Conclusion
CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

Shashi Deshpande has emerged as a great literary force. She sensitively portrays the lot of women and their mute, convoluted self-abnegation in her stories. For the courageous and sensitive treatment of large and significant themes, her works are regarded as outstanding contributions to Indian Literature in English.

Initially, Deshpande wanted to write about people as they are found in real life, but as she proceeded, women became the focus of her writings. Though she has written for women she cannot be categorized among feminist writers. She makes it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all the troubles. Rather her writings deal with the problems of modern women in conflict with tradition and patriarchal men.

She writes to mirror the society as she observes it, without bothering about name and fame. She comments.

It’s meaningless that people know me as a person and not known 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 would rather be known for my books than for myself (1991, 46).
Her novels usually begin with an unconventional marriage leading to the problems of alternation, accommodation and adjustment. The conflict in her protagonists is resolved through their desperate unconscious submission to traditional roles. Woman’s primary social role is to be a wife and mother. Man’s primary social role is to be the bread-winner. The defining edge of all female experience is that the young woman will grow up, meet a man who will be her life partner and look after her economically. In return, she will bear children and make a home.

Her novels are concerned with a woman’s quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche, an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist’s place in it. What Deshpande’s heroine wants is the freedom to think and decide for herself and the liberation from her womanhood. Vanamala Viswanatha points out that the author has presented in her work:

A typical middle class house-wife’s life. The urge to find oneself, to create space for oneself to grow on one’s own seems to be the major pre-occupation, personally I think that’s every woman’s problems. Well, that’s where you have touched a chord, I think (1991, 48).

As self-psychosis is her prime concern, death, loneliness and alienated self become her pastures through which Shashi Deshpande wades towards meaning of
life, identity and her own individuality. Her novels describe the experience of the modern, educated, middle-class Indian woman; show both similarities and contrasts to western feminist works. Many of the themes of her novels are similar to those of recent European and American women’s fiction, particularly in the description of various stages of a woman’s life.

In her novels, women have established themselves as autonomous beings, free from the restrictions imposed by society, culture, nature and also free from their own fears and guilt. They have reached the stage of understanding the fundamental truth: you have to find it for yourself.

Her fiction represents the predicament of the Indian woman placed between two poles: tradition and modernity; between family and profession; between culture and nature. She further mixes ‘humanism’ with ‘feminism’ in her fiction and so her version of the Indian woman tends to be optimistic, though radical.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), *That Long Silence* (1998), *The Binding Vine* (1993) and *A Matter of Time* (1996), deal with the same theme of adjustments and conflicts in the minds of the female protagonists, caught between traditional practices and modern trends. This has been very minutely and delicately portrayed through the characters of Saru, Jaya, Sumi and Urmi, the protagonists of these novels respectively.
Society has given woman a language and symbol defining her identity on the basis of gender. Whatever be the social status of the woman, her acceptability and position in society are determined in relation to her husband, whether living or dead. In marrying she seeks to free herself from her domineering mother, she looks forward to a new life, a relationship in which she is needed and loved. But she finds no peace and happiness as she is haunted by the phantoms of her own insufficiencies and infirmities.

The author has not tried to make her women characters stronger than they are in real life. Rather she has exposed their passivity, anxiety and confusion. As pinpointed by Promila 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 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 (1974, 268, 269).

The modern educated middle class Indian woman first rebels against parental authority as she sees the parental home a symbol of tradition and bondage. She gets married to seek emancipation but since she meets only with
disappointments, she seeks other ways of coming to terms with herself and the world which lead her finally to reconciliation and self-realisation. The author has projected this aspect of Indian woman with sensitivity and instinctive understanding as she belongs to this category. The projection of the woman’s world in her novels is authentic, credible and realistic.

Saru, Jaya, Urmi and Sumi the female protagonists rebel against the old cultural ways and tradition. Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terror* is treated as a second rate citizen in her own home owing to sexual discrimination. She develops a deep and severe hatred towards her mother. Deprived of parental care and affection, she lives a pale, loveless life.

She declines to remain within the four walls of her house and finds hard to adjust with her mother for she is a barrier in her career. Her marriage to Manu is a sign of her turning away from the traditional ways and values her orthodox mother adhered to. So Saru received only a curse as her wedding gift from her mother for Saru chooses her life partner who belongs to a low caste. The conflict between Saru and her mother represents the clash between the old and the new; the traditional and the modern.

Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence* also fights against her mother. Jaya complains against her mother’s slapdash ways and hates her warnings that silent submission is the only way to fulfilment and happiness in a woman’s life.
She has ill-feelings not only against her mother but also against her aijis, for they strongly hold on to age old customs. They keep on pointing out her arguing nature and scold her or question her going out and returning home late.

After their education the girls are tossed between their desire and submission to the parental authority. This is clearly seen in *The Binding Vine* where Urmí the protagonist is made to stay with her grand parents in Ranidurg. Through the diaries of Mira, the dead mother-in-law of Urmí, we come to know that she also had a similar confrontation with her mother. Mira had been longing to become a poet but her dreams, desires and ambitions shattered with her marriage. Kalpana, the rape victim, also had problems with her mother Shakutai because the mother blamed her without knowing about the details of the incident. She says, “Women must know fears” (1993, 148).

Mothers fail to understand their daughters and hence fail to show them the right path. Sumi, the protagonist of *A Matter of Time* is separated from her husband. Her parents Kalyani and Shripathi maintain silence for many years. Each protagonist in one way or the other rebels against her parental home because their mothers fail to show them love and affection.

Through marriage the protagonist looks forward to her second home for peace and happiness but it turns out to be an utter failure. In the second home also she has to make sacrifices and adjustments to make her marital life a success.
The novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* analyzes the complex relationship between a successful doctor Saru, and her professionally frustrated and irritated husband, Manu. Manu is not an ordinary male chauvinist. He has absolutely no reservations about considering his wife as an equal and as a person.

Saru’s conflict is every woman’s conflict between the desired and the imposed; the willed and the unwilled. Her education makes her recalcitrant and militant. Education invokes in her a consciousness, which was not present in the older generation. Therefore, she now feels that “marriage is no guarantee for happiness” (*DHNT*, 109).

The novel *That Long Silence* is a scathing critique of our social institutions like marriage and family, the way they stifle the growth and free expression of the individual. Jaya, the protagonist is so much confused about her marital life, the whole set up and the happenings around, that she finds no other way but silence as her means of communication. A continuous inner conflict goes on in her 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, and has the knowledge of the world, but emotionally she is dependent upon the traditions.

Education which has been considered merely an asset to fetch a better groom in the marriage market, opens the door to career opportunities and
economic independence. As Maria Mies points out, “Education and economic independence springing from the career defeat the docility of the Sita image” (1980, 87). Due to the differences in attitude, the marital life becomes shaky and gloomy. It becomes more of compromise than love, based on social fear rather than on mutual need of each other.

Similarly, the protagonists Urmila and Sumi of The Binding Vine and A Matter of Time respectively try to rebel even in the second stage of their life. G.S. Amur writes:

The operative sensibility in Deshpande’s stories is distinctly female and modern... she is at her best when she works out her themes in terms of intimate human relationships, generally within the family. She uses the story as medium of moral and psychological analysis and her focus is almost invariably on the inner life (1986, 112).

Urmila, grieving over the loss of her baby daughter, tries to divert her attention on two other victims of the society, Mira and Kalpana. Even when deprived of love and care from her husband, Urmi tries to fight another woman’s battle.

On the other hand, Sumi in A Matter of Time, has to return to her parents’ home with her three daughters, as her husband Gopal, without giving a clear
reason has quit the house. Sumi, the protagonist tries to tackle the situation. She comments to Devaki, “I’ve never been able to cry easily; you know that, and what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don’t know why and maybe he doesn’t really know, either?... (A Matter of Time, 107). Sumi without expecting her husband’s help, tries to bring up her family. All the protagonists, in whatever situations they are placed, don’t give up their courage. They try to fight for their rights.

G.S.Amur remarks about Deshpande’s feat:

Woman’s struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian Society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most of all as human being is Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer (1986, 112).

All the four protagonists return to their parental homes at different situations. Their loneliness gives them a chance for self-realization. Deshpande’s heroines’ journey is an initiation into the mystery of human existence.

Saru of The Dark Holds No Terrors begins to understand things as she finds that the dark is not terrible. Saru, the realist, sees the ultimate human reality in the human body and its process of decay, sees loneliness as a painful but inescapable human condition. She realizes that the sufferings of multitudes do not mitigate one’s own suffering in anyway and that she is doomed to sit and watch happiness recede from her all by herself.
As realisation dawns upon her, she becomes aware that neither secluded life nor ‘the wall of silence’ will help her. She has to speak. She now sees reality clearly; “no I am a realist, we are realists... we come into this world alone and go out of it alone” (DHNT, 109). Saru is on her course to gain her identity as an individual. The wheel finally comes full circle, when Saru tries to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with a tiny hope of resettlement.

What Shashi Deshpande imparts us through Jaya (That Long Silence) is that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their own victimization, instead of putting the blame on everybody except themselves. It is only through self-analysis and self-understanding, through vigilance and courage, that they have to fight their own battles because nobody is going to do it for them.

Jaya broods over her past life and realizes that the change is bound to occur and she hopes for the better in her future life. She feels that she must come out with her thoughts and communicate freely with Mohan and make him understand the need for mutual relationship. Jaya says:

We don’t change overnight. It’s possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope, without that, life would be impossible. And there is anything I know not it is this : Life has always to be made possible (1988, 193).
Urmila, the protagonist of *The Binding Vine*, reconciles and understands that lack of true love causes problems. She begins to believe in mankind. She accepts that relationship can be wholesome only when the people themselves are whole. She does believe that one day Kishore will remove his armour and reach her. Anu is gone but she still has Karthik. Urmii realizes that life is worth living for there are flashes of love, concern, and understanding that brighten life.

The search for an individual identity, a reaching out beyond the self, is not a deviation from womanliness but a means of fulfilment. Sumi of *A Matter of Time* also realizes her own self. She understands differences between the personal desires of each and every human being. Without finding fault with Gopal, she analyses herself. She tells him:

I knew I would not stop you, I could do nothing. When you left, I knew I would not question you, I would just let you go... I had to go back to live with my parents. I was frightened by seeing what happened to my mother. But now I know my life is not like my mother’s life, yours and mine were complete. Our life was complete (1996, 221-222).

Sumi develops a positive attitude towards her husband.

The type of society that is presented in the novels is patriarchal and male-dominated where the wives are afraid of their husbands and cannot converse freely
and frankly about their feelings. The female protagonists of the selected novels give us the new image of the Indian woman who tries to stand on her own feet and seeks to break the age-old silence by refusing to dance to the tunes of her husband.

In order to have a well-balanced conjugal life, it is imperative that husband and wife are at par with each other. They should supplement and not supplant each other. 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. Deshpande also emphasizes that mutual understanding and love are the need of the hour, and not a total revolt against tradition and traditional ways. Only such understanding and love could go a long way in bridging the gap between the older and the younger generation.

Feminism is by no means a monolithic term. If one seeks a common stand in a number of its varieties, it is the critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking which subordinate women to men in familial, religious, political, economic, social legal, and artistic domains. This patriarchal ideology teaches women to internalize these concepts in the process of their socialization. It brings into focus the concepts of gender which are manmade. As Simone de Beauvoir observes, “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine” (1974:20). This androcentric ideology pervades through those writings which have been considered great literatures and focus on male protagonists providing women secondary roles.
Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has a striking beginning in that the protagonist, Sarita or Saru, comes back to her family home overtly to look after her widower father but covertly to escape from the nightmarish brutality of her sadist husband, Manu inflicts on her every night. Living in her father’s home she reflects on the events of her life and the novel gets unfolded through her memories of the past, which continue to be compared and contrasted with her present. She remembers her childhood, her domineering mother, Kamalatai, her marriage to the versatile looking Manohar, the silent suffering which follow and her two children. These reflections reveal to her that happiness in life cannot be gained only through dependency on marriage, parents and other such institutions; there are so many other things which make life worth living.

When Saru reaches her father’s home after fifteen years, her father welcomes her “like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest” (14). Beginning with this critical experience the novelist unfolds the narrative through the memories of Saru. She recalls that her problems had started right from her childhood. They became quite serious after her younger brother Dhruva’s death which is referred to in the novel by “After Dhruva” which symbolizes the prelapsarian and postlapsarian life for Saru. His death overshadows all other memories of her life as if that was the point of her fall. She remembers how she was treated second to Dhruva. She recalls her dialogue with her mother:
Don’t go out in the sun. You will get darker.

Who cares?

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

I don’t want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life?

Why not?

You can’t

And Dhruva?

He is different. He’s a boy.

She remembers that it was only once a year at the time of Puja that she was “more important than Dhruva” (*DHNT*, 50). Otherwise it was he who dominated her every where. There was always a Puja on his birthday but none on her birthdays. After his death her birthday was not celebrated. She recalls: “After Dhruva’s death, there were no more celebrations. My birthday was passed over in silence, both at home and at school” (*DHNT*, 153). It was only on her fifteenth birthday that she got a gold ear ring from her mother as her birthday present.

Saru’s mother continuously accused her of Dhruva’s death and cursed her: “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive when he is dead?” (*DHNT*, 29-30). This leaves a traumatizing effect on her. She had become a nonentity long before she left her mother’s home. She remembers: “I just did not exist for her. I died long before I left home” (*DHNT*, 27). In fact, male-oriented societies
structure females in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender. Through this and other examples in the novel Shashi Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male-female relationship but exist between a female-female relationship as well. Saru remembers that when she wanted to study in a medical college, her mother had been against her studies. Though unsuccessful, her mother tried her best to persuade her husband not to send Saru to a medical college:

You didn’t belong to that (moneyed) class. And don’t forget medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding… let her go for a B.Sc,… you can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over. (130-131).

This reflects that girls are seen as belonging to a different family altogether and their socialization stresses their future roles as wives. Veena Das quotes an informant stating that:

Daughters are comparable to something kept in trust for another (amanat). You have to care for them, love them, and you will be held responsible for them but you are destined to lose them. Once a daughter is properly married and goes to her own house it is like a debt that has been paid.
Thus a girl has to adjust herself twice: first in her father’s house, and then in her father-in-law’s house. Goffman terms these as the “primary adjustment” and the “secondary adjustment”. These adjustments, especially the latter, put different kinds of bondage or “role playing” on the girl.

Saru succeeds in persuading her father to send her to the medical college. She was a sincere student to whom “College meant lectures in the morning, practicals in the afternoon, exams every six months and medical college at the end of two years” (DHNT, 44). But as fate would have it, she encounters Manohar and falls in love with him. Manohar or Manu was “one of the known names” (DHNT, 43) in the college for his cultural activities. “It wasn’t that he was a good student, academically I mean; he was also the Secretary of the Literary Association, actively associated with the Debating Union and the life and soul of the Dramatic Society. And, in addition to all this, a budding writer, a poet of promise, with some poems already published in magazines” (DHNT, 43-44). She defies her parents and gets married. She was quite happy to find such a versatile genius as her husband because her “age old feminine dream of a superior conquering male” (DHNT, 47) had been fulfilled.

Saru became a famous doctor and he turned out to be simply a Lecturer. This made her socially and economically his superior. Slowly “an affected indifference” (DHNT, 36) started gleaming through his tone because “there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only
for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored” (*DHNT*, 36). The esteem she earned around her made her inches taller and him inches shorter. Earlier, “he had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (*DHNT*, 36). The ego clash became inevitable because “I am something more than his wife and he has become what he is” (*DHNT*, 70). This upside down alternation – “this terrible thing” (*DHNT*, 37) – destroys their marriage.

Saru now realizes that Manu had started neglecting her quite early but “I did not at that time ponder over his tone. I was too busy... I was exhilarated with the dignity and importance that my status as a doctor seemed to have given me” (*DHNT*, 36) This simmering inferiority complex of Manu burst out the day a girl had come to interview her, who asked the following question to Manu.

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

Since that day Manu had become a sadist. He teased her in bed and behaved normally during daytime as if he had two spilt personalities one of Dr. Jekyll and the other of Mr. Hyde. Earlier, she thought that such a terrific experience was a nightmare but the bruises on her body negated her. Bewildered by the ensuing failure of her marriage she even thinks of leaving her job and to be simply his house wife because she cannot bear the shattering of her dream – “the
eternal female dream of finding happiness through a man" (DHNT, 112). But
Manu realises "And how will we live?" He cannot bear letting the children go to
third – rate schools wearing cheapest clothes. So she continues with her job. But
this acceptance of her role as the leading earning member of the family expresses
her anguish through the imaginary advice given by her to the girls in Nalu’s
college.

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband...
That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage.
Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor nurse, executive
secretary, principal teacher role, ... women’s magazines will
tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That’s
nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will
always be unequal, but take care that it’s unequal in favour of
your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you,
both of you. (DHNT, 124).

But she realized with honest astonishment that she had not made this
speech after all. She had spoken instead of medicine as a career for women.

She receives Manu’s letters but opens none of them. Later she hears the
news of his arrival to take her back. She wants to leave her father’s house so as to
avoid her encounter with him. She feels “the desperation of a trapped animal”
(DHNT, 195-196) because of the realization that she had no home at all. She
remembers how many times she had thought of committing suicide but could not
translate that into action. She has a feeling of abnegation because there had been
no way open to her neither in the present nor in the past: “But there can never be
any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My back on him. My mother died alone
because I deserted her” She remembers Madhav’s words. “I cannot spoil my life
because of that boy (his brother Satish). It’s my life after all” (DHNT, 189). She
realizes that she is powerful enough to join the fragments of her splintered
personality.

They came to her then, all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at
first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter,
the unloving wife... all persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she
could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again.
But if she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and so much
more. (201).

Saru realizes that she had been a puppet because she had made herself one,
because she had been afraid of proving her mother right. Ready to go to see her
child patient she tells Baba that if Manu comes he should be asked to wait for her.
This is a significant step in the revitalization of her relationship with her husband.
“The emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing
upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife in the end is, therefore not a
redeemed wife... one who is no longer afraid of the dark”. It is this point of enlightenment which brings to fore the lines of the *Dhammapada* given as an epigraph to the novel.

You are your own refuge.

There is no other refuge.

This refuge is hard to achieve.

It is not only Saru who suffers in this areocentric world. She remembers the suffering of her grandmother who had been deserted by her husband but “had never, so she had heard, complained, it’s my luck, she said. My fate. It was written on my forehead” (*DHNT*, 62). Saru’s own mother did not have “a room of her own”. Baba tells Saru, “Silence had become a habit for us” (*DHNT*, 181). This silence, which symbolizes distance between Saru’s parents is praised by Maikaki who called Kamalatai a woman of courage who never complained. “She never told anyone about what was happening to her. The amount she ate... I tell you, a sparrow would have eaten more. Your father never noticed because she never ate with him” (*DHNT*, 99). This silence demarcates the confines and outlines the margins. This suggests “that women constitute a muted group, the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, the dominant (male) group”. Saru thinks her mother to be a lucky woman because she died a Suhagan. She asks Saru: “why am I, a fat, old, unwanted woman left alive when he (her husband), so useful, so much wanted was taken away? Why am I alive

234
when he is dead?” (DHNT, 69). This shows that widowhood is the worst calamity a woman has to face. As T.N. Madan observes, the death of a child may be seen as a personal calamity but the death of a husband is seen as altering the social identity of a woman.

Saru’s classmate Padmakar tells her that he hates his wife because “she cannot talk about anything but servants and children. And prices... She never has her food until I have mine, she cooks just what I like and she calls me by my name” (DHNT, 120). Saru tells him that he has a woman who is a good wife and a good mother and he should be satisfied with her. The contrast between the attitudes of Padmakar and Manu symbolizes the two sides of the same coin. It is commonplace observation even today that many a man expects his wife to be educated and modern and yet have the traditional qualities of devotion and submissiveness.

Saru’s classmate Smita is a contrast to her. After her marriage she had to become first Geetanjali and Anju because “He (her husband) chose it himself when we got married” (DHNT, 106). He did so because he had been reading Tagore those days. Smita further tells her that her husband “hates anyone calling me Smita now” (DHNT, 106). Smita has to borrow one hundred rupees from Saru because he had given her just enough to buy a small gift for the baby” (DHNT, 107). This shows that marriage brings different kinds of constraints on a woman which go on erasing her personality into oblivion.
Though Saru’s suffering is like that of the other women in the novel, yet she is different from them in that she becomes her own protégé. Unlike other women who bear suffering like the torture of Sisyphus, she gathers strength not to surrender, not to run away from the problems, not to commit suicide, not to be behind the symbolic purdah or veil – in a word, not to accept defeat. Rather she accepts the challenge so as to prove herself a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, a good doctor and a good human being not from the phallocentric point of view but from her own ‘female’ viewpoint. Thus she is a revisionist questioning the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures in trying to provide an alternative. Thus the Saru of the opening section of the novel who had visualized herself as the archetype of Sudama going to an all powerful male (her father) for support, ends up as a self-sufficient woman who goes to Manu not to seek help but to complement him.

The foregoing analysis shows that Shashi Deshpande is an Indian feminist novelist par excellence. She describes with tremendous power the struggle of her protagonist Saru, who survives in an areocentric world which offers no easy outs to women. Her bridging of the gulf between realism and reality is significant. This generates in us what Coleridge had termed as “willing suspension of disbelief”. The overall implications of the novel point towards a poetics of liberation by women and of women. The novel attacks patriarchy and enables matriarchy to emerge as a powerful structure capable of encompassing the ever widening chasm in the male female relationship.
That Long Silence, acclaimed masterpiece of feminist writing in Indo-Anglian Fiction, raises the status of Shashi Deshpande among the writers of the present day. The novel highlights the image of the middle class woman sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

In their stream of thoughts both Jaya and Mohan look at their marital relationship where there is nothing but suppressed silence. Disgruntled with Mohan and at the consigning social milieu, Jaya wants to flee from the cribbed confines of an incarcerated domestic life in order to find a new identity for herself, a new mooring for her fugitive self. Communication at the domestic and personal level is a failure: "Nothing. Nothing between us... nothing between me and Mohan. We live together but there had been only emptiness between us" (TLS, 185). Jaya had never confessed her "frenetic feelings" to Mohan as it had seemed "like a disease, a disability" (TLS, 97), which she had to hide from everyone. Jaya pines for social communication but the society is impervious to her spiritual need. The society as a mirror "is always treacherous" (TLS, 1) for it fails to show what we want to see beyond our visual perception.

The metaphor of silence under which the novel is organized helps to impose a quietude and discipline: the inner dynamics of a self cut off from
human communication. That long silence is not an intrusion into the world of silence but a silent communion with the oppressed self straining for articulation, for a voice.

The novel attempts to break the silence thrust on women--and their position in society by the domineering males. It depicts the suppressed feelings, aspirations, and agony of women and also challenges men to alter their attitude to give women their due rights and dignity.

Silence is, perhaps, the most common strategy of survival. This pregnant silence, sometimes imposed forcibly on women, other times self-imposed, is the central motif of the novel as indicated by the title and the epigraph, “If I were a man and cared to know how the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy - the weight of that long silence of one-half the world”. Frightened by his reaction to an outburst of “unwomanly” anger in the early days of their marriage (TLS, 83), Jaya had henceforth suppressed all vocal expression of dissent. There were occasional weak gestures of protest – as when she childishly ignores his hand outstretched for the keys, making it look like a “supplicatory gesture” (TLS, 8) but the strategy generally adopted was one of silence.
Through Jaya, Deshpande examines a dilemma facing many women writers – their inability to let their imagination free play, without being restricted either by the distractions of domestic life or the code of society.

Through the depiction of her protagonist’s resolution, Shashi Deshpande touches on two prominent feminist concerns – the recovery of a unified female identity from a fragmented self and the re-appraisal of silence as a strategy of survival.

That Long Silence gives an excellent idea of the domestic life of a typical Indian housewife. The story of Jaya, the protagonist whose identity and individuality are suppressed due to her silence and willing devotion to her husband is the tale of many housewives. Jaya goes through a process of searching for her self which culminates finally in her resolution to be herself.

Deshpande's novel presents a glimpse of the patriarchal world through the portrayal of the protagonist. The protagonist, Jaya is repressed by patriarchy within the family, within marriage, and through the sexual stereotyping, but she has a strength of her own, and in spite of challenges and hostilities remains uncrushed. The novel attempts to highlight the causes and reasons of oppression of Indian women in the domestic set-up which
prevents empowerment of women and the scope for possible resolution in their search for female selfhood.

Shashi Deshpande is in the quest of creating "New Woman" out of her protagonists who belong to different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds.

A 'new woman' is a feminist who is in search for the means to overcome oppression, develop her powers and abilities for personal fulfilment and self-actualisation.

Shashi Deshpande's women question the existing traditions and customs and critically examine the patriarchal values of the Indian society. But each of these women arrives at a concept of feminism which is a revolution of social reality.

In the same manner, Shashi Deshpande allows one of her women characters to exercise her reproductive right by aborting unwanted foetus. In That Long Silence, Vimala, the sister to Mohan speaks of her mother's unwanted pregnancies. She says "almost all my childhood, I remember her as being pregnant" (TLS, 37).
The need to keep women economically independent is one of the main objectives of feminist ideology.

The biggest dilemma of the modern woman today is the choice between professionalism and domesticity. Despite the idealized concept of marriage, woman in reality, is essentially a subservient partner in marriage. Marriage often does not mean companionship or equality for her, rather it is a trap which negates her rights to individuality, independence and self-realization. Jaya realizes her secondary position in marriage. In That Long Silence, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the irony of a woman writer who is also a young housewife. Being a writer she is supposed to present her views and ideas before the society but still she remains silent probing into her past, struggling with her present and trying to establish rapport with her future. She is an intellectual who finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men.

She wishes to write on many important issues but Mohan, her husband expresses his displeasure and she immediately complies to his wishes, “I had relinquished all my writings, all my stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared, scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage (TLS, 144). Husband is always thought of
as a "a big sheltering tree" and a woman is safe if she has a sheltering tree over her. This 'dependence syndrome' has played havoc with a woman's sense of self-confidence. It has taken away her courage to face the world independently.

The author through Jaya tries to portray the sufferings of the married women and also how women are willing to compromise their desires in order to safeguard their marriages.

In this novel Mrs. Deshpande depicts the anxiety and difficulty of a middle class family. Mohan, to obtain name and fame as well as prestige and security, is involved in some misdeeds as a result of which he faces inquiry and loses his job.

Social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man. Generally, a woman's identity tends to be defined by others. Due to her sensitive nature, Jaya is very particular about moulding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied. At 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

242
themes of lack of communication may be over-familiar in western fiction, but in extrovert India it is not much analyzed”. (Shashi Deshpande, *Writing From The Margin*, New Delhi : Penguin Books, 2003, p. 12.).

The writers of feminism are primarily concerned with the recognition of woman as a being, an autonomous being. They want woman to realize herself through self-analysis and determination. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist thinks of her past and tries to analyse herself and her station in life. Jaya stands for revolt against oppressing social customs that throttle women in our society. Through the process of reliving the past in her mind, Jaya gets the guidance for future. She decides to break her long seven years of silence and decides herself that she is no longer a passive partner of Mohan. She breaks her self-imposed prison wall of mind and chooses to remain in the family and at the same time comes out of the confining slots allotted to her by the patriarchal society.

Women as daughters, mothers and wives need to provide mutual support and understanding. Urmî’s realisation comes close to Deshpande’s own increasing awareness of the duty of women writers and thinkers to write about women, from “woman’s point of view” (Ashoka, Rani, 2005 : 104) T. Asoka Rani comments: “Shashi Deshpande desires that women need to offer
resistance and emerge as strong-willed individuals to face life, to share responsibilities and not to escape from it”.

Deshpande’s portrayal of the women of different generations, presents the divided world of women in the traditional and modern. There are important continuities along with some new perceptions and attitudes that the women discover as they look at the different generations. In *The Binding Vine* Urmi realises the courage that women like Shakutai command coping with one disaster after another.

*The Binding Vine* deals with the sense of belongingness in a woman towards her family, but, simultaneously, there is an urge to have a room of their own. To a woman, motherhood is conducive to her fortitude, followed by the preordained servitude towards her family.

Upbringing of children is always considered to be the mother’s job in an Indian society. Even a working woman is expected to fulfil her duties towards home and her children. The image of a man is always of the bread winner of the family.

Parenthood comprises a mother and a father, but it is the woman who becomes the connecting link between the family members. Urmi states, “I
don’t know. Sometimes I think it’s woman who takes parenthood seriously; men don’t, not to the same extent, anyway.” (The Binding Vine: 76).

According to traditional Indian belief, the only redemption for a woman is achievement of motherhood, She should not aspire to anything beyond her wifely and motherly roles. Deshpande “In The Binding Vine, brings to light the life and poetry of an unknown woman. Truly Deshpande in her novels has created for us an imaginative female historiography which fills in the gaps and absences found regarding women in our social or cultural history.” (Sarla Palkar : 1991, 170)

The mother-daughter relationship has always occupied an important place in Deshpande’a fiction. She does not give much credence to the image of mother as an angel or goddess who is valorized in our culture. Her mothers are human- and therefore fallible-- as her women are human. She does not idealize ‘woman’ or ‘mother” as many feminist writers do--Alice Walker, for instance-- but instead tells us about “The vulnerability of women. The power of women. The deviousness of women. The helplessness of women. The courage of women” (On the Writing of a Novel, 34). Deshpande presents us with different facets of the mother-daughter relationship, which is a bitter-sweet experience, riddled with tensions and
conflicts, love and cruelty, joy and pain. The conflict between the mother and the daughter can be, in most cases, just a conflict between tradition and modernity, or a clash between the claims of selfhood and the need for love in relationships.

Though the novel, *The Binding Vine*, essentially revolves around the individual tragedies of Urmia, Mira and Kalpana, Deshpande hints at the raw deal faced by most women at different levels - whether it is women from chawls like Shakutai and Sulu, or the urban, educated women like Urmia’s mother, Inni, her friend, Vanaa and her mother-in-law, Akka.

The Indian custom of changing the bride’s name is a pivotal point of transformation—a complete revamping of any young girl’s psyche, so aptly documented in the saga of Deshpande’s heroines or protagonists. Mira, who is bound in a marriage against her choice, cringes further when a new name ‘Nirmala’ is thrust on her. But she refuses to give up her name and proclaims:

Nirmala, they call, I stand statue still.

Do you build the new without razing the old?

A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold

Shashi Deshpande’s clarion call to modern women in her novel *The Binding Vine* is loud and clear. The patriarchal, chauvinistic and indifferent Indian male role is challenged. The innermost recesses of a woman’s heart are brought to light through the perspectives of the protagonist, Urmī’s death of a second child forms the occasion for a journey into the past, into oneself and into the future. The experience is one which minutely analyses all the relationships a woman in the Indian society is subjected to. There are moments of revolt, deep-felt anger, desire to set things right, retreat from steps which would shatter the sense of well-being and fulfilment mirrored through these relationships. The final resolution is one which points at a relationship that is healthy, satisfying, something that is based on love and the wish to help, rather than drown the soul into the quagmire of the ‘dark night’.

The narrator is a woman and it is mainly the woman’s perspective that is presented in the novel. The keynote of the novel is struck right at the beginning where Urmī determines not to be plaster cast into a stereotyped image by people around her. If an accidental fall from a cycle and the consequent injury and anxiety make her fear a restriction in her freedom, an existential experience such as death plunges her into morbidity and a masochistic mood which is devoid of all positive values. The gradual
progress of the self through darkness, revolt and reconciliation is what is traced through a narration of Urmi’s experience.

Through the female characters of her novel Shashi Deshpande gets to the root of existence itself. Male or female, there is a divide within ourselves that leads us to love and hate, to be gentle and good and at the same time become an agent of cruelty. This is the message of the novel. Human nature itself is the “hardest to bridge, the hardest to accept, live with” (The Binding Vine : 201). The course of action in a situation like this cannot be prescribed. Both living as well as dying terrify. The terror can be overcome only by the healing touch of love, the binding vine that projects itself through the scene depicted by Shashi Deshpande at the end of the novel:

And yet, I think of Vanaa, heavily pregnant, sitting by me, holding my hand during the pains before Karthik was born, I remember Kishore’s face when he first saw Anu. I think of Akka crying for Mira, of Inni’s grief when Papa told her about his illness, of Papa’sanguished face watching her, of the touch of grace there was in Sakutai’s hand when she covered me gently at night while I slept,
of the love with which she speaks of her sister, of Sandhya ... (The Binding Vine: 203)

The paranoia of mothers protecting their daughters from the danger of sexual assault is a significant theme in the novel. Vanaa cautions her daughters, Inni is hysterical when Urmī is late returning home, and Shakutai moans, ‘Why does God give daughters?’ (The Binding Vine: 150). Mira’s poem and Shakutai’s concern for her daughters and hopes for her own future become the axis for Urmī’s memories of her daughter Anu. The theme of motherhood is discussed intensely in The Binding Vine. Saru in The Dark Holds Terrors and Jaya in That Long Silence felt that they as mothers did not approximate to the myths of glorified motherhood propounded by legend: moreover, as daughters they were closer to their fathers. In The Binding Vine, almost for the first time, Deshpande depicts, in Urmī’s grief for Anu, the all-absorbing love of motherhood, a theme she takes up in Madhu’s obsessive love for her son Aditya in Small Remedies. From the memories of physical touch- ‘I can feel the softness of her body... the heaviness of her head’- to every sensory perception - ‘I hear the soft snuffling sounds of her breathing ... I can smell her sweet baby’s flesh’ (The Binding Vine: 21)-- Urmī is obsessed with her love for her daughter. She is able to relate to Shakutai and her grief: they are both mothers, one having