I'm essentially monogamous. For me, it's one man and one man alone." But later she offers herself to him twice. And then the question hangs how she will view this act of adultery. After the act, she goes to her bed, but then deliberately avoids sleeping as that would erase what happened between Naren and her. She thinks it no sin, no crime to make love with another person.⁴

Later on, she starts musing over the reasons for giving Naren her body. As a child she was told to be obedient, meek and submissive. Then she had laughed at the older women and sworn she would never pretend to do what she was not. But after marriage, to her great shock and surprise, she found that Jayant expected her to submit and took her submission for granted. She surrendered to him step by step in the name of love. Then she realizes that it was not for love but because she did not want conflict. Her pathetic state is revealed thus:

That I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success... And so I went on lying, even to myself...⁵

According to Indu one should listen to the dictates of one's own conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as action. This fact makes her see herself as a sinner and causes deep suffering.

Another fondly cherished dream, an ideal of Indu, is to attain the state of “detachment.” Her mind keeps harping on this theme of detachment and loneliness. However, she wonders whether she would ever reach the stage of “no passions, no emotions, an unruffled placidity.” She introspects and finds herself attached and involved in many ways. She expects others to show concern for her.

Indu searches for release from the constraints of the traditional and tradition-bound institution of marriage in search of an autonomous self, only to realize that “this refuge is hard to achieve.”

There was somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant. And lost the ability to be alone.”⁶

In her quest Indu had sought escape from family relationships, but had discovered how relationships are the roots of one’s being and follow one like so many shadows that make a life without identity. Indu’s flight from family relationships landed her in another trap of shadow existence waiting for her in the person of Jayant. “I’ve got away. But to what?...” she asks Naren referring to her relationship with Jayant. Anguished, she wonders: “Are we doomed to living meaningless futile lives? Is there no escape?”⁷

In marrying Jayant, Indu had thought that she had found her alter ego – had found in him a spiritual and psychological level of closeness. She tells “I had become

complete. I had felt incomplete, not as a woman, but as a person. And in Jayant, I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self.” But marriage with Jayant had forced her to realize that self is an elusive centre, that one could never exchange roots with another. The root of all her psychological problems is feelings of “not only futility,” but of “utter vacuity,” of “emptiness.” Jayant “whom she wanted, and at the same moment hated for wanting so much.”⁸

A marriage that suppresses her femininity and her human demands, a marriage that denies her fullness of experience and forces Indu into extra-marital love, a moment of love that reaches her to the roots of her being and awakens her feminine consciousness to the core of her femininity, that “Love is a big fraud, a hoax, that’s what it is... It’s false... The sexual instinct... that’s true. Indu is only human in her distaste for love that is non-real and absurd.”⁹

Indu’s struggle for selfhood, her struggle towards liberation of the mind, her struggle for an emotional and intellectual definition of herself as a self-actualizing person is in a sense a fight against her womanhood. She felt limited by her sex and resented her womanhood because it closed many doors to her.

How to reconcile a woman’s human demand for freedom with her need for love, nurturance and how to strike a balance between her wifehood, motherhood and career and spiritual fulfillment are some of the issues raised by Shashi Deshpande in *Roots and Shadows*. Indu refuses to be mother of a child that is ‘not wholly

welcome'– in a marriage that has become non-real. It makes her feel trapped in a negative situation and threatens her positive struggle for independence.¹⁰

It is Naren, who by his touch of love discovered Indu to herself, gave her the experience of release from shadow existence and be her 'real' self.

For Shashi Deshpande, as for her sensitive and intelligent women, though modern, essentially Indian in sensibility, an autonomous self in a society that is largely conventional in its outlook is a myth. The struggle of these women to give shape and content to their individual existence in a sexist society culminates in a crisis and ends in compromise.¹¹

Indu had sworn proudly that she would never pretend. But she had pretended before Jayant, her own husband, by not revealing to him her whole self but revealing only that which he wanted to see. In doing so, she had wronged both – her own self as well as Jayant.¹² She decides to resign her job and devote herself to the kind of writing she had always dreamt of.

She came to recognize her strength as well as her weakness which she had hidden from Jayant. There was a better understanding between them and an ease in their relationship that was not there before. For happiness sneaked upon her when she least expected it. She had cried despairingly to Jayant about the book she had been writing. "If no publisher accepts it... I will publish it for you," Jayant had said

putting his arms comfortingly around her. Could this happiness have been possible if she had failed to achieve her freedom? Indu seems to be bohemian in her attitude, yet she is bound at times by values indoctrinated into her by the traditional orthodox views exposed to her since childhood.

Thus Shashi Deshpande makes her heroine choose security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and conflicting selves. This is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude.¹³

Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary India where the new has old cultural modes. The break up of the joint family has affected relationship at the husband-wife level. In the old family pattern, as Shashi Deshpande has put it, "the two met only briefly in the darkness of the night." So there hardly was any occasion for conflict. But with husband and wife constantly thrown together in the present pattern and with the wife sharing many responsibilities the problems of incompatibility and maladjustment and expectations and despair have arisen. The society continues to be male-dominated and attitudes towards women continue to be the same. Some women, on the other hand, are becoming more and more conscious of the various emancipation movements. Indu had to commit adultery to come to terms with her married life. Indu's casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she had done is shocking.

Will Indu be considered a sinner, a crazy person? Or will she be acclaimed and praised for her discovery and revolt? Will our society reject and condemn her or encourage and co-operate with her in her efforts to be honest and strive, to seek to find and not to yield?¹⁴ These questions arise after studying Shashi Deshpande's portrayal of Indu. Undoubtedly Indu has been honest to herself and has acted according to the dictates of her conscience. In such a situation she should also be able to face the consequences if any.

3.2.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN ROOTS AND SHADOWS

Another ambition or ideal dream for Indu is to attain the state of "detachment" and "loneliness" and to be perfect in herself. To achieve this she had made Naren her reference group. She always wanted to be like Naren – completely detached and non-involved. To her surprise, she finds herself involved and attached in many ways.¹⁵

On the one hand, Indu is ashamed of her not being a pure woman, but on the other hand, she hates her womanhood. She stops working for the women's magazine: "Women, women, women... I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the keys."¹⁶

In fact, she started hating and fighting against the womanhood since the day she was made aware of her being a woman by the elders. The thrusting-upon attitude by the society in general made her more rebellious and aggressive. She looks at each situation from the same angle. She even starts doubting the idea of love.¹⁷

After experiencing some of her married life, she looks down at marriage as a trap: "A trap? Or a cage?... a cage with two trapped animals glorying hatred at each other." Indu struggles hard to understand life in reality, the actual cause which is destroying her married life. She feels that her sense of certainty, confidence and assurance is being destroyed in the presence of Jayant. He never bothers to understand what she really wanted, what her feelings are.

Akka is worth special mention because she has a great impact on Indu's life. Only after her death does Indu come to know about Akka's life from Narmada Atya. Akka was married at twelve to a man well past thirty. Akka was small and dainty. She went to her husband's house after six months. By the time she was thirteen, she made two abortive attempts to run away. Her mother-in-law whipped her and kept her starved by locking her up in a room for three days. Then she was sent to her husband's room. She cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, "Lock me up again, lock me up." (77) But as Akka told Narmada that there was no escape from a husband then. She even tells Narmada before the consummation of her marriage: "Now your punishment begins Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels." (77)

The other side of Akka's character is manifest in the way she controls her husband after he is struck by total paralysis. She takes excellent care of her paralyzed husband for two years, but avenges herself of all that she had to undergo by not allowing his mistress, whom he adores, to meet him. Thus, Deshpande makes a strong statement on the arranged marriages, which are outright discriminatory towards women. A husband can have a mistress with impunity for his physical and mental needs, whereas a wife cannot take another man – her act is branded as adultery.¹⁸

Although Akka has undergone great suffering at her husband's house, on her return to her father's house after her husband's death, she enforces a rigid code of conduct on women in the household. She insists that a woman should never utter her husband's name, as it means disrespect and shortens his life span. But Indu resents it. She says what connection is there "between a man's longevity and his wife's calling him by name? It's as bad as praying to the tulusi to increase his life span."(35)

On the one hand Indu is attached to her parental house and on the other hand the house turns out to be a "caged place," "a trap" and the family "a large amorphous group of people with conflicting interests." She is always in a confused state of mind and struggling with the situations to reach a final solution.

Thus Shashi Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge. There was a time when the Indian woman was hailed as a “Pativrata,” “a Sati” and something which has to be protected by man, but now she is a changed person who is aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her individuality, her place and role in the family and society. Indu represents this very woman.¹⁹

3.3.1 THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

The Dark Hold No Terrors, Shashi Deshpande’s second novel, is about Saru – an educated, economically independent, middle-class wife – who is made conscious of her gender as a child and whose loveless relationship with her parents and strained relations with her husband lead to her agonizing search for herself. The novel opens with Saru’s return to her parents’ house fifteen years after she left home with a vow never to return. Her relations with her husband become unbearably strained and she returns home for some solace. Here she gets a chance to think over her relationships with her husband, her children, her parents and her dead brother, Dhruva.

Saru was ignored by her parents in favour of her brother Dhruva, in her childhood. No parental love is showered on her and she is not given any importance. She recalls

the joyous excitement in the house on the occasion of her brother's naming ceremony. The idea that she was a liability to her parents is deeply implanted in her mind as a child. Her mother's adoration of her son at her daughter's cost was a rallying point for the novelist to bring her feminist ideas together. The preference for boys over girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian homes, and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. Sons bring in dowry could be one reason, but the Indian society, steeped in tradition and superstition, considers birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage.²⁰

Besides, there is colour-consciousness rooted in the Indian psyche. Saru's mother constantly reminds her that she should not go out in the sun as it would worsen her already dark complexion.²¹

The turning point in her life is the accidental death of her brother by drowning. All her life she is haunted by the memories of her mother accusing her of intentionally letting Dhruva die by drowning: "You did it, you did this, you killed him" (173). She too on her part has a guilty conscience as she considers herself responsible for having remained a mute spectator to her brother's death by drowning. She never refuses the charge leveled against her by her mother. As G. Dominic Savio observes: "Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is a very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment."²² Shashi Deshpande thus reveals the social aspect of keen sibling jealousy born of a mother's undue fondness for the son.

Saru's mother's discriminatory behaviour makes Saru feel unloved and unwanted leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. She is in the grips of insecurity. As A. Anandalakshmi opines: "The birth of a son gives a woman status and she invests herself in her son's future, creating a deep symbiotic bond."²³

Saru's mother was no exception, and she loses her interest in life after her son's death. She puts the blame on Saru's shoulders. She reproaches her and takes no interest in her education, career and future. Saru's feeling of being unwanted is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence as a girl or woman. On attaining puberty she says scornfully, "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one." (62) The treatment that is meted out to her during her monthly ordeals is inhuman. She is engulfed with a sense of shame and prays in desperation for a miracle to put an end to it.

Thus, unloved and unwanted, she develops hatred towards the traditional practices during her impressionable years. Her hatred towards her mother is so acute that she becomes rebellious just to hurt her, "I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer." (142) This hatred drives her to leave home for Mumbai to seek medicine as a career. In the medical college she falls in love with a college mate Manu from a lower caste and marries him against her parents' wishes.

Devoid of love and security, she wanted to be loved. When she gets attention from Manu, she wonders, “How could I be anyone’s beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without.”(66)

The need of the moment was a relation with someone who could give her love and security. Comparing herself with the story of the fisherman’s daughter she thinks: “The fisherman’s daughter couldn’t have been more surprised when the king asked her to marry him than I was by Manu’s love for me.”(66) Later when her relations become strained with Manu she regrets for having rushed into marriage unconditionally: “The fisherman’s daughter was wiser. She sent the king to her father and it was the father who bargained with him, while I [...] I gave myself up unconditionally.”²⁴

Saru considers herself the luckiest woman on earth, as the initial years of her marriage are sheer bliss. She marries to secure the lost love in her parental home and her identity as an individual. As S.P. Swain writes: “Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility.”²⁵ Although, Saru refrains from any physical indulgence with Manu but, after marriage, she revels in it with wild abandon.

Her dingy one-room apartment with “the corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dark sealed odours”(40), is ‘a heaven on earth’ for her. But soon all this proves to be a mere mirage for her. Her success as a well-known and reputed doctor

becomes the cause of her strained marital relations with Manu. In a retrospective mood she says: "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (42) Manu is uncomfortable with Saru's steady rise in status, as he feels ignored when people greet and pay attention to Saru.

Manu does not love her as he used to earlier. Saru begins to hate this man-woman relationship, which is based on need and attraction and not love. She feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment towards her husband and children. The most solemn duties towards them remain unattended to. The children are denied due love and care as she gets in late in the evenings.

Saru's rise in social and financial status in contrast to Manu's status of an underpaid lecturer sets in great discomfort in their conjugal relation. Saru's contentment in her career is no match to her discontentment at home. And contrary to the claims of most feminists, she does not achieve fulfillment in life. Betty Freidan asserts: "For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment – autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted."²⁶

Certain incidents aggravate the already strained relations between the two to the extent that in the privacy of their room at night he doesn't behave like a husband, but a rapist. In an interview with Saru when the interviewing girl happens to ask Manu innocently: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but

most of the bread as well?"(200) The three – Saru, Manu and the girl – merely laughed it off as it were nothing. This particular incident is very humiliating to him and he feels helpless and effeminate. To gain his masculinity he gives vent to his feelings through his beastly sexual assault on Saru and feigns ignorance in the morning of his beastly behaviour. She expresses her desire to leave her medical practice but Manu dissuades her from doing so, as their standard of living wouldn't be possible on Manu's income.

Saru comes to know about her mother's death, and returns home. She feels that now she won't have to undergo the humiliation of her mother's taunts, and she has an explanation to give to her father for her returning home on account of her mother's death.

At her father's house she objectively mulls over the reasons of her disastrous marriage. She blames herself for it. The novel may be said to be a study in guilt consciousness, as Saru ruminates, "My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood."(217) What Shashi Deshpande suggests is the gender discrimination by parents towards their children prevailing in our society, and the compulsion to perpetuate male dominance if the marriage is to be kept going.

Through her relations with Boozie a friend and Padmakar her college mate, she achieves no happiness and fulfillment. These extra-marital relations are no solace and compensation for her tense married life. Kamini Dinesh aptly remarks: “There cannot be an ‘escape route’, from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has finally to fall back on herself.”²⁷

Saru was an unwanted and perplexed child. All through her life she is haunted by nightmarish experiences of scenes she encountered in her childhood. She is dissatisfied with her marriage, but in her quest for the wholeness of her identity she does not advocate separation from Manu but a tactful assertion of her identity within marriage. In the end she leaves her father’s house and goes back to Manu with a determination to assert her identity.

3.3.2 THE CHARACTER OF SARU IN THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

The Dark Holds No Terrors tells the story of a marriage on the rocks. Saru in the daytime works as a successful doctor and at night is a ‘terrified trapped animal’ in the hands of her husband Manu, an English teacher in a third-rate college.

Saru is highly self-willed and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over others. She defies traditional codes. In Saru’s case, defiance is her second nature. Sarita defies her mother and becomes a doctor. She

defies her caste and marries outside it, and defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career. As a child Saru had seen the predicament of the grandmother separated from the cruel husband and considered “an unwanted burden” by her own people. From then on, economic independence became a goal in life which Saru took to be an insurance against subordination or suppression. Every move in life is towards the realization of that goal.²⁸

The traditional Hindu woman rises up in Saru only to disappear too soon. Alienated from her husband, she comes to her parental house to see her sense of belonging to the world but the same eludes her. As Saru stays at her parental house, she gets a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her dead mother, her dead brother, with her own children.

When we look at her childhood days we find that the partisan attitude of her parents has a devastating effect on Saru. She becomes rebellious in nature. She mutely watches her brother drown in the pond without rushing to his help. Since then, she is haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death.

Life becomes more desperate for Saru, after Dhruva’s death. The mother constantly pines for her dead son and rejects even the presence of her daughter. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the adolescent Saru’s mind with feelings of hatred towards her mother. Adesh Pal who uses psychological parameters to analyse her personality observes:

For Saru the very word “mother” stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being...thus the strange childhood experiences flare up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others.²⁹

Saru's hatred gets intensified and as she attains puberty. The rigidity of do this and do not do that prescribed by the domineering mother makes her grow more wild and defiant.

After her marriage Saru is hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother has said, “let her know more sorrow than she has given me”. (197) Saru thinks at one point that she is ‘unhappy and destroyed’ in her marital life because her mother has cursed her. But gradually her hostile attitude towards her mother changes to a positive one. She even begins to see her mother as a creative essence of the feminine. She makes efforts to understand her and even identifies herself with her mother. Valli Rao finds this as “...a search for her own feminine side and for the reunification of her split self...and finally we see ‘rebirthing’ her own individual personality separate from her mother’s.”³⁰ One agrees with the fact that she finally emerges from her ordeal, a person more whole, more capable of accepting and forgiving herself than she has been at the start.

Saru falls in love with Manu and starts fantasizing about him. When Manu expresses his love for her, she feels flattered. She becomes exultant for having evoked feelings in someone who is emotionally hard to be touched.

However, the very thought of marriage unnerves Saru. Perhaps it is the fear of sex, of the unknown. Till they get married, Manu and Saru are quite innocent about their relationship. This may be because of their middle-class inhibitions. Marriage opens the sesame of all enjoyment for Saru. After the first moment of apprehensions, there is never anything withholding in her. Saru who has lacked love in her life finds a savior in Manu. "I was insatiable, not for sex but for love. Of my being loved, of my being wanted."(40)

Saru is happy with Manu, though they live in her dingy one-room apartment. As long as Saru is a student, Manu has been the breadwinner and there was peace. Problems begin to slowly creep in the moment Saru is recognized as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. Initially Saru fails to notice the change in Manu but later realizes that "...the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller, but... made him inches shorter."(42) The warmth between them cools off and the harmony is disrupted.³¹

In her new role as a career woman, Saru is no longer happy in their shabby apartment and she prefers to move into something more decent and beautiful. Manu's earnings now make her feel that it barely covers her needs.

Her work keeps Saru away from Manu for longer hours and she reaches home late at night. His ego is hurt by her success, he feels inferior and becomes brutal in his behaviour and turns a treacherous rapist at night and asserts his masculinity through sexual assaults upon Saru. She scorns the word 'love' and feels it never exists between man and woman and changes her attitude towards Manu and her marital life. Saru views sex as a dirty word. With her responsibilities increasing at home, she recoils from Manu's love-making and he takes her rejection of sex as rejection of himself. To save her marriage, Saru is prepared to sacrifice her lucrative profession. She gathers up all her courage and tells Manu, "I want to stop working. I want to give it all up...my practice, the hospital, everything." (79)

Manu disapproves of Saru's idea of leaving her job. Saru feels that it is 'sheer necessity' that holds them together. She has every reason to break away from her marriage of convenience, shorn of genuine love. Saru establishes herself as a career-oriented woman and her profession satisfies her ego.³²

Saru yearns for security and emotional attachment. She wants her father to support her. She blurts loudly and crudely, "My husband is a sadist." (199) Her father fails to understand her vocabulary like sadism, love and cruelty. On listening to Saru,

her father simply leaves her and goes away. Many times she wants to tell her father, "Baba, I'm unhappy. Help me, Baba, I'm in trouble. Tell me what to do." (44) At times she regrets for having come to her parents' house, as she is reminded of her children, her practice, and her patients. In all these memories her husband doesn't figure at all. Her visit to her father's house is a kind of escape from the sadist husband and her loveless marriage.³³

Shashi Deshpande does not glorify Saru's sufferings, she has sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonist. Saru being a realist perceives the ultimate human reality and its process of decay. She finds loneliness as a painful but inescapable human condition.

For the world, Saru is a lady doctor with a loving husband and two lovely kids but in reality, she is a victim of the most unkindest cut of all. This duplicity of her life has been killing and choking her real self.

Saru's character can be truly understood only in the light of psychological precepts. First, she carries within her the sad effects of gender discrimination. Social psychology deals with the stereotypes about the two genders. Saru's type of feminism springs out as a reaction to this discriminatory psychological set up of society at large and her parents in particular. Secondly Saru also has the deep-rooted mentality of an unwanted child. Psychologists have dealt in detail with the

mental makeup of an unwanted child. Thirdly and most tragically, Saru suffers the bruises of a terrible physical trauma on her psyche.³⁴

Saru does reach depths of self-actualization. She introspects philosophically and reaches to the conclusion that escape is a ridiculous idea. There is no escape. It is an individual's own life. One will have to shape as well as face the events of one's life. There is no refuge, other than one's own self. She realizes that she cannot attain happiness through anyone else be it a husband, a father or a child. She can attain peace of mind by her own efforts. Finally, confidently she waits for what used to be the greatest terror of her life, her husband. She is ready to face him. She is ready to face life.³⁵

These complex situations in Saru's life focus on the pathetic state of an Indian middle class working woman.

Through this narrative, Deshpande questions the assumption that the employment of the wife can serve as the means of her economic independence and self-actualization. At the same time the profession of women does not entail the potential to reduce the gap between men and women. While Saru's income provides a higher living standard to her family, her contribution remains unnoticed.³⁶

3.3.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

The Dark Holds No Terrors by Shashi Deshpande is a totally different novel in the sense that it explodes the myth of man's superiority and the myth of a woman being a paragon of all virtues. It is based on the problems faced by a career woman, a refreshingly new phenomenon in Indian English fiction.³⁷

We see the character of Saru representing the middle class working woman in modern India. She rebels against the traditions but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality at that time. This is largely due to the fact that she is passing through a transitional era. Thus the whole development of the novel can be observed in four phases i.e., flight from reality; frustration; submission; and ultimately an attempt to reconsolidate.³⁸

Her mother had successfully erased Saru from her household with the exception of a photograph only because Dhruva was in it too. The refusal to see the doctor daughter even while dying of cancer reiterates the idea of total rejection. Saru's obsessive remembrance of the mother is indicative of both her sense of guilt and her sense of defeat. Death seals off all possibilities of straightening things. Dead or alive, Saru sees the mother sapping her of all happiness and asks herself, "Why should she matter dead when she never mattered alive?" She sees her as "a vengeful ghost" and gives the dead so much power over herself.³⁹

We should not see *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to be a feminist novel on the lone basis of the female centrality in it. If a woman's very awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognized as a person rather than as a woman, her wanting to have an independent social image be considered outstepping the limits, the novel has definite feminist leanings. Perhaps in the Indian context, it certainly is a feminist novel. Saru's feminist reactions date back to her childhood when she had to contend with sexist discrimination at home. The framework of the novel provides good acoustics for a woman's voice and establishes that a woman too has choices in life. Shashi Deshpande does not glorify a woman's sufferings, but she enlists a sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonist. Throughout the novel, Shashi Deshpande maintains commendable objectivity and avoids generalizations and partial views. In fact the novel explores questions like "Who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? Or are we, each of us, both?"⁴⁰

Shashi Deshpande is certainly aware of the woman's predicament in a male-dominated society especially when the woman is not economically independent. There is a reference in the novel to a woman who, ill-treated by her in-laws, drowns herself in a well. There is reference to yet another woman victim who is tied to a peg by the in-laws in the cattle-shed and fed. Saru detests the merciless judgement of her mother who casually dismisses the topic saying, "she perhaps deserved it." The thrust here is not on man's cruelty to woman but woman's cruelty to woman.⁴¹ This underlines the fact that the novelist is not holding the normal feminist stance.

In an article, Shashi Deshpande states: "A woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings. I don't see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction." *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is certainly a protest novel especially in the Indian context in the sense that it reacts against the traditional concept that "everything in a girl's life... is shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male."

The novel does not limit itself to the narrow confines of feminist problems. With a woman as the central figure, Shashi Deshpande probes the universally relevant issues of human relationships, man's tragic aloneness and so on. It is the realization that helps Saru understand the mother's last words: "that's what all of us have to face at the end. That we are alone. We have to be alone."⁴²

Saru, a professional woman dislocates the binary of husband as 'provider and protector; versus wife as 'recipient and protected.' Saru's employment is acceptable only because it supplements her husband's income. The story of Saru clearly depicts a duality deeply entrenched in the psyche of Indian society which sways societal definitions and expectations of women's public and private roles. Consequently, women are expected to be both traditional and modern in domestic and public jurisdictions. The pathetic state of an Indian middle-class working woman is revealed.

My mother had no room of her own. She retreated into the kitchen to dress up... And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing “a room of one’s own.”(135-136)

Through this narrative, Deshpande questions the assumption that the employment of the wife can serve as the means of her economic independence and self-actualization. At the same time the profession of women does not entail the potential to reduce the gap between men and women.

3.4.1 THAT LONG SILENCE

Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian housewife. Many women writers tried their hand at expressing this long silence that had turned women into non-entities. Shashi Deshpande’s success lies in her representation of real life experience. She realistically depicts the inner conflicts of Jaya the main woman character of the novel and her quest for the self or identity.

The novel opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan moving back into the old Dadar flat in Mumbai from their cosy and palatial house. Her husband is involved in a financial malpractice and an inquiry against him is set up. Mohan is consoled to find that the children, Rahul and Rati, are away on a long tour with their family friends, and expects Jaya to go into hiding with him, which she refuses to comply with.

It is here in the small Dadar flat that she becomes an introvert and goes into deep contemplation of her past and her childhood. Had there been no such crisis in their life, she would never have given a thought to her individuality. Adele King opines: "Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is."⁴³

For seventeen long years of her marriage she successfully manages to suppress her feelings as she thought it more important to be a good wife than being a good writer. She suppresses her writing career and her association with her one-time neighbour, Kamat. Her career as a successful writer is jeopardized right in the early years of her marriage. A short story of hers bags the first prize and gets published in a magazine. When on the threshold of getting recognition as a creative writer of some merit, Mohan expresses his displeasure at that particular story written by her. The story is about a man who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body. Mohan suspects that the man portrayed in the story is he himself. She thinks, "Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that." (144) But the writer in her goads her and she begins to write under a pseudonym, which does not help, and her stories are rejected one after another. Her neighbour Kamat tells her that her stories lack strong emotions as she has suppressed her anger and frustration. But she cannot express her anger and feelings lest it should damage her relation with Mohan. She had learnt to control her anger as Mohan considered this anger in a woman as "unwomanly." (83) She tells Kamat: "Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an

angry young woman?"(147) Later she writes light humorous pieces on the travails of a middle-class housewife in a column entitled "Seeta." She not only gets encouraging response from the readers but also a nod of approval from Mohan.⁴⁴

Her association with Kamat, a widower living above her flat, lends yet another dimension to Jaya's personality. She is drawn towards him as he treats her as his equal, and offers her constructive criticism on her writings. She receives her mail at his address to avoid confrontation with her husband who disapproves of her writings. He showers his attention on her as he is lonely. Her ease in his company makes her womanly inhibitions wither and she opens up her problems to him and their relation leads to physical attraction. He warns her against wallowing in self-pity and asks her to pursue her literary career by giving expression to her real inner self.

In her zeal to play out the role of a loyal wife and a caring mother, she smothers her real self. She does not protest the change of her name from Jaya to Suhasini at her marriage just to keep Mohan happy. Her dress and her appearance are proof of her submission to Mohan's liking, replicating an absorbed family-woman.⁴⁵

She represents the urban, middle-class woman who is educated and has had exposure to liberal Western ideas. Her upbringing demands the suppression of the self so that the marriage can survive. When the occasion to choose between her family and husband arises, she chooses the former.

Jaya complies with her husband's decision and accompanies him in silence to their present exile. It is here, that the process of self-examination begins for Jaya. She reminisces her seventeen year old marriage, its frustrations and disappointments and her personal failures. All her fears, guilt, strangulated anger and silence begin to haunt her and consequently through a period of intense introspection she kills Suhasini, the silent, submissive partner of Mohan. Her association with Kamat proves to be fruitful for she realizes that justice has not been done to herself and her talents. She renews her creative activity as a writer and shortly emerges as a new being.

Thus Shashi Deshpande has woven the tragic tales of Jaya's relations and her acquaintances into the texture of the novel, and so the novel inevitably takes on a feminist character. It can be said that Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* traces Jaya's passage through an excess of doubts to convinced expression and attestation.

3.4.2 THE CHARACTER OF JAYA IN THAT LONG SILENCE

Jaya, like Indu of *Roots and Shadows* and Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, journeys from ignorance to knowledge through suffering. Going through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realization, she emerges as a confident individual, fully in control of herself, significantly more hopeful and able to accept life like the other two characters. If Indu is a journalist and Saru, a doctor, Jaya is a successful columnist and an aspiring novelist.

Jaya, to begin with, is a conservative, educated, middle-class smiling placid, motherly woman” (15-16) who learns to suppress her own wishes and act according to her husband’s. She who cannot dare to protest, “I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts. Only silence.” (143) Has finally unlearned her silence, refuses to be led by nose and affirms with confidence,⁴⁶ “I’m not afraid any more.” (191)

Outwardly she is a satisfied housewife married to an apparently caring man, with no dearth of material comfort. But on scrutiny, it is revealed that to achieve this stage of fulfillment as a wife, Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refuses to fit in with her image as a wife and mother, besides a failed writer.⁴⁷

In the early years of her marriage, Jaya has been on the threshold of acquiring name as a creative writer of some merit. It is Mohan her husband who has been encouraging her to write. In fact, he introduces her to editors of various papers and magazines. On Mohan’s advice, she begins writing middles. She had made a good beginning with a story about a man “...who could not reach out to his wife except through her body.”(144) This story won a prize for its realistic portrayal of life. Yet Mohan assumes that the story portrays their own personal life. He is very apprehensive that people of his acquaintance may assume that he is a kind of person portrayed in the story. But Jaya knows that there is no truth in his accusation, still

she does not try to reason with Mohan, as she does not like to risk her relation with him.⁴⁸

Jaya, suppressed at every stage of her life, compromises to conform to the role of an ideal Indian woman. She feels that she will 'break-down', that she can't go on, and 'can't cope' to live in deception but does not give expression to these feelings because of her fear of hurting Mohan and jeopardizing her marriage, her fear of destroying the veneer of the happy family she tries to project and her fear of failing as a writer.⁴⁹

Just as Indu, who obeys her husband's wishes and fancies, and like Saru, who thinks that a wife must be a few feet behind her husband's, Jaya also bows to the male superiority. Sometimes, Jaya appears to be not very different from other women – who suffer their husband's humiliations silently and who think that a woman without her kumkum on the forehead is nothing.

Marriage to Jaya portrays the image of the pair of bullocks yoked together and suggests that yoked bullocks should share the burden between themselves, but no one knows whether they love each other or not. The image of the beasts performing their assigned duties mechanically undermines the relationship of husband and wife who are united in marriage for love, but not for leading a mechanical life which results in ending up in mutual hatred and distrust.⁵⁰

Jaya in order to maintain her marriage as a happy one slowly transforms herself to this ideal of womanhood where she learns to repress her anger. Jaya always works up to please her husband. Jaya even transforms her appearance to suit his idea of a modern woman- cuts her hair and wears dark glasses. She ultimately gets so completely absorbed into the family-fold that from a fiercely independent woman, she is transformed into the stereotype of a woman. Jaya desperately clings to her husband as if her life depends on him. At times she is beset with the fear that something may happen to Mohan and Jaya feels:

The thought of living without him had twisted my insides. His death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. (96-97)

Jaya's story, in the larger context, is the story of generations of women. Jaya is in search of an individual identity.⁵¹

Jaya thinks that real emotional involvement is unlikely between a man and a woman. Her blunt confession is "Love? No, I know nothing of it.(153) Jaya is romantic to begin with, but later she is so disenchanted that she gives up her efforts to please Mohan and look attractive for him and describes it as "a man and a woman married for seventeen years without mutual love or understanding".

This lovelessness in her marriage draws Jaya towards Kamat, a middle-aged lonely intellectual who is not rich or socially significant as Mohan, but warm, friendly and companionable. He treats Jaya as an equal and Jaya is completely at ease in his company, sharing with him things which she cannot tell others including Mohan. Her physical intimacy with Kamat is characterized by a spontaneity and ease, but more important in their relationship is perfect mutual understanding and friendship between them. That is why his sudden death is a great blow to her.⁵²

For Indian women marriage and motherhood are considered mandatory for fulfillment and happiness. Jaya is caught in this dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife to her husband and secondly, struggling to express the emotions of women's experience, seldom expressing them in a male-dominated, chauvinistic society. Deshpande herself admits this kind of dilemma when she says that women have this kind of emotions but never come out. Jaya knows that her relationship with Mohan is spoiled by incompatibility and lack of communication. If she suffers, it is in silence, if she revolts, it is also in silence. She suppresses her feelings lest they should spoil her relationship with her husband.⁵³

Jaya knows about Mohan's involvement in a case of bribery and the fears of prosecution, loss of job and societal disgrace on Mohan's part. She does not want to laugh but she does laugh at Mohan and finally lands herself in a more hopeless situation. "Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in

horror as I rocked helplessly. When finally, I recovered myself I was alone in the room.”(122)

She bursts out into a hysterical laughter which upsets Mohan so much that he leaves the Dadar flat without a word. Jaya understands Mohan’s agony. He is agonized to see Jaya in place of Suhasini, the name given to her after marriage.

Jaya realizes that she has no face to show to the world in the absence of her husband. It is he who provides comforts and gives meaning to her life. Further, Jaya feels that she is secure only in the care of Mohan, his absence and walk-out makes her wade through the waters of uncertainty, she becomes rudderless and others are no substitute.

A change is discernible in Jaya, a change in a different direction. The earlier impulsive Jaya becomes a mature woman.⁵⁴

Jaya also observes that meaningful co-existence can come only through understanding, respect and compassion, not through domination or subjugation. Jaya makes a powerful statement on the totally unfair system prevailing in our society of the subjugation of women. As she realizes, it is fear on the part of woman that has allowed the subjugation to continue. Women need not succumb and assume the roles cast upon them. She says, “...in this life itself there are so many cross

roads, so many choices.”(192) Women have allowed victimization instead of bargaining for partnership.

Jaya understands that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she had to fight her own battle and work out her own solution. Accordingly she feels the necessity to break the silence, articulate her predicament, and establish her identity. She decides that she will live from now onwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She will make adjustment but it will not be a servile one. Her giving up writing for the newspaper column ‘Seeta’ symbolizes giving up her traditional role-model of wife, now she will write what she wants to write and will not look up at Mohan’s face for an answer she wants. This makes her voyage of discovery complete.⁵⁵

Jaya can no longer be a passive, submissive and silent partner to Mohan. The novel ends with her determination to speak, to break her long silence. *That Long Silence* depicts Jaya’s self-doubts, fears, guilt, silent indignation towards articulation and assertion. Suman Ahuja, a reputed critic, observes that Jaya “Caught in an emotional eddy, endeavours to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying albeit in vain, to re-discover her true self, which is but an ephemera...an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and a failed writer.”⁵⁶

The novelist presents some elements of new-woman in the novel *That Long Silence*. The pre-matrimonial love of Jaya and Mohan is a good paradigm of new-woman.

Mohan was enamoured of Jaya's modernity and her modern education. With a new feminist frankness Jaya presents inter-dependence of love and sex: "First there's love then there's sex – that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I had realized that it could so easily be the other way round." Woman's realization between her solitude in the "act of sex" and the possibility of love without bodily union (as in the case of the affinity between Jaya and Kamat) are delineated clearly and add an unorthodox frankness to an abstruse awareness.⁵⁷

The advancement from maintaining absolute silence to the breaking of the silence speaks of a transition that Jaya has accomplished. The connotations of 'Silence' in the novel could possibly be categorized under the following heads: i) Suppression and Security, ii) Loss of Identity, iii) Death and Realisation, iv) Social milieu.⁵⁸

3.4.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THAT LONG SILENCE

Generally, a woman's identity is defined by others, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e., as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, and so on. Her name keeps on changing according to the wishes of others. In *That Long Silence*, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means a "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman." Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. The former symbolizes victory and the latter submission.

Jaya tries to adapt herself to the main current. She longs to be called an ideal wife. She revolts in silence. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and he calls it "strength": "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender."⁵⁹

Jaya's husband, Mohan, interprets things in relation to the effect it may have on the society. He likes to conform to the social norms even if they are strong. The success of Jaya's novel depicting the relationship between man and woman is weighed in relation to what society would think in future. He wants to make Jaya also think like him and induces her not to deliberate on such themes that would endanger their marriage. Jaya, a representative of the typical Indian woman, then wants to mould herself as her husband wills. Her father made her think that she was different from others and hence, she could not cope with her hostel mates and kept herself aloof from other girls.⁶⁰

In her childhood, she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility. But after her marriage, she changes automatically. As a child she used to get angry very soon. After her marriage she controlled her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman 'unwomanly'.

When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she, at all times, tries her best to follow his advice. It also throws light on her being closer to her father than to her mother. At times she complains against her mother to her father.

Jaya is very particular about moulding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied. In the very beginning of the novel, we see that she tries to reason out with her father as to why she should not listen to the songs broadcast on the radio, but ultimately she keeps silent, suppressing her desire. Here, Deshpande has presented the theme of lack of communication. As she herself declares: "The themes of lack of communication may be over-familiar in western fiction, but in extrovert India it is not much analyzed."⁶¹

Shashi Deshpande presents the meanings of silence in this novel. As she herself puts it: "You learn a lot of tricks to get by in a relationship. Silence is one of them..."

To make the story authentic and appealing, Deshpande has used the device of first-person narrative to ensure its credibility by making the protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman. Jaya is basically a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband, Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs. The difference between their outlook is so great that they fail, time and again, to understand each other. To Mohan, a woman sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot

food is the real “strength” of a woman, but Jaya interprets it as nothing more than despair. The difference in their attitude is the main cause of their failure to understand each other.⁶²

In her stream of thoughts, Jaya, too, looks at her marital relations where there is no conversation with her husband. This unhappiness is reflected not only in her conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion. Her writings are rejected by the publishers. And when, finally, Mohan angrily walks out of the house, she feels that she has failed in her duty as a wife.

As Veena Sheshadri writes: “One ends up by wondering whether Jaya has imposed the long silence on herself not out of a sense of duty or to emulate the ideal Hindu woman of the ages gone by, but in order to camouflage the streaks of ugliness within her.”⁶³

In order to have a well-balanced conjugal life, it is imperative that husband and wife be on a par with each other. They should supplement and not supplant each other. Further, they should know each other well physically as well as emotionally. It is this harsh reality that Deshpande tries to project through the female protagonist who, at the end, chooses to break her long silence of the past.

It is not only Jaya’s silence that Deshpande is highlighting but the silence of each and every character in the novel from different strata of society. The novel is not

only about Jaya's efforts to obliterate the silence that is suffocating her. It is also about the despair and resignation of women like Mohan's mother; Jaya's servant; Jaya's mentally disturbed cousin Kusum. It also deals with Mohan's silence which is the silence of a man who speaks but can find no one to listen to him.

Thus, in the novel, Deshpande has presented not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later on reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Her inner turmoils are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not to be frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her actions by the society. She is unable to unfold the truth. Her image becomes like that of a bird who has got wings and knows that it can fly, but, somehow, does not. In the same way, Jaya is aware of her abilities and she knows that she can expose them openly, but somehow she does not. She always remains silent which indicates that the traditional roles of women still have primacy over all the newly-acquired professional roles.⁶⁴

3.5 HER EARLY NOVELS: COMMENT

Shashi Deshpande portrays modern educated and career-oriented, middle-class women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. She depicts women in the roles of wife, mother, daughter and as an individual in her own right.

In her first novel, *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande suggests that the modern Indian woman represented by Indu should learn to conquer their fears and assert themselves. The novel ends on a note of compromise which is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude. With the conviction of rationale and accountability, Indu holds steadfast to her decisions in a tradition-bound household which is proof enough of her individuality.

In the second novel, *The Dark Hold No Terrors*, a mature Saru shuns extremes and takes a practical view of the circumstances. She is neither the typical Western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one's identity within marriage.

Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence* has raised her voice against the straitjacketed role models of wife and mother, and rebels against the suppression of the age-old patriarchal set-up. Her silence is her armour when faced with despair, but there comes a time when she sheds this silence. Thus the novel is a feminist critique but seeks to expose and not perpetuate patriarchal practices.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are strong women who refuse to sacrifice their individuality in order to uphold traditional role models laid down by society. They

display a tangible development and attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. These protagonists evolve their own role models.

Chapter – III

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CHAPTER – IV

Women Characters in the Later Novels of Shashi

Deshpande

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CHAPTER –IV

WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE LATER NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

4.1 THE LATER NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Shashi Deshpande holds great worth as an Indian English woman novelist. She has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of a woman. In her later novels, she has portrayed her protagonists as actually aware of their smothered and fettered existence in a male dominated society. The realistic delineation of woman as wife, mother and daughter and their search for identity and sexuality as well is revealed.

Her later novels discussed in this chapter are *The Binding Vine*, *A Matter of Time* and *Small Remedies*. *The Binding Vine*, her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi and focusses attention on victims like Kalpana and Mira – victims of man's lust and woman's helplessness. In her novel, *A Matter of Time*, Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. It is about three women from three generations of the same family and the way they cope with the tragedy that overwhelms them. *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing classical singer, who avoids marriage and

home to pursue her genius. It also unfolds Madhu's story and that of her aunt Leela among other women characters.

4.2.1 THE BINDING VINE

The Binding Vine is about Urmi, an educated middle-class wife who is grieving over the death of her one-year-old daughter Anu, and in the process becomes very sensitive towards the sufferings and sorrows of other people as well. Had she not undergone such a personal loss, perhaps she wouldn't have had any concern with the others. Thus her narrative comprises three tales – one about herself and the other two about Shakuntala, a rape-victim's mother, and Urmi's mother-in-law, Mira, a victim of marital rape.

The novel opens with Urmi grieving over her dead infant daughter. Although she tries to fight the loss, she feels that forgetting this loss would tantamount to betrayal. "This is one battle. I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray."(21) It is her intense attachment to her daughter that becomes the cause of her suffering.¹

In such an aggrieved state she happens to meet Shakuntala, mother of a rape-victim, Kalpana. She meets her in the hospital where her sister-in-law, Vanaa works. Kalpana is lying unconscious and her mother thinks that she has met with a car accident, however Kalpana has been brutally raped. Her mother Shakuntala's reaction is that of a typical Indian mother bred in an oppressive male-dominated society. She tells Vanaa: "It's not true, you people are trying to blackmail my

daughter's name.”(58) Most Indian mothers would react in a similar way as they are concerned about their daughter's marriage. The novelist has evocatively laid bare Shakuntala's agony, anger, helplessness and fear. The character has been presented so realistically that it leaves a sense of *déjà vu* in the readers.²

Shakutai does not want a report to be lodged with the police. A victim of rape is a loser on two counts. First, she has been raped, secondly the society looks down upon such a victim as a *kulta* (a characterless woman) which leaves the victim in a much miserable plight.

Shashi Deshpande further reveals how the police conduct in such cases. The police officer registers the case as a mere accident to the great shock of Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge.

Urmi wants justice to be done to Kalpana by bringing the culprit to book. She finds herself a lonely crusader in her fight. She gets the case reopened and with this the identity of the rapist is revealed who is no other than Prabhakar, Shakutai's sister's husband.

Yet another saga of misery, submission and sorrow is that of Urmi's late mother-in-law, Mira. The novelist here ventures into a completely untouched subject of marital rape in Indian Writing in English. She has touched upon the subject in her earlier novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. In *The Binding Vine*, Mira has aversion to physical intimacy with her husband and still she has to put up with his obsession for her. She gives voice to her inner self in her poems “in the solitude of an unhappy

marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty-two.”(48) It so happens that many years after her marriage, Urmi receives an old trunk full of books and a few other things from Mira’s husband’s stepmother, referred to as *Akka*. Among these books Urmi finds Mira’s diary which is “not a daily account of her routine life but a communion with herself.” (51) When *Akka* hands over Mira’s jewellery to Urmi, she says, “They are Kishore’s mother’s,” but while giving books and diaries to her, she says, “Take this, it’s Mira’s.”(48)

Urmi goes through the poems in Mira’s diary and gets a glimpse of her troubled marriage. She comes to know from *Akka* how Kishore’s father had pursued and married Mira, a college student. The poems and entries in the diary are proof enough for Urmi to conceive the forced sexual activity Mira had to undergo in an incompatible marriage.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande suggests here that forced violation of a woman’s body even in marriage can be as traumatic as rape, even though it is not placed in the same bracket. In case of Harish and Vanaa also we see Vanaa’s submission just to keep her marriage intact. This type of acceptance with deceit makes Urmi angry; it makes a woman as a spineless wooden creature subjected to male domination. Urmila fights for another woman’s cause while others have fought their own battles. It shows how she exhibits her interests and capacity to purge the society of its needs.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande has presented Urmila as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by her daughter’s death. Despite her longings and frustrations, Urmila is not a radical feminist but one who, tries to

make the best of her life by hardening to face the harsh realities of life. Besides Deshpande has taken a bold step forward by exploring the working women's needs of the head, heart and the anatomy.³

4.2.2 THE CHARACTER OF URMILA IN THE BINDING VINE

The long silence that had become the hallmark of woman's existence is broken by Urmila, the protagonist of *The Binding Vine*. The earlier women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande have already begun to question their roles, functions, attitudes and even behaviour. They have realized that they have to unshackle themselves from the chains of bondages which have chained these women's rights for centuries. They are aware that the age-old societal norms and their preordained roles have subjected them to severe suffocation and humiliation. They finally succeed in knowing about themselves but only within the limited purview of their own lives. In a way these women have no interest to raise their feelings as modern feminists do with the capacity to purge society of its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory.

Urmila of *The Binding Vine* is one who is ahead of her predecessors by her endeavors to help other women. Often referred to as Urmi, she is an upper middle class career woman. She is also a grieving mother who has recently lost her one year-old baby daughter, Anu, and consequently has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitivity which leads her to befriend the helpless Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana lies in comatose state in a hospital after being brutally raped. The mutual support and sympathy between Urmila and

Shakutai in coming to terms with each other's grief is remarkable. Normally Urmila's meeting with Shakutai would not have happened as Shakutai belongs to a different strata of society. It is the same sensitivity which also makes her delve into the poems of Mira, her long dead mother-in-law and understand the mind of the young Mira who is subjected to rape in her marriage. In spite of the best efforts made by her friend cum sister-in-law Vanna, and Inni, her own mother, to bring grieving Urmila back to normal life, Urmila seems to be taking her own time to cope with the untimely loss of her daughter all by herself.⁴

Mira's poems and diaries engage her attention. Through her diaries Urmila establishes a communion with her and tries to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl, who suffered and wrote poems. Mira becomes a symbol of female oppression. Urmila understands that Mira was a favorite daughter of her father who was obviously proud of her intelligence and talent which made him present Mira a book of poetry. Urmila also understands that Mira had a deep desire of being recognized as a good creative writer and a poet, but for her fear of being laughed at her creative expression. Her questioning, anxiety and uncertainty are all felt in her heart, and her poems are the true reflections of her latent feelings.

Mira's writing reflects the extent of forced sexual activity resulting in rape in her marriage. Perhaps her situation reflects the mute suffering of many such unfortunate women. In the words of Adrienne Rich, 'it is not rape of the body alone but rape of the mind as well.'⁵ Mira dies in childbirth after four years of a loveless

marriage. Every day and every moment that she spends, there is a cry of rape and anguish. These feelings run all through her writing. To her sex becomes something like the sting of a scorpion to be borne by women in silence. In one of her poems,

Mira laments:

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

Utterly lonely, Mira lives in that alien house whose inmates treat her as a mad woman. Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion. She confesses:

I've worked hard at knowing Mira, I've read her diaries, gone
through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously
translated them into English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira.
(174)

Urmila understands that even as a child Mira has hated the way her mother has been surrendering herself to her husband. She opposes every inch of her mother's advice, who says, "never utter a no; submit and your life will be a paradise."(83)

Urmila knows that the life which seems terrible to Mira is normal to most women of her time. But Mira is not an ordinary woman. Urmila wonders how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and freedom and living with a man whom she could

not love and other people with whom she had nothing in common to share with. She thinks that “perhaps it was her writing that kept her going that kept her alive.”(127)

Even in the midst of vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped forever, Mira is aware of the new-found love for her unborn child. But Mira is unfortunate even in this – she dies in childbirth “...having bled to death within an hour after her child was born.”(136)

Thus Mira stands as a classic example of the multitude of unfortunate women who are forced into a loveless marriage and finally succumb to the lust of their husbands. Urmila’s involvement with Shakutai, her sister and daughter bring to light the manner in which the stamp of the traditional culture is operative in the sexual disparities between men and women of the lower class.⁶

Urmila, to her surprise, realizes how social approval undermines the sympathy of the mother for her daughter. The mother like the rest of the society blames her daughter for her hopeless state. Shakutai has been abandoned by her husband for another woman yet, she is extremely anxious to get Kalpana settled. Mira too was a victim of physical abuse years ago, but the mother did not dare to defy the norms of society. Mira’s mother too kept silent and stood helpless at the misery of her daughter.⁷

Shakutai hovers over the family name. If a girl is raped, for no fault of hers, she alone is censured, and victimized. Urmila is shocked to find that every one wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process the rapist is able to get away scot free.

Though Urmila is filled with all sympathies for Kalpana, she is unable to do anything. In a way, she remains a mute spectator. Shakutai even wishes for her daughter's death. She says "but sometimes I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death."(178)

Urmila's crusade for helping Kalpana does not receive the approval even at her home. So far the protagonists in the earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande have fought their own battles. Urmila is Shashi Deshpande's first protagonist who decides to fight another woman's battle. She succeeds in annulling the transfer of Kalpana to another hospital. Back at her home, Urmila's friend Vanaa and her mother Inni cannot understand her deep involvement with the girl. Finally, Urmila presents Kalpana's case in the press. Initially resentful, Shakutai now seems to be slowly realizing the enormity of the situation.⁸

Shakutai's morality is overwhelmed at the demonstration and tides of protest from women folk. Later, the police investigation reveals the rapist to be Kalpana's uncle Prabhakar. If marriage is the only means of security for people like Shakutai, Mira and Sulu are women who are physically vulnerable even within the secure structure of marriage. Urmila learns from Shakutai that Sulu always lived in constant terror

of being thrown out of her house because she cannot have children.⁹ Urmila's accusation of her mother for leaving her with her grandparents in her childhood shows how Indian women are subjected to domination by their husbands. Urmila's mother explains to her daughter that it was her father and not she who had sent her away, for he did not trust his wife in matters relating to childcare.

Urmila is aware that women at different levels irrespective of their social backgrounds are given a raw deal. Urmila is furious at the way even educated women submit themselves to safeguard their marriage. Vanaa's constant repetition of "Harish says" irritates Urmila and she reprimands Vanaa "Assert yourself; you don't have to crawl before him, do you"? (80)

As Urmila observes, the common idea of holding the mother to be solely responsible for taking care of the children has remained the same without any new signs of change. The unfairness deep-rooted in Indian society towards women is revealed when Akka is made to marry a widower with a child, only to give his son a mother. Stories like this are only a tip of an iceberg that describe the fate of many women who are made to accept marriage under the pressure of societal norms. To those women, marriage is the only goal in the life of a girl and the most difficult task on earth is to find a groom.¹⁰

Acquaintance with Shakutai provides an opportunity for Urmila to have a glimpse at the lives of women living in the slums. In spite of her doing all kinds of work to support her family, her husband deceives her for another woman.

In spite of bearing the burden of such a worthless husband and struggling all alone to find a good life for her children, Shakutai's name is always mentioned if something in the family goes wrong.

As Urmila understands from the lives of Shakutai and Sulu, absence of security in marriage haunts them. Urmila understands how self-confidence of a vivacious girl can be shattered by the institution of marriage which transforms her into a nervous woman. Shanthi Sivaraman observes, "Urmi is different...wants to assert herself and not crawl before a man."

Urmila is of the opinion that marriage is a necessity for women and especially for women like Shakutai, marriage means security. At the same time Urmi's own marriage to a man of choice whom she knew from childhood has incompatibility springing mainly from Kishore's withdrawing nature. When Vanaa her sister-in-law advises her to be more careful about her relationship with Dr. Bhasker, Urmila thinks:¹²

But how can Vanaa, secure in the fortress of her marriage to Harish, understand, what it is like-marriage with a man who flits into my life

a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind? (164)

Long separation from her husband gives her an opportunity to think of another relationship and sometimes she overcomes a longing for physical gratification during her husband's long absence from her. Dr. Bhasker has declared his love for her, and though Urmila perilously comes close to respond to Bhasker, she just holds back and thinks: "It's so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife." (166)

To Urmila, happiness in her marriage was magical, while to her mother it meant a constant pre-occupation with her husband's feelings. It is this marital bond that makes Urmila reject Bhasker's overtures – a decision which could not be taken so firmly by Shashi Deshpande's other protagonists like Indu, Saru and Jaya. Urmila never dares to overstep the boundaries chalked out in the system of marriage. Whether this virtue will be ever acknowledged by the husband or not, it goes unsaid. Urmila loves her husband so dearly that when Dr. Bhasker asks her whether she loves him, Urmila confesses, "I love my husband and therefore, I am an inviolate."¹³ (165)

Urmila may be educated and exposed to Western ideas but nowhere does she show that she agrees with Simone De Beauvoir's belief that marriage diminishes man but almost always it annihilates woman. Besides, Urmila is able to see the contrast

between her life and the terrible life that these other women have been forced to lead.¹⁴

While Kalpana's mother moans, "Why does God give us daughters...?"(60) To Urmila, who is mourning the recent death of her infant daughter Anu, the thought is jarring: "We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them the world we dreamt of for ourselves."(124)

When he was dying of cancer Urmila's father begs for her forgiveness for leaving her at Ranidurg when she was young. Having lost her daughter, Urmila now realizes that she too is not free from the pangs of guilty conscience of whether or not she had been a good mother to Anu. Urmila is practical unlike her pseudo feminist friend Preeti who is over enthusiastic to fight for equal rights for women. To her, Preeti is a symbol of the shallow female opportunist without integrity.¹⁵ Preeti excitedly tells Urmila that a judge had delivered his judgment stating that a wife could not be forced to have physical relationship with her husband against her will. Soberly, Urmila reminds Preeti that one judgement by a single judge will not make any difference to all the womankind. As there are not many women who can appeal or file in a court of law in such matters. Preeti's request for Mira's story to make a film out of it is turned down by Urmila and this perhaps brings out Urmila's moderation even in her feminism. She values the sanctity of womanhood and marriage.¹⁶

Urmila does not exhibit male-hatredness. She has no desire to seek a world without men. She only wishes for a world where women are treated equal to men. Luckily for her, she finds like-minded male friends, one is Dr. Bhasker to whom Urmila is not just a wife of somebody but an individual with an identity of her own. He even falls in love with her impressed by her passion for truth and justice.¹⁷

Urmila understands that the relationship between her Papa and Inni, Vanaa and Harish, Vanaa and her daughters, Shakutai and Kalpana are all filled with love and compassion, but it does not prevent them from being cruel to each other, ignited by clashes of egos. Relationships can be wholesome only when the people themselves are whole. When the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu are considered, Urmila regains her courage. She decides to be content with her life with a hope that her husband Kishore will remove his armour of withdrawal one day and thus he could facilitate her to reach him.

Anu has gone but she still has her son Kartik. Urmila realizes that, however burdensome our ties are, however painful our experiences are, one can never give up.

Shashi Deshpande seems to be engaged in a constructive process of consciousness raising. Her object is to enable the more affluent women to share awareness of sexist's experiences that create co-operation and pave the way for uniting people to find themselves with a strong cord of sisterhood. Urmila and Vanaa help each other

in their distress and suffering. Vanaa helps Urmila to come out of her emotional crisis. This novel is remarkable as it introduces the concept of female bonding. It depicts a woman who helps another woman who is less fortunate. This is a positive development for Urmila unlike the other protagonists. Urmila strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indignant at their uncomplaining attitude in the name of family honour.¹⁸

The need to express one's feelings and the need to be heard by the society is an all-pervading urge for the present day women. If Indu of *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya of *That Long Silence* are fulfilled individuals, it is because both of them attempt to write, face resistance and find the strength to decide what they want to write. Unlike them, Urmila draws society's attention to her protest, and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. Urmila is seen, at the end of the novel, recollecting the bonds of love that provide the "Springs of Life" (203) for human survival. She is not a rebel against the system because she believes that things are gradually improving though at a slow pace.¹⁹

4.2.2 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE BINDING VINE

This moving and exquisitely crafted novel renders visible the lives of three women who are haunted by fears, secrets, and deep grief but are bound together by strands

of life and hope of a binding vine of love, concern, and connection that spreads across chasms of time, social class, and even death.

Deshpande does not want to be seen as someone who writes about issues and problems - she is keen to point out that she is a writer of fiction. Her characters' struggles are those of ordinary women fighting to be themselves rather than conforming to stereotypes - to a fixed idea of how women should be.

Urmi had spent her own childhood living with her grandparents and does not have a close relationship with her mother, nor with her husband who is often away. She is traumatized by the loss of her daughter and seems to be searching for love.²⁰

The Binding Vine deals with the multi-facetedness of its protagonist Urmi. Her one-year-old daughter has died and she is unable to forget her. She also realizes her responsibility to her living son Kartik who needs her love and watches her anxiously. It is not that she takes every death of her kith and kin in this way. When her father died she could bear the shock easily. She says that "Papa is only a memory, a gentle memory." But Anu is different. When Inni wants to have a framed photograph of Anu on the wall, she reacts bitterly saying she does not need a picture to remember her daughter.

But when her friend Lalita asks how many kids she has, she replies, "Only one. A Son." And soon she realizes that she has done injustice to Anu.

Obsessed with the memories of her daughter, she comes across a photograph of her mother-in-law Mira which is introduced as “Kishore’s mother. Kartik’s grandmother.” Akka tells her that her brother saw Mira at a wedding and fell in love with her. Since then he had “single –minded pursuit of an object: marrying Mira”. He was suggested as a good match for Mira and in this way the marriage was arranged. She died while giving birth to Kishore.²¹

Urmi notices the difference in handing over of Mira’s property to her. Little bits of Mira’s jewellery are given saying, “They are Kishore’s mother’s....” This shows that a woman loses her identity after marriage. She is seen either as a wife or mother which in a way erases her real self and imposes another alien self on her. When the books and diaries of Mira are given, Akka says,” Take this, it’s Mira’s.”(48) She did not mention Kishore at all. The difference made by Akka symbolizes that the poems and diaries are self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on husbands or any men.

After reading the poems, Urmi realizes the suffering of Mira. For the time-being she forgets her own suffering and tries to probe into Mira’s poetry to visualize the kind of troubled life she had lived. Taken together, the poems and the diary entries connote molestation in marriage.

Mira's loneliness was a part of her being. When she came to her in-law's house, she was christened Nirmala- the first estrangement from her identity, her own self. One of her poems is written in reaction to this horrible incident:

A glittering ring gliding on the rice
Carefully traced a name 'Nirmala'.....
Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (101)

But this strong assertion remains a private experience, it never becomes public in her lifetime.²²

Mira's diary also mentions her meeting with the rising poet Venu. When Mira gave some of her poems to read, he said, "Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men."(127) It shows the attitude of a male poet. It can also be seen as a kind of brutality, because "even to force your will upon another is to be brutal."(133) This reflects the agony of a creative woman in an androcentric world. It connotes the handicaps of women writers in a male chauvinist society.

Mira uses her pen as a weapon to save herself from abuse, anonymity and mutilation in the prison house of her husband. The poems of Mira haunt Urmi so much that she decides to resurrect her by publishing them. But Vanna is enraged. "It is as if the knowledge of what her father did, of what he was, has threatened something." (181) In fact, male-oriented societies nourish women in such a way that

they start looking at the world and interpreting it from male point of view.²³ Urmi shares the anguish of not only her mother-in-law but also of Kalpana - a girl who becomes a prey to her own relative who molests her.

Though Urmi is accused of being a “traitor” to Mira and Kalpana by other women, she is resolute to break the silence of women which comes in different forms – sometimes in the name of social taboos, sometimes in the name of the family honour. She justifies her stand because she sees these mishaps from the female point of view.²⁴

Shashi Deshpande acts as a moderate Indian feminist writer who does not go to extremes. She knows that the “wails of anguish or thunder of curses or growls of anger do not by themselves turn into great literature.” It is significant that in the creative female world of Deshpande all men are not villains. For example, the husband of the protagonist Urmi is good to her and she is fully satisfied with him. But she realizes the responsibility to her own caste- the *Stri Jati* – and struggles to bring its truth before the society. This embodies the depth of the dimensions of personality of Deshpande’s heroine. Contrasted with the earlier protagonists Urmi is concerned with the redemption of her own caste.

Urmi’s effort to publicize the gruesome reality of Kalpana’s life is an effort to oppose a ‘culture in which such feminist dreams have been replaced by fundamental patriarchy that divides women into rigid categories based on function.’ Though not

free from the dangers of being treated as a propaganda literature, *The Binding Vine* occupies a significant place in the Indian feminist fiction. It succeeds in deconstructing the interior colonialism of which women have been victims.²⁵

4.3.1 A MATTER OF TIME

A Matter of Time deals with the human predicament of three women representing three generations of the same family. For the first time Deshpande makes a man the protagonist of the novel, but this has not led her to focusing entirely on the man. As usual she has given expression to women's pain, suffering and endurance in marriage.

The novel veers round an urban, middle-class family of Gopal and Sumi with their three daughters – Aru, Charu and Seema. It begins with Gopal entering the house and telling Sumi that he is leaving the house for good. Sumi is unable to react verbally. The next morning she tells it to her daughter, repeating Gopal's words in toto. She is so shocked with Gopal's action that she lapses into complete silence, trying simultaneously to keep things normal for her daughters. But they feel restless as "Sumi, despite her façade of normality, has about her – a kind of blankness – that makes them uneasy."(10-11)

Gopal's walking out on the family comes as a shock to the readers as well. They feel why Gopal married Sumi in the first place. Theirs is not an arranged one but a love marriage. Gopal asks himself: "Why did I marry Sumi? Because I met her – it's as simple as that."(65-66) Thus, the marriage is devoid of any initial romance, but is

the inevitable outcome of a matter-of-fact relationship. The contract was easy and its breach even easier. But their marriage cannot be said to be incompatible as their first physical consummation is fulfilling and gratifying to both. No tenable reason is assigned for Gopal's desertion and the readers remain in the dark as to his motive behind his mindless act.

Kalyani, Sumi's mother, decides to plead with Gopal to return home. Gopal assures her that Sumi is not at all responsible for his decision, but does not offer any other reason for the act. But Sumi feels hurt when her daughters blame her for Gopal's act of desertion. Sumi, in fact, is trying to come to terms with the hard, painful reality, and expects her daughters also to do the same. Sumi's sister, Premi, tries to elicit a tenable reason from Gopal, which proves futile. Later Premi comes to know from Aru and Charu that his students at the college had humiliated their father, which could have been the plausible reason for his resignation from his job. But it seems to be so facile an answer that the same is unacceptable to the readers. Perhaps, Gopal himself is not sure about the reasons behind his decisive act.²⁶

Gopal's sense of alienation and loneliness since his father's unholy marriage to his brother's wife remain so even after his marriage. Earlier also he felt himself like an outsider and even after marriage the feeling does not leave him:

I saw it when Sumi put the baby to her breast. [...] when I looked at them, that they belonged together as I never did. [...] they were together in a magic circle. Woman and child. And I was outside. A man is always an outsider (68).

The mother-son bond is so deep-rooted in a man's psyche that it is nearly impossible to extricate oneself from it. When Shankar expresses his inability to protect his wife from his mother's sharp tongue saying, "She gave me birth, she brought me up, she looked after me", (216) Gopal reflects: "That's a debt we can never repay, it's a burden we can never lay down."(216)

Gopal's desertion is cause for great worry to Sumi's mother, sister and cousin, but this sudden crisis in life brings out Sumi's great inner strength and self-respecting, strong character. She stoically accepts the humiliation and disgrace of a deserted wife. She raises no fuss over it and lapses into a stone-like silence. Her self-respecting nature makes her refuse all monetary help from close relatives. She takes up a temporary teaching job to fend for herself and her daughters. Sumi proves that she is made of different stuff as she harbours no grudge against Gopal by setting him completely free to pursue his own purposes by asking Aru not to sue her father for maintainence. She even decides against putting pressure on Gopal to return home for her and for her daughters. Her daughters are also anxious if their father is dead or alive, but Sumi is sure about his being alive and pursuing his own goal.

The reunion of Gopal and Sumi is an unusual one. When he returns she neither cries to him nor abuses him nor does she ask him for any explanations. Everything is normal as Sumi enters the room and finds him having lunch and reading poems.

After lunch also she finds him in a happy mood, laughing and talking to the children. His presence does make difference to others and her daughters, but for herself she realizes that they can "never be together again" (88).

Thus she has come to terms with her present with an understanding to move ahead in life without bitterness for the man who had been the cause of her humiliation and suffering. Now she is a new woman with a new understanding and consciousness, all set to begin her life confidently anew as a teacher and creative writer. But this was not to be. Sumi and her father, Shripati, meet their tragic end in a road accident.²⁷

Unlike the earlier novels, Deshpande gives voice to the man's point of view. Gopal's thoughts and feelings are laid bare before us. Motherhood has been given a prominent a place in literature and society.

4.3.2 THE CHARACTER OF SUMI IN A MATTER OF TIME

Sumi of *A Matter of Time* gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from being a deserted wife. At the age of forty, she stands alone and helpless along with her three teenaged daughters. But she is not emotionally shattered as is common with housewives without economic independence. She demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She displays rare courage and self-confidence. Unlike any other in her place, she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion has brought out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent, asserts her identity and revives her creativity. She, thus, comes a long way from the other women for whom marriage is mostly the be-all and end-all of their existence. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent

spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment.

Sumi evolves herself from the invisible chains of patriarchal pressure and other family responsibilities. She is seen gradually emancipating as a new and independent woman experiencing the anguish of an isolated partner. Sumi helps her children to get on with their lives.

Sumi also comes to her parental house like the other protagonists did earlier. If others submit themselves to introspection and rumination, Sumi straightaway decides to face the facts squarely. After 23 years of her marriage, in a very casual way Gopal walks out and unburdens his responsibilities as husband and father of three grown up children leaving Sumi in a shocked silence. Describing the whole scene of Gopal's casual desertion, Keerthi Ramachandra says:

He waits for Sumi's reaction, but within moments both realize that there's nothing more to be said and he leaves as quietly as he had entered.²⁸

Sumi too wants to fight her own battle and assert her individuality. Though deserted, Sumi does not contemplate a divorce as she considers this to be of no use to her. Divorce frees a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily. The divorcee has to further bear the onslaughts of a harsh society which does not allow her to be free and happy. Sumi, has the full support

and sympathy of her parents, sister, cousins and others. This has helped her to a great extent to withstand the shock, pain, humiliation and the trauma of desertion.²⁹

Sumi and Gopal enjoyed a harmonious relationship during the early years of their marriage. Their joyous intimate love, physical as well as mental, leads one to understand their conjugal bliss especially in the early years of their marriage. Thinking of their first union, Gopal thinks “And I knew then that it was for this, this losing yourself in another human being that men give up their dreams of freedom.” (223)

However, this happiness seems destined to drift as there is a basic incompatibility, a dissimilarity of temperaments. The fear of being unable to fulfill his obligations as a husband and a father coupled with an intense loneliness and a feeling of isolation from his wife and daughters has compelled him to choose what could easily be termed a coward's way out.³⁰ This is the only plausible explanation for his mindless act.

Gopal's character is closely linked to Sumi's character. Therefore an analysis of his character is necessary while dealing with Sumi's image. Gopal's inward thoughts always remain unsaid to anybody. He is not able to explain even to his wife Sumi, the reason that compelled him to isolate himself from the family. He only assures them that Sumi is in no way responsible for that decision and therefore she need not be blamed. Kalyani, Sumi's mother, has vague suspicion that Gopal has done this

for the sake of money which is not true. She pathetically implores him, “what have you done to my daughter, Gopala don’t do this, don’t let it happen to my daughter...” (46)

Sumi knows that Gopal believes that “Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes – a lifetime of commitment – is not possible for all of us.” (69) She remembers that when they had decided to get married, Gopal proposed that if either of the two wanted to be free, he or she would be left to go. Reminding Gopal about this, Sumi tells him: “How can you think of separating of wanting to be apart, when you are eighteen in love?...I thought we would always be together.” (221) Like Deshpande’s earlier protagonists, Sumi too was craving for love and acceptance from her husband.

She is, however, not unconscious of the developments taking place in him. Sumi does not seek any explanation from Gopal. She knows well that “...the reason lies inside him, the reason is him.” (24) However, she desires to ask him only one question, which however remains unasked.

What is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns?.... Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (27)

Gopal is grateful to Sumi for not asking any questions and thus saving him mortification of voicing half truths. Sumi does not even wish to talk about Gopal's act of desertion with anyone.

Gopal, the idealist, realizes the futility of existence and he says, "I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I knew I could not go on." (41)

His own inner emptiness is thus explained adequately. The existential alienation which Gopal experiences can be offered as one of the most possible reasons for his transformation leading to his inexplicable desertion of the family.

Sumi views the desertion as 'sanyasa' and says, "I've begun to think that what Gopal has really done is to take sanyas." (123)

Gopal's childhood has not been normal, because his father had taken his brother's widow for marriage and he was born of that union. He struggles within himself and undergoes severe inner conflict. His predicament seems to parallel that of Hamlet's. What ruins his peace is his painful realization that even his sister Sudha and he do not share the same father. Isolated and abandoned, Gopal for long has been nurturing the same feeling of loneliness and desolation.³¹

Perhaps his insecure childhood, his lack of understanding of the true concept of happiness and ignorance of the quality of joy could have prompted Gopal to renounce his grihasthashrama. Gopal can be compared to the protagonist of Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha who also deserts his wife and son. However, unlike him, Gopal is yet to find solution to his loneliness and achieve peace. Gopal's desertion fails to convince any one and the least of all of them is Aru, his daughter. To her, it is "...not just a tragedy, it is both a shame and a disgrace". (13) She does not want him to get away scot-free while they have to face the disgrace, shame and humiliation the desertion brings. Her demand for family maintenance is not approved by Sumi who endures the pain with patience, self-respect and magnanimity.³²

Gopal's desertion upsets everyone. But, surprisingly, it has brought out Sumi's real hidden strength. Right from her marriage, Sumi has been a contented wife and mother and has willingly subordinated herself to her husband and daughters. Though disappointed and frustrated, Sumi seeks to cope with the disgrace and humiliation of desertion in an admirable way. She surrounds herself with a death-like silence which can convey her pain more effectively than words can express. The only person to meet Gopal without rancor is his wife, Sumi, who recognizes the essential loneliness of all human beings and so sets him free. This cannot be called passivity. She deliberately plays cool and maintains her matter-of-fact attitude. Her patience, tolerance, sense of equanimity and stoicism makes her an 'enigma'. As Shashi Deshpande observes:

Sumi's acceptance is not passive. She blocks out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself; she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity; she would do anything for pride....³³

Sumi dislikes to unlock her heart and lay bare her emotions to Gopal. Her pride prevents her to show her grief to him. Nor does she request him to come back to her. She controls her feelings and looks composed and equanimous to the outside world. She tries to show the world that it is important for women like her to retain her feelings and maintain their self-respect.

Revealing an independent and individualistic spirit, Sumi refuses to accept any kind of economic assistance either from her parents or from Premi, her doctor sister or from Ramesh, Gopal's doctor nephew. Working as a teacher, though on a temporary post, she wants to stand on her own legs and assert her identity. Sumi picks up her heart and prepares for the future.

She looks for a permanent job, and with great determination learns to ride a two-wheeler at her age.³⁴ With stoicism, Sumi meets the disapproving comments from women like Shankar's mother, who says:

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

(161)

Sumi wonders how the fate of women is being measured only through their marital status. A woman gets respect only if she has her husband, irrespective of the number of wives or mistresses he has. They have to live together under the same roof because 'what is a woman without a husband?' (167) Sumi thinks of her parents, Kalyani and Shripati, who live like strangers under the same roof and have not spoken for years. "But her kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife." (167) Sumi feels that this is no existence in the true sense.

It is not that easy for a woman, separated or divorced from her husband to begin a new life. On the contrary, Sumi, after Gopal's walk-out, revives her creativity. She writes a play which becomes a success. Inspired by this success, she now desires to rewrite the story of Surpanakha in the *Ramayana* from a different perspective, from Surpanakha's view-point.³⁵

This reflects Sumi's modern progressive outlook. She is anxious that man-woman relationships should be sound, equal and non-partisan. Sumi stands for responsibility, motherly love, care and concern. Every moment she is seen worried about her grown-up daughters. She desires that her daughter's life should be easy and comfortable. She fervently hopes: "I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to taste life, I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter." (220)

It is a pity that Sumi dies when she is taking up a job to support herself and her daughters. Perhaps, through Aru, the novelist looks hopefully at the younger generation to penetrate the silence, make women realize their situation and speak up for themselves. Inheriting her mother's pride and dignity, courage and confidence, Aru assures her father that they will be all right. "We'll be quite alright, don't worry about us" (246) This was a very important dimension that Shashi Deshpande could give to the character of Sumi.

4.3.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN A MATTER OF TIME

While dealing with Sumi's character in the novel, Shashi Deshpande has expressed her ideas about women in general. She raises questions such as: Does man's destiny change when he engages in a bewildering search for life's meaning? Can a woman's ambivalent attempt to clear self-doubt transform her destiny? Shashi Deshpande raises these age-old questions in her book *A Matter of Time* about women whose lives are dominated by the shame and guilt caused by the actions of their spouses. The lives of three generations of women living in their family home, "the Big House," seem to be ruled by similar patterns of destiny. In fact, destiny is the word of choice of one of the central characters, Kalyani, the grandmother. Deshpande crafts a suspenseful story about Kalyani. She was forced into an arranged marriage with her maternal uncle Shripati, and the tragedy of their life occurs when he initially deserts her and then returns to live in an isolated room in the Big House. He ceases talking to Kalyani. Thirty-five years later, Kalyani is devastated by another man's desertion-this time that of her son-in-law, Gopal, who walks out on her

daughter Sumi, and away from a much-coveted job to find an answer to life's emptiness.³⁶

Sumi is confident of her capabilities to make choices and assumes control over her life. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure.³⁷

Deshpande's characters develop in her works. The inner workings of a family are examined clearly. The book is also a mirror of a society in transition. The change in Indian society is skillfully elaborated through the different generations in this book; the grandmother Kalyani who is not really educated, Sumi who is educated but doesn't work outside the home, Sumi's sister Premi, who is a successful doctor, and the young girls Aru, Charu and Seema, who all aspire for careers and independence. The old and the new co-exist in a family that is modern, but with certain old values.

With a style that is lilting and gentle, Deshpande draws us into an intricate web of family relationships, without passing judgment on any other characters' deeds. For the reader, however, there is no escaping the clutches of emotion or feeling, when reading about the trials and tribulations these women undergo because of their relationships.³⁸

One agrees with the view that women do not remain victims, despite their unquestioning acceptance of male flight from the family in Shashi Deshpande's novels. And the men are transformed betrayers into objects of self-pity, trapped in a morass of human flaws and psychic distress.³⁹

4.4 SMALL REMEDIES

Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande's latest novel was published in the year 2000. Here she adopts the structure of a biography within a biography. Madhu Saptarishi, the protagonist is an urban, middle-aged, educated woman who has been commissioned by a publisher to write a biography on a famous classical singer, Savtribai Indorekar, doyenne of Gwalior Gharana.

Madhu has been asked to write Savitribai's biography wherein she was to be presented as a heroine. But she refuses to present her as such since the latter had been a victim of gender discrimination prevalent in our patriarchal social set-up. Imposing the current concept of heroinism on an old woman seemed not only impractical but out of place to Madhu. Instead, she presents her as a young woman who had led a sheltered life not only as a child in her parental home but also as a daughter-in-law in an affluent Brahmin family. It is her daring independent nature that makes her seek her own identity and elope with a Muslim *tabla* player to live in a strange town. Although born in a tradition-bound orthodox Brahmin family, she makes a name for herself as a great classical singer. Madhu records how Savitribai felt hurt when her grandmother asked her to stop singing immediately during her performance at a family gathering.⁴⁰

Savitribai's father with his unconventional ways stood out from society. He was a widower, bringing up a daughter on his own with a male servant at home. He would observe no rituals or religious rites and would openly indulge in a drink or two every evening. But all his unorthodox behaviour never invited any censure or disapproval from society. But when it came to Savitribai, it was a different story: "Being a man he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted without disapproval." (139) People are shocked and disapprove of Savitribai's action as she elopes with a *tabla* player to some other town and also begets a child from him.

Even Savitribai's father-in-law is no different. He too could get away with his way of life without any censure or disapproval from society. He had a mistress who was a well-known Thumri singer. He visited her regularly and the people around knew this. It was not much of a secret affair and the women gossiped about it. His choosing a wife from his own class and mistress from another was quite acceptable, but for a daughter-in-law pursuing a career in classical music was scandalous.

The gossip surrounding Savitribai in Neemgaon was that a Station Director who had helped her get many contracts with the radio was her lover. He was a regular visitor to her place. In course of time a daughter Munki is born to her from him. As the child grows up, Madhu recalls how children would tease her by calling the Station Director her *mama*, a euphemism for mother's lover. Savitribai, while narrating her life story to Madhu, conceals the fact that she had any lover, but the small town knew that the Station Director was her lover. In a patriarchal set-up, as

Savitribai was “A woman who had left her husband’s home” (222), she was considered an immoral woman. Like her father and father-in-law, she too had led a most unorthodox life and had also paid a price for it as a woman. To society, her way of life was inexorable, while her father’s or, for that matter, her father-in-law’s was connived at.

Savitribai is ashamed of her youthful indiscretions as while relating her life-story to Madhu, she conceals her intimate association with Ghulam Saab and also hides the fact that she had a daughter from him. This shows Savitribai’s anxiety over her past’s reckless action, which she considers a blemish on her character and respectability. She keeps herself aloof from her illegal daughter Munni, lest it should tarnish her image. But this dissociation of hers from her daughter is too much for Madhu as she herself is a devoted and loving mother, grieving over her son’s death.

Madhu cannot stomach the fact that Savitribai has kept herself dissociated with her daughter born out of wedlock and has kept it a most guarded secret. She also gave Munni her name “Indorekar” which she had adopted as her very own identity as singer and which comprises neither her maiden name nor her married one; all this smacks of her possessiveness as she claims her as exclusively her own child, neither her husband’s nor her lover’s. In her quest for identity she has become overly selfish and possessive, for she gives the child her own identity for her own sake, but disowns her when it comes to sacrificing her hard-earned name for her only child. She loves the child till her own emotional needs get fulfilled but when it comes to Munni’s own identity and happiness, she selfishly keeps her out of her life, recoiling

under the guise of respectability and a good name. Madhu wonders as to why a woman who had the daring to walk out on her marriage and family, feared to make public the fact that she had borne a child out of wedlock.

Meenakshi Indorekar, her daughter, is no exception. She leads the life of a disowned child and is unhappy and ashamed of her existence, as she is a child born of her mother's association with another man. She dissociates herself from Ghulam Saab, rejecting him as her father and later does the same to her mother. Madhu recalls how as a child Munni had concocted stories of a lawyer-father living in Pune, and also underwent great mental torture when the neighbourhood girls teased her by asking her about the identity of her real father – was it Ghulam Saab, the Station Director or the man “who lives with your [Munni's] mother?” (77). She was desperate for a new identity that would cut her off from her past.

In her desperate quest for a new identity cut off from her past she has not only given up her mother's identity but refused to acknowledge any familiarity with her past connections or acquaintances.

Then there is a story of Leela and Joe in the novel. After the death of her first husband, Vasanth, Madhu's aunt Leela takes up a job to become economically independent and also to educate her brother-in-law. Living in the crowded *chawls* among cotton mills she would work for women suffering from TB. This led to coming into contact with Joe, her second husband, who had set up a clinic for TB patients. He was a widower with two children, spoke flawless English and was well-

versed with Literature. Besides medicine, his other loves were literature and music. On the other hand, Leela neither spoke nor knew anything on literature and music. Though Leela belongs to a different caste, Joe falls head over heels in love with her. She did not believe in caste and the two are married. Despite the vast difference in their inherent natures, to Madhu, the two had a wonderful relationship.

The narrator of the novel Madhu, her life story is different. Madhu, waking up after a nightmare, discloses to her husband Som a secret that she had slept with another man when she was fifteen. Som is unable to come to terms with her act. The relationship between the two begins to disintegrate. Madhu fails to comprehend Som.⁴¹

With his typical male psychology Som holds on to this lone act of sex forgetting the fact that he himself has had a full-fledged relation with a married woman before marriage. She reflects: "Purity, chastity and intact hymen – these are the things Som is thinking of; these are the truths that matter." (262)⁴² This incident brings a rift in their relationship which is later patched up after the death of their son.

Compared to the earlier novels, *Small Remedies* has been wrought on a wider canvas. Taking into account the Indian composite culture, the structure of the novel encompasses the plurality and diversity of this culture. In this particular novel her characters – male and female – are drawn from different communities and professions. She gives an honest and realistic portrayal of a Maharashtrian

Brahmin family. Here, an Anthony Gonsalves, a Hamidabai and Joe are all, in a sense, part of Madhu's extended family.

With total control over her unwieldy material, she weaves a fabric of intricate design in this novel in which music forms the organizing strand. At the center of the sprawling narrative is a woman called Madhu Saptarishi engaged in writing the biography of the singer Savitribai Indorekar, a living legend of the Gwalior gharana.

Deshpande's main concern is not the Hindustani classical music, but the gross gender discrimination prevailing not only in society but in the field of classical music as well.

4.4.2 THE CHARACTER OF MADHU IN SMALL REMEDIES

“To achieve something... you have got to be hard and ruthless...There is no other way of being a saint. Or a painter. A Writer.” This unexpected first paragraph of *That Long Silence* (1988) is the voice of the narrator, but it also gives us a clue to the author's approach to writing. *Small Remedies*, Deshpande's recent novel, is the most confident assertion of this strength and a deliberate denial of sentimentality.

Right from childhood Madhu had sensed the gross discrimination women had to undergo in a society that had one law for men, another for women. She remembers how men could lead a life of their choice with impunity, while women were jeered at and looked down upon if they showed any deviation from the assigned roles set up by society for them.

For Madhu, writing Savitribai's biography is not voluntary labour undertaken for love or admiration, it is an assignment she has been asked to do. With the biographer's detachment from her subject she makes clear-eyed inquiries into the larger problems of writing a life – anyone's life, even one's own. Madhu realizes that a chronological account will not do because we see our lives through memories and memories are fragmented, almost always cutting across time. Madhu is overwhelmed by her own omnipotence because she can create an infinite range of Savitribais – 'a great rebel who defies the conventions of her time. The feminist who lived her life on her own terms. The great artist who sacrificed everything for the cause of her art' or the impetuous lover who abandoned a secure married life in a Brahmin household to live with her Muslim accompanist. Madhu's publishers want a trendy feminist biography. They tell her that victim stories are out of fashion, heroines are in. But Madhu cannot impose the new concept of 'heroinism' on an old fashioned woman who whitewashes her life through selective amnesia. Each session with the Bai (as the great singer is called) triggers off Madhu's own memories, some of them connected with Munni, Bai's daughter by her Muslim partner. Munni was Madhu's playmate once. Madhu has some memories entirely unconnected with Bai and they sometimes refer to her own troubled life. We do not know the exact nature of her problems until quite late in the novel, but we do know that Madhu's friends feel that working on this assignment may be a therapy, helping her to come to terms with her own personal trauma. The author is in no great hurry to get on with the story. The narrative unfolds leisurely 'like a raga, beginning with aalap, continuing

with *vistaar*, gradually gaining momentum in a quickening spiral of suspense eventually to achieve a cathartic calm.⁴³

Deshpande seems to do the same here as she has always done in the past while conveying with seemingly effortless ease the sense of loose, yet precise, networking of extended families and their convoluted hierarchies and equations. In *Small Remedies*, the motherless Madhu is at first overwhelmed by the inclusive warmth of her husband's family. Immediately after this comes an ironical comment deflating this euphoria.⁴⁴

Although Madhu refuses to get emotional about music, there is precision in her descriptions, as in the recounting of the first big concert she attended as a child where Munni's mother sang, accompanied on the tabla by a man Munni refused to accept as father.⁴⁵ Madhu is motherless and had been brought up by her father and a male servant. However though motherless as a child, she on her part is a very caring mother, conscious of every little need of her son Aditya. The motherless Madhu is at first overwhelmed by the inclusive warmth of her husband's family but later on her feeling of euphoria gives way to dissatisfaction.

In *Small Remedies*, Deshpande is attempting much more than she did in her earlier novels. *Small Remedies* has gathered up, in one large sweep, the plurality, diversity and contradictions of our contemporary culture where an Anthony Gonsalves, a Hamidbhai and Joe can all be part of Madhu's extended family, and the daughter of Ghulam Saab can opt, though not very easily, to get accepted as Shailaja Joshi.

4.4.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN SMALL REMEDIES

Small Remedies is a saga of women emancipation. The novel is about the ‘making’ of a writer and a social worker. Here, Deshpande envisages a hopeful future for women in their “shared experienced as women.” Madhu, Savitri Bai Indorekar, and Leela learn to know themselves and in the company of female folks they achieve their social as well as spiritual identities. These women attain solicitude and ‘sense of self’ through their occupations and skills and continue to defy the servility imposed on them by men.⁴⁶

For Savitri Bai Indorekar, in her music lies the aesthetic dimension of the erotic as well as her spiritual salvation. Extremely devoted to her practice she left her in-laws’ house and moved to Bhavanipur with her lover and Tabala master Ghulam Saab. Savitri Bai rearranges her domestic life without her kith and kin and confronts dilemmas in life of her own. Madhu writes about Savitri Bai:

I can make Bai the rebel who rejected the conventions of her times.
The feminist who lived her life at her terms...The woman who gave up everything – a comfortable home, a husband and a family – for love (166).

Madhu’s aunt Leela is another non-conformist who participated in the ’42 Quit India Movement, and was responsible for daring deeds. Leela is a widow, who marries a Christian man and works for the upliftment of the women of the lower

strata. Madhu narrates Leela's suffering and angst in her effort to create a space in a male stratified system:

I know that Leela was, certainly, a person who accepted wholly the consequences of her actions – Therefore, no complaints. In her work, too, though she was sidelined after years of working for the party, though she never reached the top of the hierarchy, while men who'd worked under her got there, she never complained...⁴⁷

Munni, the daughter of this famous mother, professed to hate music. Ruthlessly, discarded by Savitribai in her subsequent climb to respectability, this girl is the most vivid character in the novel.

Twelve-year-old Munni could enact entire Hindi films, repeating songs, dances and dialogues exactly, fabricated stories about herself and did things forbidden to other children. Looking back, Madhu now sees Munni's unashamed lies as an attempt to make sense of her insecure existence, to create a life-story to suit her dream, as Savitribai is now doing for the benefit of her biographer.

If *Small Remedies* is a book about writing a book, on the reflections of the impossibility of ever capturing in words the truth about any life, it is also about how the enterprise can take on a life of its own.

This book shows societal ambivalence towards women's changing roles. Madhu's desire to write an honest and true biography of Bai helps her in overcoming her

sense of loss after the death of her son Aditya and her husband's distrust for yielding to a stranger in a moment of strong impulse. Arduous mental upheaval reveals her weakness and her strengths. Madhu leaves her home to come to terms with her identity and desire.⁴⁸

It is true that Deshpande presents a very conventional idea of feminism. Within the four walls of domesticity, she presents a certain image of middle class ethos, still one can read here the theme of resistance. Deshpande recognizes the importance of interaction among different generations of women. She emphasizes that women's strength lies in their acknowledgement of their desires not only sexual but creative as well. Deshpande's work exemplifies that women need to be assertive in order to regain their mental equipoise and individuality.

4.5 HER LATER NOVELS: COMMENT

Shashi Deshpande in her later novels keeps her narratives female-centred and gives an intimate insight into the psyche of the middle-class Indian women who feel oppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal socialization. She provides new ideals for a better man-woman relationship, thereby broadening the scope of woman's existence. She not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values, but also prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman. To her, traditions are the values of harmony and coexistence that symbolize the Indian way of life, and modernity is the assertion of the independent, individual identity. After having passively played out

their socially ordained roles, her protagonists move out of their cloistered selves to assert their individuality as human beings. Deshpande feels that the woman must be true to her own self if she wants to realize herself. The straitjacketed role imposed on woman only bogs her down in mire of negation and suppression. She must venture out of the familial framework to give full expression of her individuality and identity.

Shashi Deshpande's novels reveal her deep insight into the plight of Indian women, who feel smothered and fettered, in a tradition-bound, male-dominated society. She delineates her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. They are aware of their strengths and limitations, but find themselves thwarted by the opposition and pressure from a society conditioned overwhelmingly by the patriarchal mind-set. Deshpande highlights their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a male-dominated society.

Chapter – IV

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CHAPTER –V

Feminism and Shashi Deshpande's Feminism

- 5.1.1 Feminism
- 5.1.2 Feminism and Feminity
- 5.1.3 Post-feminism
- 5.2 Shashi Deshpande's views on Feminism
- 5.3.1 Male Repressive Force within Marriage
- 5.3.2 Stereotypical Image of Women as Wife
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- 5.3.4 Problems in Shashi Deshpande's novels
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CHAPTER –V

FEMINISM AND SHASHI DESHPANDE’S FEMINISM

5.1.1 FEMINISM—

The term ‘feminism’ has its origin from the Latin word ‘femina’ meaning ‘woman’ (through French ‘feminisme’). It refers to the advocacy of women’s rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of ‘equality of sexes’. In other words, it relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. The term became popular from the early twentieth century struggles for securing women’s suffrage or voting rights (the suffragette movement) in the western countries, and the later well-organized socio-political movement for women’s emancipation from patriarchal oppression. The political scope of *feminism* has been broadened by the impact of *Marxist* ideology that has made feminists challenge *sexism* along with *capitalism* for both encouraged the patriarchal set-up.

Shashi Deshpande’s women characters keeping in mind the various types and phases of the women characters expressed in her six novels are studied here and it tries to link these novels with the various phases of feminism. For this purpose it is necessary to have some discussion of feminism and feminist literature.

Writers like Jane Austen, Mary Wellstonecraft, Virginia Woolf pledged for the equality of opportunity for the woman based upon the equality of value. But it was left for Simone De Beavoir to come out with a bold manifesto for a frontal attack on the patriarchal hegemony in our society. In her famous treatise, *The Second Sex*, she has, like a raging rebel, hit hard at the androcentric customs and conventions, art and culture, philosophy and religion which have always assigned women the secondary or rather slavish position to men.

5.1.2 FEMINISM AND FEMINITY

Feminism is, indeed, a serious attempt to analyze, comprehend and clarify how and why is feminity or the feminine sensibility is different from masculinity or the masculine experience. Feminism brings into perspective the points of difference that characterize the 'feminine identity' or 'feminine psyche' or 'feminity' of woman. It can be studied by taking into account the psychosomatic, social and cultural construction of feminity vis-à-vis masculinity.¹

The male writers have mostly seen women as inferior and weak. Gendering and some sort of misogyny are evident in the texts written by men.² They see men as 'superior sex' or the 'stronger sex' while women are seen as are the 'inferior sex' or the 'weaker sex'. Men are considered as logical, rational and objective, and, women are perceived as emotional, inconsistent, intuitive, subjective and lacking self-confidence.³

But the modern woman has raised her voice against the atrocity and injustice done to her by the system. And it is their pronouncement in an overt tone that has created the difference also in textuality.

It was mainly after the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s that the contemporary feminist ideology evolved and the female voice was heard with special concern. The focus of the literary studies was shifted to women's writing with a view to re-reading, revisioning and reinterpreting it in the light of long-existing gender bias and sexual politics in history, culture, society, family, language and literature.⁴

5.1.3 POST-FEMINISM

The first wave feminism has been the political movement for women's rights. The second wave feminism relates to the historical context of patriarchy and oppression and attacks the male domination in aggressive, militant tone. The third wave feminism challenges the gender discrimination and attempts to find a rationale for the identities of masculinity and femininity. The fourth wave feminism is termed postmodern feminism and may be called 'post-feminism', which lays emphasis on individual woman's inner freedom and awakening. It tries to resolve the issues and problems raised by feminism and attempts to understand the relationship of interdependence between man and woman.⁵

The term 'post-feminism' has become an umbrella term to cover a variety of concepts. Besides the egalitarian perspectives, it covers the concepts of the 'brave new world', 'the girlpower', cyberspace', 'androgyny', 'pluralism', and to a certain extent the doctrine of 'multiculturalism'. The 'brave new world' and the 'girlpower' refer to the world of young women who are bold, assertive, self-assured and competitive, and do not require the crutches of feminism to secure space for themselves. The 'bad girls', who can counter men by their feminine wiles and their assertive-aggressive sexuality, are also included in post-feminism.⁶

The major thrust is now on the *homo sapiens*. The discrimination based on race, class, sex, gender, colour, community or ethnicity is seriously challenged. It inculcates the concepts of mutual understanding and respect, irrespective of the differences. Particularly speaking about gender differences. Allan and Barbara Pease's book *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps* (2001), with a subtitle *How we're different and what to do about it*, is the latest research-based survey of man-woman relationship and the problems of gender identities, and is, no doubt, a significant work towards that end.⁷

Post-feminism would certainly find out definite constructive, consensual resolves for the various issues raised by feminism. It is hoped the ensuing century (and the millennium) is free from all those conflicts that have been too much stretched out only because of conceited egos and several other complexes among the genders. The

'post'-phase of feminism would hopefully fill up the gaps between one human being and the other created in the past.⁸

5.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S VIEWS ON FEMINISM

As the study attempts to study Shashi Deshpande's women characters, her portrayal of women needs to be studied from a feminist angle. As an author of the '70s and 80s', she mirrors a realistic picture of the contemporary middle-class, educated, urban Indian woman. Her novels portray the miserable plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the twentieth century. Shashi Deshpande has made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustrations of women despite her vehement denial of being a feminist.

A look at her novels will reveal her treatment of major women characters and will show how the themes in them are related to women's problems. Shashi Deshpande has exposed the gross gender discrimination and its fall-out in a male dominated society in her first novel *Roots and Shadows*. In the novel, she depicts the agony and suffocation experienced by the protagonist Indu in a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. She refuses to play the straitjacketed role of a wife imposed upon by society. Her quest for identity is tellingly expressed in the novel. *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, her second novel, is about the traumatic experience the protagonist Saru undergoes as her husband refuses to play a second-fiddle role. Saru undergoes great

humiliation and neglect as a child and, after marriage, as a wife. Deshpande discusses the blatant gender discrimination shown by parents towards their daughters and their desire to have a male child. After her marriage, as she gains a greater social status than her husband Manohar, all begins to fall apart. Her husband's sense of inferiority complex and the humiliation he feels as a result of society's reaction to Saru's superior position develops sadism in him. Her husband Manu vents his frustration on Saru in the form of sexual sadism, which has been vividly portrayed by Deshpande. *That Long Silence*, the third novel, is about Jaya who, despite having played the role of a wife and mother to perfection, finds herself lonely and estranged. Jaya realizes that she has been unjust to herself and her career as a writer, as she is afraid of inviting any displeasure from her husband. Her fear even discourages her from acknowledging her friendship with another man. These three novels belong to her early phase and portray a mild form of feminism.

The Binding Vine, her fourth novel, deals with the personal tragedy of the protagonist Urmi to focus attention on the victims like Kalpana and Mira. Urmi narrates the pathetic tale of Mira, her mother-in-law, who is a victim of marital rape. Mira, in the solitude of her unhappy marriage, would write poems, which were posthumously translated and published by Urmi. Urmi also narrates the tale of her acquaintance Shakutai, who had been deserted by her husband for another woman. The worst part of her tale is that Shakutai's elder daughter Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, her sister Sulu's husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana's behalf and brings the culprit to book. In *A Matter of Time*, her fifth novel,

Shashi Deshpande for the first time enters into the metaphysical world of philosophy. Basically, it is about three women from three generations of the same family and tells how they cope with the tragedies in their lives. Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal, and she faces her humiliation with great courage and stoicism. Deep inside, she is struck with immense grief, and tries to keep herself composed for the sake of her daughters. Sumi's mother Kalyani was married off to her maternal uncle Shripati. When their four-year-old son gets lost at a railway station, Shripati sends Kalyani back to her parents' house with their two daughters. On his mother-in-law Manorama's request, when Shripati returns he maintains a stony silence for the rest of his life. Kalyani's mother Manorama fails to beget a male heir to her husband, and fears lest he should take another wife for the same purpose. Manorama, to avoid the property getting passed on to another family, gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati. Thus, Deshpande has revealed to our gaze the fears, frustrations and compulsions of three women from three generations of the same family. *Small Remedies*, her latest novel, is about Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing doyenne of Hindustani music, who avoids marriage and a home to pursue her musical genius. She has led the most unconventional of lives, and undergoes great mental trauma due to the opposition by a society that practises double standards – one for men and the other for women. Even as a child she was a victim of gross gender discrimination. Besides, Madhu the writer of her biography, narrates her own life story and also those of her aunt Leela and Savitribai's daughter, Munni.

A close analysis of her novels leaves no doubt about her genuine concern for women. Her protagonists are acutely aware of their smothered and fettered existence in an orthodox male-dominated society. Caught between tradition and modernity, her protagonists search for identity within marriage. Deshpande's novels contain much that is feminist. The realistic delineation of women as wife, mother and daughter, their search for identity and sexuality as well, leaves the readers in no doubt where her real sympathies lie.

She has been against her works being labelled as "feminist," as it has traditionally been regarded as an inferior type of literature. She denies any influence of the militant feminism like that of Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan, and Kate Millet. She concerns herself with women's issues in the Indian context. In an interview she tells Lakshmi Holmstorm:

It is difficult to apply Kate Millet or Simone de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our lives in India. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning bras and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences.⁹

Women-centered narratives in her novels have led many interviewers to ask her as to what extent does she consider herself a feminist. In one such interview Shashi Deshpande says:

I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it.¹⁰

In a paper presented at a seminar, 'The Dilemma of the Woman Writer', Shashi Deshpande protested: "It is a curious fact that serious writing by women is invariably regarded as feminist writing. A woman who writes of women's experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, caused her strong feelings. I don't see why this has to be labelled feminist fiction."¹¹

Shashi Deshpande was so fascinated by her women characters that she laid more emphasis on women. Shashi Deshpande says that she knows how the women feel and she knows the mood of India. It has been observed that the predominating issues and themes in her novels emerge from the situations that focus on women caught in the crisis of a transitional society where the shift is taking place from conventional to unconventional. She traces out the tensions in which the Indian woman is caught in a transitional world.¹²

Shashi Deshpande's novels mainly portray women from the middle class. For her creative expression might be: (a) her own background as she hails from a middle-class family, (b) she is pre-occupied with the social forces at work in society: the clash between the old and the new; between idealism and pragmatism: and (c) the middle-class woman in her works represents a larger part of the contemporary Indian society. The woman she portrays is undeniably a forerunner of the "doomed female" of modern India. The portrayal is quite unique. Her protagonist neither represents the old, orthodox image, nor a modern westernized woman, and she is the 'every woman' of the Indian middle-class society, who tries hard to rise above tradition but is involuntarily adapted to it.

It is not difficult to agree with the view that in Shashi Deshpande's novels, we observe a change corresponding to the change in the contemporary society. We notice that the plot in her novels begins with an unconventional marriage and later on deals with the problems of adjustment and conflicts in the minds of the female protagonists and ultimately portrays their endeavour to submit to the traditional roles.¹³

Shashi Deshpande maintains a unique position among the contemporary, up-coming Indian writers in English. Many writers appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family. Shashi Deshpande has minutely dealt with the phenomenon, arriving at the conclusion that women, after attaining all types of

rights, are now struggling to adjust rather than to get free from the traditional world. She deals with the middle-class woman who represents the majority and covers a wide area in the modern society. She takes up women characters very carefully. The female protagonists in her novels are:

- (1) Young girls who can be led astray. For example, in *Come Up and Be Dead*;
- (2) Married women who suffer silently. For example, *That Long Silence*; and
- (3) Working women who, most of the time, are out of the family and come in direct contact with society. For example, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.¹⁴

Woman in Shashi Deshpande's novels is initially an unconventional one. She willy-nilly submits herself to the tradition, perhaps realizing the wisdom of the traditional ways at this stirring moment of the transitional phase of society. Ultimately, she is an appendage to man or family. Though economically independent, she is emotionally dependent on her husband.

In Shashi Deshpande's novels, the protagonist's growth towards an honest acknowledgement of responsibility for her own repressed state is shown in her earlier novels as well as her later novels.

The protagonists' quest for identity gets largely accentuated due to their frustrating experiences in the Indian patriarchal society. In her novels, the host of male characters – husbands, lovers, fathers and other relations – display different aspects of patriarchy and oppression. While the majority of the husbands are patriarchal in

their approach, the older men, particularly the fathers, are broad-minded. Surprisingly, the male friends are “feminist” in their approach and sympathise with the protagonists’ lot. Deshpande’s male characters only serve to enable the protagonists to define their identities more fully.

One agrees with Sarla Palker when she says that the writer has tried to convey to the society that the need of time, in this transitional phase, is not a total revolt but a gradual change in the society for which everyone has to put some effort to bridge the gap between the old and the new generation.¹⁵

5.3.1 MALE REPRESSIVE FORCE WITHIN MARRIAGE

With Shashi Deshpande, we move into a much more middle-class ethos and the forms of male repression within the family that takes on an uglier, more obvious form. In novel after novel, marriage is shown to be an institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male domination. Shashi Deshpande’s exploration of female subjugation in patriarchal family structures takes on a larger dimension than the inner psychological world. In her novels she creates, in fact, a mosaic of marriage, women come and go, aunts, cousins, mothers, mothers-in-law, friends, acquaintances, each providing a different slant on marriage, a dozen sub-texts to the main text of a protagonist whose marriage is collapsing. Shashi Deshpande is a writer who can focus intensely and elaborately on a network of male repression and

is concerned with making statements regarding the politics of male power and its effect on women.

In *That Long Silence*, Mohan's mother had been the traditional long-suffering Indian wife, uncomplainingly bearing the burden of her husband's harshly imposed authority over his household. The father had been an unrelenting autocrat, demanding that fresh food should be served to him whatever time he decided to return home. The sights and sounds of beaten womanhood reverberate through the novel sometimes creating an impression of unrelieved gloom.¹⁶

It is tempting to fit the Jaya-Mohan relationship into this slot of the very real human tragedies caused by male attitudes of superiority. The assumption of the masculine right to control is seen in Mohan's attitude to Jaya's writing career. It is he who sets the parameters for the kind of writing his male ego and the norms of male-dominated society might permit her to indulge in. He boasts, "From the very beginning I've allowed you to write, I've encouraged you, I was proud of you." But, in reality, his wife's writing was merely an extension of his own status. And because he is unable to recognize her identity as distinct from his own, his fragile male ego had been unable to accept when she had won a prize for a story of "a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body." Mohan, to whom she is not a writer by profession, but an object to be exhibited, is worried: "They will think I am this man. How can I look anyone in the face again?" Stricken with guilt at her unfeminine selfishness, Jaya had quit writing. However, Mohan's male

attitude of “I am the centre of the world” is only partly responsible for the yawning gaps in the relationship.¹⁷

In the *Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita survives in a male dominated world which offers no easy-outs to women. The preference for boys over girls which is openly witnessed in most Indian homes is seen in the blatant discrimination between Saru and her brother which leads to a sense of insecurity and hatred towards her parents. Devoid of love and security, she wanted to be loved and gets that attention from Manu whom she marries. There is an inverse decline in her conjugal relationship with her social and financial rise. She becomes clear eyed with no illusions left about love and romance, after her relationship with three men Manu her husband, the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padmakar. Saru neither surrenders nor escapes from the problem, but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own protégé.

In *The Binding Vine*, the father is only ‘a gentle memory’ but values were embedded into Urmil by the patriarchal norms. A girl is always asked to behave herself in society and she is not allowed to interact much with men. Any deviation from these norms invites the wrath of the family members as it invites danger of her modesty getting outraged. Urmil the protagonist also focuses attention on a man’s lust and a woman’s helplessness. Urmil, at every turn of the novel, emerges fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. Here protest comes easily for Shashi

Deshpande's protagonist and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes.

In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi deserted by her husband Gopal, for no fault of her own is not emotionally broken. She does not contemplate divorce, yet the social stigmas associated with divorce in the Indian society haunt her. Shashi Deshpande shows that a woman may get relief from the painful life of a wrong marriage through divorce, but it will not always re-establish her socially, psychologically or financially. In her parents' home, she feels she is lost and has no place there. However Sumi deliberately plays cool and maintains her matter-of-fact attitude. She is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity. Her pride prevents her to show her grief to Gopal.

The protagonist Madhu of *Small Remedies* had sensed from childhood the discrimination that women had to undergo in a society that had one law for men and another for women. Men could lead a life of their choice with impunity like Savitribai's father who was unconventional, and Savitribai's father-in-law who had a well known Thumri singer as a mistress. Both men could get away without any censure or disapproval from society. Women were jeered and looked down upon if they showed any deviation from the assigned roles set by society for them. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande, through the marriage and later estrangement between Som and Madhu, gives a stark picture of the patriarchal mind-set of men.¹⁸

While many writers, both men and women passively accept and thus perpetuate social stereotypes, feminist writers either reject gender stereotyping in toto or modify and re-define them after critical scrutiny. These stereotypes exert pressure on every aspect of a woman's existence. Two major areas are foregrounded in the novels selected for this thesis— the role of a woman as a wife and the attitude to female sexuality. The novels, each in their own way, construct representations of these stereotypes before exposing them to a critical re-appraisal through their female protagonists.

Most of the protagonists do not have a separate identity or role outside their home. Some of them are not economically independent as they have no jobs, and this proves a great hurdle to their self-realization. Sarita, who is a successful doctor and economically independent, finds her personal expectations and familial duties in conflict. Jaya and Indu, too, attempt to find a role outside the family but soon realize that the restricting bonds of the family hinder them in the process. Even their desire to express themselves through writing is suppressed or hindered. The traditional male fails to realize that a woman needs to realise her identity not only within but also outside the domestic sphere.¹⁹

Indoctrinated with the idea that any aggressive gesture of sexual attraction towards a male, even her husband, is somehow lacking in feminine modesty, a woman schools herself to repress her sexual desires. The male repressive force is shown working in various ways in Shashi Deshpande's novels.

5.3.2 STEREOTYPICAL IMAGE OF WOMEN AS WIFE

In Deshpande's novels, discords or disappointments in marital relationship impel introspection in the protagonists. They do not disregard the importance of marriage as a social institution and seek solutions to their marital problems with marriage. They seek a balanced, practical approach to their problems. They have the courage born of their being honest to themselves after an objective appraisal of their situation. They do not blame the others or their husbands for their troubles, but blame also themselves. Their desire to seek solutions to their problems leads to their temporary withdrawal from their families, followed by an objective appraisal of the whole problem. They are traditional at times in their approach as they strive to seek identity and self-realization upholding social conventions and institution. They are women who are individuals with awareness of their rights and duties; they have legitimate passions and expect an independent, autonomous existence. Their circumstances lead to their becoming mentally mature and they finally consider marital relationship as worthy of preservation.

Marital sex in *That Long Silence* falls along well-defined lines. Jaya's experience is that of many Indian women married off to virtual strangers. A pre-marriage inhibition: "intimacy with him had seemed a gross inadequacy"; her husband's unquestioning assumption that she could slip into marital intimacy with the greatest naturalness, a gradual awakening to physical pleasure and then a sinking into a wordless routine activity which exacerbated the sense of aloneness. She, who longs

for a communion rather than a mere physical union, never has the courage to make demands, for that would entail freeing herself from psychological shackles regarding feminine behaviour.²⁰

And yet, so schooled is Jaya in denying her own sexuality, that she walks out on Kamat, the man who had reached out to her physically and emotionally, afraid to face the truth of her own sexual arousal by a man who is not her husband.

Jaya's power of self-determination is severely corroded by this interiorization of patriarchal role-expectations. She had acquiesced to all her husband's decisions, to leave the job and come to Mumbai, to seek refuge from an unpleasant situation in the family flat. Even values are jettisoned in the trap of the Sita-Savitri-Gandhari syndrome. She had traded her self-respect as a writer for his approval, had sacrificed her talents as a serious writer and confined herself to the weekly 'Seeta's Column' which had measured up to Mohan's idea of what was socially permissible writing for a wife. The insidious inducement of the security of marriage, a security which could be shaken by attempts at self-assertion, had led Jaya to a painful decision: "I had relinquished them instead, all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I have been scared – scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage."²¹

Shashi Deshpande deals with the theme of sexual repression with an unusual forthrightness for an Indian woman writer. In *Roots and Shadows*, there is a powerful depiction of a woman's deliberate repression of her vibrant sexuality.

The result of this perennial lack of individuation is an intense self-alienation. Deshpande is able to suggest a life of stultifying mechanical routine in which the thinking, determining self is lost in the desperation to fulfill role-expectations. In a powerful passage in *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande hints at the soul-destroying effect of such total self-obliteration of Indu:

When I look at the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant, when I undress I think of him. Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him... And one day I thought, ' isn't there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own?'²²

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru for whom escape has always been her mode of resolving the tangled knots has come to realize that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. Saru learns to see reality clearly. She realizes that "we come into this world alone and go out of it alone." (208) Finally she realizes that if all is 'alone' what is there to fear. She realizes that her ego is responsible for all the problems that crept into her life. Escapism is no solution, a permanent solution has to come from within. Her father's advice and the call of her profession steadies her and gives her the courage to confront reality. The steadied woman in Saru says: "Baba, if

Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can." (221) These words stand as a proof of the assertion of her individuality and her willingness to confront reality.

In *The Binding Vine*, Urmila is one who endeavours to help other women. She is an upper middle-class career woman who is fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. For Urmila, happiness in marriage is magical and she never dares to overstep the boundaries chalked out in the system of marriage. Urmila loves her husband so dearly that when Dr. Bhasker asks her whether she loves him, Urmila confesses, "I love my husband and therefore, I am an inviolate." (165) At the end Urmila is seen recollecting the bonds of love.

In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi is deserted by her husband Gopal for no fault of hers. However she learns to pick up the threads of her life. Though deserted, Sumi does not contemplate a divorce, and unlike any other woman in her place, she does not seek any explanation from Gopal and bears all the disgrace and humiliation. Sumi does not even wish to talk about Gopal's act of desertion with anyone. She gracefully frees her husband from marital bonds without venting ill feelings.

Madhu of *Small Remedies* is a victim of double standards for men and women being practised in society. Through the marriage and later estrangement between Som and Madhu, Shashi Deshpande gives a stark picture of the patriarchal mind-set of men. Once, Madhu discloses to her husband a secret that she had slept with a man

when she was fifteen. Som, her husband, with his typical male psychology holds on this lone act of sex forgetting the fact that he himself has had a full-fledged relation with a married woman before marriage. Here Shashi Deshpande suggests that in our society pre-marital sex could lead to the disintegration of a marriage.

Shashi Deshpande appears to believe that by not protesting and offering resistance, the women have to blame themselves for their own victimization. She, therefore, suggests that they themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them from a state of captivity for several centuries. They have to free themselves from the socially constructed stereotypical images.

5.3.3 GENDER STEREOTYPES

Shashi Deshpande expresses the position of woman in a patriarchal society – someone without a clear sense of purpose and without a firm sense of her own identity. Her women characters do not place themselves in the centre of a universe of their own making, but rather are always painfully aware of the demands and needs of others.

Jaya in *That Long Silence* is ensconced in the structures and prescriptions of security, accultured firmly into socially-determined roles and attitudes. Jaya the narrator protagonist is confronted with the basic problem of fixing her identity, of recovering the “self” from the roles of dutiful daughter, submissive wife and caring

mother. Jaya rejects the very idea of a unitary self, as if there is no such thing as one self, intact and whole, waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, there are so many, each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other.

In *That Long Silence* the protagonist has raised her voice against the straitjacketed role models of wife and mother, and rebels against the suppression of the age-old patriarchal set up. Thus the novel can be seen as a feminist critique of patriarchal practices.²³

In *Roots and Shadows* the protagonist Indu struggles to assert her individuality to achieve freedom which leads her to confrontation with her family and the male dominated society.

The Dark Holds No Terrors is all about male ego wherein the male refuses to play a second fiddle role in marriage. A mature Saru shuns extremes and takes a practical view of the circumstances. She is neither the typical Western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for the wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one's identity within marriage.

Shashi Deshpande has presented Urmila of *The Binding Vine* as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by her daughter's death. Despite her longings and frustrations, Urmila is not a radical feminist but one who,

as Basavaraj Naikar opines: “Having entered a *chakravyuha* from which there is no escape, they want to make the best of their life by hardening themselves to face the harsh realities of life.”

In *A Matter of Time*, Sumi accepts her husband’s desertion without any protest. She raises no fuss over it and lapses into a stone like silence. The later reunion of Gopal and Sumi is an unusual one. When he returns she neither cries nor abuses him nor does she ask him for any explanations.

Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behaviour. Thus, Madhu in *Small Remedies* is a victim not only of the double standards of society but of her own innocence. She had slept with Chandru one night in a hotel room in her innocence, and again, in her innocence, she discloses this to Som. Had she spared him the knowledge of her indiscrete act, the relation between the two would have remained normal.

In portraying struggles of these women for identity, Shashi Deshpande waves no feminist banners, launches into no rabid diatribes. She drives her point home with great subtlety and delicacy.

Besides, Deshpande has taken a bold step forward by exploring the working women’s needs of the head, heart and the anatomy. Deshpande has ventured out of the cordon she had confined herself to and articulates the agony, pain, doubts and fears of her protagonists – male and female alike. She does not fight for justice of

women at men's cost, but presents their respective limitations as spouse. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande fight the prevalent gender stereotypes and assert their individuality.

5.3.4 PROBLEMS IN SHASHI DESHPANDE'S NOVELS

Marital relationships have almost inevitably been the focal point of novels written by Shashi Deshpande. But there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance. The emphasis is not on the development or mechanics of the relationship but on the forces which work together to make the relationship a farcical exhibition of togetherness. Functioning along fixed parameters, marriages become an arid formality, devoid of contact.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu undergoes great mental trauma in her marriage due to her husband Jayant's double standards who, though educated and liberal, does not tolerate any deviation on Indu's part from the traditional role of a wife. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* the marriage is on the rocks because Manu feels embarrassed and insecure with the rising status of his doctor wife and is intolerant about playing a second-fiddle role in their marriage. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya has been told that her husband is like a sheltering tree. She has to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if she has to water it with deceit and lies. Hence with her new self-awareness, Jaya ironically views herself and Mohan as "a pair of bullocks yoked together", moving together merely because it was more "comfortable." In *The Binding Vine*, Urmi has a long distance marriage since her husband Kishore is in the navy. She

craves for some physical gratification during his long absence but she never oversteps the boundaries chalked out in marriage and remains virtuous. In *A Matter of Time*, the marriage breaks because Sumi's husband walks out on her. In the end he returns to a new Sumi, who has coped with the tragedy with remarkable stoicism. In *Small Remedies*, Madhu too gets totally estranged by her husband Som after she naively discloses to him about her single act of physical intercourse before marriage.

A sense of non-fulfillment, of incompleteness, had lain dormant in Shashi Deshpande's characters, suppressed out of fear of denting the façade of a happy marriage. The woman learns to adopt certain strategies in order to survive within marriage. These strategies conceal her true self much like a purdah hides the line of the body. Silence is, perhaps, the most common strategy of survival.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists withdraw from their families for a while; analyze their circumstances objectively without any external aid or advice. Then they return to the home and family knowing full well as to what is to be expected of themselves and their respective spouses.

These protagonists lack a cordial relationship with their mothers. Sarita articulates her dislike for her mother: "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one."²⁴ Jaya likes her father more than she does her mother. Even Indu dislikes the domineering matriarch Akka's domination, who is a mother figure for Indu.

Shashi Deshpande has presented a woman's world from a woman's point of view. None of the novels discussed have well-developed male characters, and are seen only in relation to the protagonists as husbands or fathers or brothers. In Deshpande's novels husbands have been indirectly made responsible for their wives' troubles.²⁵

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are strong. They refuse to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of upholding the traditional role models laid down by society for women. But they attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita returns to her paternal home to escape from her husband Manohar's sadism. This temporary withdrawal helps her view her situation objectively. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu frees herself of the constricting traditional role of a wife and mother, and dons the mantle of the family matriarch at Akka's bidding. She realizes that her husband Jayant need not determine the role she should play in her own and other people's lives. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya undergoes great mental trauma because she has refused to go into hiding with her husband as an enquiry against his financial irregularities is on. She kept her eyes shut to her husband's illegal earnings at office like Gandhari. Even her journalistic writings are circumscribed by her husband's likes and dislikes. After having rejected traditional role models, Deshpande's protagonists display great strength and courage in evolving their own role models as per the requirement of their social milieu.²⁶

Deshpande's protagonists display a tangible development during the course of the novel. They go through a process of self-examination before they reach self-actualization. Thus, Shashi Deshpande has been successful in creating strong women protagonists who refuse to get crushed under the weight of their personal tragedies, and face life with great courage and strength. Comparatively, they appear to be more life-like and more akin to the educated, middle-class, urban Indian woman of today.²⁷

5.4.1 THEMES AND CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

Among Indian women writers Shashi Deshpande is specifically committed to the reorganization of female subjectivity. Her concerns related to the feminist questions are important in the interest of an Indian feminist-praxis. Her fiction holds a great promise and helps us in finding ways in which the historical 'location' of Indian women can be interpreted in terms of their subordination accentuated by law, sacred literature and practice. Deshpande's feminist ideology stems from her belief in 'self-striven' approach towards women's empowerment or what S.L.Sharma terms as 'empowerment without antagonism' in her article of that title. She refuses to indulge in 'adversarial-orientation' or intemperate expressions towards men. She attributes profession to her protagonists as a 'strategic interest' which enables them to enter the prevailing and androcentric system and to dismantle their politics. Deshpande's treatment of issues like Indian woman's autonomy, identity, space and

desire may lead to an Indian model of feminism which will be workable, honest and more viable for indigenous condition. Instead of providing tales of female victimization she seems to be concerned with the idea of 'how women can live afresh?'²⁸

Deshpande provides a revised version of Indian women's world as her protagonists come out of the bedrooms, kitchens and attics to articulate and reconstitute their lives through their 'feminist awareness' and introspection. Deshpande's novels record polyphonic voices behind every structure and relationship which have contributed to silent Indian women. Muted by society and patriarchy her protagonists feel crippled by a sense of inferiorization, non- entity and loss of 'self.'

Deshpande's novels encapsulate the tensions underlying women's aspirations and their cultural identities. Their urge for self-definition culminates in the identification of the areas of conflict. They are encased and suffocated in the patterns of androcentric culture and their desire to perform is taken over by the necessity to conform. These women are steeped in the conventions and customs of a patrilineal society which dislocates and alienates them from the process of being and becoming. Deshpande's novels are polemical attacks against the patriarchal world, where women are treated as a 'kind of non-man.' Like Margaret Atwood, Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Deshpande also argues that male assigned roles of wife and motherhood entrap women in the masculine plot of desire and thereby marginalize them from other socio-political, economical and creative spheres of life.

Deshpande explores the traumas and agonies of being a woman. She is concerned with women's quest for self-definition. In an interview Deshpande admits that all her characters are concerned with their "selves" and they learn to be "honest to themselves." Women's passivity and submersion in the traditional roles of wife and mothers terminates in their self-diminishment. Deshpande's women, however do not walk off this marriage which institutionalizes the essentialist construction of the feminine self-lessness and masculine self-assertion and self-conquests. These women seek for an 'aesthetic space' within the restricting confines of domesticity which is provided by various professions, occupations and creative activities. The traditional criticism on Deshpande's fiction recognizes her significant contribution to the field of feminist studies. Her contribution lies in her portrayal of professional Indian women which is a fast emerging class. The strength of Deshpande's work is her awareness of gender-disparity, sexual division of labour which starts at home and which are deeply enrooted in the public and private lives. "The discrimination based on gender differences are interlocked at every level of society from the most intimate to the most general."²⁹

Shashi Deshpande's approach is different from that of all other feminists. She also deals with the excesses committed upon the female-fold for centuries leading to their deep but quiet suffering and their passive resignation. She shows how women revolt against it and try to search their own identity in the hostile world of male chauvinism. She has also consideration for a home- a home of peace and love that can provide security for women.

She feels that security is an important requirement of women. If a home provides her safety, she may not revolt against the home. She is not for revolt for the sake of revolt but rather for revolt in the sector and degree to which it is required. So, she shows that there are some husbands who are good and some women who are not at all prepared even to raise their voice.

5.4.2 TITLES OF THE NOVELS

Take, for example, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The title is paradoxical. Darkness usually holds terror. But here it is not darkness but the protagonist Saru's husband that haunts her. The pathos and irony in the title is apparent. Saru says, "The dark holds no terrors. The terrors are inside us all the time. The sorrows are inside us all the time. We carry them within us and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them to scratch and maul." (85) This is how our obsessions and fears haunt us like nightmares. The title is not simply symbolic but also metaphoric.

The title of *The Binding Vine* is appropriate in a number of ways. Its symbolism has got what Empson calls the first type of ambiguity- that is, the words or phrases connoting several things, some in one direction, some in the other one. *The Binding Vine* suggests, among other things, the following:

1. The protagonist's bond of familial ties of parents, husband and children,
2. her bond of pregnancy; that is the bond of the umbilical cord,

3. her bond of love for her lost daughter,
4. her bond of love for Mira's poems,
5. her bond of sympathy for the wrongs done to Kalpana (who has been raped and killed),
6. her being bound by the chain of untoward circumstances.

Now, the beauty of the novel lies in showing all the above-mentioned connotations interplaying with one another in the pattern of the book and suggesting multiple connotations.

We would like to look at the different shades in the symbolism of *The Binding Vine*.

In the following two passages of *The Binding Vine*, Mira says in one of her poems:

“Desire, says the Buddha, is the cause of grief;
but how escape this cord
this binding vine of love?”(136-137)

Mira also says in anguish in another poem:

“Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm will I emerge a beauteous being? Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist.” (65)

So, we see first the bond of love and then the bond (chain or fetters) of forced silence. This is the predicament of a typical middle class Indian woman who wants expression but gets suppression and oppression.

The title of *That Long Silence* is both symbolic and metaphoric. The silence in the novel is the silence which has been the destiny of Indian women down the centuries. They can be refuted, abused, beaten, expelled and raped and still they have to be silent. Thus, the “long silence” contains rich suggestions. The feminist movement cannot afford to put up with the silence. Silence is as good as death. It has to be broken ruthlessly.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Deshpande makes a point that economic deprivation and physical torture are the instruments used to cut and curb the spontaneous growth of a woman from her roots. The predicament of Indu portrays the inner conflict when she wants to express herself through creative writing. But at the same time there are those traps, the shadows of wanting to belong. “To belong, to be wanted, needed, loved, desired and admired...how many traps there are! And I fall into all of them.”(27)

The title *A Matter of Time* shows how Sumi who has been deserted by Gopal is not emotionally shattered but with time is seen emancipating as a new and independent woman. The title is apt because the novel deals with the human predicament of three women representing three generations of the same family.

With the title *Small Remedies* Shashi Deshpande reminds us of the pain and sorrow that accompany the ephemeral happiness we experience in the process of living. The common symbols of Om, mango leaf toran, charms, amulets, the myriad

superstitions, are small remedies and they have to counter the terrible disease of being human, being mortal and vulnerable. Shashi Deshpande's titles are expressive, symbolic and meaningful.

5.4.3 HER CHARACTERS AND THEIR BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS

Shashi Deshpande portrays modern, educated and career-oriented middle class women who are sensitive to the changing time and situations. They are aware of the social and cultural disabilities to which they are subjected in the male-dominated society. They want to rebel against them in their search for freedom and identity, but they find themselves up against well-entrenched social inertia. Conscious of the predicament of a woman in a male-dominated society, especially when she is not economically independent, the author presents her women as desiring to become economically and ideologically independent. She finds them caught up in a conflict between their family and professional roles, between individual aspirations and social demands. Indu of *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya of *That Long Silence*, being women writers, are torn between self-expression and social stigmas-material and psychological traumas. As Maria Mies observes, "Her problem arises firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a social status and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity."³⁰ Her women like Saru succeed in overcoming social stigmas asserting their potential arena. Deshpande's career women

.... are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives.³¹

Shashi Deshpande's women stand at the cross-roads of traditions. They seek change but within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them but merely to make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They perceive it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it. Soon thereafter, they realize that one restrictive set-up is replaced by another "new bonds replace old, that's all" (*Roots and Shadows* 14). Her women protagonists are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role of wife. They do not accept to be considered merely as the objects of gratification. They challenge their victimization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Yet their concept of freedom is not imported from the west. They believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which result in the disruption of family relationships. Deshpande's woman protagonist generally seeks to come out-

.... from inherited patterns of thought and action in favour of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in.³²

A glimpse of her novels reveals how poignantly she expresses the frustration and disappointments women experienced in social and cultural oppression in the male-dominated society. *Roots and Shadows*, her first novel, highlights the agony and trauma experienced by women in male-dominated and tradition-bound society. The novelist exposes the absurdity of rituals and customs which only help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This shows how a woman grows from 'self-surrender' and 'self-abnegation' to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity. Indu, in Shashi Deshpande's first novel, *Roots and Shadows*, is one who, in her quest to be independent and complete, realizes that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in general in contemporary Indian society which is passing through a transition from the old cultural modes to the new socio-economic forces impinging effectively on the pattern of human lives. Indu represents a woman torn between age-old traditions and individual views. Because of her awareness of the sanctity of the familial bonds, she restrains herself from the precipitous action of fleeing from the domestic scene. She views these bonds as unreasonable in the beginning, gradually, she learns to be bound by them as a typical traditional Indian woman, for she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realizes that it would be wise to seek freedom without undermining her obligations and responsibilities and without losing her individuality. Indu's decision not to submit herself to anyone's dictates, not to get influenced by her husband in career matters shows that she is making independent decisions. Her search for freedom results in

her emergence as a bold and challenging woman of determination. She negates all feminine limitations and also acquires the power to change others.

The Dark Holds No Terrors rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife's existence is to please her husband. It reveals a woman's capacity to assert her own rights and individuality and become fully aware of her potential as a human being. Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the representative of middle-class working women in modern India, rebelling against traditions but ultimately trying to compromise with existing reality. When her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life, she undergoes a trauma, but eventually stands up to the situation. She realizes that escapism is never a solution and that she is her own refuge. She succeeds in realizing her selfhood through her profession and proves to the world that economically independent women like her can bring change in the society and that women as individuals can have some significant control over their relationships and professions. Her promise of reconciliation with her husband is not her defeat or submission but her newfound confidence to confront reality. Thus, she achieves freedom and harmony in life without compromising on her obligations and responsibilities.

That Long Silence traces the passage of a woman through a maze of doubts and fears towards her affirmation. Viewing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on men for the subjugation of women. She observes that both men and women find it difficult to outgrow the images and

roles allotted to them by society. All the expression of concern for women is a raid upon this silence in *That Long Silence*. But Shashi Deshpande does it not by speaking against their silence on a public platform or through a handbill or a manifesto. Instead she maintains an aesthetic distance. She weaves the things into a metaphoric structure. It shows how the protagonist Jaya, after long, decides to break silence and give vent to her suppressed feelings. This may also be read as the expression of the entire womankind which has been forced to keep its lips sealed for centuries by the system of the society, especially middle-class. So, Jaya begins to write a fortnightly column "Seeta." To the Indians, Sita is the best example of undeserved suffering all through her life with brief interludes. Perhaps Jaya might have thought: "Is woman born to suffer and that too without complaint?" Hence she decides, "I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us." Thus, Shashi Deshpande presents Jaya as a role model for all the women suffering from this or that kind of injustice. They have to articulate their grievance.³³ Jaya, a modern woman rooted in tradition, experiences an impulsive desire to be emancipated and, at the same time an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. As a result, she tries simultaneously to be a suitable wife and to retain her identity as an individual. However, in order to fulfill her roles as wife and mother, as Mohan wants her to, she gradually transforms herself to be a stereotyped house-wife always trying to please her husband. But slowly she begins to realize that her very compromise shatters her individuality. She realizes that women have allowed themselves to be victimized instead of working for a partnership. She too has contributed to her victimization and that she has to fight her own battle and

work out her own strategy. Accordingly, she decides that she will live afterwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She, no doubt, makes some adjustment of her own volition, taking care to see that she does not lapse into servility. Her decision to have her own way gives a new confidence to her and this confidence brings her emancipation.

Another characteristic concern for other women is observed in Shashi Deshpande's novel, *The Binding Vine*. It shows how the educated earning woman helps a poor woman and thereby inculcates the spirit of solidarity among women. The novelist depicts the agony of a wife who is the victim of marital rape. She also portrays the plight of women raped outside marriage who would rather suffer in silence in the name of family honour. If Indu, Saru and Jaya are involved in fighting their own battles, Urmila of *The Binding Vine* is ahead of them by her endeavours to help other women- the poor and the downtrodden. She strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves fearlessly. She is indignant at the uncomplaining attitude of the victims in the name of family honour. Accordingly, she exhibits interest and capacity to purge the society of its evils. If her predecessors finally emerge as fulfilled individuals finding the strength to decide what they want to do, Urmila is an independent individual from the beginning with an identity of her own. Urmila draws the society's attention to the inequality of sexes and thus she has less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. In spite of all this, she does not rebel against the established system because she believes that things are improving gradually but surely, though at a slow pace.

Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*, portrays Sumi a woman who is more mature and dignified than her predecessors. The other women protagonists cannot think of themselves outside the familial bond. Sumi being a little detached, she manages herself admirably and almost becomes self-dependent.

Sumi of *A Matter of Time* gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from the utter desolation and trauma of being a deserted wife. At the age of forty, deserted by her husband, she stands alone and helpless along with her three teenaged daughters. But she is not emotionally shattered as is common with housewives without economic independence. She demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity. She displays rare courage and self-confidence in trying to cope with the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliations and frustrations, all by herself. Unlike any other in her place, she has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. Her desertion by Gopal, instead of making her an emotional wreck, has surprisingly brought out the real, hidden strength in her. She desires to be economically independent and assert her identity. She revives even her creativity. She, thus, comes a long way from Indu, Jaya, Saru and even Urmi. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. Shashi Deshpande seems to look hopefully at the younger generation to restore equality between the sexes and achieve harmony.

In *Small Remedies*, each individual character solves her problems on her own and does not reject all relationships in life. Her protagonists Madhu, Savitribai and aunt Leela need to be on their own to come to terms with life, but once they have achieved that, they return to their normal life, fortified by their newly found wisdom. Madhu, the woman character of the novel also returns at the end to her husband, Som.

Her women characters exhibit different behavioural traits. The young ones reject the traditional behavioural patterns and try to create new ones by synthesizing the old with the modern.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Each of Shashi Deshpande's novels is special and offers food for thought on human relationships and emotions. Deshpande is a master writer in the way she articulates human emotions, the fears and feelings experienced by humans, by women. Reading her books is like peeping into the hidden corners of one's own mind. Recognizing oneself in her characters, one does not feel lonely in the world anymore. Reading her novels and stories is thus an immensely satisfying experience, as reading becomes a healing process.

Her concern about the problems of women and their quest for identity makes one consider her novels as feminist texts. She however does not like this labelling.

A woman who writes of women's experience often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feeling. I don't see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction.³⁴

Later, Shashi Deshpande changes her stand and admits herself to be a feminist but only as a person and certainly not as a novelist. She declares her stance in an interview on the issue: I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first, and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it.³⁵

Further elucidating her viewpoint, she declares:

...I am a feminist, I'm a very staunch feminist in my personal life...cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders, this is my idea of feminism. I am a feminist very much and I strongly react against any kind of cruelty or oppression, denial of opportunities to women because they are women...the important thing is we have the right to live ourselves. But as a writer I'm not going to use my novels to carry the message of feminism. Then it becomes propaganda."³⁶

She, more or less, affirms the same opinion in another interview when she says: "my objection was to being called a feminist writer."³⁷

Shashi Deshpande is not a militant strident feminist. She believes that we are all part of society, and we need a family and some ties. More than being a feminist, she is a humanist. Her views are more akin to the modern feminist thought which is no longer regarded as radical. She expresses her desire to be a humanist in an interview given to Vanamala Viswanatha:

...I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women in relation to men. I don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing. If it presents such perspective, it's only a coincidence.³⁸

Shashi Deshpande describes, in unequivocal terms, her idea of feminism. To a question from an interview whether she would like to call herself now a feminist, she reacts thus:

Yes, I would, I am a feminist in the sense that, I think we need to have a world, which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings. There is 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. I think that's my idea of feminism."³⁹

She effectively portrays the lot of Indian women and the convoluted state of things. Her writing is known for courageous and sensitive handling of significant and

intractable themes affecting the lives of women. Her works, therefore, constitute an outstanding contribution to Indian literature in English.

Chapter – V

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CHAPTER –VI

Conclusion

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CHAPTER –VI

CONCLUSION

6.1.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE'S WOMEN CHARACTERS

Shashi Deshpande's achievement lies in the depiction of her central character, the introspective and inward probing woman. She is representative of girls brought up in middle-class families in post-Independent India, a time when most parents strove hard to provide their children with English education and exposure to Western modes of living and thinking. Parents inculcated in their girls a certain duality, sometimes quite unconsciously: On the one hand an impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated, and on the other, an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. The woman of today, therefore, speaking in the language of psychology, has a near-schizophrenic personality: one side staidly "accepts" while the other craves to "speak", to think and express the life of the mind. Her novel *That Long Silence* presents Jaya caught in this dilemma: firstly, trying to be a fit wife to her husband and secondly, struggling to express the kind of emotions women experience, but seldom expressed in a male-dominated chauvinistic society.

Shashi Deshpande's heroines question and disparage social institutions of love and marriage. It is an indication that the "passive feminine" has ceased to exist. Instead we have the highly intelligent woman who questions incessantly, confronts her problem inwardly, and analyses it objectively. The result of that love and marriage

becomes meaningless and loses status as prop of life. Sex alone seems to sustain the man-woman relationship as observed earlier. This is quite a shocking idea but it is traced throughout Deshpande's novels. This shift from the "pativrata" image to that of the sexually-emancipated woman certainly marks the emergence of a new class of Indian women who are coming out of their conservative shells and are ready to accept the sexual and psychological realities of human life. It is really a sign of radical change occurring in the Indian sexual landscape.

The sexual impasse which has rocked the lives of the Deshpande heroines, along with their acute, unusual and unconventional sensitiveness, has compelled them to perceive and define matters of sex such as 'love' and 'marriage' from quite a different angle. Deshpande herself calls her creations "thinking characters," whose new definitions of categories like love, marriage, sex are the feedback from the author's reading of the Western feminists. These definitions of love, marriage and sex give a typical female point of view to marital difficulties.

In three of her novels, there is an identical strand of thought. It is the realization of love as duly a physical instinct. It can be stated that Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu of *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya of *That Long Silence* pursue the "shadows" of romance and love but ultimately arrive at the "roots" which is sex.

6.1.2 SOME CHARACTER-TRAITS OF HER WOMEN CHARACTERS

The heroines of Deshpande resort to freedom not only intellectually but sexually too. For, their sexual starvation forces them to seek recourse to extra-marital sex. Here, Freud's terminology of the sexual instinct as "motor force of life" could help to understand the situation better. Since their sexual hunger is repressed, the Deshpande women strive for expression through sexual relationship of affairs with men other than their husbands. Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has affairs with Boozie (her boss) and Padmakar Rao (her college mate) which seem to be temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life. Indu of *Roots and Shadows* represents the "new woman" who is on her way to an 'erotic sexual utopia', where she can realize herself sexually without public opprobrium or private guilt. She is sexually satisfied with her affair with her cousin Naren, and does not feel the guilt of it. At times only she, like Saru, feels guilty of it. She is disillusioned with sex also. Saru sees sex as a disease. Sex, or in other words, the relation of man to woman is seen as unnatural and breeding "only treachery, only deceit, only betrayal."¹

The solution given by Deshpande to this sexual predicament is ambiguous and argumentative. Deshpande leaves the solution to the individual. The novelist's credo is "take refuge in the self." In other words, Deshpande means that the heroines will, in future, assert themselves; they will no longer allow their "she" to get deceased. By this assertion of the self, Deshpande certainly takes her heroines to the pole of

feminism, though she may not have aimed at propounding any such "ism." And these women have certainly begun their protest as indicated by their sexual emancipation. The questions in debate are these: is this sexual prolificacy an indication of a fast spreading "new morality?" Or is it a sign of the approaching sexual promiscuity? It is true that while men have enjoyed sexual freedom from the time immemorial, women have been hedged around by unbreakable taboos. But since the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande have broken them, how far will they be accepted? The question is open to debate. Yet, the juxtaposition of two contrary opinions regarding this issue will suffice.

It is this working of an individual dialectic of sexual dilemma in her novels that makes Shashi Deshpande a feminist. Besides, the sexual taboos-of sex as a "male feeling"; as "the sting of scorpion to be borne by women"- have occupied the Indian literary realm for a long time. Very rarely has any writer portrayed the theme of a woman desiring for sex or suffering because of sex. Now it is time for change. Deshpande has certainly transcended those cultural times when sex was conspicuous by its non-mention. By giving sexual freedom to her heroines and by her reversal of the traditional triad ("love," "marriage," "sex"), Deshpande has transferred the Indian novel into its most controversial phase. Deshpande's women have certainly gone beyond the struggle of a woman who pulsates with conflicting desires, both instinctive and physical. Yet, they do not represent the typical Lawrentian woman who holds the sexual autonomy in her hands. And uncertainty lingers over the question of whether these Indian heroines will find a place of acceptance in a well-

defined area of living. The solution to this sexual predicament too remains at crossroads and depends only on the individual's way of solving her own problems.

Another common factor to observe in the novels is that the woman presented is not complete in herself unless there is someone to shelter her, whether it be her father, brother or husband. "This is my real sorrow, that I can never be complete in myself," says Indu in *Roots and Shadows*. A continuous inner conflict goes on her (woman's) mind whether to rebel against the social set up or to submit to the tradition, whether to listen to her intellect or to her emotions, for intellectually, she is free, independent. She has the knowledge of the world but emotionally, she is so dependent upon the traditions that she ultimately follows the latter one. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu finds out the cause of her sorrow, accepting the fact that she can never be complete in herself without Jayant, her husband. It shows the questioning and restless mind of the character whose desires are not being fulfilled anywhere.

The fact of women being complete in themselves and thus being introduced to others with their husband's established relationships, is clear when Indu is introduced to her different aunts who are called Kakies, Mamies, and so on. Indu, being critical, observes: "These women...they are called Kaku, Kaki, Atya.... As if they have to be recognized by a relationship because they have no independent identity of their own at all." (78)

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya too is not sure of her own identity. Her name changes from Jaya to Suhasini when she gets married and becomes her husband's property. She becomes a very submissive woman and longs to be called an ideal wife because

she does not see any other way out to live. The only weapon she has with her is “silence and surrender.” To know her own identity and what she really is, she starts comparing herself with others, and satisfies herself by saying that she is at least not the insane Kusum. She is better than her: “Suddenly it occurs to me – as long as Kusum was there, I had known clearly who I was; it had been Kusum who had shown me out to be who I was. I was not Kusum. Now, with Kusum dead....?” (24)

Similarly, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru, who is not on natural terms with her husband and somehow is dissatisfied with the whole relationship, finds it very difficult to express herself in front of her father regarding their conflicts: “And each time it happens and I don’t speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us.” (88)

Whether women be educated, professional or housewives, they are always suppressed with the weight of imposed traditions. Smita, another girl in the novel, is always in search of shelter. She never does the work she wants to, but is always ready to do what her husband asks her to do. Her name, after marriage, is changed twice and she accepts it willingly. Her friend asks: “This drastic change of identity, changing both the names that identified you for so many years...how then do you know yourself, and who you are?”

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice. The protagonists – Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* – continually search to define themselves and ask themselves if there is any “self” to be found. Indu wonders whether in trying to

please her husband, she has “become fluid, with no shape, no form of her own.” Jaya sees herself in two pictures: Jaya, who is searching for individual identity although she does not know what she really wants; and Suhasini, who is soft, smiling, placid, mother, still she knows that “The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.”²

Deshpande’s women characters show traits of a woman in a period of transition. They belong to the post – 1960 period and are economically better, but they do not know how to express themselves in this new socio-economic set-up. Their ways of behaviour express this dilemma.

6.1.3 MOTHER AND DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

An important aspect in Deshpande’s novels is the lack of cordial relations between a mother and a daughter: In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the mother-daughter relationship occupies the centre stage. Saru’s mother’s cold and indifferent attitude towards her develops a sense of antagonism in Saru towards her mother. She develops aversion to all the traditional values represented by her mother. Saru’s experiences in her crucial years of puberty make her hate womanhood itself.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya also does not have any cordial relationship with her mother, and in turn her mother also does not have any strong maternal feelings towards her daughter. It is her mother’s disapproval that makes her marry Mohan.

Like Saru, she tries to be as dissimilar from her mother as possible, rejecting her as a role model.

In *The Binding Vine*, we find Urmi's relation with her mother as direct and frontal. Her hostility towards her mother is evident from her angry tone and language she uses when speaking with her or about her to others. She hates her for having sent her to Ranidurg as a child to be brought up by her grandparents.

In *Small Remedies*, we find that Savitribai Indorekar's relationship with her daughter Munni is not warm. Munni feels unwanted, unloved and rejected by her mother and she develops a feeling of aversion towards her. Munni even goes to the extent of taking a new name, Shailaja Joshi. Shashi Deshpande's novels say that, "There is no mother who could serve as a model for the daughter."³

Mothers in Shashi Deshpande's novels do not realize the fact that the traditional middle-class idea that a woman's only career should be her family is now rejected by the up-coming girls who are very much influenced by factors such as the spread of scientific ideas, the growing impact of other cultures on the individuals, and the availability of a vast body of literature. Though most of the educated working women still give preference to marriage and their family life, the wish to be economically independent, to have an individual identity in society is more pronounced among the majority of women than was found earlier.⁴

This becomes the reason why the girls insist on continuing their studies even when they don't get any support from their family. Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, hates her mother as she puts all sorts of restrictions on her freedom. The mother equally hates the daughter, "What daughter? I have no daughter" (100) is the kind of attitude she has. She falls ill, but hates to go to the doctor for the simple reason that her daughter belongs to the same category. Saru hates her mother even when she is dead: "I hate her, sapping me of happiness, of everything. She's always done it to me...taken happiness away from me. She does it even now when she's dead." (100) Even at the time of taking admission into a medical college, Saru does not seek her mother's advice but asks her father only giving more respect to him. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, is typical of many women in dealings with her father. Similarly, Indu, in *Roots and Shadows*, whose mother died in giving birth to her, sees her father almost as a God. It is notable that mother-daughter relationship is shown as difficult and uncordial in Shashi Deshpande's novels.

6.2 HER USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Shashi Deshpande writes in English and gives voice to women's issues. She defends her means of expression by arguing:

To those of us who write in English, it is neither a foreign language, nor the language of the colonizer, but the language of creativity. Whether the writing is rootless, alienated or elitist should be judged from the writing, not from the language. My writing comes out of myself, the society I live in. It is shaped, as I am, by my family, my

ancestry, the place I was born in, the place I live in, the culture I am steeped in, the fact that the writing is in English changes none of these things.⁵

The kind of English language she uses is simple. She does not indulge in showy, bombastic or rhetorical English. It is so simple and straight that it never hinders the reader in any way. Deshpande's concern has been the expression of the Indian middle-class ethos. And her simple, unassuming English reflects it. The English language she uses is of the kind used by an average, middle-class, convent-educated individual. She writes about the middle-class people and the language used is also middle-class English, sometimes a little incorrect by the British standards.

Deshpande admits that writing in English is a drawback in this country as it alienates the writer from the mainstream. But at the same time, she considers English as one of the Indian languages. She says:

I believe that English writing in this country is a part of our literatures; I consider English as one more of our *bhashas* as Ganesh calls them. I know that our writing comes out of an involvement with this society, out of our experiences here, our readership is now here, and happily our publishers are here as well. Yet, I am disturbed by the recent trend in English writing which in its pursuits of role models outside, is alienating itself from its roots.⁶

Being an English writer she may have a limited readers' circle compared with the Hindi writers, but this does not make her a non-Indian. She is also against being labelled as Indian-English Writer. She protests:

I am an Indian writer. My language just happens to be English, which cannot be called a foreign language at all because it is so much used in India.⁷

She is also against using the Indian version of English to provide an Indian flavor to her novels:

I do not use Indianisms to make my writing like Indian. I never try to make India look exotic. I do not think of a western audience at all. I belong to Indian literature. I would not like ever to be called an Indo-Anglian writer. I feel strongly about that.⁸

She says about her use of English:

My English is as we use it. I don't make it easier for anyone really. If I make any changes, it's because the novel needs it, not because the reader needs it.⁹

She is fully aware of the problems Indian writers in English face and is of the opinion that they should evolve a language of their own which will remain distinctively Indian, and yet will be English. She has always aimed at the Indian

readers and not the Western ones. Her creative use of the language has been greatly lauded in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

Deshpande eschews linguistic pyrotechnics and formal experimentation, but has sufficient command of her tradition to give the lie to the belief that the English language is incapable of expressing any Indian world other than a cosmopolitan one.¹⁰

Thus, she is ever vigilant to the issues associated with the contemporary society such as the language issue, and has evolved a literary skill that enables her to present them realistically and convincingly.

6.3 ON COMMITTED WRITING

Shashi Deshpande hates to write propaganda literature. She does not intend to moralize or set forth her own brand of feminism; she is genuinely concerned about people. In yet another interview, she says:

I hate to write propagandist literature. I think good literature and propaganda don't go together. Any literature written with some viewpoint of proving something rarely turns out to be good literature. Literature comes very spontaneously. When I write I am concerned with people.¹¹

But she finds that a lot of men are unsympathetic to her writing while a lot of women are sympathetic. According to her, the reason behind this is “women see a

mirror image and men see, perhaps, a deformed image of themselves.”¹² This fact seems to be portrayed in her novels. It also explains her sympathetic portrayal of women.

Earlier Deshpande was scornful of the so-called committed writing in literature. But, with the passage of time, she realized that all good writing is socially committed writing. She admits:

There was a time when I was scornful of what is called committed writing. I considered such writing flawed because it being message-oriented diminishes its artistic worth. But now I know that all good writing is socially committed writing, it comes out of a concern for the human predicament. I believe, as Camus says, that the greatness of an artist is measured by the balance the writer maintains between the values of creation and the values of humanity.¹³

Deshpande’s commitment to women’s cause is evident in her novels.

6.4.1 HER TECHNIQUE AS A NOVELIST

Deshpande avoids the simple technique of straightforward narration and employs the flashback method instead, to draw her readers’ attention. The narrative technique has earned criticism from some critics who feel that this leads to confusion in the mind of readers. In novels where the writer is to present a gallery of characters along with their relationships and interactions, it becomes necessary for

him to present things in their chronological order and not indulge in too much experimentation. According to Shama Futehally the narrative technique is a device which is useful either when some element of suspense is needed, or for a novel with a non-narrative structure.¹⁴ In Shashi Deshpande's novels the reader has to cope with an abundance of characters simultaneously and without introduction. At times it is confusing. Hence a chronological clarity is important.

Her heroines are educated young women with liberated and progressive ideas, therefore even ordinary incidents acquire a new meaning. The first person narration helps the writer to probe deep into the mind of the protagonist, her hopes, fears, aspirations, frustrations and so on, and thereby highlight the gross gender discrimination prevalent in society. Some reviewers like C.W. Watson, compare Deshpande to the master storyteller Chekhov.

Shashi Deshpande has used a combination of the first person and the third person narrative coupled with flashback devices to lend authenticity and credibility to her novels. Deshpande's development as a novelist necessitates a chronological study of the narrative techniques employed by her in her novels.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande shifts the narrative from the first person to the third person narrative in every alternate chapter. This double narrative method helps to lend great authenticity to the portrayal of the main woman

character Sarita's inner self. Deshpande has commendably accomplished the task of giving a realistic portrayal of the mental trauma Sarita undergoes.

While using efficient narrative technique, Deshpande has succeeded in the portrayal of Sarita's mental state with remarkable objectivity. Besides, her art lies in her amalgamating the past with the present seamlessly through dreams, nightmares, flashbacks, reminiscences and the simple third person narration.

Y.S. Sunita Reddy has observed about Shashi Deshpande's novel *That Long Silence*:

The narrative with its slow unknitting of memories and unraveling of the soul reads like an interior monologue quite similar to the stream of consciousness technique employed by the like of Virginia Woolf.¹⁵

A different view is expressed by another critic, Prema Nandkumar, who maintains that the novel is "not a forbidding stream of consciousness probe in the Virginia Woolf tradition. It is very much a conventional tale full of social realism evoked by links of memory. Not misty recollection but clear-eyed story telling."¹⁶ For the protagonist an objective analysis of what went wrong with her marriage and the reasons for failing as a writer, is a kind of catharsis. The technique is described by the narrator Jaya herself who in the novel says: "All this I've written – it's like one of those multicoloured patchwork quilts the *Kakis* made for any new baby in the family. So many bits and pieces – crazy conglomeration of sizes, shapes and colours put together." (188)

In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande adopts a different mode of narration. In *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*, Deshpande uses a narrative structure that does not progress chronologically. But instead moves back and forth thematically, gradually narrating one incident after another till the whole story is revealed. But in *The Binding Vine* Deshpande interweaves three women of different age, status and education. Urmi narrates the entire story in the first person. To offer a realistic and objective representation of Urmi's mother-in-law Mira's marital experiences, Deshpande has made use of the poetry and writings in her diary and notebooks. She has commendably and brilliantly reconstructed Mira's unspoken humiliation and anguish at being subjected to marital rape through the character of Urmi.

Small Remedies has been structured as a biography within a biography. Deshpande delves deep into the traumatic lives of Savitribai Indorekar, Leela, Munni and Madhu by moving her narrative back and forth between the present and the past. The novel works at different levels – 1) the personal, 2) the worldly, 3) women's rights, 4) communal violence, and 5) motherhood. Through the mouthpiece of Urmi, Deshpande has given voice to her own dilemma as a writer – if a biography is an exercise in truth telling, and if it is, whose version must it be? Urmi has been commissioned by a publisher to write Savitribai Indorekar's biography and she is unable to decide whether she should mention only what Savitribai tells about herself to Urmi or everything that Urmi knew about her, including her most guarded secrets.

Madhu Singh is all praise for Deshpande's skill in interweaving myriad themes into a one close-knit narrative. Comparing *Roots and Shadows* with *That Long Silence*, she points out that the former "is the more powerful of the two. In its succinctness lie its strength and the punch."¹⁷ Thus she uses different narrative techniques in her novels to communicate different themes.

6.4.2 MYTHS

Myths are a very important tool of narration for writers. Deshpande, in *That Long Silence* suggests how innocuous seeming bedtime tales told to children made subtle but indelible impression upon their psyche. Jaya, the protagonist, recollects the fable of the foolish crow and the wise sparrow, which she had often heard as a child. But she does not tell this fable to her children for fear that it would distort their personalities into becoming like the priggish sparrow that was not at all concerned with what went around the world but her children and family.

In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande uses the myths of Sita to articulate Jaya's predicament. She follows her Vanita *mami's* counsel that a husband is like a sheltering tree that should be kept alive even if one has to water it with deceit and lies.

In *The Binding Vine*, a mythological parlance can be seen in the stories of Urmila, Mira and Shakuntala and the tales of the mythological characters of their names. The mythological Urmila, Lakshmana's wife, is left in a broken and aggrieved state

when Lakshmana leaves for the forest with Lord Rama. In this novel Urmila is greatly aggrieved by the loss of her child. In this novel, Urmila's mother-in-law Mira, like the mythological Mira, remains detached to her husband and both desire relations based on love and not sexual pleasure. Her husband, like her mythological counterpart who had been wronged and deserted by King Dushyanta, deserts Shakuntala or Shakutai in this novel.

Although mythological allusions have been used by Shashi Deshpande, she does not consider it to be any conscious or deliberate literary device. In an interview to Lakshmi Holmstorm, she tells:

I think a number of us do that in India all the time; we relate a great deal to our personal lives, our daily lives, to the myths. We find parallels as a matter of course. And we do this with all the myths, any myth that seems appropriate, whether they were originally about men or women. In that sense it is a part of a language, a grammar that one knows and understands, rather than a conscious literary device.¹⁸

Like other literary men and women who have used myth as an important device to enhance the literary effect of their works, so has Shashi Deshpande made use of myth rather unconsciously.

6.4.3 USE OF IRONY AND SATIRE

Although rarely, Shashi Deshpande makes use of irony and satire in her novels. The presence of these literary ingredients in her novels may not be a deliberate use by Deshpande but there are incidents with these elements. The most striking example is in *That Long Silence*, an event in which Jaya's husband Mohan accuses her of avoiding him in his most adverse situation. Jaya herself was undergoing great mental trauma, and such an allegation throws her off-balance. She tries to control herself:

I must not laugh, I must not laugh [...] even in the midst of my rising hysteria, a warning bell sounded long and clear, I had to control myself, I had to cork in this laughter. But it was too late. I could not hold it any longer. Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly. (122)

It can be seen as an example of her use of wry irony.

Later she breaks her silence by recording her story, and thus regains her sanity by relieving herself of her pent-up frustrations. Another attempt at irony is Deshpande's creation of the character, Priti, in *The Binding Vine*. When Urmila tells Priti that she was going to publish Mira's story, she was extremely thrilled as the story was going to prove a sensational one. She even plans to adapt the story into a film. Even in Kalpana's rape, her concern is mere hypocrisy as she is concerned

with the great publicity the tragedy will generate. But Deshpande can do without these literary ingredients, as her style is very straightforward for irony and satire.

6.5 ACHIEVEMENT AS A NOVELIST

Shashi Deshpande is from a middle class, Marathi-Kannadiga background, and her schooling in English worked as a major influence in shaping her writing and the use of English language.

With Shashi Deshpande, we move into a much more middle-class ethos and the forms of male repression within the family take on an uglier, more obvious form. In novel after novel, marriage is shown to be an institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male domination. For example the narrator Jaya of *That Long Silence* goes through a period of intense introspection, placing her marriage and herself under the scrutiny of a merciless examination. Her narrative moves deliberately to encompass a horde of other women, all victims of an endemic imbalance between male power and female powerlessness within marriage. Shashi Deshpande's exploration of female subjugation in patriarchal family structures takes on a larger dimension. "She creates, in fact, a mosaic of marriage; women come and go, aunts, cousins, mothers, mother-in-law, friends, acquaintances, each providing a different slant on marriage, a dozen sub-texts to the main text of a protagonist whose marriage is collapsing."¹⁹

The primary focus of attention in Shashi Deshpande's stories is woman – her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common person in the case of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, she finds herself enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes and love.

A central concern of Deshpande's novels is the stultifying effect of women psychologically and physically entrapped in culturally determined ideas of marriage and wifehood. Her female protagonists – Saru, Indu, Jaya, Urmi, Sumi and Madhu – all try desperately to mould themselves to fit that image before learning to question the image itself. This growth within the protagonist becomes the author's strategy of exposing the stereotypes before questioning and re-defining them. This is a major instrument offered by the reminiscential narrative mode and helps to off-set some of the disadvantages of the first person narrative method. Distancing is absent from Shashi Deshpande's handling of the protagonist Jaya in *That Long Silence*.

While accepting the Sahitya Akademi Award about a decade ago, Shashi Deshpande had expressed her impatience with reviewers who routinely used words like "sensitivity" and "sensibility" if the writer happened to be a woman. She said that she herself thought of her work in terms of strength. Unfortunately, the stereotype of a frail and intense novelist writing mainly about women's victimhood has dogged her far too long. The reason for this unfair labelling is not far to seek. Shashi Deshpande's early novels were published just at the time when the post-*Midnight's*

Children generation of writers was becoming big news. Since she refused to play by global rules, she could not be included in this league. The only other exportable slot the media could think of was the Champion of Oppressed Women. But anyone who has read her novels carefully knows that her special value lies elsewhere - in an uncompromising toughness, in her attempts to do what has never been attempted in English, her insistence on being read on her own terms and a refusal to be packaged according to the demands of the market. "To achieve something ... you have got to be hard and ruthless... There is no other way of being a saint. Or a painter. A writer." This unexpected first paragraph of *That Long Silence* (1988) is the voice of the narrator, but it also gives us a clue to the author's approach to writing. *Small Remedies*, Deshpande's sixth and recent novel, is the most confident assertion of this strength and a deliberate denial of sentimentality.

Deshpande's writing is spontaneous. On Vanamala Vishwanatha's observation that her writing is not obviously Indian, Deshpande says:

No, I don't believe in making it obviously Indian. But all this is basically because I'm isolated - I'm not part of any movement and not conscious of readers to impress. To get wider recognition here and abroad, you have to be in the university and places like that with the right contact. I'm an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home. None of these things are within my reach. This has, I believe, done me good, it has given me great freedom. I'm happy with this anonymity. Once you get publicity-conscious, your writing becomes affected. I'm truly happy with this freedom.²⁰

In a recent issue the editor of the magazine *Indian Review of Books* wrote the following about Shashi Deshpande: "She has been quietly writing for the last thirty years, without fanfare, without ceremony about the human predicament, playing out the lives of ordinary people who we might encounter on the streets, bringing into sharp focus the meaning of life itself." Ritu Menon, a critic, explains this lack of critical or popular attention that is accorded to Deshpande as being "partly explained by her location - distant from the media capitals of Mumbai and Delhi - and her own modest, almost reclusive, lifestyle. Much more likely an explanation is the fact that she is almost completely 'home grown,' ... " Now she is a writer in her own right.

Shashi Deshpande is characteristically forthright. As R. Mala comments, "Deshpande has certainly transcended those cultural times when sex was conspicuous by its non-mention."²¹ The dilemma of women awakening to their physical needs yet conditioned to regard these as immoral is brought out sensitively through *Jaya*. *That Long Silence* deals with this aspect of women's existence at some length.²²

Shashi Deshpande handles the issue fleetingly, but with her characteristic authenticity. Shashi Deshpande's protagonist grows towards an honest acknowledgement of responsibility for her own depressed state.²³

Some critical comments have been made on Shashi Deshpande's novels such as: 1) The novels are difficult to read as several characters appear and disappear and

seem to serve no ostensible purpose. 2) Deshpande's style needs a lot more exercising and experimentation 3) The plot, too, would be better if some of the fringe characters were left out 4) In Deshpande's first novel *Roots and Shadows*, even a family tree on the introductory page does not really make for the concept of the novel.

The presence of many characters in the novels makes difficulty for reading the novels. It can be stated that since her novels are realistic and based on real life situations, the presence of several characters was necessary. Over the years her style has matured as she became more adapt in her writing skills. The fringe characters presence was felt necessary by Shashi Deshpande in her novels because that in her opinion makes the novels realistic. Deshpande's convincing portrait of the protagonist with their veneer of middle-class respectability is commendable.

6.6 CONCLUSION

A close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals her deep insight into the plight of Indian women, who feel smothered and fettered, in a tradition-bound, male-dominated society. She delineates her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. These women are aware of their strengths and limitations, but find themselves thwarted by the opposition and pressure from a society conditioned overwhelmingly by the patriarchal mind-set. She highlights their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a male-dominated society.

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists' quest for identity gets largely accentuated due to their frustrating experiences born of the prohibitive nature of the Indian patriarchal society. In her novels, the host of male characters – husbands, lovers, fathers and other relations – display different aspects of patriarchy and oppression. The older men, particularly the fathers, are broad-minded. The male friends are “feminist” in their approach and sympathize with the protagonists' lot. Deshpande's male characters only serve to enable the protagonists to define their identities more fully.

Shashi Deshpande keeps her narratives female-centred and gives an intimate insight into the psyche of the middle-class Indian women who feel oppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal socialization. She provides new ideals for a better man-woman relationship, thereby broadening the scope of woman's existence. She not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values, but also prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman in her novels.

Deshpande's women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination, first as daughters and later as wives. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them, and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that limit their capability and existence as a wife. Fettered to their roles in the family, they question the subordinate status ordained to them by society. Deshpande has made realistic

representation of the Indian middle-class women and her sincere concern for women and their oppressive lot is reflected strongly in all her novels.

The women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's novels go through a thought process after which they see themselves differently. There is a change in their mental attitude, which is spelt out in a change in action. We feel that the revolution comes not out of escaping the situation, but facing the situation with a different idea of "what I am"...this is the biggest revolution. I know what I am now, I am going to live my life knowing what I am. There is no better revolution than that. This is what her women characters state.

By liberation, Shashi Deshpande means being humanitarian, being aware of responsibilities and duties refusing to give in to oppression and cruelty.

Her protagonists, in moments of crisis look to the past; they are shown going to their parental home. Reasons of disorder in the family life are given in her novels in various ways. The novels can be seen as different expressions of the problems in real life situations. To that extent, the novels can also be seen as realistic.

The concept of sisterhood is more prominently seen in two recent novels – *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time*. Whether it can be seen as a solution to end male domination in the society is an important question. Sisterhood cannot be seen as a solution. In India the male and female worlds were separated until recently. What

the women were doing the men did not generally know. Cooking and bringing up children and childbirth were part of the woman's world and it was the women in joint families who supported one another in times of trouble and illness. There was some cruelty too between women but more than that was the support which showed a bond of sisterhood. However sisterhood has never solved the problems of women, but has only been a comforting balm. Companionship between men and women is the only solution to the problem of women, sisterhood is only comfort.

Shashi Deshpande's emphasis on sisterhood is coupled with the idea that the institution of marriage needs to be seen in a different light in the modern context. Her novels suggest ways of adjustment by the heroines to the issue of marital problems and their different expressions.

Shashi Deshpande occupies a place of pre-eminence among the contemporary women novelists concerned with women's issues. Deshpande's creative talent and ideology have established her as a great feminist writer genuinely concerned with women's issues and anxieties.

Chapter – VI

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