CHAPTER IV

ASSERTION FOR SELF

As a matter of fact, violence is designed to breed docility and submissiveness for serving a regime of oppression and exploitation while allurement and intellectual enfeeblement are instruments to sustain injustice, inequity and exploitation of the deprived and dispossessed. Such a regime, in history, has served the powerful and the rich. In addition, this regime also generates, by necessity, a condition for assertion of rights by citizens to ameliorate. In consequence, society survives.

In fact, this two-pronged strategy of violence and allurement by the regime of an ear entails a double-edged counter weapon in assertion of human rights and dignity, as a being, by citizens. It cannot be a mere defensive mechanism; it has to be a continuous process of assertion to put the offenders in the defensive, to succeed. Clearly, it is not a case of brute violence alone and crude exploitation of one person by the other. It is seen that the oppressors and exploiters in combination today have not only mastered the techniques of violence and caste a wide network of multi-facet exploitative regime world wide, but also created a full-fledged system of allurements and intellectual enslavement by subverting the logical bent of mind on a massive scale. The apparent dichotomy between the interests of citizenry and those of the organised regime on behalf of the super-powerful and the rich, is a glaring fact of present day society to be ignored. In the
complexity of circumstances, mere assertion of human rights, ignoring the assertion of one's human dignity in the face of easy allurements and soft options to ride the ladder, is a difficult proposition to meet the regime of oppression and exploitation squarely. The woman specially, finds herself in such a whirlpool of adverse circumstances where she is 'deprived of depriveds'.

In such a situation, it is feminism that has come forward with one set of solutions to woman's problems in her present day circumstances, with assertion for self as the principal prescription. In its analysis of woman's 'enclosures' in present society, feminism views institutions of marriage, family and the community as principle evils which keep woman chained to slavery. Alice Jardine writes: "Feminism is generally understood as a movement from the point of view of, by, and for women"¹ Karen often views that "Feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of men's priviledge and women's subordination within any given society"². As a philosophy, it opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society. The first major feminist manifest 'The Vindication of the Rights of Women' by Mary "Wollstonecraft is the document where full humanity of women is asserted and the author demands recognition of women as independent, individual human beings, having their own independent personality."³ In fact, what modern feminists are demanding, is an echo of what The Vindication stands for.
William Blackstone, a distinguished professor of law, one time at Oxford, describes marriage as a 'civil death' of woman. He states:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything.4

Simone de Beauvoir, a radical feminist, belonging to the first generation to the cause, studied issues like female sexuality, marriage, prostitution and 'unrewarding drudgery' of housework. Her own life and her companionship with Existentialist philosophy of late twentieth century, Jean Paul Sartre, worked as a model for exponents of feminism. She met Sartre when both were in their twenties and lived together without marrying till death and without children. She believes that the secondary position of woman in relation to man, is not imposed of necessity by her natural 'feminine' characteristics but rather by strong forces of social bindings imposed by men. According to her:

She is called 'the sex' by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex absolute sex, no less... she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential.5

De Beauvoir argues that for emancipation, women must seek professional autonomy, and financial independence and also avoid marriage and children.
De Beauvoir frankly discusses topics like sexual initiation, sexual pleasure for women. She opines that woman is not free agent in the society for choosing the man of her erotic destiny, and her pleasures are at the mercy of an institution like marriage. She laments in the book that woman has been denied the right to sexual pleasure. Man, according to Beauvoir, wants his wife to be entirely his. She describes maternity (motherhood) with disgust. She calls upon women to be freed from the bonds of such slavery. This book from De Beauvoir, however, did not initiate any movement as The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan took American society by storm in 1963. The book challenges the belief that woman’s place is at her home and she should find fulfilment in motherhood and family affairs.

Another important exponent of feminism, Kate Millet believes that patriarchy imposed strict fidelity on women and hopes for the times when monogamous family will cease to exist. She thinks that one of the aims of freeing women, is to free them from ‘immemorial subordination’ which in the process, can bring us “a great deal closer to humaniy”6. In her book, The Female Eunuch, Germaine Greer declares that “Women ought not to enter into socially sanctioned relationship, like marriage because if women are to affect a significant amelioration in their condition, it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry.”7(p.319) Greer like Kate Millet regards small family as a disaster and feels no obligation to rear children which may be tended by other willing adults. She tells
women that ‘to be emancipated from the helplessness and need and walk freely upon the earth that is your birthright.’(p.330) they have to fight for it.

Later, a group of feminists started advocating for certain compromises so that humanity can better survive. Betty Friedan in her later treatise, The Second Stage, argued that “women have changed, family patterns have changed, sexual norms have shifted and the institutions must also be changed to accommodate present day reality in order to survive. She pleaded that it requires not only a shift in woman’s consciousness, but also a flexibility, evolving new forms of living within the changing context, of American family”.⁸ She is adopting, here, a new vision of the family, advising women to abandon her rage, their strident anti-family and anti-male positions and going back to the family which, according to her, always have been the source of women’s power. She admits that “it may sound corny, but there is a power in women’s ability to create life, the closeness to life, that men don’t have.”⁹(p.61) The Australian born feminist, Lynne Segal also puts similar argument in her study, Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism (1987). She challenges the feminist orthodoxies on marriage, motherhood and female sexuality.

Since the days of Jane Austin, fiction as a distinct stream in literature focused more and more on issues of women’s subjugation. There were concerted efforts to forge strategy in fiction for projecting feminist views on life and its problems.
During the Victorian age, when love-making and domesticity were thought to be the sole concern of women, it was Elizabeth Gaskell who presented a feminist point of view in her novels, protesting against the old image of women as a mere sex-object. She affirmed the dignity of woman in the family as well as in social life. It was a period when England witnessed transition from pre-dominantly agricultural economy to a manufacturing one. In between, sharp conflict on sustainable wage in manufacturing industries, the life of hired labour became increasingly hard. Women slowly were forced to come out for jobs to supplement the family income for survival. They were subjected to harsh exploitation and sexual harassment at workplaces. The women novelists of 19th century like D.M.Clark, The Bronte Sisters, Elizabeth, Sewell, Elizabeth Gaskel were sore on dualism of women’s life during this period. They were not for the outright rejection of prevalent social doctrines. Craike’s Novel, John Halifax, Gentleman is full of romantic love. She is caught in between tensions of both wanting to be independent of society, yet is not willing to reject its code. The heroine of Jane Eyre rebels against orthodox norms and asserts for a spinster life through the characters of Caroline Helstone and Shirely Keeldar. Nevertheless, both the girls retreated in the end to a state of subservience.

The last years of nineteenth century was a period in which everything could be challenged. It was a time of enthusiastic extremism and gleeful revolt. Previous writers had prepared the ground to serve the changing times. It was a period of deep and
serious inquiry over questions of moral and social behaviour. It was believed that society was sick. New Woman became the focal point of attention with challenging mores. Relative permissive atmosphere gave rise to investigation of female role in the changed milieu. Financial independence and personal fulfilment gained through work, began attractive alternatives to marriage. General diseases, contraception, divorce and adultery were made common talking points of the new womanhood. The institution of marriage came under severe attack. A changed morality, a fresh code of behaviour and sexual ethics were forged. Major novelists like Hardy, Meredith and Gissing battled for 'artistic freedom' and began writing explicitly about topics associated with New Woman. It was a period of highly polemical and often lurid fiction which later was carried to the twentieth century. Free love was canvassed enthusiastically in fiction and Grant Allen's, The Woman Who Did, became the model anti-marriage novel of the times.

During 1980s women writers in America, like Toni Morrison came to be symbolised with the trials and turbulations of American Blacks in fiction. Her novels depict the new emerging patterns of female assertion in personal, familial and social spheres. This plethora of fiction revolves around the problems dear to feminists of West like sex-freedom, sexual exploitation and travails of female's life in fast moving world of self with economy engulfing their peace and tranquillity. The 'caged' person is in desperate search of alternatives.
Shashi Deshpande as a notable Indo-Anglion novelist of post-independence period, like her peers in the West as well as in India, feels like giving a go by to the institutions of marriage and family and favours the change in sexual mores for better ‘fulfilment’. In *Roots And Shadows* Indu, the protagonist sums up her vision of marriage “The Indian way. The husband. A definite article Permanent. Not only for now, but for ever. To be accepted. Stop.” (pp.126-7). Now for Hemant, a petty clerk in the drudgery of service to fend a wife and two children, marriage “is a trap”. (p.60) About motherhood, in the novel, *The Binding Vine* Urmi muses to Vanna “Sometimes, I think they brainwash us into this motherhood thing. They make it seem so mystical and emotional when the truth is that it’s all just a myth. They have told us so often and for so long that once you’re a mother, you have these feelings, that we think, we do...”(p.76) Indu in *Roots And Shadows* thinks “Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment ad tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce...”(p.3) In the novel, *A Matter of Time*, the protagonist Aru surmises “I’ve been thinking about marriage a great deal.... What’s there in it? I mean, look at Āmma and now Sumi... What do you get out of it.?" (p.138) The abhorrence of the writer to the institution of marriage as a shackle to the growth of woman’s personality, is patent and clear.

The concept of free woman is pronounced by Jaya in the novel, *That Long Silence* when she declares, “I could have
told her about my excitement when I had started on the pill and taken in its possibilities. I’m a free woman now, I had thought, I’ve assumed control over my own body, over its clumsy, cumbersome processes. Now, I will conceive only when I want to..."(p.63) The fulfilment of self and the satisfaction Jaya derived from this assertion, is classic to the ideals of feminism. It is a different matter that this case of middle class jubilation makes no effort to hide its pleading for ‘family planning’ exercise released as a solution to country’s poverty by the state.

Jaya feels uneasy about her relation with Mohan, her own choice of a husband. She felt alone inspite of passionate union, with him. This dissatisfaction leads her to surmise on “men-woman relationship as nothing but ‘deep chasm between the two.”(p.98) She opines “They are separated for ever, never more than at the moment of total physical togetherness.”(p.98) She feels caged in marriage and looks outside for fulfilment.

Jaya often found family life unenduring. “Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony.... in our dull grooves...I had often wondered that wars always took place in other countries, tidal waves and earthquakes occurred in far-off unknown places, that murder, adultery... had their places in other people’s lives, never in ours.”(p.4) She feels their marriage is nothing better than “a pair of bullocks yoked together”(p.7). The comment reflects the truth that inspite of assertion in choosing her partner by Jaya, the marriage remains incompatible, and a failure in fulfilment, an obstacle in realisation of her self. This
is one part of the story. The other side of this failure on account of assertion by Jaya, affected the realisation of self in relation to Mohan about which the novelist is apparently unconcerned, being a feminist exponent.

It is contended that family has gained significance as a founding block of social structure with private property as the motive force of its dynamism under patriarchy. Marriage with monogamous sexual interaction between husband and wife for procreation and self perpetuation formed the base for such a familial relation. Community and social mores and values in consonance with this familial structure emerged in course of time to serve its need. With the introduction of commodity, production replacing the previous mode of production for consumption and fulfilling community and social needs, has introduced a new element where individual is the atomised unit, though largely family structure remains patriarchal in relationships. The stress has now come to self-actualisation and self-fulfilment with 'one's own room' rather than on collective familial dignity as a means to achieve one's realisation. It has given rise to a new dimension to the struggle among members within a family of heterogeneous interests among individuals, in clash. Feminism seeks to champion the individual interests of women members within the family with self-realisation as its ideological slogan. The incidence of oppression and exploitation, multiplied many-fold under commodity production for sale and purchase in the market with patriarchal social dispensation intact, visits women with more ferocity than in
earlier structures. It appears that feminism relies on formal institutions of state to help ameliorate the condition of women as individuals dispensing with the institutions of family and community. The dichotomy, however, in the situation arises when a highly centralised state structure appears to enhance the interests of commodity production and distribution where inequity and injustice is in-built. The protagonists of novels by Shashi Deshpande are caught in between this kind of circumstances with ideals and aspirations fuelled by feminism with socio-economic conditions not maturing so fast as it would require. These protagonists assert their 'self' and seek realisation in in-hospitable economic conditions and legal-administrative structures crumbling and a barren education system in place. It stands to reason that in an atomised society, assertion by individuals against onslaught by an exploitative system, is imperative even in case of collective remedy to fight injustice. In most of the cases, however, assertion flounders when individual perception refuses to recognise the collective wisdom over issues of injustice and a reasonable course for just solution.

Aru, the protagonist in the novel, *A Matter of Time* by Deshpande, asserts to undo the injustice her father has done to her mother, Sumi and family members by deserting them. As an educated girl she firms up to sue her father and tries to convince Sumi of this without success. The dialogue between the daughter and her mother on this account is instructing to project the two different characters by the novelist:
"I think you should see a lawyer," Aru says to her mother, Sum.
"You mean because of Gopal?... But I don't see the point."
"The point? The point is you've got to do something."
What? Get a divorce? I'm not interested."
But he owes you, he owes all of us, yes, you especially, he owes you... lamely 'something'. He can't get away like this. He has to give us maintenance.'

Sumi laughs, she seems genuinely amused, Gopal has outsmarted the law. He's given us all that he had. And he has nothing now, not even a proper job. I don't think, he's getting more than a bare subsistence from Shanker's press- so Ramesh tells me. So what can law make him do?'
"Sumi, you are making it too easy for him, you are letting him get away with it. He's getting off scot-free. It's not right, he must be made to realise what he's done..."
"How? By punishing him? Do you want to punish him, Aru? I don't. I am not interested. I just want to get on with my life."
"Let him go? As if he's a -a mere acquaintance or somebody with whom we have had a small misunderstanding? I don't understand you at all."

The long quote is important on many accounts. It is indicative of two sets of approaches which Sumi and her daughter, Aru, adopt on a question of perceived injustice by a husband and a father; Gopal in this case. Sumi, a mature wife, understands her husband and his position, has a balanced view of life, expresses her surprise over 'punishing' Gopal by a daughter and declares her resolve "I am not interested"(p.61) in punishing her husband, while simultaneously asserts herself when she says, "I just want to get on with my life."(p.61) Aru, the immature daughter fired by the 'liberating ideas' of self, on the other hand, is out to condemn her father for deserting his wife, Sumi without understanding any reason for it and wish to punish him, relying more on the maintenance law. She has the perfect
understanding of her right as a daughter vis-a-vis the obligation of a father to his siblings. Similarly, Aru has the perfect understanding of the rights of a wife against a husband, when she reminds her mother, Sumi, "Ma, he is your husband. How can you dismiss it (injustice by desertion) so lightly?" Aru expresses her disappointment with Sumi: "I don't understand you at all." (p.61)

The assertion of self by Aru here is one-sided and selfish, without any feeling of affection for a father, whom she hardly understands and who has provided her with an atmosphere of informality and freedom to develop her personality along with Sumi, so long. The assertion on her part is mere bravado of a young girl bordering on useless anger. Aru's determination to hurt her father is evident when on a visit to him, she defiantly accepts the coffee cup from Shankar knowing fully well the wish of Gopal to the contrary. "Though she recognises his unspoken desire that she refuses it, too, Aru takes the glass from Shankar." (p.62) Secondly, the dialogue between the daughter and her mother indicates the assertion of self by the females against the male, as a father and a husband without any sense of obligation on their part to him who has opted a life of workingman for subsistence leading a secluded mode. It seems that divorce is the solution of the problem in the eyes of Aru which her mother, Sumi emphatically rejects as of no interest to her. Sumi realises the futility of law in resolving the affair between a husband and a wife while for Aru it is a dependable
course. She answers Aru by saying: 'So what can the law make him do?' (p.61) even in case of a maintenance cost.

Aru puts the ultimate question to her father on his obligation to the wife and children: "why did you get married at all, why did you have children:"(p.62) The only rational answer, a father, in the circumstances could give to his daughter, came in a measured manner: “It is too late to think of that now, Aru. It serves no purpose arguing about these things.”(p.62) He silently as a father advises her: “It’s not important what you do to me now, Aru. It’s what you’re doing to yourself that’s wrong.”(p.63) Aru refuses to heed the advice of her father - a mature voice than her’s. She pursues her own project of ‘punishing’ Gopal doggedly till the advocate, Surekha explained her the futility of the exercise Aru intends to carry. Surekha tells her, “And in your case, I don’t see that going to the law will help anyone. It would be just vendetta.”(p.205) Aru, later herself comes to realise; “there is nothing else, nothing went wrong between him and Sumi.”(p.206) Evidently the initial assertion of Aru to stand against a perceived injustice from her father rested on a partial understanding of the situation. The self in her case shuts out the ‘self’ of Gopal or her mother, when Aru went full steam for her assertion.

In the novels of Shashi Deshpande women characters, confronted with conditions uncongenial to their own needs, urges, hopes and aspirations, tend to conduct themselves in different ways evincing different attitudes, temperaments and responses. She has portrayed women characters who are
discontended with their place in society. The struggle to carve out their identity in home and outside, seems to be her theme, they grow and change to meet the situations. Deshpande’s women are sensitive, thinking ones, be it Kalyani, the grandmother in A Matter of Time or Sumi, Jaya, Saru or Indu in other novels. These women are different individuals, all of them going their different ways. Individuality is the hallmark of her protagonists in the novels and assertion for self is the credo for all of them.

As a concept, feminism draws its sustenance from individualism, at its highest peak in existentialism in late twentieth century when capital has shifted its focus on financial field of operation in its phase of acute crisis. Existentialism took shape as a culmination of this trend of thought, in individualist values. ‘Being and nothingness’ form the cardinal word of this latest trend, influenced by the concept of an’ absolute independent entity. With a similar method of thinking Feurbach’s “humanism took shape in the early stages of industrial revolution in western Europe while existentialism came up in the era of acute crisis of capitalism at its peak.”

Every one has a separate entity or existence in the society-- thus according to this system of thought, is the existence of independent entity of the individual even though in relationship with space and time. They believe in the absolute free existence of individuality. According to it, the freedom of choice of the individual should not be interfered with. In the opinion of Jean Paul Sartre ‘individuals are condemned to freedom’. He
considers that the very question of morality is irrelevant and meaningless. Feminism cannot be understood apart from this system of thought. As a hegemonic thought, individualism has been successful in emerging its concepts with the identities of individuals and as shaped the women’s thinking about themselves and the world.

True to the ideals of individualism, it is contended that feminism be viewed as a mode of existence in which woman is “free from dependence syndrome.” This is now widely published as an accepted concern on feminism. Professor Chaman Nahal asserts further that there is dependence syndrome affecting the life of women: be it the husband or the father, brother or the community, whether it is a religious group or ethnic one. He enjoins: “When women free themselves from the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materialises.” So with the definition. Professor Nahal proceeds to explain this ‘self’.

Professor Nahal contends that the society lives by myths; preceding society created myths around Sita and Savitri for their loyalty and dedication and conditioned the society around such myths to follow. So now, he pleads, new myths are to be modelled for replacement for the society to be reconditioned. While examining how well feminism has been presented and how replacement models are possible within the Indian context in the survey of Indian writing in English, Nahal commends a novel, *So Many Hungers* by Bhabhani Bhattacharya as a good feminist piece. He explains: (its) "character, Kajoli, shows
great courage in the face of all odds and is really not dependent on anyone; neither on her grandfather, nor on her husband. She is dependent in the way we are connected to people. And then she goes to Calcutta where she is sold into prostitution and she saves herself by selling newspapers.”

When this novel is commended as a “great novel” by Professor Nahal it qualifies as his ‘replacement model’ for a myth to condition the society in the changed circumstance, as also a model for self assertion by a female protagonist as a true champion of feminism, notably “within the Indian context.”

The above quote from Chaman Nahal sums up succinctly the crux of the argument in favour of fighting against dependence syndrome which has emerged as the clarion call of feminist thought in the country. Of late, this is the consensus opinion on feminism and its cause. From die-hard rightists to radical left, all find ‘economic independence’ of woman as the sole remedy for patriarchal injustice to women today. Such is the influence of ‘economic determinism’ on the prevailing thoughts of all shades in the present society when ‘money’ has come to regulate all social-economic relationships. Mulk Raj Anand paints Gauri as the ‘brightest star on the canvass... (p.64) in a flash of brilliance which explodes the Sita myth and redeems emancipation’ in his novel The Old Woman and Cow, “when she has a taste of independence at the hospital where she begins to help out with nursing, notwithstanding the advances of Dr. Batra there”. By now the new myth of this economic independence for woman’s liberation, is a running theme and
society seems to be adequately conditioned as envisaged by Professor Nahal. Shashi Deshpande adequately respects this new myth in her novels when her protagonists assert for self and seek professions or careers in defiance of elders, where necessary. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* rebels against her mother to become a doctor of medicine, yet, could not find peace in life; then decides to leave the clinic to get out from the oppressive relationship with her husband.

The fallacy, however, in the argument, detailing the definition, is that the detested dependence syndrome remains blissfully confined to 'grandfather, brother or the husband' while the dependence on the brothel keeper or the owner of the newspaper is projected as an acceptable ladder for independence from home. The irony of choosing an 'independent' profession like prostitution and hawking at a dust cheap rate in the street to keep the flag flying for 'liberation of woman' in preference to home syndrome, is notable for its forthrightness. The principle of 'one oppression replacing the other oppression' in a class, caste and creed divided society, is neatly overlooked in this commendation by Professor Nahal when familial relations are substituted by master-servant relationship, giving little respite to dependence of women. Thus, the projected independence turns out to be a sham under the present socio-economic conditions available in the country even after country's independence when feminism got currency as a creed.

Nonetheless, the credo of feminism propounded by this definition by Nahal, serves two purposes in its stride: in
consonance with the requirements of owner of capital in various sectors of economy for market and the powers-that-be, a congenial atmosphere is created by this credo for a ‘freely available’ and relatively cheap female labour and her sexuality also ‘free available’ as a commodity in the market. In this context, it is note-worthy that individualism, in the history of philosophy emerged in conjunction with the rise of industrial mode of production where basic unit of labour is the individual replacing an earlier mode in agriculture production for satisfying consumption with family labour as its basic unit under the preceding period of patriarchy. In that period, cooperative labour in a harmonious family was the credo while ‘self’ replaced it in the industrial mode. The conflict between the value-system of previous mode represented by the family and the values centred around ‘self’ or the individual human being is the crux of the struggle between ‘conservative’ and the ‘modern’. In fact these terms, conservative and modern seem contrived to hide the insidious struggle for establishing the values of barbarous market-forces in an antagonistic competition against each other, for supremacy. And, to recondition the society, as Professor Nahal commends. Secondly, the dependence syndrome theory helps admirably to break the emotional bonds for the home on the anvil of individual interest which remains the dream of those forces in market economy which strive to create a ‘reserve army’ of freely available labour. It may or may not be sheer coincidence
that this is an avowed aim of feminism or at least a dominating section of it, to break the 'bondage' of family, universally.

In the novel, *Come Up And Be Dead* by Shashi Deshpande, the effect of loosening families, is on the surface where female sexuality is turned into a commodity for sale and pucha by 'consent' through a system of allurement and intrigues. The parents of a suicide victim, Mridula exclaim in desperation that it was because we are breaking. Mridula's father explains his agony to the investigating officer: "Someone made her pregnant... my daughter... she was well dressed, she went to a good school, she had friends... we cannot get away from that. She slept with some man. It does not matter to me now who it was. The guilty people are us... my wife and I. We are splitting up, you know. That's why all this..." (p. 193) Yet, the assertion for self in the novel is galore. Mridula's friend and classmate in the school, Sona reacted sharply when her mother decides to leave the place apprehending trouble. Sona accuses her mother for not consulting her before the decision and retorts: "You did not think of me, at all". (150) Sona, a girl of sixteen asserts her individuality and asks her mother: "Am I a dummy or a puppet or something? Have I no mind, no life of my own? to decide where to stay and where not to go." (p. 158)

Defying the advice of Akka, the surrogate mother in the novel, *Roots And Shadows*, the heroine, Indu marries Jayant in assertion for self, yet fails to reach fulfilment. *Roots And Shadows* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* as also *That Long*
Silence are novels by Shashi Deshpande of the woman's self-quest and pose the view that women in these novels have established themselves as autonomous beings, free from circles of bondages imposed by family, marriage, society, culture and also are free from their own fears and sense of guilt which they have unlearnt. Indu dismisses the shadows that she had, thought to be her life, her real self. She once declared, "I would never go back" (p.20) to the family she had left earlier, yet Indu returned to the family once again to find her roots. Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors asserts her individuality and longs for autonomy, yet she finds that even the marriage of her choice becomes another 'enclosure' for her that restricts the movement towards self-realisation and autonomy. There are recurrent scenes of enclosures in Roots and Shadows as well as in The Dark Holds No Terrors. Saru, even when she comes back home "felt herself enclosed" (p.12). Indu and Saru both assert their 'self' through independent marriages and seek a room of their own and autonomy in defiance of families and values, rituals surrounding these families, freely available for city life and its mores. Saru resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that this will help her in winning the freedom. The novel describes her situation quite explicitly;

I had come away from my parents in a fever of excitement after the last battle. The die was cast, the decisions taken, my boats burnt. There could be no turning back. (pp.31-2)
Saru, Indu and Jaya in these novels pose that men and women both are products of their culture and victims of the institution of marriage.

To proclaim, like Marro in *La Puberte* that "the only difference between women who sell themselves in prostitution and those who sell themselves in marriage, is in the price and length of the time the contract runs"\(^{17}\), may help soothe some ruffled nerves and provide a bit of solace in response to the violence done to women by male egotists, yet, it is a poor hype on the institution of marriage in spite and much poorer assessment on prostitution in relation to women. "Sex-slavery, under decadent patriarchy"\(^{18}\) of the pre-industrial period and the male-slavery under present-day market economy for profit, being progeny of the same parentage in power and money, have a common vintage in force as well as notional freedom of choice; one expressed in prostitution and the other in expropriation of sex by procurement. In the circumstances, distress sale or working under allurements are conditions where freedom of choice is better for the owner of capital rather than the worker. If the victim is female, the law grinds fine. Feminism, as a concept has failed to provide a viable replacement model in place of marriage which entails 'one-man, one-woman' marital relationship for self-renewal.

Shashi Deshpande seems to suffer from this dilemma. In her fictions, the institution of marriage is perceived as a circle of bondage, a tool to oppress woman in conjunction with family. The heroines of her novels assert to break the 'cradle of
bondage' in family and move out for better fulfilment in marriage of their choice, yet find themselves in new circle of bondage in marriage soon thereafter. The 'darkness' engulfs their lives. The novel, **The Dark Holds No Terrors**, is woven around the travails of Saru by Deshpande. As a result of assertion by her, Saru married Manu in love. The woman who had been so defiant in childhood and adulthood, felt utterly helpless and panic-stricken with the approach of darkness. She became afraid of the 'dark' at night because her man would invade her body and commit monstrosities upon her. She is in the grip of "the familiar irritation, the familiar exasperation"(p.17) owing to an unbridgeable gulf between herself and Manu even after their companionship of fifteen long years. Though she is a medical doctor by vocation and a self reliant woman by all means, yet her marriage has floundered. The cause of this disintegration is a searching but tactless interview of Manu by a lady reporter of a women's Magazine: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the bread but butter as well?" (pp.35-6) Thereafter, Manu turned into a sadist. Saru's dream of a happy home with children twittering about and a loving husband to prop up in the struggle of life as a result of her assertion for self and walking over her parents' bondage, shattered due to new circle of bondage in marriage. She has a desire to "sleep peacefully the night through. To wake up without pain. To go through tomorrow without apprehension"(p.27), but she finds "such a congenial atmosphere only at her parental home with its peaceful
surroundings” (p.83) on return. The parental home is contrasted to her spousal house, where, according to Saru “terror waited for me in our room. I could not escape it.” (p.70) Saru again, ‘asserts in escape’ to her parental home leaving her husband and children to their own care. In marriage, she finds herself to a “two-in-one woman” and “a terrified, trapped animal” (p.134).

In her marital life, however, Saru asserts for her ‘self’ in maintaining relations and taking favours from an ambitious man like Boozie.

Shashi Deshpande employs ‘silence’ as a metaphor to describe the passive assertion by her heroines in case of marital oppression for a long period before these heroines find opportune moments to active assertion. Saru says in, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* “silence had been a habit for us.” (p.199)

Indu in *Roots And Shadows* states about her cold relationship with Jayant thus: “I am passive. And unresponsive. I am still and dead.” (p.192) In the novel, *The Binding Vine*, Urmi adopts a posture of silence on being asked by Bhasker, her lover, about her none-too-happy marriage with Kishore, “I can say nothing. The silence stretches between us.” (p.161) In the novel, *That Long Silence* the heroine, Jaya’s dreams of having a happy home with her husband Mohan and children proved to be a chimera at long last. They adopted an unbreakable, yet unnerving silence towards each other. As elsewhere, here too silence denotes lack of communication, frigidity of feeling and lack of understanding and compassion. This state of affairs
reflected in her literary pursuits being dry and lifeless. Sarabjit Sandhu sums up:

This unhappiness is reflected not only in her (Jaya’s) conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion.19

The result is that Jaya loses her individuality and she fails in her writings. A strained relationship with her husband creates a void in her married life and she meets failure and frustration in her creative activity. There is a complete communication gap between the couple. They drift apart. Jaya finds her neighbour Kamat as a good companion instead, in an inhibited way. “After Kamat’s death Jaya continues to live with Mohan but in a mood of emptiness.”(p.185) When the mood of loneliness overpowers her, she realises the mistake of leading a marooned and cocooned life. She finally resolves to “erase the silence”(p.192) between herself and Mohan. Again she decides to assert. In this novel Deshpande presents the meaning of silence. As she puts it “You learn a lot of tricks to get by in a (marriage) relationship. Silence is one of them...”20 But this silence is revolt in silence, a passive assertion for self, taking time to be active. Sarla Palkar approvingly quotes Elizabeth Robins: “If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy --”21 the weight of that long silence of one-half of the world, as the epigraph to Shashi Deshpande’s novel, That Long Silence, “the most acclaimed piece from her so far, announcing the intention
of this talented contemporary Indian writer to break the long silence that has surrounded women their experience and their world." Jaya in *That Long Silence*, re-examines her experiences of her life after marriage with Mohan when they shifted to Dadar flat. Her frustrations and disappointments as a 17-year girl and her decision to marry Mohan on her own, visited by fresh experiences of a married life, haunts her as something killing her individuality and stunts the growth as a free human being. Jaya can no longer be passive and silent partner to Mohan. The novel ends with her resolve to speak out, to break the long silence as an assertion for self, taking lesson even from her mother and two grandmothers.

The novel *That Long Silence*, is a strong critique of our social institutions like marriage and the family, the way these block the path, the expressions of the individual. Jaya perceives her relation with Kamat, her neighbour, in the same light, and comes to the conclusion about the futility of marriage itself. This novel is concerned mostly with women like Kusum who was Mohan’s cousin sister and many such others who were victims of patriarchy as well as their own silence, pocketing all the slights and bear odds silently. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel knew the travails of four generations and then concluded to break the silence. She proclaims: “I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone.”(p.191) and suggests assertion by women themselves for a change in the situation. The writer here highlights the silence not only of Jaya, but also of every other character in the novel. Veena Sheshadri comments: “The
novelist also tells about despair and resignation of women like Mohan's mother... It also deals with Mohan's silence which is the silence of a man who speaks but can find no one to listen to him."23

Nayantara Sahgal talks about in her novels concerning women who are oppressed by marriage, by political circumstances, by accidents of history. Raj Narasimhan in Forever Free (1979) establishes a different model of living through defiance. Uma Vasu Dev in her novel, The Song For Anasuya paints a model of paying back the men in their own coin and be happy with herself. Kamla Markandaya weaves her stories who are complete without dependence syndrome.

There is no denying the fact that middle class women in the West and in India had much in common, yet there was also much that differentiated them. What stood between them was not only a different cultural and social history underpinned by economic factors of different categories but also the fact that the family has a different function for the economic system in capitalist centres of the world than for a peripheral economy which has not been able to free itself from both feudal and colonial set.

Although, women have been taking part in the economic life and production process since long, barring a microscopic minority that woman's sphere is essentially confined to 'home'. The kitchen, however, had been the exclusive domain of women belonging to the working populace whereas these are the servants who do kitchen duties in upper middle class families.
The problems and issues dear to these categories of women, thus differ and assertion in their case too have different meanings for them. This aspect remained largely neglected for inquiry in the feminist quest.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels are concerned with woman’s quest for self, an exploration into female’s psyche and an understanding of her urges and despairs. Her heroines speak of Virginia Woolf’s ‘A Room of One’s Own’, and claim their right on their own bodies. About the middle class background of her characters, even in detective-cum-crime novels like If I Die Today and Come Up And Be Dead, Deshpande admits in a letter, “The point is I always begin with characters - even the themes from character who belong to the class I know best.”

Her women, confronted with conditions uncongenial to their own needs, urges hopes and aspirations tend to conduct themselves in different ways evincing different attitudes and temperaments. She has portrayed these characters who are discontented with their place in society. Their struggle to carve out their identity in home and outside against odds, seems to be her theme. Despande’s novels have a number of women who display remarkable dynamism and their stories display a considerable development in their outlook on life and their attitude towards it.

The latest novel by Shashi Deshpande, A Matter of Time, is set in Karnataka encompassing three generations of middle class men and women. It is a story about Sumi who returns to her parental home with her three daughters after her husband
Gopal walks out on her for reasons even he cannot articulate. Sumi’s parents live in strangely oppressive silence without speaking to each other for almost 35 years. At the heart of the novel Sumi’s daughter, Aru is struggling to understand her father’s ‘desertion’ and her mother’s indifference with a strong instinct to ‘kill’ the injustice. Her assertion not to allow Gopal ‘go scot free’ is remarkable for dogged persistence in ignorance. Aru forges entirely unexpected relationships that are destined to change the course of her life and understanding about life and its changing perceptions with times. Deshpande explores the intricate relationship between these women and their males. This novel probes the question of what makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns with no rancour.

Gopal, a part of a so-called normal middle class family, turned his back on everything in his life, a lovely wife, three intelligent daughters and a good job without looking back. His assertion for self in silence is notable. The five women in this novel are sensitive women, yet, five different individuals with their own stories of urges and despairs. All of them go their different ways. Five souls that don’t add up to make the whole. They tell themselves that they have only one life to live. They assert their individuality, significant enough to fit into the enormity of this concept of just one chance to live. The five women in the novel, Sumi her mother Kalyani and the three daughters as also the two men, Gopal and the father of Sumi - Shripati are persons of strong will and rigid sense of
individualism pervade their pride. All of them are assertive for 'self' though living in the traditions of family. It is a typical family, though there is no trace of a 'family' except the emotional bond of kinship with the suffering Kalyani who belongs to the first generation in the story. Sumi finds self expression and freedom in getting a job which she could not avail before she met her death in the fatal accident alongwith her father, old Shripati. (232-3)

Assertion of one's rights is very essential for a just world when oppression injustice and exploitation reign supreme, assertion even to the extent of rebellion in the interest of one's dignity and equitable entitlements. This is a law of social conduct, enjoying social sanction throughout human history, notwithstanding any edict of juridical law or sermon. Following the same law matriarchy had to give way to patriarchy in the face of changing requirements. Patriarchy, in return, cannot now answer the requirements of a just and equitous world in terms of male-female relations either. It is to follow the same route. One day, polygamy, polyandry or bigamy had to give way to monogamy for good reasons, and not merely to provide 'sons'. It liberated both male and female of anarchy in sexual relationship. Monogamy raised both males and females to a new height of emotional and social standard. Promiscuity in sex either by male or female down-grades their cultural taste and affinity to each other. It cannot be pleaded as something liberating to either. It cannot be pleaded that it is man alone who habitually is promiscuous alone. Nonetheless, it
is amoral to reason that promiscuity of a man gives reasonable ground for a female promiscuity. The assertion for self in sexual promiscuity is a proposition with a negative attitude, which can be neither healthy nor liberating in any form. If purdah is bad, nudity cannot be a bliss either; assertion for such a right rings one to the border of crass individualism.

There is no doubt that patriarchy has done violence to woman, but not necessarily the man. Equating the two is generally done, sometimes with malice but to disastrous effects. It cannot be asserted that some men in hierarchy happily become tools of such a violent history. Conversely, if some day a woman arose in hierarchy of power and riches, she was less evil to women. In fact, it is not the person -- male or female who denotes patriarchy, it is the system which money power has evolved to expropriate the less fortunate ones, since the days of mercantile capital of pre-industrial vintage. Man carries the cross primarily because he was in the front to carry the burden of property initially, in history. It can be surmised that feminism of today lacks serious understanding of diverse forces which went to work history at different stages of human development. Assertion for self based on partial understanding of the ‘truth’ is sure to bring disaster in its wake, if not doom. The fine net-work of oppression and exploitation of woman needs a correct compass of attitude to negotiate the difficult path of liberation and equity, which many fiction writers in English today apparently lack seriously. Shashi Deshpande is no exception. Her fictions are good examples of female
assertion but for a cause which is not very clear of its goal to her protagonists.

This is also not the whole truth that Indian woman is docile, submissive or slavish in her familial relationships, nor the opposite is also true for men in general. Human nature in both of its qualities and failings is common to men and women. Women’s sensibilities born of her conditions are sharp and dignified. There are assets to humanity. And need to be respected. Male ego has to learn to live with it. Deshpande’s women are not docile. They assert. They rationalise. They think. May be the wrong way. Still, they are humans.

Feminist literature in ‘modern’ India is full of despise, invectives and derisive description against ‘tradition and custom’ as if traditions, per se, are untrust-worthy and breaking every tradition is synonymous with modernity. Riding on such a simplicity, much of feminist onslaught, escaped unnoticed by an over-whelming majority of womenfolk in the country.

Uma Vasudev, for example in her novel, The Song for Anasuya extols paying back the men in their own coins, as Dreiser in, Sister Carrie tries the ladder of success the way men do. She first picks Charles, then George; then discards both of them. In Uma Vasudev’s novel Anasuya is a woman who uses men and discards them. The argument is : “if a man can do this, why cannot woman do this. It is a tell-tale description of ‘new and modern woman’ and her relationship which is posed to be followed as a model.”25 It eloquently describes the rationale of feminism behind its inveterate anger
against the institution of marriage, and its pleadings for sexual
freedom. Almost all of such protagonists of feminism see only
subordinate woman in a family. Saru, more contemptuously
than in remorse, describes such women, "Stupid, silly martyrs...
ediotic heroines 'in the novel The Dark Holds No Terrors by
Shashi Deshpande. (98) Urmi in the novel, The Binding Vine
finds, 'Girls are objects in a catalogue for marriage'. (p.160) In
A Matter of Time, by Deshpande, Sumi laments and
comments sarcastically.' He (the family god, Ganpati) does not
do such a good job for looking after the women in the family.
(p.115) In Roots and Shadows Indu finds that "a woman's life
contains no choices."(p.6) Veena Paintal, another fiction writer
in English also asks upper class women to 'fight against
traditional expectations of society' which they were used to and
become independent.25 Independence for Paintal too is
synonymous with service outside the family on wage and
exercising choice in sexual partnership at will. She also
idealised, in a way, the revolt to break all 'bonds' of obligations
to those who were responsible to bring them in this world and
sacrificed their comforts to bring them up. Her call is "to rebel
against the traditional expectations of society to adopt the new
standards of master-servant relationship between capital and
labour instead; rejecting the bonds of family and marriage while
adopting the 'bond' of sexual wilderness."26 She presents
models for assertion for self in her novels, An Autum Leaf
and Spring Returns.
Shashi Deshpande also follows the same track basically which her immediate peers have traversed for upholding the standards laid down by mores of industrial life nurtured by the West and transported through education worldwide, including India. To fight for these mores is the standard for assertion for autonomy. Shashi Deshpande, in an interview reveals that “all her characters are concerned with their ‘self’ and they learn to be honest to themselves.” Indu, the protagonist in Roots and Shadows learns to see inward and dismisses all ‘shadows’ and finally declares, “That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing.”(p.205) in a way to assert her self and will. She decides to come out of the shadow of Jayant, her husband whom she had married on her own as a defiance to her parents. Indu had left the home ‘full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially’ - a mother surrogate in the novel. Indu had refused to accept Akka as a role-model and rejected her authority as mother figure in the family, deciding to carve out a life of her own, hoping that by rejecting Akka she will gain independence and freedom to live as she pleases without the bonds of the family and the society which is symbolised by the house. Saru in the novel, The Dark Holds No Terrors hated her mother to such an extent that she declares : “If you are a woman, I don’t want to be one”(p.55) . When she married Manohar as her lover and asserted her autonomy she thought it as a step towards self-realisation for a happy and free life. The rejection of familial ‘enclosures’ by Indu and Saru was an assertion of self to lead their own life in a world where the
feeling of 'my life is my own' gives a heady satisfaction. In her novels, Shashi Deshpande projected mother-figure as embodiment of cruel patriarchy at work in the family and her heroines find rejection as a way to assert their individuality in search of new environment where mother cannot exercise her will.

The parental home, as symbol of tradition and old values has no room for the heroines in the fiction of Shashi Deshpande. Indu and Saru both seek marriage of their choice as an alternative to the 'bondage created by the parental family. Saru resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the status of a wife with the dream of her new role that will give her the freedom she aspires. Discarding the family, in exercise of self-assertion for better perceived avenues and again leaving the spousal home for the parental family in search of roots is another exercise of self assertion. It is a dilemma which both, Saru and Indu face in their immaturity and half-baked understanding of freedom and independence in today's world of frustrations, and clash of unreconcilable individual interests or inflated egos. The conflict within to decide her course is evident when Saru asks her father not to open the door to Manu when he reaches her home while the next moment she pleads her father to tell Manu 'to wait'. "I will be back as soon a I can" : (p.202) Now she is asserting herself to face him on her own individuality and her rights. After passing through this agonising period of re-examination, she is no longer doubtful about her potentials as a human being, taking her profession as
a doctor for her own. She declares: "My life is my own." (p.201)

The one incontrovertible fact of present day social life is that injustice and oppression is inherent in the political-economic system where, for historical reasons, males are in the lead in comparison to females. Women are at the receiving end along with vast numbers of deprived sections. It is certain that no amount of formal institutions of state or legal safety nets are going to provide satisfaction to them against such injustice and oppression, unless the victims themselves assert to stand erect and challenge such forces. To reach the stage of such realisation is a real struggle to experience. The protagonists of Deshpande's three major creations, The Dark Holds No Terrors Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence reach a stage of this realisation after going through an agonising process of experiences. As O.P. Bhatnagar sums, "In the end comes the realisation that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it." This assertion for self, is indicative of a certain attitude to the problems of woman's life.

Evidently, mere concern to the problems of women do not make one exponent of feminism. In history such concern for women is as old as the decadent patriarchy since the days of feudal times and mercantile capital in the pre-industrial phase in human history. It was the natural reaction of humans to injustice and oppression which is alien to human nature itself.
Feminism, on the other hand, is a definite outlook with a philosophical base in the later phase of financial oligarchy, more so during the post second world war period in the social conditions of the West. The writings of Shashi Deshpande, specially her novels provide a rich material where assertion for self is the running theme with a definite message to the readers.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p.19.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.


26. Ibid. 167.
