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CHAPTER- III

WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF

SHASHI DESHPANDE

3.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE’S EARLY NOVELS

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

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

A detailed study of these three novels will throw more light on their nature.
3.2.1 **ROOTS AND SHADOWS**

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

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

Among the myriad women characters is the old tyrannical matriarch Akka. She is rich and childless, and decides to stay in her brother’s house after her husband’s death where she wields absolute control with her venomous tongue. It reduces Indu’s grandfather Kaka into a tongue-tied, submissive character.
Akka, representative of the old order, is so obsessed with untouchability that she refuses to move into a hospital for fear of getting polluted by the touch of nurses belonging to other castes. She is also very particular about how a girl should conduct herself in society.

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

All along Indu has been playing the role of wife to perfection to keep Jayant happy and satisfied. Despite her reluctance, she has to continue the frustrating job of writing for the magazine just to keep Jayant satisfied. She tells Jayant about her disillusionment with a social worker who was given an award who says: “That’s life! What can one person do against the whole system! We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget we have a long way to go.”(19) Thus, she continues to write what suits the magazine and not her own conscience. She compromises against her conscience with the values of a hypocrite society where success is counted sweetest. Had Akka not called her, she wouldn’t have had time enough to think about her identity and selfhood, which she had effaced just to prove that her marriage was a success. Her realization is manifest in her private conversation with Naren her cousin to whom she bares all.
Indu, who had considered herself smart, educated, independent and clever, comes to the painful conclusion that she was no better than her Kakis and Atyas.

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

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

She is painfully aware that she is not different from the women at home. All the time she misses Jayant and wants him to be beside her. She feels miserable and incomplete in Jayant’s absence. Jayant who hates any display of passion on Indu’s part denies her even the most basic sexual need in marriage. Even in the privacy of their bedroom, she is not let to shed her inhibitions. She tells Naren: “Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly and says, ‘no, not now’, when I had taken the initiative.”(91) Being so snubbed by Jayant she feels humiliated and disillusioned. In a choked voice, she tells Naren: “When I’m like that he turns away
from me. I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive. I am still dead."(92) So her lot is not much different from the other household women. Like them she too has becomes "still and dead."

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

In Shashi Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows much critical controversy has been raised about the author’s motives regarding the incestuous relation between Indu and her cousin, Naren. It is Naren to whom she tells every little detail of her married life and he makes her take the most daring step of surrendering herself to him not once but twice in the novel. She indulges in the act with much wild abandon and cherishes it later without any guilt consciousness.
She resolves not to disclose this to Jayant as she thinks it had nothing to do with him. This assertion of her self has sparked off contradictory remarks from the reviewers.¹

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

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

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

Here, the novelist exposes the hypocrisy and double standards prevalent in society. The easily available man like Naren is not considered a suitable match, instead they
pay a handsome dowry for one who has nothing but his family’s social status. Shashi Deshpande does not make any sweeping anti-dowry statements but raises the issue subtly to be pondered over by the readers.

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

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

3.2.2 THE CHARACTER OF INDU IN ROOTS AND SHADOWS

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

The writer has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian society. To the first orthodox group a female could “neither assert, demand nor proclaim,”
and an ideal woman is one who "sheds her 'I', who loses her identity in her husband's." According to this group, a woman has to "adapt herself to her circumstances and environment." Against this age-old set up of woman's life is placed the new one represented by Indu. She views and reviews the concepts of self, sin, faith, love and other values. She has visions and revisions of her ideal of detachment and freedom and tries to achieve them. She tries to see and listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But in all her efforts she fails miserably either due to the impact of the sanskar or fear and timidity or all these together. 3

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

Although she is different from other orthodox women she also wishes that Jayant should be with her forever. Only her reasons for thinking so are different. She had also aspired to assert her 'I'. But after marriage it occurs to her that whatever she was doing, like, looking in the mirror, dressing, undressing, she was doing for Jayant. The paradox is that she is not happy with Jayant, but she cannot live without him. She has achieved completeness with Jayant, but she does not want it.
At one point in the novel when Naren tries to make love with her, she declares: “I’m essentially monogamous. For me, it’s one man and one man alone.” But later she offers herself to him twice. And then the question hangs how she will view this act of adultery. After the act, she goes to her bed, but then deliberately avoids sleeping as that would erase what happened between Naren and her. She thinks it no sin, no crime to make love with another person.

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

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

According to Indu one should listen to the dictates of one’s own conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as action. This fact makes her see herself as a sinner and causes deep suffering.
Another fondly cherished dream, an ideal of Indu, is to attain the state of "detachment." Her mind keeps harping on this theme of detachment and loneliness. However, she wonders whether she would ever reach the stage of "no passions, no emotions, an unruffled placidity." She introspects and finds herself attached and involved in many ways. She expects others to show concern for her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to reconcile a woman’s human demand for freedom with her need for love, nurturance and how to strike a balance between her wifehood, motherhood and career and spiritual fulfillment are some of the issues raised by Shashi Deshpande in Roots and Shadows. Indu refuses to be mother of a child that is ‘not wholly
welcome'— in a marriage that has become non-real. It makes her feel trapped in a negative situation and threatens her positive struggle for independence.

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

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

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

She came to recognize her strength as well as her weakness which she had hidden from Jayant. There was a better understanding between them and an ease in their relationship that was not there before. For happiness sneaked upon her when she least expected it. She had cried despairingly to Jayant about the book she had been writing. "If no publisher accepts it... I will publish it for you," Jayant had said
putting his arms comfortably around her. Could this happiness have been possible if she had failed to achieve her freedom? Indu seems to be bohemian in her attitude, yet she is bound at times by values indoctrinated into her by the traditional orthodox views exposed to her since childhood.

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

Indu’s predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary India where the new has old cultural modes. The break up of the joint family has affected relationship at the husband-wife level. In the old family pattern, as Shashi Deshpande has put it, “the two me: only briefly in the darkness of the night.” So there hardly was any occasion for conflict. But with husband and wife constantly thrown together in the present pattern and with the wife sharing many responsibilities the problems of incompatibility and maladjustment and expectations and despair have arisen. The society continues to be male-dominated and attitudes towards women continue to be the same. Some women, on the other hand, are becoming more and more conscious of the various emancipation movements. Indu had to commit adultery to come to terms with her married life. Indu’s casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she had done is shocking.
Will Indu be considered a sinner, a crazy person? Or will she be acclaimed and praised for her discovery and revolt? Will our society reject and condemn her or encourage and co-operate with her in her efforts to be honest and strive, to seek to find and not to yield? These questions arise after studying Shashi Deshpande's portrayal of Indu. Undoubtedly Indu has been honest to herself and has acted according to the dictates of her conscience. In such a situation she should also be able to face the consequences if any.

3.2.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN ROOTS AND SHADOWS

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

On the one hand, Indu is ashamed of her not being a pure woman, but on the other hand, she hates her womanhood. She stops working for the women's magazine: "Women, women, women... I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the keys."
In fact, she started hating and fighting against the womanhood since the day she was made aware of her being a woman by the elders. The thrusting-upon attitude by the society in general made her more rebellious and aggressive. She looks at each situation from the same angle. She even starts doubting the idea of love.  

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

Akka is worth special mention because she has a great impact on Indu’s life. Only after her death does Indu come to know about Akka’s life from Narmada Atya. Akka was married at twelve to a man well past thirty. Akka was small and dainty. She went to her husband’s house after six months. By the time she was thirteen, she made two abortive attempts to run away. Her mother-in-law whipped her and kept her starved by locking her up in a room for three days. Then she was sent to her husband’s room. She cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, “Lock me up again, lock me up.”(77) But as Akka told Narmada that there was no escape from a husband then. She even tells Narmada before the consummation of her marriage: “Now your punishment begins Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels.”(77)
The other side of Akka's character is manifest in the way she controls her husband after he is struck by total paralysis. She takes excellent care of her paralyzed husband for two years, but avenges herself of all that she had to undergo by not allowing his mistress, whom he adores, to meet him. Thus, Deshpande makes a strong statement on the arranged marriages, which are outright discriminatory towards women. A husband can have a mistress with impunity for his physical and mental needs, whereas a wife cannot take another man — her act is branded as adultery. 18

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

On the one hand Indu is attached to her parental house and on the other hand the house turns out to be a "caged place," "a trap" and the family "a large amorphous group of people with conflicting interests." She is always in a confused state of mind and struggling with the situations to reach a final solution.
Thus Shashi Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge. There was a time when the Indian woman was hailed as a “Pativrata,” “a Sati” and something which has to be protected by man, but now she is a changed person who is aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her individuality, her place and role in the family and society. Indu represents this very woman.

3.3.1 THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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

Saru was ignored by her parents in favour of her brother Dhruva, in her childhood. No parental love is showered on her and she is not given any importance. She recalls
the joyous excitement in the house on the occasion of her brother's naming ceremony. The idea that she was a liability to her parents is deeply implanted in her mind as a child. Her mother's adoration of her son at her daughter's cost was a rallying point for the novelist to bring her feminist ideas together. The preference for boys over girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian homes, and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. Sons bring in dowry could be one reason, but the Indian society, steeped in tradition and superstition, considers birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage.  

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

The turning point in her life is the accidental death of her brother by drowning. All her life she is haunted by the memories of her mother accusing her of intentionally letting Dhruva die by drowning: "You did it, you did this, you killed him" (173). She too on her part has a guilty conscience as she considers herself responsible for having remained a mute spectator to her brother's death by drowning. She never refuses the charge leveled against her by her mother. As G. Dominic Savio observes: "Dhruva's demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is a very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment." Shashi Deshpande thus reveals the social aspect of keen sibling jealousy born of a mother's undue fondness for the son.
Saru's mother's discriminatory behaviour makes Saru feel unloved and unwanted leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. She is in the grips of insecurity. As A. Anandalakshmi opines: “The birth of a son gives a woman status and she invests herself in her son's future, creating a deep symbiotic bond.”

Saru's mother was no exception, and she loses her interest in life after her son's death. She puts the blame on Saru's shoulders. She reproaches her and takes no interest in her education, career and future. Saru's feeling of being unwanted is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence as a girl or woman. On attaining puberty she says scornfully, "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one."

The treatment that is meted out to her during her monthly ordeals is inhuman. She is engulfed with a sense of shame and prays in desperation for a miracle to put an end to it.

Thus, unloved and unwanted, she develops hatred towards the traditional practices during her impressionable years. Her hatred towards her mother is so acute that she becomes rebellious just to hurt her, "I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer." This hatred drives her to leave home for Mumbai to seek medicine as a career. In the medical college she falls in love with a college mate Manu from a lower caste and marries him against her parents' wishes.
Devoid of love and security, she wanted to be loved. When she gets attention from Manu, she wonders, "How could I be anyone's beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without." (66)

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

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

Her dingy one-room apartment with "the corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dark sealed odours" (40), is 'a heaven on earth' for her. But soon all this proves to be a mere mirage for her. Her success as a well-known and reputed doctor
becomes the cause of her strained marital relations with Manu. In a retrospective mood she says: "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband."(42) Manu is uncomfortable with Saru's steady rise in status, as he feels ignored when people greet and pay attention to Saru.

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

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

Certain incidents aggravate the already strained relations between the two to the extent that in the privacy of their room at night he doesn't behave like a husband, but a rapist. In an interview with Saru when the interviewing girl happens to ask Manu innocently: "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but
most of the bread as well?"(200) The three – Saru, Manu and the girl – merely
laughed it off as it were nothing. This particular incident is very humiliating to him
and he feels helpless and effeminate. To gain his masculinity he gives vent to his
feelings through his beastly sexual assault on Saru and feigns ignorance in the
morning of his beastly behaviour. She expresses her desire to leave her medical
practice but Manu dissuades her from doing so, as their standard of living wouldn’t
be possible on Manu’s income.

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

At her father’s house she objectively mulls over the reasons of her disastrous
marriage. She blames herself for it. The novel may be said to be a study in guilt
consciousness, as Saru ruminates, “My brother died because I heedlessly turned my
back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure
because I destroyed his manhood.”(217) What Shashi Deshpande suggests is the
gender discrimination by parents towards their children prevailing in our society,
and the compulsion to perpetuate male dominance if the marriage is to be kept
going.
Through her relations with Boozie a friend and Padmakar her college mate, she achieves no happiness and fulfillment. These extra-marital relations are no solace and compensation for her tense married life. Kamini Dinesh aptly remarks: "There cannot be an 'escape route', from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has finally to fall back on herself."  

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

3.3.2 THE CHARACTER OF SARU IN THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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

Saru is highly self-willed and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over others. She defies traditional codes. In Saru's case, defiance is her second nature. Sarita defies her mother and becomes a doctor. She
defies her caste and marries outside it, and defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career. As a child Saru had seen the predicament of the grandmother separated from the cruel husband and considered “an unwanted burden” by her own people. From then on, economic independence became a goal in life which Saru took to be an insurance against subordination or suppression. Every move in life is towards the realization of that goal.28

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

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

Life becomes more desperate for Saru, after Dhruva’s death. The mother constantly pines for her dead son and rejects even the presence of her daughter. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the adolescent Saru’s mind with feelings of hatred towards her mother. Adesh Pal who uses psychological parameters to analyse her personality observes:
For Saru the very word "mother" stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being...thus the strange childhood experiences flare up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others. 29

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

After her marriage Saru is hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother has said, "let her know more sorrow than she has given me". (197) Saru thinks at one point that she is 'unhappy and destroyed' in her marital life because her mother has cursed her. But gradually her hostile attitude towards her mother changes to a positive one. She even begins to see her mother as a creative essence of the feminine. She makes efforts to understand her and even identifies herself with her mother. Valli Rao finds this as "...a search for her own feminine side and for the reunification of her split self...and finally we see 'rebirthing' her own individual personality separate from her mother's." 30 One agrees with the fact that she finally emerges from her ordeal, a person more whole, more capable of accepting and forgiving herself than she has been at the start.
Saru falls in love with Manu and starts fantasizing about him. When Manu expresses his love for her, she feels flattered. She becomes exultant for having evoked feelings in someone who is emotionally hard to be touched.

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

Saru is happy with Manu, though they live in her dingy one-room apartment. As long as Saru is a student, Manu has been the breadwinner and there was peace. Problems begin to slowly creep in the moment Saru is recognized as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. Initially Saru fails to notice the change in Manu but later realizes that "...the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller, but... made him inches shorter." (42) The warmth between them cools off and the harmony is disrupted. 31
In her new role as a career woman, Saru is no longer happy in their shabby apartment and she prefers to move into something more decent and beautiful. Manu’s earnings now make her feel that it barely covers her needs.

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

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

Saru yearns for security and emotional attachment. She wants her father to support her. She blurts loudly and crudely, “My husband is a sadist.”(199) Her father fails to understand her vocabulary like sadism, love and cruelty. On listening to Saru,
her father simply leaves her and goes away. Many times she wants to tell her father, "Baba, I'm unhappy. Help me, Baba, I'm in trouble. Tell me what to do." At times she regrets for having come to her parents' house, as she is reminded of her children, her practice, and her patients. In all these memories her husband doesn't figure at all. Her visit to her father's house is a kind of escape from the sadist husband and her loveless marriage.

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

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

Saru's character can be truly understood only in the light of psychological precepts. First, she carries within her the sad effects of gender discrimination. Social psychology deals with the stereotypes about the two genders. Saru's type of feminism springs out as a reaction to this discriminatory psychological set up of society at large and her parents in particular. Secondly Saru also has the deep-rooted mentality of an unwanted child. Psychologists have dealt in detail with the
mental makeup of an unwanted child. Thirdly and most tragically, Saru suffers the bruises of a terrible physical trauma on her psyche.\textsuperscript{34}

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

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

Through this narrative, Deshpande questions the assumption that the employment of the wife can serve as the means of her economic independence and self-actualization. At the same time the profession of women does not entail the potential to reduce the gap between men and women. While Saru’s income provides a higher living standard to her family, her contribution remains unnoticed.\textsuperscript{36}
3.3.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE DARK HOLDS NO TERRORS

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

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

Her mother had successfully erased Saru from her household with the exception of a photograph only because Dhruva was in it too. The refusal to see the doctor daughter even while dying of cancer reiterates the idea of total rejection. Saru’s obsessive remembrance of the mother is indicative of both her sense of guilt and her sense of defeat. Death seals off all possibilities of straightening things. Dead or alive, Saru sees the mother sapping her of all happiness and asks herself, “Why should she matter dead when she never mattered alive?” She sees her as “a vengeful ghost” and gives the dead so much power over herself.\(^{39}\)
We should not see *The Dark Holds No Terrors* to be a feminist novel on the lone basis of the female centrality in it. If a woman’s very awareness of her predicament, her wanting to be recognized as a person rather than as a woman, her wanting to have an independent social image be considered outstepping the limits, the novel has definite feminist leanings. Perhaps in the Indian context, it certainly is a feminist novel. Saru’s feminist reactions date back to her childhood when she had to contend with sexist discrimination at home. The framework of the novel provides good acoustics for a woman’s voice and establishes that a woman too has choices in life. Shashi Deshpande does not glorify a woman’s sufferings, but she enlists a sufficient amount of sympathy for her protagonist. Throughout the novel, Shashi Deshpande maintains commendable objectivity and avoids generalizations and partial views. In fact the novel explores questions like “Who is the victim and who is the predator? Are the roles so distinct, so separate? Or are we, each of us, both?”

Shashi Deshpande is certainly aware of the woman’s predicament in a male-dominated society especially when the woman is not economically independent. There is a reference in the novel to a woman who, ill-treated by her in-laws, drowns herself in a well. There is reference to yet another woman victim who is tied to a peg by the in-laws in the cattle-shed and fed. Saru detests the merciless judgement of her mother who casually dismisses the topic saying, “she perhaps deserved it.” The thrust here is not on man’s cruelty to woman but woman’s cruelty to woman. This underlines the fact that the novelist is not holding the normal feminist stance.
In an article, Shashi Deshpande states: “A woman who writes of women’s experiences often brings in some aspects of those experiences that have angered her, roused her strong feelings. I don’t see why this has to be labeled feminist fiction.” *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is certainly a protest novel especially in the Indian context in the sense that it reacts against the traditional concept that “everything in a girl’s life... is shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male.”

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

Saru, a professional woman dislocates the binary of husband as ‘provider and protector; versus wife as ‘recipient and protected.’ Saru’s employment is acceptable only because it supplements her husband’s income. The story of Saru clearly depicts a duality deeply entrenched in the psyche of Indian society which sways societal definitions and expectations of women’s public and private roles. Consequently, women are expected to be both traditional and modern in domestic and public jurisdictions. The pathetic state of an Indian middle-class working woman is revealed.
My mother had no room of her own. She retreated into the kitchen to dress up... And I have so much my mother lacked. But neither she nor I have that thing "a room of one's own." (135-136)

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

3.4.1 THAT LONG SILENCE

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

The novel opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan moving back into the old Dadar flat in Mumbai from their cosy and palatial house. Her husband is involved in a financial malpractice and an inquiry against him is set up. Mohan is consoled to find that the children, Rahul and Rati, are away on a long tour with their family friends, and expects Jaya to go into hiding with him, which she refuses to comply with.
It is here in the small Dadar flat that she becomes an introvert and goes into deep contemplation of her past and her childhood. Had there been no such crisis in their life, she would never have given a thought to her individuality. Adele King opines: “Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.”

For seventeen long years of her marriage she successfully manages to suppress her feelings as she thought it more important to be a good wife than being a good writer. She suppresses her writing career and her association with her one-time neighbour, Kamat. Her career as a successful writer is jeopardized right in the early years of her marriage. A short story of hers bags the first prize and gets published in a magazine. When on the threshold of getting recognition as a creative writer of some merit, Mohan expresses his displeasure at that particular story written by her. The story is about a man who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body. Mohan suspects that the man portrayed in the story is he himself. She thinks, “Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that.”

But the writer in her goads her and she begins to write under a pseudonym, which does not help, and her stories are rejected one after another. Her neighbour Kamat tells her that her stories lack strong emotions as she has suppressed her anger and frustration. But she cannot express her anger and feelings lest it should damage her relation with Mohan. She had learnt to control her anger as Mohan considered this anger in a woman as “unwomanly.”

(83) She tells Kamat: “Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an
angry young woman?"(147) Later she writes light humorous pieces on the travails of a middle-class housewife in a column entitled “Seeta.” She not only gets encouraging response from the readers but also a nod of approval from Mohan.44

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

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

She represents the urban, middle-class woman who is educated and has had exposure to liberal Western ideas. Her upbringing demands the suppression of the self so that the marriage can survive. When the occasion to choose between her family and husband arises, she chooses the former.
Jaya complies with her husband's decision and accompanies him in silence to their present exile. It is here, that the process of self-examination begins for Jaya. She reminiscences her seventeen year old marriage, its frustrations and disappointments and her personal failures. All her fears, guilt, strangulated anger and silence begin to haunt her and consequently through a period of intense introspection she kills Suhasini, the silent, submissive partner of Mohan. Her association with Kamat proves to be fruitful for she realizes that justice has not been done to herself and her talents. She renews her creative activity as a writer and shortly emerges as a new being.

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

### 3.4.2 THE CHARACTER OF JAYA IN *THAT LONG SILENCE*

Jaya, like Indu of *Roots and Shadows* and Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, journeys from ignorance to knowledge through suffering. Going through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realization, she emerges as a confident individual, fully in control of herself, significantly more hopeful and able to accept life like the other two characters. If Indu is a journalist and Saru, a doctor, Jaya is a successful columnist and an aspiring novelist.
Jaya, to begin with, is a conservative, educated, middle-class smiling placid, motherly woman" (15-16) who learns to suppress her own wishes and act according to her husband's. She who cannot dare to protest, "I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts. Only silence." (143) Has finally unlearned her silence, refuses to be led by nose and affirms with confidence, \(46\) "I'm not afraid any more." (191)

Outwardly she is a satisfied housewife married to an apparently caring man, with no dearth of material comfort. But on scrutiny, it is revealed that to achieve this stage of fulfillment as a wife, Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refuses to fit in with her image as a wife and mother, besides a failed writer.\(^7\)

In the early years of her marriage, Jaya has been on the threshold of acquiring name as a creative writer of some merit. It is Mohan her husband who has been encouraging her to write. In fact, he introduces her to editors of various papers and magazines. On Mohan's advice, she begins writing middles. She had made a good beginning with a story about a man "...who could not reach out to his wife except through her body."(144) This story won a prize for its realistic portrayal of life. Yet Mohan assumes that the story portrays their own personal life. He is very apprehensive that people of his acquaintance may assume that he is a kind of person portrayed in the story. But Jaya knows that there is no truth in his accusation, still
she does not try to reason with Mohan, as she does not like to risk her relation with him.\textsuperscript{48}

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

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

Marriage to Jaya portrays the image of the pair of bullocks yoked together and suggests that yoked bullocks should share the burden between themselves, but no one knows whether they love each other or not. The image of the beasts performing their assigned duties mechanically undermines the relationship of husband and wife who are united in marriage for love, but not for leading a mechanical life which results in ending up in mutual hatred and distrust.\textsuperscript{50}
Jaya in order to maintain her marriage as a happy one slowly transforms herself to this ideal of womanhood where she learns to repress her anger. Jaya always works up to please her husband. Jaya even transforms her appearance to suit his idea of a modern woman—cuts her hair and wears dark glasses. She ultimately gets so completely absorbed into the family-fold that from a fiercely independent woman, she is transformed into the stereotype of a woman. Jaya desperately clings to her husband as if her life depends on him. At times she is beset with the fear that something may happen to Mohan and Jaya feels:

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

Jaya's story, in the larger context, is the story of generations of women. Jaya is in search of an individual identity.\(^{51}\)

Jaya thinks that real emotional involvement is unlikely between a man and a woman. Her blunt confession is "Love? No, I know nothing of it." (153) Jaya is romantic to begin with, but later she is so disenchanted that she gives up her efforts to please Mohan and look attractive for him and describes it as "a man and a woman married for seventeen years without mutual love or understanding".
This lovelessness in her marriage draws Jaya towards Kamat, a middle-aged lonely intellectual who is not rich or socially significant as Mohan, but warm, friendly and companionable. He treats Jaya as an equal and Jaya is completely at ease in his company, sharing with him things which she cannot tell others including Mohan. Her physical intimacy with Kamat is characterized by a spontaneity and ease, but more important in their relationship is perfect mutual understanding and friendship between them. That is why his sudden death is a great blow to her.\textsuperscript{52}

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

Jaya knows about Mohan's involvement in a case of bribery and the fears of prosecution, loss of job and societal disgrace on Mohan's part. She does not want to laugh but she does laugh at Mohan and finally lands herself in a more hopeless situation. "Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in
horror as I rocked helplessly. When finally, I recovered myself I was alone in the room.”(122)

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

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

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

Jaya also observes that meaningful co-existence can come only through understanding, respect and compassion, not through domination or subjugation. Jaya makes a powerful statement on the totally unfair system prevailing in our society of the subjugation of women. As she realizes, it is fear on the part of woman that has allowed the subjugation to continue. Women need not succumb and assume the roles cast upon them. She says, “...in this life itself there are so many cross
roads, so many choices."(192) Women have allowed victimization instead of bargaining for partnership.

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

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

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

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

3.4.3 THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THAT LONG SILENCE

Generally, a woman's identity is defined by others, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e., as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, and so on. Her name keeps on changing according to the wishes of others. In That Long Silence, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means a "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman." Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. The former symbolizes victory and the latter submission.
Jaya tries to adapt herself to the main current. She longs to be called an ideal wife. She revolts in silence. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and he calls it “strength”: “He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender.”

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

In her childhood, she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility. But after her marriage, she changes automatically. As a child she used to get angry very soon. After her marriage she controlled her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’.
When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always
good to Mohan and she, at all times, tries her best to follow his advice. It also throws
light on her being closer to her father than to her mother. At times she complains
against her mother to her father.

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

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

To make the story authentic and appealing, Deshpande has used the device of first-
person narrative to ensure its credibility by making the protagonist read her inner
mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman.
Jaya is basically a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband,
Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs. The difference between their outlook is
so great that they fail, time and again, to understand each other. To Mohan, a
woman sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot
food is the real “strength” of a woman, but Jaya interprets it as nothing more than despair. The difference in their attitude is the main cause of their failure to understand each other.62

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

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

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

It is not only Jaya’s silence that Deshpande is highlighting but the silence of each and every character in the novel from different strata of society. The novel is not
only about Jaya's efforts to obliterate the silence that is suffocating her. It is also about the despair and resignation of women like Mohan's mother; Jaya's servant; Jaya's mentally disturbed cousin Kusum. It also deals with Mohan's silence which is the silence of a man who speaks but can find no one to listen to him.

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

3.5 HER EARLY NOVELS: COMMENT

Shashi Deshpande portrays modern educated and career-oriented, middle-class women who are sensitive to the changing times and situations. She depicts women in the roles of wife, mother, daughter and as an individual in her own right.
In her first novel, *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande suggests that the modern Indian woman represented by Indu should learn to conquer their fears and assert themselves. The novel ends on a note of compromise which is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude. With the conviction of rationale and accountability, Indu holds steadfast to her decisions in a tradition-bound household which is proof enough of her individuality.

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

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

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are strong women who refuse to sacrifice their individuality in order to uphold traditional role models laid down by society. They
display a tangible development and attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal. These protagonists evolve their own role models.
Chapter III


4. Ibid., p. 128.

5. Ibid., p. 129.

6. Ibid., p. 128.

7. Ibid., p. 130.


9. Ibid., pp. 136-142.


12. Ibid., pp. 95-120.

15. S.P. Swain, p. 45.
16. Ibid., p. 65.
17. Ibid., p. 65.
24. Y.S. Sunita Reddy, p. 56.


32. Ibid., p. 130.


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