CHAPTER II

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMAN

One positive aspect of feminism is that woman’s role and status in society have gained and added focus. It reframed issues, which released a wide ranging debate, drawing attention to various facets of woman’s existence in tryst with history. As a carrier of ideas, literature happily took up this debate with full enthusiasm and helped in raising issues from a variety of angles. Indian literature also can claim a reasonably rich tradition in this respect, though a powerful section seems to be influenced much by western thought. Family and institution of marriage have come under furious attack, even without a viable alternative, in a zeal to uphold freedom of choice and free sex without giving a serious thought to the outcome. The object of the present study is to evaluate the novels of Shashi Deshpande in this respect. Thus, the role and status of Indian woman have to be studied in a balanced way to determine the focus of the issues relating to family and institution of marriage.

To avoid confusion it is necessary that a distinction is made in this study between feminist movement which is an ongoing phenomena for a number of centuries, and a recent movement released in the later half of this century with an outlook of feminism as a distinct ideological category. Then, in its positive contribution feminism brought woman again in focus. On the other hand, the negative role of this effort has not been less conspicuous. It drew upon partial facts of social
history for its convenience and gave it such a prominence that the vision itself stands blurred and conditioned to a large extent. Its Indian version often quotes one Manu but forgets conveniently to refer the other Manu on the same theme. The emphasis on partial facts without contextual reference constitutes a glaring draw-back of this effort. Manu is quoted to say:

Day and night women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons... Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped as god.

The other Manu, often ignored, emphasizes:

Where women, verily are honoured, there the gods rejoice, where, however, they are not honoured, there all sacred rites proved fruitless... where the female relations live in grief that family soon perishes completely; where, however, they do not suffer from any grievance - that family always prosper.¹

Moreover, Manu is not the whole India, neither one whole era is of its long history. This dichotomy in placing the facts for a balanced opinion by this pro-active movement is also often reflected in literature. The Oxford History of India believes that the 'laws' of Manu were put together between the years BC 200 and 200AD. Manu himself is said to have lived in the third century A.D. The compilation of 2684 couplets divided in twelve chapters of this 'law' was Hinduism's attempt to put its rules, its list of rights and wrongs, do's and don'ts together
when it was threatened by the simpler and straightforward appeal of Budhism. There was much in Indian history before this Manu’s period which had shaped the role and status of women. Speaking of such earlier times Frederick Engels comments “the communistic household implies the supremacy of women in the house, just as the exclusive recognition of a natural mother, because of the impossibility of determining the natural father with certainty, signifies high esteem for the women. Women occupied not only a free but also a highly respected position among all savages.”² He further adds “The division of labour between the two sexes is determined by causes entirely different from those that determine the status of women in society.... The social status of the lady of civilization, surrounded by sham homage and estranged from all real work, is infinitely lower than that of the hard working woman of barbarism, who was regarded among her people as a real lady and was such by the nature of her position.”³

It is conceded generally that woman has attracted Indian thought since ages passing through various phases of its development. Even the battles which women valiantly fought and lost against the emerging forces of patriarchy in their last efforts to retain matriarchy, are documented. The first phase of the victorious patriarchy was clearly a period of compromise with the women-power in its interest of stability in social relation and consolidation, to strike a mean for social harmony and progress. A balance was struck and a respectable status of woman was recognized. Ancient scriptures and folk lores are
testimony to this trend, in the ancient period which is understandably the first phase of patriarchy. A close look at history testifies that this long lasting phase in India started losing ground with the consolidation of an authority in the form of rule - the Raja and rise of commercial interests. The growth in the importance of money-power affected interpersonal relationship, while the consolidation of authority in the hands of ruling elites sharpened the chasm between them and the citizens In both the cases women have been at the receiving end. The status of woman took a nose-dive during this period when she was treated as an object of entertainment at the hands of rich and ruling elite drunk with autocratic power. The manifestation of this authority was found in the 'patriarch' within the family. Scriptures also dutifully came in support of the new regime to subdue women. There is a notable difference here from western countries : barring this small section of urban - based people, the population in general remained largely unaffected due to a self-contained life in 'little republics' regulated by community elders who had their own code of social behaviour with respectable status of women assured. The family worked within the ambit of this community to guide, train and supervise the behaviour of individuals in the unit, with its 'patriarchs' in duo '-Kul Pita' 'Kul-Mata'. These little republics were unique in their composition and informal structure covering the entire gamut of social life including dispute resolution mechanism. One can have a glimpse on such patriarchs -in - relics governing the affairs of the family in
Roots And Shadows by Shashi Deshpande. Indu wonders how old Akka, a body on small puffy feet, maintained her authority, her power over everyone. The detachment of Baba and Kalyani in A Matter of Time, is another duo. Though it is true that Akka’s power was mainly due to her wealth which made her a pivot of attention for young members in search of careers yet her command over other members of the family was equally strong without the influence of her wealth. The community as a part of social set up is, however, shut off in the novels of Deshpande. It finds no mention there. The community as such is left with no significance, by now, when formal institutions have taken over for long. The literature of the Middle Ages is full of this dual nature in woman’s role and status.

British rule did not bring about any substantial change in the status of women until renaissance gained legitimacy and built sufficient pressure for certain legislative actions like abolition of sati and child marriage.

Arya Samaj, as a precursor to renaissance in India was the first organised effort to highlight certain aspects of woman’s life like sati, widowhood and illiteracy. It brought them back to socio-religious activities as part of its overall campaign to reform Hindu religion from its obscurantism and conservatism. Arya Samaj did not redefine the role of woman in the changed context since the perspective was different. Its notable contribution, however, remained in the field of female education. A path breaking effort was made in this regard. Later, Raja Ram Mohan Roy as the father figure of renaissance
pleaded consistently for female education in a way to redefine the status of women in Indian society. This opened the venues of English education to Indian women.

In this connection another fact is noteworthy. The fore-runners of Indian renaissance were those who had come into contact with British intelligentia through English education. They were charged with the philosophy of liberal democracy epitomised by British model based on principles thrown up by French Bourgeois Revolution. This outlook largely had shaped the conceptual frame of social crusaders who later tried to define the role of women in the context of rising struggle for country’s independence from British rule. Literature of this period in regional languages as well as in English broke new grounds in re-interpreting the role and status of Indian women. Munshi Prem Chand and Sarat Chander Chatterjee in regional languages and Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, in English, are some of the well-known writers in this respect.

Munshi Prem Chand is the father-figure of realism in Hindi literature who highlights the travails an ordinary Indian woman has to bear while trying her best to maintain family fortunes in the worst of conditions with dignity, perseverance and resilience. He is conscious of the changing times and mores when youngmen are on the verge of shifting values as urban life allures them and young girls dare to defy elders for choosing a husband of their choice. Kafan and Godan are examples of this changing scenario. Both, Bankim Chatterjee and Ranbindrenath Tagore have portrayed women who show
courage and strength in critical situations and play pivotal roles. It was Sarat Chander Chatterjee who created perhaps the most memorable portraits of women in Indian literature. His appreciation of innate strength and human qualities of women characters and their sensitivity to uphold social values, is superb. Kiranmayee in *Chitratreen*, Kamal in *Shesh Preshan*, Bharti in *Patherdabi* are some of such characters. Mulk Raj Anand’s women remain unredeemed and are dumb, mute creatures caught in a concentrated struggle where principal instinct is for survival. Chaman Nahal regrets, "our older writers whom we may call the first generation to Indian English writing -- R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand missed out on great opportunity of tumultuous freedom struggle without creating any woman replace-model, to further feminine cause."\(^4\)

With the fervour of a social activist, Anand exposed the hideous actualities of sweepers, coolies, plantation workers and women, whom he called' the poorest of the poor.' In *The Old Woman and the Cow*, Mulk Raj Anand shows how the simple, unlettered girl, Gauri learns to be a competent nurse, stands on her feet to defy domestic injustice with a determination to see a better future. Raja Rao’s approach is Vedantin. For him, what matters is not the individual but the role allotted to him or her in life. The woman in the novels of R.K. Narayan plays an important role, sometimes passively and at other times aggressively in a network of family, religion and society. He does not condemn or praise any issue, any character, male or female. The message seems to be : life is but a nightmare
comedy, that the law of life can’t be avoided. The issues of the woman torn between her career and her home, between her needs of nurturance and autonomy, between her pulls to be unconventional and her inhibitions are found in his novels. Bhabani Bhattacharya presents Indian woman in his novels as imbued with vitality and ideals, yet, victimised ultimately. He creates woman protagonist as a finer human instrument than the male filled with radiance and possibilities, interlinking individual with the society. She breaks through the pattern of sexuality and sensuality and discovers herself as a human being on the threshold of possibilities. The author says much by implications about the woman’s role in society. He sees the mother in his women protagonists, young and old.

Nayantara Sahgal analyses woman’s marginalisation and deprivation both before and after marriage and explores different avenues open to her in her quest for identity in the face of greater emotional and material hardships. The struggle for identity and fulfilment in her women, is worked out on personal level within the family. Her ambit is the elite class. She makes a close study of the sufferings and responses of women belonging to this class in a sexist society. Interestingly, the educated, affluent women in India, as depicted by Sahgal in her novels, have similar experiences as the middle class women in service in Western countries have. Feminism as it now exists dates from the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* from Betty Friedan in 1963. The book took the American society by storm. It challenges the popular belief that a woman’s place is
at her home and that she should find fulfilment in motherhood. According to Betty Friedan the core problem for women is not sex but identity which has always been denied to them. Friedan declares that “for woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfilment autonomy, self-realisation, independence, individuality, self-actualisation - is as important as the sexual need.” She argues that a woman can find fulfilment only in a creative work of her own. Sahgal espouses this quest for woman. So does Shashi Deshpande. Her protagonists in the novels seek fulfilment of their own, which comes into conflict with their elders. *Roots and Shadows* (1983) marks the beginning of the quest of her woman for self. The theme is continued in her later novels. In one of her interviews Deshpande’s concern is revealed when she says that all her characters are concerned with their ‘selves’ and they learn to be ‘honest’ to themselves.

Kamala Markandaya has a varied repertoire of women characters in her fiction. Her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* deals with the life travails of a peasant woman. In all her novels, the author sets forth a goal for autonomy for the self, nurturance for the family and fellow feeling for the community of men and women. They are on a quest for autonomy. For Toril Moi, the feminist writing has “an anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist position.” which can be seen in Markandaya also especially in her novel, *Possession* where Caroline seems to be a possible consequence of this anti-patriarchal rage. She writes as a woman who has attained a sexual equality which comes
only when one is not obsessed by one’s own sex. Her fiction gives fresh insights to the changes in men and women as human beings. Markandaya pleads for the importance of family life. In her vision of sisterhood of human race, lies the key to the quest of meaningful life in general and individual life in particular.

The themes in the novels of Anita Desai are “the hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships, the founding and nurturing the individuality, and the establishing of individuality” of her characters. She represents the ‘creative release of the feminine sensibility’ which began to emerge after the World War II. Her purpose of writing novels, in her own words is “to make us see what the subconscious does to an impressionable creature, how much more power it has on them than sun and circumstances put together”. Through her themes, characterization and images about confinement and lack of freedom, Anita Desai has raised questions regarding the status and role of women in society. The most crucial issue that she takes up for discussion again and again, is the question of women’s freedom. Her young women yearn for freedom. They are irritated by the sheltered, over-protected life reserved for them and the condescending, discriminative attitude towards them not only by the society but also by the family. Her ‘Sita’ always has the feeling of being tied with a chain, which “can only throttle, chok and enslave”, her house seemed so like a jail, to her. Her novels highlight the subordinate status of woman in society and the dominance of male in it. According
to her, fathers and husbands very often treat women as their property, which can be owned, controlled and disposed of the way they like. The novelist has drawn attention repeatedly to the dominance of men over women in the society. Desai’s fictional women turn romance upside down. The girl meets or marries the boy, measures him and finds inadequate and marches on her own way. The debunking of motherhood runs as a continuous thread in the novels of Anita Desai. Santha Krishanswamy comments "Anita Desai's exploration of the disturbed psyche of the Indian woman ultimately leads to an emphasis on loneliness, the inevitable lot of human beings, men and women inclusive. Each being is driven back upon his own lonely resources eventually."

It would be better to say that this is the psyche of middle class woman rather than Indian woman, as a whole as Shantha describes. Ruth Jhabvala is another writer of post-independence period, writing about Indian scene. As a European woman in India, married to a parsi, she feels like a ‘bird in a gilded cage’ and experiences erosion wrought on the European sensibility by Indian modes of living. She usually wrote about the rising commercial bourgeoisie from Northern India. She pleads for free love, not to be tied down in matrimony and freedom for choice. She laments that young women in India are not really so ‘mod’ after all; in the slow but gradual transition of a ‘tradition-bound’ society, the woman is often restrained by the forces of conventions and women characters of Jhabvala do not have the strength of will to cross such restrictions, as she feels it. She
 ridicules the 'shackles of guilt and shame in sex', usually the social code in Indian society. The predicament of Nimmi in *The Nature of Passion* finding her boy-friend letting her down so easily, is a telling commentary on freedom of choice: "men kissed only if they were in love and if he was in love, why should he give her up so readily" (p.249)\(^1\). Nimmi was smarting to find meaning in love through a 'a kiss under moonshine' while for Pheroze the kiss proved as a mere passing reference. It is note-worthy here that Shashi Deshpande pleads on this aspect in comparison: Indu, the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows* enjoys her extra-marital sexual encounter with Naren with a sense of fulfilment she never experienced before without any emotional involvement with him. Indu rather envies Naren for his sense of detachment. She perceives and acts in response to her 'physical instinct'. All talk of 'love' is nonsense for her:

> Love... there was no such thing between man and woman.. only a need which both fought against futilely, the very futilely, turning into the thing called love. (p.65).

Clearly, the modern writers in English during pre-independence period, were largely reticent on a separate approach to women's problems and did not denounce the institution of marriage and most of them were influenced by western education. They were concerned with bigger issues of social life current at that time, though many voiced in favour of women and their cause of gender equality and social educational upliftment. It was Raja Rao of this generation who largely came forward to defend the
two institutions of family and marriage where woman is the fulcrum. The writers of post-independence India in English language particularly, on the other hand, took up cudgels for upholding feminism in Indian conditions. The language, the idiom and the ethos of feminism became popular with them in literature. Shashi Deshpande is one such writer of fame.

Raja Rao, like most Indians, regards maternity as the most sacred of earthly manifestations. The pregnant woman for him is auspicious. He says: "I envy woman who can give birth."(p.92) Talking about the role of woman as mother his logic is that it is the mother who takes upon herself the task of the continuity of racial life, of vitality. She creates order in society and it is motherhood which makes the institution of marriage holy, indissoluble and continuous. In the words of Manu: "To be mothers were women created and to be fathers men." His Little Mother in *The Serpent and the Rope* does not seek to express her individuality or to get into the troubled waters of ego assertion. For Shashi Deshpande, child-bearing is a trauma and her heroines shudder at some of the natural biological functions of the females. Indu, the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows* constantly speaks of the dark room where so many women had given birth and one of her recurring dreams, is the hidden passage through which she escapes. Indu does not have a child and she fears to have one. She tells herself, "The truth is, I will have no child that is not wholly welcome."(p.3) Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has her middle-class inhibitions. Though she has had two children yet
her maternal emotions do not show. Indu contemptuously describes marriage as "behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce...." (p.3) Her heroines long for control on their bodies. Jaya in That Long Silence pities Nayana 'Poor Nayana, Have you ever seen her not pregnant? Her mother-in-law was just the same.'(7) This is the picture Deshpande draws of a poor sweepress coming down on stairs with a huge garbage bin on her head.

In Nayana's case Shashi Deshpande seems to have brought official version on family planning by linking her disappearing silver anklets with constant pregnancies as if to justify her poverty with the growing population of a family, with her low social status. It is like utilizing the art of literature to dish out a middle-class vision for a purpose. The deprivation of Nayana's family is a fact of economics which her pregnancies or no pregnancies can hardly mitigate. Nayana's social status as a poor sweepress is neither affected because of her gender nor is her role as a loving mother of her daughters less humane than Jaya's status or role. Indian ethos to respect every pregnant woman, is close still to Raja Rao than Deshpande, inspite of a long campaign on advantages on family planning. This sets a standard for evaluating the role of woman in Indian society, past and present.

The mother-son, mother-daughter relationship is a close and intricately interwoven one, which took shape during the
first phase of patriarchy and survived the second phase of pre-industrial phase. Since the industrial phase pushed by mercantile capital, could not get that thrust in India due to colonial economy as it had been in England or other western countries. The familial bonds and accompanying values here survived with tenacity for long. The type of unconscious faith in such mores and values that Little Mother of Raja Rao in The Serpent and the Rope or such characters as Akka in Roots and Shadows and other novels of Shashi Deshpande, are in conflict with the protagonists of Deshpande who are influenced by cross-cultural patterns and conflicts released by the industrialized mode with a 'culture of trade'.

Despite the incongruity of age, Little Mother is mother to Rama, in The Serpent and the Rope, in more ways than one and looks up to him as head of the family, when his father is no more. She has the innate wisdom of her ancestors and a quite dignity that inspire affection and respect not only from youngsters but also from elders in the family like Uncle Seetharamu. This is the magic behind the authority of Akka in Roots and Shadows and Ajji in That Long Silence, "who single-handedly keep the family together" (p.143). Akka declares Indu as her heir after her death. Indu's authority is not only because of property but also it is of the recognition granted to her by elders. Only youngsters are jealous of her in their greed to get property which is a symbolic of changed times. It is not a mere question of gender preference. Motherhood is a specialized role in itself inherited by woman
from her status and role in the society under matriarchy. Like marriage, like life, like everything else, it also is based on impersonal principle. What matters is not the individual but the role allotted to or assumed by him or her. For Little Mother or Akka, happiness lies in playing her role as a mother figure in the family - Akka or Indu as heir to the family authority acts as 'patriarch' in the family. Mother's role under this dispensation as the inheritor and preserver of 'culture of community' and racial stability is affirmed again and again through these characters.

The status of a female as daughter is unique, sacred and complex in the Indian society. She is considered a pious soul before marriage. She is daughter of the village and the community - a pious responsibility to keep in a life-long allegiance. The complexity enters when one chooses to go for marriage by attaining a certain age. But to those who don't, none can deny their existence in the family, village and community with dignity. If one passes the test of a pious social conduct in her young age, she earns the respect and regard of the community and her association with the family, village and community remains life-long. None has the authority to deny it.

This status of a daughter is the outcome of a long practice of social conduct during monogamous patriarchy which took deep roots in its first phase which lasted much longer than any other period of human history so far. The second phase of patriarchy under feudal autocracy which found an element of 'entertainment' in sex with a woman, did not affect this exalted
status of 'daughters'. It formed a separate class of art-women or courtesans which saved the commoners from contamination because their inter-action with the rulers and the rich was almost negligible. But the erosion of this status came with the advent of a value system qualitatively opposed to the customary style of social life having human being at its centre respecting equanimity of genders. Here, human being was replaced with money as the centre of this up-coming value system.

The monogamous patriarchy ruled out the marriage of daughters in the same village and the community. Sexual relation with family members, within the village and the community were barred for good reasons. When a daughter chooses to marry, in this dispensation, she per force is to move out. This brings a complexity in her relations with dual loyalty for life long adherence. To make comparison of a daughter with a son who is to remain within the ambit of a single family and to cite no place of daughter in the parental tree, is incongruous logic as Shashi Deshpande has done in her novels artificially to highlight a grouse for gender discrimination in case of daughters. There is ample reason to suggest that the gender discrimination in favour of a son has aggravated during the present era of 'property based cultural values'. The enemy is this property based value centred system and not the son as such. The much cited case of Dhruva in The Dark Holds No Terrors where Saru nurses grouse against her mother and hence the whole family institution is a case in point. She did not kill Dhruva nor Dhruva had less attachment with his sister. The
expression of accusing Saru for killing Dhruva, is a mere expression of the deep anguish by the mother for loosing her son. Yet, Saru takes this accusation of her mother to the extent that she develops a life long feeling of animosity against her mother. Even her father fails to satisfy her. The citation neither strengthens the case of gender discrimination on behalf of the family against a daughter nor does it help in Saru’s development as a balanced personality. “You killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?” (p.173) is a cry from a wounded mother in desperation who charges the elder of the two for her failure to prevent the mishap and help the drowning boy. Except this charge, mother did nothing to penalize Saru for murder, if murdering Dhruva was the accusation.

No one can deny that presently there is gender discrimination in favour of a son and against the daughter in most of the backward families and it is getting strengthened due to reasons of self-centred individualism propelled daily and hourly by wild craze for grabbing riches in a market-based competitive world all around amidst scarcity of opportunities for common people.

Feminism does not answer a viable alternative, neither does Deshpande address this question of better alternative to a daughter’s position in the family as posed in Dhruva’s case. Dhruva’s case did not reflect the general status of a daughter in an average middle-class family even in India, inspite of gender discrimination prevalent in present day society. Apparently, the commentators and critics have over-
done to cite this dialogue to prop their case of gender discrimination in case of a daughter to highlight the general malasie. The daughter has still a unique place in the family inspite of bad examples here and there, though the erosion in these values is a disquieting feature, due to changed value-system. Shashi Deshpande too has failed to see this question in depth and merely has given prominence to a grouse of a disgruntled little girl against her mother. Saru in this case is not a good example of feminist outlook, neither as an adolescent nor as a young educated woman. A family having only a son without a paring sister is not considered as a complete family. The balanced development of one without the other is not possible. The daughter helps her parents in keeping the rough edges even in difficult times as well as contributes labour in domestic chores. Her liaison with the family after marriage is a continuing process which helps the circle of relations to expand. The examples of Saru, Indu, Urmı and Jaya in the novels of Deshpande also corroborate this feature.

The customary understanding of marriage is that it is a social and ethical relationship between a man and a woman meant for bearing as well as bringing up children in perpetuation of self in a social milieu. Though no one forces the couple to have children, social desirability does exercise a kind of pressure. Moreover, the child is the obligation of a couple going for a sexual act. It is unethical to deny the obligation for a voluntary action one prefers to exercise. Feminism, however, has given a twist to this vital aspect of
social life of males and females with disastrous consequences to the social fabric. Rather than improving, it has degraded the status of women. These days feminism has come to stand for 'enjoying' sex freely and changing the mores that inhibit its free flow; demolishing the institutions of family and marriage while reconditioning the society on rights and wrongs on matters regarding sex.

Biologically, sex fulfills an urge for procreation after reaching a certain age among males and females. The urge dies out in both at a definite age. Animal world still goes by this principle while there is a shift in the human species because of its thinking faculty - biological operation remains the same while a perfectly conditioned psychology stimulates the urge among both males and females and boosts the act for seeking readily available and cheap source of enjoyment. Centuries back, feudal rulers and a few rich had invested this attribute of entertainment in sex and started the game of degrading women in a small way. It was industrial revolution which provided the first philosophical base to this effort of feminism with its deadly blow to the institution of family and community in quest of 'free' labour emotionally attached to nothing except the employer. In its latest phase of post-industrial finance capital ruling the roost world over after the second world war, it is feminism, as a definite philosophical category of this period which has come out fiercely against these two institutions of family and marriage describing these as circles of bondage: one as a cradle of bondage' while the other as "a pair of bullocks
yoked together" (p.7). It is Jaya who summarizes her understanding of marriage as a protagonist of feminism in *That Long Silence*. This twist to sex-urge on behalf of women by exponents of feminism is now pivotal to their crusade for 'liberating' them from these 'circles of bondage', taking clue from existentialism where 'freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes', is the right thing to do' as aptly described by O.P. Bhatnagar commenting on *Roots and Shadows* by Shashi Deshpande. Clearly, feminism seeks philosophical sustenance from existentialism as the latest manifestation of individualism which industrial revolution had shaped in its hey days.

According to Indu, the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows* there is no such thing as 'love'. She opines:

The sexual instinct... that is true. The maternal instinct... that is true too.
Self-interest, self-love... they are the basic truths,...
(p.173)

She holds marriage as a trap: "A trap? Or a cage?... a cage with two trapped animals glorifying hatred at each other." (p.67) Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* pinpoints that the codeword of our age is 'sex' and not love. (p.65) These characters begin to understand that marriage obstructs their growth as individuals. They see marriage only in terms of the dark rooms where terror awaits them. Saru feels as though "she had exchanged one pair of pinching torturing shoes for another". (p.74) Marriage, like the parental home seems to be
"the chalked lines drawn by others. At the idea of demolition of Akka’s house Indu comments “yes, the house had been a trap too, binding me to a past I had to move away from. Now, I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary uneven edges of me” (p.204).

The most remarkable revelation about Indu is that she pulls herself out of the binding embrace of her husband and assumes an independent posture. She feels no guilt or shame about her sexual encounter with Naren. According to her what happened between her and Naren does not concern Jayant, her husband. “That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together.” (p.205) Their battle cry is ‘My life is my own’ towards autonomy. They first sought a room of their own through marriage of their choice but they were soon disappointed with their new ‘homes’. Saru married Manu against the wishes of her parents but she was soon disappointed. Saru’s extra-marital affairs with Boozie is taken as an expression of her autonomy and freedom. That Long Silence is similarly a scathing denouncement of social institutions like marriage or family. The perception is sought to be projected that these institutions stifle the growth and free expression of the individual, and obstruct the free communication between human beings. Jaya’s extra-marital relationship with Kamat is cited as an example. It is said Jaya could not even stay and pay homage to her best friend on his death for the fear of ruining her marriage, so hell with ‘marriage.’
In English language fidelity is a positive term. Marriage under monogamous dispensation entails fidle relationship between husband and wife for a smooth sailing as it involves cultural, emotional and ethical aspects also. Sexual instinct in humans is not a brute animal act devoid of any emotional allegiance. But Shashi Deshpande’s heroines clearly plead for an infidel sexual life in relation to their husbands. It is like pleading for the negation of marriage itself as an institution without any superior alternative in its place for better human relations. The code of monogamy is for both, husband and wife. The infidelity on the part of one cannot be a sound ground to plead for promiscuous behaviour on the part of the other. Feminism, however, seems to rest its logic for such a conduct on a perceived fall-back of males. It can be asserted that promiscuity is not in the nature of men and women as a class and definitely it remained largely so before the enjoyment or entertainment attribute was added to sex. Prostitution too is the product of this period. Curiously, no husband in the novels of Shashi Deshpande hankers after extra-marital relations: these are the wives who cherish such a relationship and seek ‘fulfilment’ in such a conduct. This lowers the esteem of woman, rather than liberate her. Indu’s resolve not to tell her husband about her sexual encounters with Naren is not so innocuous and clean or totally devoid of fear. Moreover, it can’t be taken as a manifestation of her autonomy or self-realisation. Her bold declaration that “she is essentially
monogamous” (p.81) proved of little value to evaluate her on her own words.

The heroines of Shashi Deshpande, more so Indu, Saru and Jaya, are fired with the sexual -liberation thrust of feminism, as a gateway to self-fulfilment and freedom. Indu, who “loves her husband too much, too passionately” (p.83), describes her rendezvous with Naren in a solitary night, “An ecstasy filled my body and I could not be still any more. There was joyous sense of release, of passion I could experience and show and participate in. I clung to him convulsively .... I said ‘Thank you, Naren”. (pp.151-52) Next morning there was no awkwardness between us. (p.153) and “I felt light hearted and liberated.” (p.154). And knowing for what he (Naren ) was... irresponsible, unreliable, fickle, amoral’ the next night Indu again clung to him as if he was a pillar. “It was years since I had cried that way... At last it was over...” (p.156) She sheds shame and guilt over this adultery easily. Other heroines of Deshpande too take liberty with their sex and enjoy without any qualm or remorse, as if it had nothing to do with their conduct in marriage. Feminism doesn't deal a question here, if sex and marriage can be separated. Shashi Deshpande also doesn't brace it in her novels. By inference, it can be assumed that she hopes feminism stands for such a distinction. In a society based on monogamous marriage for sexual relations between man and woman, the efforts of feminism to break the marriage code of conduct without any qualms of guilt, lead to a situation when there is no sanctity of marriage itself. It will be a game
of the rich and the powerful in a society marvelling in market forces. In such a scenario the status of woman is bound to take a nose-dive and the woman will be reduced to a ‘commodity’ in the market of entertainment and allied trades. Their position will not be better than that of a ‘sex-worker’ in search of survival. Shashi Deshpande, as a novelist, is a happy participant in such a quest with her heroines as role-models.

For one reason or the other, the present as well as past position of women in India is generally evaluated with a western eye. The past of Indian women is studied from present western postulates developed in a different milieu where the westerners had a colonial interest to hammer about their superiority vis-a-vis Indian ‘backwardness’. To break with this past, one needs the status of Indian woman and her roles in varied capacities to have a fresh look.

It is a fact of history that the situation with regard to the role and status of woman in India, started deteriorating sharply during eighteenth century when foreign rulers mounted ruthless plunder. They also uprooted the Indian social ethos of community life replacing the informal social structure. The formal structure was based on centralized bureaucracy. Its main aim was to serve a highly brutalized state which started controlling the whole gamut of social, economic and cultural life of the people. Destitution of both male and female population ruined its culture with giving rise to all its attendant vices. Their dignity was the first victim. For almost two centuries, Indian women suffered the attendant agonies of this
dark period with many social evils, segregation and exploitation, including sexual abuse. The purdah system became prevalent. Widow marriage was a taboo in certain castes and areas. Girls came to be considered a burden on the destitute families when their dignity was always at stake with an attendant stigma to the family in case of any mishap. Certain outdated customs with religious sanctity attached, continued with tenacity for want of proper educational efforts. It needed a cultural thrust which was largely absent even during country’s struggle for independence because of its overwhelming compromising traits with the ruling sections. The accumulated moss here, however, cannot find remedy with an imported medicine of foreign vintage unless it is rooted in its native climate. No society can ever prosper with its present as rootless. Most of the writers in English, including Shashi Deshpande have a borrowed outlook on these social problems and their perceived solutions concerning women. Family and its elders symbolise not only moral authority on familial problems but also are endowed with a vast treasure of experiences. Indu, Saru, Jaya or Urmi suffer defeat in marriages of their choice and experience disappointment in search of mirage, they borrowed from others of doubtful values. Shashi Deshpande, through these heroines, depicts this dilemma and a poor grasp on basics of women’s problems in India.

It is hardly contested that the role of Indian women in present day social economic and cultural fields is exceptional. In this connection one aspect is notable that these are middle
class women, who form the subject matter of feminist writers
generally, constitute a minor fraction of the total female
population of the country. It is hardly 9% of the whole. More
than ninety percent of female population does not have the same
experiences, frustrations and aspirations as these middle class
women have. Inspite of heavy stress and strains, female
population in nearly 80% households in the country are active
coopartners in family labour for bread earning operations apart
from owning the responsibility of the upkeep of the house and
rearing children who normally are taken as assets for their
labour potency. The women in these households carry the
burden of running the family affairs. The position of woman in
relation to family affairs is unique and unquestionable in most
of these households, more so in rural India. Even the staunch
patriarch finds the home barren without a female: mother, a
wife or a sister. The young in the family without a mother or a
sister is generally a dwarfed crop; emotionally and
psychologically. The situation in middle class families where
woman remains member of a consumer unit is different from the
rest. Shashi Deshpande has viewed 'Indian woman' from the
eyes of 'middle class woman in her writings. This sets a
serious limit to her views on problems relating to Indian
women. In addition, the middle class women in India today
have better opportunities to rise in social ladder with better
educational facilities, inspite of low estimation by their male
partners. In the lower middle class families, in comparison,
male chauvinism is pronounced who are torn between their
expanded urges and the harsh realities of their economic life. Novels of Deshpande give expression to the women of this middle class India after independence. These women seek their role in economic activities and share its fruit on an equal footing while opportunities are not expanding to the requisite level. They are placed between these conflicting situations.

As an example, **Come Up and Be Dead** is a novel by Shashi Deshpande where woman of middle class family is placed face to face with the power of up-coming finance capital, as an object of entertainment for profit. She is reduced to a commodity, a mere disposable pawn in the game of multiplying capital, where family bonds are breaking down and new set of 'modern' values is gripping the minds of young men and women. Deshpande has woven an intricate story of money, women, and crime, when family is breaking and new, self-centred values are gripping the young.

A Christian girls' school is the hub of activities with its high rise walls and a new Head Mistress is in place with a desire to bring down that wall and get the girls out of it. But she apparently is oblivious of the new forces working within these walls to the detriment of those ideals which prompted her for renovation. Board of Directors reposed faith in her. The Board has a rich gentle-looking industrialist in Mr. Verma as one of its members, who owns a hotel-cum-restaurant, Open Sesame in the town. He operates through one youngman, Sanjay in enticing adolescent young students for his 'entertainment' trade in the hotel. The 'big chief' supplies
high class virgins at a price. A racket works. Sharmila, a student of the school is an accomplice with her cousin, Sanjay to run this operation. The drama unfolds with the suicide of a student Mridula who became pregnant in the course of these shady deals. Full-blown intrigues start taking tolls and the first victim is the brother of the Head Mistress. Then Mrs. Jyoti Raman falls another victim in succession. Mrs. Raman was the mother of another diligent student Sonali, a friend of Sharmila and Mridula. Being apprehensive of Sonali’s future Mrs. Raman plans to shift from the town leaving her job from the school but Sonali resists. Before she leaves the town, Mrs. Raman also fell victim to a murderous attempt in the school. In his attempt to murder Sonali, Sanjay tries to eliminate Sharmila, his own cousin as an accomplice with whom he had deep sexual relationship quite known to the students. Police inspector Prasad exposes Dr. Girish who was ‘Obsessed with making money’ as an accomplice in the crime racket.

When inspector Prasad approached the father of Maridula to investigate the circumstances which led to her suicide he admits that “guilty people are us, my wife and I ... we are splitting up ... that is why all this (when girls go pregnant in such an unripe age and lost life). He laments’ now there is a family” (p.193).

The educated urban women in India are hardly aware of how economic conditions are leading them to the situations in which their position is nothing but a raw material, a commodity in the market and an easy prey to the entertainment theory by
the powerful and the rich in the society. Their natural urge for independence and equality is turned to their disadvantage as a human being with self-respect and dignity. It is all happening because of the compelling economic distress which drive them in the labour market. When these women are the classic housewives, they feel they are dependent on their husbands. And when they are in the labour market, they are face to face with the new masters who are out to exploit them economically and physically. Often the frustrations in such conditions, lead women to come out in protest against 'patriarchal' bonds when questions of marriage or employment arise as an expression of the conflict between their own expectations and their role definitions in the family. The number of urban middle class, women who are complaining about contradictory stresses and strains upon them, has been increasing instead of decreasing. “Kala Rani’s book on Role Conflicts of Working Women seems to confirm this trend.”¹⁴ This is why more middle class women are forced to seek employment due to economic necessity but customary expectations regarding their family roles having been not found satisfactory substitute. The spread of education among them coupled with a shrinking job market, has sharpened the conflicts between a family system and the new job requirements of women.

The subjective frustrations of educated middle class women, however, have to be seen against the backdrop of an increasing deterioration of the objective living conditions of the majority of Indian women, particularly of the deprived sections
in the rural areas and working slums in urban centres. This became evident when the census of 1971 had come out and the Committee on the status of women in India submitted its report in 1974.

The data collected from all over India and presented in the report, points out that the status of Indian women has been continuously going down in almost all the spheres of social life, particularly during the decade of 1961-71. Their sex ratio, educational standard, work participation, healthy, political representation etc. have reached the lowest ebb since 1911. The authors of the report concluded that the development processes themselves have had an adverse effect on the socio-economic conditions of the poorest sections of women.

Comparing the problem of sheer survival which "a large section of Indian women face with the issue of role-conflicts of educated middle class women, appears to be peripheral." This aspect is hardly taken note of by the exponents of feminism in India when they espouse the causes which form the core of this movement in the West, like 'dependence syndrome' and free sex. The result may be reverse when such concepts are fought for among the lower middle class poverished sections and the deprived masses; women tend to become easy target of allurements and manipulations from the rich. Their oppression and exploitation take new forms, more subtle but degrading. The novel, *Come Up And Be Dead* by Shashi Deshpande is an eloquent description, to this rising trend at present.
It is of little value to assert that women enjoyed a hoary past and an exalted position in the Indian family once. It is important to stress on this aspect merely to delineate Indian family mores from the West. Their status in the family is not of a subordinate, even today as many feminists would like others to believe. Middle-class women have become the most vulnerable part of society today with the intervention of colonial values and inroad of financial oligarchy in the economic life of the country during these past fifty years. Mridula and Sharmila in the novel *Come Up And Be Dead* are but examples of this decline. Patriarchal norms, now in the deformed economic system are too degenerated in tune with the new requirements to the disadvantage of woman. The dominance of one against the other, became a universal characteristic of the system while mutual trust and cooperation was the hallmark of the earlier phase of patriarchy, as joint labour of the family was essential for any worth-while social production. At present every individual, male or female seems to be in a constant race for dominance in the family or outside. If Indu in the novel *Roots And Shadows* wins the race for dominance on getting inheritance from Akka, other younger ones who feel lost, nurse oppression in the system. Naren expresses this feeling when he says, “I was hoping she (Akka) would leave me all her money. But you beat me to it”(p.85). The pestering of Sharad to cultivate Indu for money and Indu’s rebuke is a fine example of this domineering mentality (III). In
the circumstances, the oppression and exploitation, inherent in the system, comes easily on the fore.

With the decline of woman's status in socially necessary production and reducing her to the position of "service-worker"\textsuperscript{16} or 'entertainment-worker' the proportionate rise in her oppression and exploitation is a direct consequence. The motive force behind this onslaught is not 'male' but something else. This has to be clearly underscored and assimilated to understand the implication of feminism in India.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


3. Ibid. P.37.


8. Ibid.


15. Ibid., p.61