CHAPTER III

OPPRESSION AND EXPLOITATION OF WOMAN

The violence on the personality, body and mind of woman is not new for sociologists to worry: its form, content and intensity today are. It is a matter of concern to sociologists and others that the organized crime against women, more subtle and less crude is the new norm; content is all pervasive and culturally regimented while the intensity is mind-boggling. Contrary to the often repeated claim that industrial revolution of eighteenth century had released a liberating era of humanism based on equality, liberty, and fraternity, ground reality is that the position of woman has worsened from what it was in pre-industrial phase. In-depth empirical studies may pin-point reasons in detail, but one bare fact is that the farther a place from city-centres progressively safer it is for women against violence both physical and mental; safer still if such interior hamlets are away from modern education with its claim of liberating effect. It may sound paradoxical at first hand, yet it is true that the graph of crime against women has risen in direct proportion to the level of 'modern' education in a given society. It may have to do something with the syllabi patterned by those who control the strings and shape its thrust for a pre-determined purpose. Today, parents of a school-going girl live in state of constant apprehension and anxiety about the safety of their ward even within the four-walls of educational centres. One is not sure if these institutions are not the recruiting centres to catch
the girls young for some nefarious games being played with women. *Come Up And Be Dead*, the novel by Shashi Deshpande illustrates this feature of modern life. Smelling a rat, a school teacher, Mrs. Jyoti Raman, decides to take her daughter away from the town without telling any reason to her school-going daughter. But the daughter is not interested in leaving the school. She defies her mother and outrightly says, “This life is my choice. That’s enough for me.” (p. 154) At this reaction, Mrs. Jyoti Raman gets very perturbed and helpless about her daughter’s future. She bemoans: “What else do I have in the world apart from you?” (p. 154). This is to the adamant Sonali who demands her right to decide her own course.

It is known that violence is a tool in the hands of patently weak persons to oppress and exploit their potential but disarmed victims. At that, woman is a soft target for her being female sex, who is to bear the brunt of violence as well as go through the ignominy of outrage done to her body. This is the story since the rise of state as a specialized organ of organised violence by the rich when the society was vertically divided between haves and have-nots. A system of oppression and exploitation of the deprived and less fortunate started taking shape with the advent of this new feature in human history. Women were special targets of this system for their additional attribute of being female sex and introduction of gender discrimination. With the consolidation of such forces presently, the oppression and exploitation of women has
increased many-fold. With the help of education, its sweep is astounding. The idea of seeking 'pleasure' in sexual jaunts seems to have gripped the young generation lately with no hands barred. Crime against women is rising at an alarming rate year after year. Against this backdrop, the young generation in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and specially her protagonists symbolise a trend of self seeking fulfilment with their own reasons to advance. For some, it is personal fulfilment like Indu and Naren in *Roots and Shadows*, while others say it is rebellion against family bondage like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Sonali, Sharmila, Bunny and host of others in *Come Up And Be Dead*, to name a few. They all are oblivious of the reasons of their own predicaments, except what they feel subjectively.

The sexual exploitation of women is now a universal phenomenon and is on the rise when market driven economy is holding the sway. The case of Russia where market economy was introduced in 1991 and People's Republic of China which opted for market-driven development in 1976 are recent examples where women and children are the first victims of this dispensation, inspite of its democratic veneer and vows of equality. The life has become more insecure for them than what it had ever been before, in the home, in the neighbourhood and outside, more so at their work places. The state and industry-sponsored inducements as also allurements to draw bigger number of young girls into sex-related services like tourism, modelling, beauty contests, advertisements and
entertainment, have made the position and status of women more precarious and vulnerable. However, simultaneously efforts to check the slide down in their condition are also visible on national as well as international levels.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in 1994, appointed a special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. In a preliminary report, the Rapporteur explained why women are vulnerable to violence thus:

Women are vulnerable to violence because of their female sexuality (resulting in, inter alia, rape and female genital mutilation); because they are related to a man (domestic violence, dowry deaths, sati) or because they belong to a social group, where violence against women become a means of humiliation directed at the group (rape in times of armed conflict or ethnic strife). Women are subject to violence in the family (battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related, violence, incest, deprivation of food, marital rape), to violence in the community (rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking in women, forced prostitution) and violence by the state (women in detention and rape during times of armed conflict.) (E/CN.4/1995/pp-42)

Shashi Deshpande has highlighted certain aspects of this violence against women in her novels. She has dealt with power relations between men and women, denial to women leading to sexual harassment, killing of female foetuses, rapes, etc.

As a result of constant pressure built on these issues and mobilisation of public opinion U.N. General Assembly adopted a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women on December 20, 1993. It was the first international instrument to express a universal political consensus that states have
human rights obligations to prevent gender-based violence and to redress the harm caused. The declaration defines violence against women as ‘Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’ (Art I). The definition of violence in the Declaration is not confined to actual use of physical force, it also includes all forms of action that disempower women because of the fear of violence, whether the fear is instilled by the state, the community or the members of the family.

Within four-walls of a family, however, it becomes difficult to decide who oppresses whom. Indu is a rebel against Akka, the mother surrogate in the novel Roots and Shadows. She left home because of her hatred for the family, for Akka specially. Indu marries Jayant against the wishes of Akka, who is seen as the symbol of authority by her. Indu seeks a ‘room of her own’ and autonomy through marriage. In order to achieve freedom she seeks marriage of choice as an alternative to the perceived bondage created by the parental family. She resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that her new role will help her in achieving the cherished freedom. Soon her second ‘home’ becomes the very prison she had tried to escape from. She turns cold to her husband and soon learns the "gift of silence" (p.36) from her marriage. She masters the art of deception and develops extra-marital relations. Fearing that her continued stay would stifle
her progress towards self-actualisation, Indu returns to her first home whim she had likened to a 'cradle of bondage'. On returning her parental home Indu finds more about Akka; her past, her concern and her sufferings. Indu, then realises that Akka was not a sadist as she had taken her to be. On returning home after over a decade, Indu found that Akka had bequeathed her property to her rather than to anybody else inspite of the anguish she felt over Indu's leaving the home. In the first instance Indu thought that she was right in considering Akka as the tormentor and herself as the victim. But Akka, on her part, might have taken Indu as a tormentor in that situation. By the time Indu realised the mistake, however, the damage had already been done. By the time Indu realised the mistake, however, the damage had already been done.

Like Indu, Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors, repents on her decision of leaving home by defying her parents in her young age and marrying Mohan against their wishes. She proves a failure in her married life as Mohan gradually becomes a sadist. In this situation she considers her mother right and recollects her saying:

You won't be happy with him. I know you won't. A man of different caste, different community... what will you two have in common?(p.90).

Saru nurses a childhood grouse against her mother for her giving a preferential treatment to the son. She feels greatly pained and wronged on being blamed by her mother for the
drowning of her brother. Again, Saru defies her mother who does not like her going to Bombay for medical studies. With diligence Saru earns a name as a doctor and her status rises higher than that of her husband. But soon she begins to realise that marriage and her duty to her children come in the way of her professional growth. She visualises marriage only in terms of an enclosure where terror awaits her. She 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' where she has to walk on. At one point she proposes to leave the job, but Manohar dissuades her from doing so.

Saru defied her mother to study medicines to become a doctor so that she could get economic independence. But later, she finds that despite this economic independence, she has not got happiness in life. Ultimately, she leaves the job and returns to her parental home. Thus, Saru finds first her mother as her tormentor then her husband as a person causing her mental agony. Again she finds her father cold. Deshpande, thus suggests that a young woman may defy her elders in the family in search of happiness and fulfilment which may prove illusory.

In the novel *That Long Silence* Jaya learns the art of silence: she revolts in silence. Jaya finds despair in the life of a woman: "I saw a struggle so bitter (between husband and wife) that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender." (p.36) In her childhood, Jaya had been brought up with a loving care and affection. After her marriage, Jaya
sheds her anger: "She was a child who used to get angry very soon. But after marriage, she tolerated her anger. She realised that to Mohan anger made a woman 'unwomanly'." (p.83) She tried to keep a balanced relationship between husband and wife: "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel." (p.7)

The novel opens with Jaya and her husband, Mohan, moving from their well-settled, comfortable house to their old house in Dadar where they had stayed earlier when their financial position was not that good. The shift was necessitated because of an enquiry into some business malpractices against Mohan. He explained that it was all for "you and the children" (p.10). But Mohan was wrong in assuming that she would accompany him to Dadar house and behave as usual because she proved otherwise. Often she grumbled that their marriage is no better than "two bullocks yoked together. So better to go to the same direction, as to go different directions will be painful" (p.10). Shashi Deshpande comments: "You learn a lot of tricks to get by in a relationship. Silence is one of them... You never find a woman criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage the relationship."² Here, the violence to woman is clear, but the violence against man, husbanding the family for keeping the balance on an even keel in a marriage is forgotten. Mohan, Jaya’s husband, provides all comforts to his wife and children and they enjoy them without any objection. But when he is in trouble, Jaya does not co-
operative with him and resents his decision to shift the family. The novelist here seems to plead that violence is inherent in a marriage where 'bits of ourselves' have to be sniffed off 'to keep the balance on an even keel', a hindrance to self-actualisation - the loved theme of feminism. It is recognized that marriage is a mutual 'bond' which both male and female enter into for enjoying a married conjugal life. It is also conceded that this art of keeping balance on even keel cannot reasonably be denied in such a relationship unless one decides to part, for good.

In the novel, *Come Up and Be Dead*, a school teacher, Mrs. Jyoti Raman is worried about the deteriorating situation in the institution. She in her concern for her school-going daughter, decides to shift from the town. Apparently, feeling tormented over her mother’s decision, Sonali, her daughter reacts:

"Am I a dummy or a puppet? Have I no mind, no life of my own? Just because you are my mother, it does not give you the right to order me about to make me live the way you want. I don't care about your plans. I won't go the way you want. You can go anywhere you like, I am staying here." (p.154)

The sense of oppression which Sonali nurses over her mother’s decision is clear to her mother when she commented ruefully, "What else do I have in the world apart from you."(p.154)

There is nothing in the novel to suggest that Sonali repented her decision to stay back even after her mother’s murder. There is
no indication that Sonali ever realised the agony her mother suffered because of her outburst. The assertion of the girl for self is well projected, without any care for others.

There are others who hold the opinion that the institution of family itself is one of the causes of women’s oppression in India. In fact, this is the staple food of feminism to advance its views on women’s liberation. There is another opinion to the contrary: in a review of *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and State* edited by J. Krishnamurty. Manjira Majumdar holds: “It appears that women were rarely repressed by the family, a fact that is often unintelligible to the western eye.”³ Indu, Saru, Jaya and Sonali as protagonists of Shashi Deshpande’s novels represent the contrary view to the finding of Majumdar. These young girls rebel against their families. But on attaining maturity and experience, at least Indu and Saru, change opinions about their previous decisions.

In spite of certain regressive practices like sati and taboos about widow marriage which are tantamount to torment of females in the family, the relationships within a family are harmonious in India. In this connection, it is worthwhile to note that family in India is not merely a jumble of relationships, it is a culture. Family denotes a harmony of interests. Clash of antagonist interests within the family is the only situation where oppression takes a discordant note. This was the tragedy of Indu and Saru when both of them in the early stage of their life, did not recognise the opinion of others and instead nursed a notion of repression.
Oppression in itself is not the object of any society. Oppression is always intended to serve a system of exploitation. Conversely, if exploitation as an object persists, oppression keeps a fertile ground to grow in one form or the other. This is the chemistry of both. And this is the story lurking behind the march of history since patriarchy took roots in society giving rise to hostile camps of the haves and the depriveds at the head of which the state emerged as a formidable power to rule the day. In this system of exploitation, women form a part of the scheme as men do. In one form, however, the concerning sexual exploitation and gender-discrimination, females suffered inspite of legislative and constitutional back-up. The graphic description of 'two young men and a girl' indulging in appalling pubic nuisance,(175) in That Long Silence is a case in point. The laughter grew louder and chased Jaya in the heavy rain who could not stand the agony of the scene and helplessness of her protest. The writer, by this single incident, has successfully raised the issue of sexual exploitation of woman in the present day society in its horrendous details with telling effect.

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed in her novels violence against women in various forms, rousing sympathy for the victims which helps provide raison d'etre to the actions of her protagonists. As a daughter, Saru feels always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother. Her brother's birthdays are celebrated with enthusiasm while her birthdays are ignored. When her brother is drowned, she is the first to be blamed and scolded by her mother: "You killed him. Why didn't you die?"
Why are you alive, when he is dead?" (p. 173). Saru strongly resented this type of discrimination and she rebelled against her mother by going to Bombay to study medicine, where she found hostel-life as a kind of 'rebirth'. Here, the writer seems to suggest hostel-life as an alternate model of life free from family oppression. It is here, living in a hostel, that she exercises her right to choose her husband with no consideration of castes etc. It is here in hostel life when she feels she is no longer an untouchable for those three days; 'you can't even talk about it.' (p. 87) She feels so because at home she was not allowed to touch anything for three or four days during menstruation on account of religious considerations by her mother. The heroine of *Roots and Shadows*, Indu is a sensitive girl. She finds dominant Akka and her family to be great hindrance in achieving her goal in life. When she studies in college, Akka does not allow her to meet the boys and cultivate friendship with them. Growing with such personal torments, she later leaves the house and marries Jayant who is her own choice.

In the novel, *The Binding Wine*, Kaplana, a maid servant's daughter is molested by a rich man. She suffered trauma. Her mother was in agony and asked Urmila, the protagonist in the novel, to understand her pain and not to blame the girl for this:

*She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man, she didn't do anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It is not her fault."*(p. 147)
Kalpana, belonging to a lower-income group family was fashionable and mod. She fell victim to molestation by a rich man. Another ‘slim body of a girl clad in jeans’ in the novel, *That Long Silence*, was subject to sexual molestation by ‘two young men’ with intoxicant cigarette (p.175). Here Shashi Deshpande seems to suggest that a weak and sensuous person always invites the brute force to exploit; violence coming in trail, if necessary. It is another matter that today the cunning and resourceful elements in society have mastered the science and art of making their targets weak and sensuously bewitching with modern aides like cosmetics and artful exposures of female bodies. Kalpana is depicted as walking on the roads in western-style dress.

Through the character of Saru, Shashi Deshpande tries to show how woman may suffer even in a marriage of her choice. Saru took a fancy to Mohan in college days and married. She thought that this marriage would provide her love and security which she felt lacking at her parents’ home:

*I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted.* (p.35)

But soon Saru was in for disappointment. She felt that her love and attachment with her husband was diminishing day by day. Though she was enjoying a better status as a leading doctor, yet something was lacking in their relationship. She now earns the bread as well as the butter. This brought a drastic change in their relationship:
Till now, he had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband. (p.37)

She feels that her husband does not love her the way he used to earlier. With the rise in her social status as a leading doctor there occurred a decline in their conjugal relationship. Manu became a sadist rapist in the night which terrified and humiliated Saru to the bones: For an amicable solution to this silent war between the two she tells her husband that she will resign from the post of doctor. In response to it her husband, Manu as a sane head of the family says, "come on, Saru, don't be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that?" (p.73) She rebels again and goes to her parental home in search of place, but she met the same fate and she did not know what to do. Indu in Roots and Shadows doesn't want to lead her life as the other members of the house do. She feels oppressed under Akka's thumb. So to get freedom from her and family bondages, she decides to run away from the house and marries Jayant of her choice. She finds herself not different from other women in the family since she does what her husband wants. Indu murmurs that 'then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone.(p.34) She found herself not different from other women as she always wants Jayant to be with her. She does which her husband would like her to do. She says:

When I look in mirror, I think of Jayant, when I dress I think of Jayant when In undress I think of him. Always what he wants, what he would like what would please him.
And I can't blame him. It is not he who has pressurised me into this. It is the way I want it to be....(p.34)

She finds that her attachment with Jayant stifles her individuality and thus her second home of choice has become the very prison she had used to escape from. Indu experiences disillusionment in sex too and suffers a silent sexual humiliation. She nurses the ideal of detachment and freedom, tries to listen to the voice of her conscience. But she fails either due to the impact of a different culture or a fear of stigma or timidity or all these combined together. She says:

... that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure, I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success... And so I went on lying, even to myself. (p.115)

Indu, is torn asunder because of her sense of guilt over her relation with Naren. She herself views her act as a sin, a deception which causes her agony before she rationalizes her conduct as an expression of autonomy. She toys with the idea of leaving Jayant; ... sometimes I wonder If I will leave him. The only way in which I can be, myself, my whole self again.(p.97). Instead of leaving Jayant she goes to him with the hope that things will change, She is torn between her inner conflicts of getting freedom and social fears to reach a solution.

Likewise, Jaya in That Long Silence suffers frustrations and humiliations. She was leading a happy married life when her husband, Mohan is caught up in some shady deals. Jaya, a sensitive educated woman finds her new surroundings
disturbing. She had always tried her best to keep a balance in her relationship with her husband: "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship." (p.7) She had dreams in childhood to change the ascribed situation of woman but now she finds herself absolutely helpless. She tries to adapt herself to the situation: "I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon." (p.36) Even in physical relationship she finds that it is always husband who dominates and wife suffers. She admits "The emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit of being a wife, of sustaining him and supporting him." (p.98) There was no natural or harmonious relationship between the two, as it is noticed that one is unable to express his or her real feelings freely to the other. This is the reason why the question of shifting their family to another place hurts her. She feels frustrated and quite lonely. She finds her neighbour Kamat, who lives upstairs, sympathetic to her. Jaya recalls his saying:

"As if he had realized my feelings, he'd gone on, "You want to use my address for your mail? You can use my typewriter too if you want to. He'd then suggested a name I could use.""(p.146)

She was more comfortable, free and uninhibited with him than with her husband. But when she found him dead in his room she panicked and left the place in silence in the fear that it might cause damage to her married life. Her inner turmoils are bitter and she is unable to speak about them. She remains silent perhaps in order not to be frustrated and disappointed.
She has the understanding about her husband that “his mood was best met with silence” (p.78) and she, for long, kept situations away lest these might spoil her relations with him. “But silence, the stillness too frightened her” (p.145).

Mrs. Jyoti Raman, in the novel, Come Up And Be Dead ruminates about her husband when Sonali, her daughter, threatens that she will contact her father in case she doesn’t pay the fees and leaves her alone:

My father.... does she know what those words mean? Shall I ever tell her about the man who is her father? And I do, will she judge me just as harshly as she always does?...
(p.160)

Jyoti sat alone and recollected: “she had been only sixteen when she was married. A year more than Sonali at the time. Her ignorance about what went on between man and woman had been abysmal. Her ideas of her husband were so coloured by what he had done to her that night, that she really knew nothing about him, apart from his sexual desires which seemed to her both abnormal. She was trapped. And the worst horror had been that, the more reluctant she was, the more he has seemed to enjoy it. Her mother later told her that there is nothing we can do about it. One day she tried to commit suicide. For him, it was the end. Both separated thereafter for good.”(pp.161-2) The agony Jyoti had to bear for an incompatible marriage and rape by the husband, is a violence which women generally are destined to bear silently with dire consequences to their bodies and minds.
Similar is the case of a wife in Akka, the surrogate mother in *Roots and Shadows*. As a result of a traumatic married life, she shifted to her ancestral home. Indu learnt about Akka, her past, her concern and her suffering after her death. The sweeper-girl Nayana had her own tale of sorrow in married life. She tells Indu, “Now, behnji, I don’t do it (use Kaajal) any more. What is the use? The Kaajal will flow away with my tears.”(p.134)

According to feminism, the institution of marriage with monogamous marital relations between man and woman in the family is an embodiment of female’s oppression under patriarchy. Shashi Deshpande has depicted the unbearable mental sufferings through the female character - Akka in the novel, *Roots and Shadows*. Her husband craves for his mistress during his illness despite the fact that his wife, Akka nursed him in the best possible manner.

Similarly, in *That Long Silence*, the protagonist, Jaya has to give up her writings when her husband shows anger and pain, on her getting a reward for an article in which she had shown male’s ego in husband-wife relationship. To be an ideal, conventional and cultured wife to her husband she has to be a silent sufferer. She always said ‘no’ when Mohan asked her if he had hurt her. Later, Mohan charges her with not cooperating with him when he is in trouble over an enquiry on some business malpractice. Her write-ups written at the instance of Mohan, were not published because they now lacked the anger of woman. She had learnt from Kakies that ‘anger
makes woman unwomanly." (p.83) In the novel, *A Matter of Time*, the protagonist, Summi has to bear all sufferings with her daughters in the absence of her husband, Gopal, who leaves her without saying anything to her. She asks no questions when she sees him leaving the house:

*The realisation that there is nothing more to be said by either comes to them almost simultaneously and he goes out as quietly as he had come in* (p.9).

The novelist has shown that, in a patriarchal society woman has to suffer man's beatings. The husband takes it as his right to use the rod to control his wife. Indian woman suffers beating by her husband passively because she has the fear of being forsaken and unloved by the husband and rejected by the near ones. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* tells her father:

*The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body* (p.102)

In *Roots and Shadows* Akka has to suffer the beatings of her mother-in-law and her husband. Her mother-in-law tortures her mentally and physically as Akka is incapable of giving birth to a child and her husband beats her badly because she is incapable of satisfying him sexually. It was a tragedy of sorts that Akka was married at the age of 13 years to person of 30 years. Atya tells the story of Akka:
Her mother-in-law I heard, whipped her for that and locked up for three days, starved as well. And then, sent her back to husband’s room (p.70)

Her husband... you know how men were in those days, specially when there was a lot of money. He had weakness for women. How could a child satisfy him. He always had mistresses.(p.70)

In *That Long Silence*, the maid servant, Jeeja suffers her husband’s beatings passively. She also forced her daughter-in-law to suffer drunkard husband’s beatings silently in order to keep kum-kum on her forehead. Her edict is:

*Stop that. Don’t forget, he keeps the kum-kum on your forehead, what is woman without that?*(p.53)

In the novel, *A Matter of Time*, the novelist depicts a different type of oppression. Summi’s mother, Kalyani was coming home to Bangalore for the holidays when at Bombay V.T. she lost her mentally retarded four year old son while the father, Sripati was away to check the reservation leaving Amma with the children and the luggage at the platform. The boy was never found. “Kalyani kept sitting at the platform waiting for Sripati to return who had gone in search of the boy. He kept on searching like a mad man for two months with no avail. Thereafter they sent a word to Kalyani’s father who brought her back home. Baba-Sripati has not spoken to her since the day it happened.”(p.140) For thirty long years Baba cut himself completely away from her - not speaking to the wife for so long. Another type of cruelty described in the novel is for an AIDS patient marrying a girl. Summi finds it as a new dimension of
betrayal and cruelty in the man-woman relationship, which Shashi Deshpande has shown (p.145). Kalyani survived her mother’s myriad acts of cruelty after she returned back home as a rejected wife. At her father’s death, her mother scolded her: “You are my enemy, you were born to make my life miserable”. And the words echoed in Kalyani’s ears every night (p.153). The agony of the married daughter returning to parent’s home is writ large on her face.

There is yet another type of suffering which Indian women bear in silence. Women suffer their ailments passively, with little support from husbands and mother-in-laws. Saru, a successful lady doctor in the novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors, is stunned to know from a woman patient about the indifferent and callous attitude of her mother-in-law to her. The woman took such suffering as granted. Saru ruminates:

It was so much easier for woman in those days to accept, not to struggle, because they believed, they knew, there was nothing else for them. And they called that fate. (p.62)

In That Long Silence, Jaya feels pained to know about the horrible death of her mother-in-law because of her husband’s indifferent attitude to her illness and repeated abortions (p.38). Vimala had the same fate when she was taken to the doctor, her mother-in-law reacted: “She’s been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her away if you want to. I never heard of women going to hospitals and doctors for such a thing. Doctors pronounced the case was too late to do anything. She
dies a week later; (her silence intact.”(p.39) Similar was the neglect of Kusum who suffered and died. Jaya comments, “nobody needs her”.(p.21)

In the life of a woman there are moments of agony and sufferings due to frictions, frequent quarrels, even sometimes beatings and gender discrimination in the family. But this is one part of the story; a small part at that, yet this part forms the staple diet for feminism to sustain, and advance its attack on the institutions of family and marriage as a solution to problems of oppression and exploitation in the society today. The incidence of oppressions and exploitation of women in different roles in the family are presented by way of generalization to give a picture of diseased institutions worthy of early burial. This life in the family is something more than the agony, the frictions, the beatings, the discrimination. This is inspite of a petty jealousies, bickerings, trivial and despicable intrigues going on in the family” (p.160) as Indu comments in Roots and Shadows. (p.160).

Apart from oppression and exploitation of women in the family, violence they suffer outside the family has assumed monstrous proportions during these hundred years or so. The second world war and thereafter specially, is a period of sharp decline in the status of woman and her dignity as a person. The intensity of oppression and exploitation of woman outside the family, on the work place and the street, has increased many fold. In addition, she is reduced to a mere commodity in the market of pleasure and comfort for the lustful rich and
powerful. As a result, overt and covert trade in woman's flesh involving intrigues and crime rule the roost. The novel, *Come Up And Be Dead* is a symbolic piece, in which 'high class virgins' of tender age are initiated into sex. Apart from his industrial concerns, Mr. Verma, a highly placed person and a member of the Board of Directors, managing the girls School, runs a lucrative sex-racket in his hotel-cum-restaurant with one youngman, Sanjay as its linchpin. This youngman initiates his cousin, Sharmila, in the ring who was a student in the school. Another student, Mridula whose mummy had left her free to take care of herself: "I trust you, I have confidence in you" (p.71) was trapped for "just a bit of fun" (p.72) by this gang. She became pregnant and later died. Before her death when Mridula tried a proposal to marry Partap she repented that "I never knew. They never told me." (p.71) Later she committed suicide. On apprehension that Partap knows much, he was killed by Sanjay with the help of a doctor who was in confidence with Partap, being his physician. The school thus became the centre for intrigues and murders. Bunny, another student later told her mother: Amma this place is no good (p.18). Parents of the students grew apprehensive about their daughters with the rise in sex-related crimes in the school. Sonali's mother, Mrs. Jyoti Raman tried to persuade her daughter to leave the place but to no avail. She argued:

*Why, even your friend Bunny has left.... We are leaving, I am leaving within a month and so are you I am not. I'll stay here.* (p.16)
The mother paid the price and she was also killed on the apprehension that she knew much about the gangster's activities through her daughter. Girish, a doctor in the town, became a partner in the game of making easy money. In this game he became a tool for elimination of his patient, Partap, by Sanjay. In order to wipe out the likely evidences he tried to murder the suspect Devyani. On suspicion that Sharmila is too close to Sonali and is trying to save her, Sanjay tried to kill her with grievous injuries. The investigating officer comments:

In fact, he wondered whether she realised at all that she had been an accomplice to a crime. What she brooded upon was Sanjay's treachery to her. Sharmila had been only fourteen when the boy, a cousin, had seduced her. Since then she had been besetted about him, totally under his influence. (p.261)

Rape and sexual harassments are the two other worst situations which women have to face in the external world. Apart from sex-track, they are allured to participate in as an organised professions by the rich and powerful people. These conditions have brought immense sufferings to woman.

The illicit sexual harassments have become a common occurrence in the contemporary world of uneven distribution in resources where more and more women from the working population have to venture out for jobs day and night under financial constraints. It is not mere coincidence that more and more women are invested with the attribute of 'pleasure and comfort' in sex and adored as a seductive doll through
inducements, higher the graph of crime against women is rising. Education is not helping to keep this graph in check inspite of its claim to 'higher culture'. Harassments of women at work places involve mis-use of one's official authority in exercise of discretions so vested by rules and procedures. Inspite of directions from the Supreme Court to check the root, there is no respite in the rising incidences of sexual harassments of women at the work places. Abductions, rapes and murders, even of minor girls are occurrences of brutal sexual exploitation of women with serious repercussions to their personality growth. Shashi Deshpande is alive to this problem and has projected the issue in her novels. Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors, becomes the victim of sexual harassment at the hands of her boss. She was avoiding her boss to see her in the party as her husband's suspicious eyes were gazing at her. Her situation becomes more vulnerable when her boss came to her and put his hands on her shoulder and said:

What is this, Saru? No time to greet your old teacher? Why are you avoiding me?(p.85)

In The Binding Vine, Urmi comes to know that her long-dead mother-in-law was subjected to rape in her marriage. There is another girl, Kalpana, who is raped and badly mauled by a rich man. She lies unconscious in the hospital with her grieving mother whom Urmi tries to console. Shakuntala is a deserted woman working as a helping hand in a school. Her eldest daughter is caught up in a rape. Shankuntala mourns:
If a girl's honour is lost, what is left? The girl doesn't have to do anything wrong people will always point a finger at her. I have daughter, what will happen of her..?(p.59)

In the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors, Boozie, the professor of Saru had an aura around him meticulously built. It was part of his reputation for his fondness of pretty girls. Before he began with a batch of new students, there were guesses made and bets laid.. who would it be this time? Saru, though not very pretty, came into his close contact when she was doing her first house job. First the gentleman rebuked her over a mistake: “I don't want incompetent, clumsy uninterested females cluttering up this place. Go home and play with your rolling pins.”(p.81) Saru felt humiliated: “it was like having my clothes torn off in public.”(p.81) Thereafter, the good professor started showing interest in her. From the day he stopped his car at the bus stop where she stood and took her out for a cup of coffee, saying, “The day I have no time to take a pretty girls out to tea, I'll cut my throat.”(p.82) Saru later realised that his interest in her was as a woman, not as a student.

Saru started having “dreams for a good life and a house of her own, furnished with all the gee-gaws that are an indispensable part of the dream”.(p.84) And here Boozie was, the fairy godfather who could with a wave of his magic wand... “if I could please him. I knew I could if tried. I did. Boozie gave her research scheme and extra money every month (and kept her for longer hours away from Manu, (her husband). She
got the dream fulfilled. She had the money.” (p.84) This sums up the other part of exploitation of woman by the highly placed and resourceful ones in a system where one lives in the world of mirage.

The moot point, however, is that this state of affairs where woman is destined to bear the agonies of this violence to her body and mind cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely in an equitous world. Shashi Deshpande believes that the solution lies in woman’s self-assertion which she has tried to project through her novels. But the assertion of individuality by woman alone cannot solve the problem of her oppression and exploitation which is inherent in a particular society. It is a moot point if society can be changed by an individual effort. Shashi Deshpande does not go into this question.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

