CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

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6.1.1 SHASHI DESHPANDE’S WOMEN CHARACTERS

Shashi Deshpande’s achievement lies in the depiction of her central character, the introspective and inward probing woman. She is representative of girls brought up in middle-class families in post-Independent India, a time when most parents strove hard to provide their children with English education and exposure to Western modes of living and thinking. Parents inculcated in their girls a certain duality, sometimes quite unconsciously: On the one hand an impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated, and on the other, an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. The woman of today, therefore, speaking in the language of psychology, has a near-schizophrenic personality: one side staidly “accepts” while the other craves to “speak”, to think and express the life of the mind. Her novel That Long Silence presents Jaya caught in this dilemma: firstly, trying to be a fit wife to her husband and secondly, struggling to express the kind of emotions women experience, but seldom expressed in a male-dominated chauvinistic society.

Shashi Deshpande’s heroines question and disparage social institutions of love and marriage. It is an indication that the “passive feminine” has ceased to exist. Instead we have the highly intelligent woman who questions incessantly, confronts her problem inwardly, and analyses it objectively. The result of that love and marriage
becomes meaningless and loses status as prop of life. Sex alone seems to sustain the man-woman relationship as observed earlier. This is quite a shocking idea but it is traced throughout Deshpande’s novels. This shift from the “pativrata” image to that of the sexually-emancipated woman certainly marks the emergence of a new class of Indian women who are coming out of their conservative shells and are ready to accept the sexual and psychological realities of human life. It is really a sign of radical change occurring in the Indian sexual landscape.

The sexual impasse which has rocked the lives of the Deshpande heroines, along with their acute, unusual and unconventional sensitiveness, has compelled them to perceive and define matters of sex such as ‘love’ and ‘marriage’ from quite a different angle. Deshpande herself calls her creations “thinking characters,” whose new definitions of categories like love, marriage, sex are the feedback from the author’s reading of the Western feminists. These definitions of love, marriage and sex give a typical female point of view to marital difficulties.

In three of her novels, there is an identical strand of thought. It is the realization of love as duly a physical instinct. It can be stated that Saru of The Dark Holds No Terrors, Indu of Roots and Shadows and Jaya of That Long Silence pursue the “shadows” of romance and love but ultimately arrive at the “roots” which is sex.
6.1.2 SOME CHARACTER-TRAITS OF HER WOMEN CHARACTERS

The heroines of Deshpande resort to freedom not only intellectually but sexually too. For, their sexual starvation forces them to seek recourse to extra-marital sex. Here, Freud's terminology of the sexual instinct as "motor force of life" could help to understand the situation better. Since their sexual hunger is repressed, the Deshpande women strive for expression through sexual relationship of affairs with men other than their husbands. Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* has affairs with Boozie (her boss) and Padmakar Rao (her college mate) which seem to be temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life. Indu of *Roots and Shadows* represents the "new woman" who is on her way to an 'erotic sexual utopia', where she can realize herself sexually without public opprobrium or private guilt. She is sexually satisfied with her affair with her cousin Naren, and does not feel the guilt of it. At times only she, like Saru, feels guilty of it. She is disillusioned with sex also. Saru sees sex as a disease. Sex, or in other words, the relation of man to woman is seen as unnatural and breeding "only treachery, only deceit, only betrayal."

The solution given by Deshpande to this sexual predicament is ambiguous and argumentative. Deshpande leaves the solution to the individual. The novelist's credo is "take refuge in the self." In other words, Deshpande means that the heroines will, in future, assert themselves; they will no longer allow their "she" to get deceased. By this assertion of the self, Deshpande certainly takes her heroines to the pole of
feminism, though she may not have aimed at propounding any such "ism." And these women have certainly begun their protest as indicated by their sexual emancipation. The questions in debate are these: is this sexual prolificacy an indication of a fast spreading "new morality?" Or is it a sign of the approaching sexual promiscuity? It is true that while men have enjoyed sexual freedom from the time immemorial, women have been hedged around by unbreakable taboos. But since the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande have broken them, how far will they be accepted? The question is open to debate. Yet, the juxtaposition of two contrary opinions regarding this issue will suffice.

It is this working of an individual dialectic of sexual dilemma in her novels that makes Shashi Deshpande a feminist. Besides, the sexual taboos-of sex as a "male feeling"; as "the sting of scorpion to be borne by women"- have occupied the Indian literary realm for a long time. Very rarely has any writer portrayed the theme of a woman desiring for sex or suffering because of sex. Now it is time for change. Deshpande has certainly transcended those cultural times when sex was conspicuous by its non-mention. By giving sexual freedom to her heroines and by her reversal of the traditional triad ("love," "marriage," "sex"), Deshpande has transferred the Indian novel into its most controversial phase. Deshpande's women have certainly gone beyond the struggle of a woman who pulsates with conflicting desires, both instinctive and physical. Yet, they do not represent the typical Lawrentian woman who holds the sexual autonomy in her hands. And uncertainty lingers over the question of whether these Indian heroines will find a place of acceptance in a well-
defined area of living. The solution to this sexual predicament too remains at crossroads and depends only on the individual’s way of solving her own problems.

Another common factor to observe in the novels is that the woman presented is not complete in herself unless there is someone to shelter her, whether it be her father, brother or husband. “This is my real sorrow, that I can never be complete in myself,” says Indu in *Roots and Shadows*. A continuous inner conflict goes on her (woman’s) mind whether to rebel against the social set up or to submit to the tradition, whether to listen to her intellect or to her emotions, for intellectually, she is free, independent. She has the knowledge of the world but emotionally, she is so dependent upon the traditions that she ultimately follows the latter one. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu finds out the cause of her sorrow, accepting the fact that she can never be complete in herself without Jayant, her husband. It shows the questioning and restless mind of the character whose desires are not being fulfilled anywhere.

The fact of women being complete in themselves and thus being introduced to others with their husband’s established relationships, is clear when Indu is introduced to her different aunts who are called Kakies, Mamies, and so on. Indu, being critical, observes: “These women...they are called Kaku, Kaki, Atya.... As if they have to be recognized by a relationship because they have no independent identity of their own at all.” (78)

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya too is not sure of her own identity. Her name changes from Jaya to Suhasini when she gets married and becomes her husband’s property. She becomes a very submissive woman and longs to be called an ideal wife because
she does not see any other way out to live. The only weapon she has with her is “silence and surrender.” To know her own identity and what she really is, she starts comparing herself with others, and satisfies herself by saying that she is at least not the insane Kusum. She is better than her: “Suddenly it occurs to me – as long as Kusum was there, I had known clearly who I was; it had been Kusum who had shown me out to be who I was. I was not Kusum. Now, with Kusum dead....?” (24)

Similarly, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru, who is not on natural terms with her husband and somehow is dissatisfied with the whole relationship, finds it very difficult to express herself in front of her father regarding their conflicts: “And each time it happens and I don’t speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us.” (88)

Whether women be educated, professional or housewives, they are always suppressed with the weight of imposed traditions. Smita, another girl in the novel, is always in search of shelter. She never does the work she wants to, but is always ready to do what her husband asks her to do. Her name, after marriage, is changed twice and she accepts it willingly. Her friend asks: “This drastic change of identity, changing both the names that identified you for so many years...how then do you know yourself, and who you are?”

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice. The protagonists – Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* – continually search to define themselves and ask themselves if there is any “self” to be found. Indu wonders whether in trying to
please her husband, she has "become fluid, with no shape, no form of her own."
Jaya sees herself in two pictures: Jaya, who is searching for individual identity
although she does not know what she really wants; and Suhasini, who is soft,
smiling, placid, mother, still she knows that "The real picture, the real 'you' never
emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten
different mirrors show you ten different faces."

Deshpande's women characters show traits of a woman in a period of transition.
They belong to the post-1960 period and are economically better, but they do not
know how to express themselves in this new socio-economic set-up. Their ways of
behaviour express this dilemma.

6.1.3 MOTHER AND DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

An important aspect in Deshpande's novels is the lack of cordial relations between a
mother and a daughter: In The Dark Holds No Terrors, the mother-daughter
relationship occupies the centre stage. Saru's mother's cold and indifferent attitude
towards her develops a sense of antagonism in Saru towards her mother. She
develops aversion to all the traditional values represented by her mother. Saru's
experiences in her crucial years of puberty make her hate womanhood itself.

In That Long Silence, Jaya also does not have any cordial relationship with her
mother, and in turn her mother also does not have any strong maternal feelings
towards her daughter. It is her mother's disapproval that makes her marry Mohan.
Like Saru, she tries to be as dissimilar from her mother as possible, rejecting her as a role model.

In *The Binding Vine*, we find Urmī’s relation with her mother as direct and frontal. Her hostility towards her mother is evident from her angry tone and language she uses when speaking with her or about her to others. She hates her for having sent her to Ranidurg as a child to be brought up by her grandparents.

In *Small Remedies*, we find that Savitribai Indorekar’s relationship with her daughter Munni is not warm. Munni feels unwanted, unloved and rejected by her mother and she develops a feeling of aversion towards her. Munni even goes to the extent of taking a new name, Shailaja Joshi. Shashi Deshpande’s novels say that, “There is no mother who could serve as a model for the daughter.”

Mothers in Shashi Deshpande’s novels do not realize the fact that the traditional middle-class idea that a woman’s only career should be her family is now rejected by the up-coming girls who are very much influenced by factors such as the spread of scientific ideas, the growing impact of other cultures on the individuals, and the availability of a vast body of literature. Though most of the educated working women still give preference to marriage and their family life, the wish to be economically independent, to have an individual identity in society is more pronounced among the majority of women than was found earlier.
This becomes the reason why the girls insist on continuing their studies even when they don’t get any support from their family. Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, hates her mother as she puts all sorts of restrictions on her freedom. The mother equally hates the daughter, “What daughter? I have no daughter” (100) is the kind of attitude she has. She falls ill, but hates to go to the doctor for the simple reason that her daughter belongs to the same category. Saru hates her mother even when she is dead: “I hate her, sapping me of happiness, of everything. She’s always done it to me...taken happiness away from me. She does it even now when she’s dead.” (100) Even at the time of taking admission into a medical college, Saru does not seek her mother’s advice but asks her father only giving more respect to him. Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, is typical of many women in dealings with her father. Similarly, Indu, in *Roots and Shadows*, whose mother died in giving birth to her, sees her father almost as a God. It is notable that mother-daughter relationship is shown as difficult and uncordial in Shashi Deshpande’s novels.

6.2 HER USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Shashi Deshpande writes in English and gives voice to women’s issues. She defends her means of expression by arguing:

To those of us who write in English, it is neither a foreign language, nor the language of the colonizer, but the language of creativity. Whether the writing is rootless, alienated or elitist should be judged from the writing, not from the language. My writing comes out of myself, the society I live in. It is shaped, as I am, by my family, my
ancestry, the place I was born in, the place I live in, the culture I am steeped in, the fact that the writing is in English changes none of these things. 

The kind of English language she uses is simple. She does not indulge in showy, bombastic or rhetorical English. It is so simple and straight that it never hinders the reader in any way. Deshpande’s concern has been the expression of the Indian middle-class ethos. And her simple, unassuming English reflects it. The English language she uses is of the kind used by an average, middle-class, convent-educated individual. She writes about the middle-class people and the language used is also middle-class English, sometimes a little incorrect by the British standards.

Deshpande admits that writing in English is a drawback in this country as it alienates the writer from the mainstream. But at the same time, she considers English as one of the Indian languages. She says:

I believe that English writing in this country is a part of our literatures; I consider English as one more of our bhashas as Ganesh calls them. I know that our writing comes out of an involvement with this society, out of our experiences here, our readership is now here, and happily our publishers are here as well. Yet, I am disturbed by the recent trend in English writing which in its pursuits of role models outside, is alienating itself from its roots.
Being an English writer she may have a limited readers’ circle compared with the Hindi writers, but this does not make her a non-Indian. She is also against being labelled as Indian-English Writer. She protests:

I am an Indian writer. My language just happens to be English, which cannot be called a foreign language at all because it is so much used in India.7

She is also against using the Indian version of English to provide an Indian flavor to her novels:

I do not use Indianisms to make my writing like Indian. I never try to make India look exotic. I do not think of a western audience at all. I belong to Indian literature. I would not like ever to be called an Indo-Anglian writer. I feel strongly about that.8

She says about her use of English:

My English is as we use it. I don’t make it easier for anyone really. If I make any changes, it’s because the novel needs it, not because the reader needs it.9

She is fully aware of the problems Indian writers in English face and is of the opinion that they should evolve a language of their own which will remain distinctively Indian, and yet will be English. She has always aimed at the Indian
readers and not the Western ones. Her creative use of the language has been greatly lauded in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

Deshpande eschews linguistic pyrotechnics and formal experimentation, but has sufficient command of her tradition to give the lie to the belief that the English language is incapable of expressing any Indian world other than a cosmopolitan one.¹⁰

Thus, she is ever vigilant to the issues associated with the contemporary society such as the language issue, and has evolved a literary skill that enables her to present them realistically and convincingly.

### 6.3 ON COMMITTED WRITING

Shashi Deshpande hates to write propaganda literature. She does not intend to moralize or set forth her own brand of feminism; she is genuinely concerned about people. In yet another interview, she says:

I hate to write propagandist literature. I think good literature and propaganda don’t go together. Any literature written with some viewpoint of proving something rarely turns out to be good literature. Literature comes very spontaneously. When I write I am concerned with people.¹¹

But she finds that a lot of men are unsympathetic to her writing while a lot of women are sympathetic. According to her, the reason behind this is “women see a
mirror image and men see, perhaps, a deformed image of themselves.\textsuperscript{12} This fact seems to be portrayed in her novels. It also explains her sympathetic portrayal of women.

Earlier Deshpande was scornful of the so-called committed writing in literature. But, with the passage of time, she realized that all good writing is socially committed writing. She admits:

There was a time when I was scornful of what is called committed writing. I considered such writing flawed because it being message-oriented diminishes its artistic worth. But now I know that all good writing is socially committed writing, it comes out of a concern for the human predicament. I believe, as Camus says, that the greatness of an artist is measured by the balance the writer maintains between the values of creation and the values of humanity.\textsuperscript{13}

Deshpande's commitment to women's cause is evident in her novels.

\textbf{6.4.1 HER TECHNIQUE AS A NOVELIST}

Deshpande avoids the simple technique of straightforward narration and employs the flashback method instead, to draw her readers' attention. The narrative technique has earned criticism from some critics who feel that this leads to confusion in the mind of readers. In novels where the writer is to present a gallery of characters along with their relationships and interactions, it becomes necessary for
him to present things in their chronological order and not indulge in too much experimentation. According to Shama Futehally the narrative technique is a device which is useful either when some element of suspense is needed, or for a novel with a non-narrative structure. In Shashi Deshpande's novels the reader has to cope with an abundance of characters simultaneously and without introduction. At times it is confusing. Hence a chronological clarity is important.

Her heroines are educated young women with liberated and progressive ideas, therefore even ordinary incidents acquire a new meaning. The first person narration helps the writer to probe deep into the mind of the protagonist, her hopes, fears, aspirations, frustrations and so on, and thereby highlight the gross gender discrimination prevalent in society. Some reviewers like C.W. Watson, compare Deshpande to the master storyteller Chekhov.

Shashi Deshpande has used a combination of the first person and the third person narrative coupled with flashback devices to lend authenticity and credibility to her novels. Deshpande's development as a novelist necessitates a chronological study of the narrative techniques employed by her in her novels.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande shifts the narrative from the first person to the third person narrative in every alternate chapter. This double narrative method helps to lend great authenticity to the portrayal of the main woman
character Sarita’s inner self. Deshpande has commendably accomplished the task of giving a realistic portrayal of the mental trauma Sarita undergoes.

While using efficient narrative technique, Deshpande has succeeded in the portrayal of Sarita’s mental state with remarkable objectivity. Besides, her art lies in her amalgamating the past with the present seamlessly through dreams, nightmares, flashbacks, reminiscences and the simple third person narration.

Y.S. Sunita Reddy has observed about Shashi Deshpande’s novel *That Long Silence*:

The narrative with its slow unknotting of memories and unraveling of the soul reads like an interior monologue quite similar to the stream of consciousness technique employed by the like of Virginia Woolf.15

A different view is expressed by another critic, Prema Nandkumar, who maintains that the novel is “not a forbidding stream of consciousness probe in the Virginia Woolf tradition. It is very much a conventional tale full of social realism evoked by links of memory. Not misty recollection but clear-eyed story telling.”16 For the protagonist an objective analysis of what went wrong with her marriage and the reasons for failing as a writer, is a kind of catharsis. The technique is described by the narrator Jaya herself who in the novel says: “All this I’ve written – it’s like one of those multicoloured patchwork quilts the Kakis made for any new baby in the family. So many bits and pieces – crazy conglomeration of sizes, shapes and colours put together.” (188)
In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande adopts a different mode of narration. In *Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*, Deshpande uses a narrative structure that does not progress chronologically. But instead moves back and forth thematically, gradually narrating one incident after another till the whole story is revealed. But in *The Binding Vine* Deshpande interweaves three women of different age, status and education. Urmi narrates the entire story in the first person. To offer a realistic and objective representation of Urmi's mother-in-law Mira's marital experiences, Deshpande has made use of the poetry and writings in her diary and notebooks. She has commendably and brilliantly reconstructed Mira's unspoken humiliation and anguish at being subjected to marital rape through the character of Urmi.

*Small Remedies* has been structured as a biography within a biography. Deshpande delves deep into the traumatic lives of Savitribai Indorekar, Leela, Munni and Madhu by moving her narrative back and forth between the present and the past. The novel works at different levels — 1) the personal, 2) the worldly, 3) women's rights, 4) communal violence, and 5) motherhood. Through the mouthpiece of Urmi, Deshpande has given voice to her own dilemma as a writer — if a biography is an exercise in truth telling, and if it is, whose version must it be? Urmi has been commissioned by a publisher to write Savitribai Indorekar's biography and she is unable to decide whether she should mention only what Savitribai tells about herself to Urmi or everything that Urmi knew about her, including her most guarded secrets.
Madhu Singh is all praise for Deshpande’s skill in interweaving myriad themes into a one close-knit narrative. Comparing *Roots and Shadows* with *That Long Silence*, she points out that the former “is the more powerful of the two. In its succinctness lie its strength and the punch.” Thus she uses different narrative techniques in her novels to communicate different themes.

### 6.4.2 MYTHS

Myths are a very important tool of narration for writers. Deshpande, in *That Long Silence* suggests how innocuous seeming bedtime tales told to children made subtle but indelible impression upon their psyche. Jaya, the protagonist, recollects the fable of the foolish crow and the wise sparrow, which she had often heard as a child. But she does not tell this fable to her children for fear that it would distort their personalities into becoming like the priggish sparrow that was not at all concerned with what went around the world but her children and family.

In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande uses the myths of Sita to articulate Jaya’s predicament. She follows her Vanita *mami*’s counsel that a husband is like a sheltering tree that should be kept alive even if one has to water it with deceit and lies.

In *The Binding Vine*, a mythological parlance can be seen in the stories of Urmila, Mira and Shakuntala and the tales of the mythological characters of their names. The mythological Urmila, Lakshamana’s wife, is left in a broken and aggrieved state
when Lakshamana leaves for the forest with Lord Rama. In this novel Urmila is greatly aggrieved by the loss of her child. In this novel, Urmila’s mother-in-law Mira, like the mythological Mira, remains detached to her husband and both desire relations based on love and not sexual pleasure. Her husband, like her mythological counterpart who had been wronged and deserted by King Dushyanta, deserts Shakuntala or Shakutai in this novel.

Although mythological allusions have been used by Shashi Deshpande, she does not consider it to be any conscious or deliberate literary device. In an interview to Lakshmi Holmstorm, she tells:

> I think a number of us do that in India all the time; we relate a great deal to our personal lives, our daily lives, to the myths. We find parallels as a matter of course. And we do this with all the myths, any myth that seems appropriate, whether they were originally about men or women. In that sense it is a part of a language, a grammar that one knows and understands, rather than a conscious literary device.¹⁸

Like other literary men and women who have used myth as an important device to enhance the literary effect of their works, so has Shashi Deshpande made use of myth rather unconsciously.
6.4.3 USE OF IRONY AND SATIRE

Although rarely, Shashi Deshpande makes use of irony and satire in her novels. The presence of these literary ingredients in her novels may not be a deliberate use by Deshpande but there are incidents with these elements. The most striking example is in *That Long Silence*, an event in which Jaya’s husband Mohan accuses her of avoiding him in his most adverse situation. Jaya herself was undergoing great mental trauma, and such an allegation throws her off-balance. She tries to control herself:

I must not laugh, I must not laugh [...] even in the midst of my rising hysteria, a warning bell sounded long and clear, I had to control myself, I had to cork in this laughter. But it was too late. I could not hold it any longer. Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly. (122)

It can be seen as an example of her use of wry irony.

Later she breaks her silence by recording her story, and thus regains her sanity by relieving herself of her pent-up frustrations. Another attempt at irony is Deshpande’s creation of the character, Priti, in *The Binding Vine*. When Urmila tells Priti that she was going to publish Mira’s story, she was extremely thrilled as the story was going to prove a sensational one. She even plans to adapt the story into a film. Even in Kalpana’s rape, her concern is mere hypocrisy as she is concerned
with the great publicity the tragedy will generate. But Deshpande can do without these literary ingredients, as her style is very straightforward for irony and satire.

6.5 ACHIEVEMENT AS A NOVELIST

Shashi Deshpande is from a middle class, Marathi-Kannadiga background, and her schooling in English worked as a major influence in shaping her writing and the use of English language.

With Shashi Deshpande, we move into a much more middle-class ethos and the forms of male repression within the family take on an uglier, more obvious form. In novel after novel, marriage is shown to be an institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male domination. For example the narrator Jaya of That Long Silence goes through a period of intense introspection, placing her marriage and herself under the scrutiny of a merciless examination. Her narrative moves deliberately to encompass a horde of other women, all victims of an endemic imbalance between male power and female powerlessness within marriage. Shashi Deshpande's exploration of female subjugation in patriarchal family structures takes on a larger dimension. "She creates, in fact, a mosaic of marriage; women come and go, aunts, cousins, mothers, mother-in-law, friends, acquaintances, each providing a different slant on marriage, a dozen sub-texts to the main text of a protagonist whose marriage is collapsing."
The primary focus of attention in Shashi Deshpande's stories is woman – her travails and privations, tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes. Her stories suggest that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common person in the case of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, she finds herself enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes and love.

A central concern of Deshpande's novels is the stultifying effect of women psychologically and physically entrapped in culturally determined ideas of marriage and wifehood. Her female protagonists – Saru, Indu, Jaya, Urmi, Sumi and Madhu – all try desperately to mould themselves to fit that image before learning to question the image itself. This growth within the protagonist becomes the author's strategy of exposing the stereotypes before questioning and re-defining them. This is a major instrument offered by the reminiscential narrative mode and helps to off-set some of the disadvantages of the first person narrative method. Distancing is absent from Shashi Deshpande's handling of the protagonist Jaya in That Long Silence.

While accepting the Sahitya Akademi Award about a decade ago, Shashi Deshpande had expressed her impatience with reviewers who routinely used words like "sensitivity" and "sensibility" if the writer happened to be a woman. She said that she herself thought of her work in terms of strength. Unfortunately, the stereotype of a frail and intense novelist writing mainly about women's victimhood has dogged her far too long. The reason for this unfair labelling is not far to seek. Shashi Deshpande's early novels were published just at the time when the post-Midnight's
Children generation of writers was becoming big news. Since she refused to play by
global rules, she could not be included in this league. The only other exportable slot
the media could think of was the Champion of Oppressed Women. But anyone who
has read her novels carefully knows that her special value lies elsewhere - in an
uncompromising toughness, in her attempts to do what has never been attempted in
English, her insistence on being read on her own terms and a refusal to be packaged
according to the demands of the market. "To achieve something ... you have got to
be hard and ruthless... There is no other way of being a saint. Or a painter. A
writer." This unexpected first paragraph of That Long Silence (1988) is the voice of
the narrator, but it also gives us a clue to the author's approach to writing. Small
Remedies, Deshpande's sixth and recent novel, is the most confident assertion of this
strength and a deliberate denial of sentimentality.

Deshpande's writing is spontaneous. On Vanamala Vishwanatha's observation that
her writing is not obviously Indian, Deshpande says:

No, I don't believe in making it obviously Indian. But all this is
basically because I'm isolated - I'm not part of any movement and not
conscious of readers to impress. To get wider recognition here and
abroad, you have to be in the university and places like that with the
right contact. I'm an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home.

None of these things are within my reach. This has, I believe, done me
good, it has given me great freedom. I'm happy with this anonymity.

Once you get publicity-conscious, your writing becomes affected. I'm
truly happy with this freedom.
In a recent issue the editor of the magazine *Indian Review of Books* wrote the following about Shashi Deshpande: "She has been quietly writing for the last thirty years, without fanfare, without ceremony about the human predicament, playing out the lives of ordinary people who we might encounter on the streets, bringing into sharp focus the meaning of life itself." Ritu Menon, a critic, explains this lack of critical or popular attention that is accorded to Deshpande as being "partly explained by her location - distant from the media capitals of Mumbai and Delhi - and her own modest, almost reclusive, lifestyle. Much more likely an explanation is the fact that she is almost completely 'home grown,' ... " Now she is a writer in her own right.

Shashi Deshpande is characteristically forthright. As R. Mala comments, "Deshpande has certainly transcended those cultural times when sex was conspicuous by its non-mention." The dilemma of women awakening to their physical needs yet conditioned to regard these as immoral is brought out sensitively through Jaya. *That Long Silence* deals with this aspect of women’s existence at some length.

Shashi Deshpande handles the issue fleetingly, but with her characteristic authenticity. Shashi Deshpande’s protagonist grows towards an honest acknowledgement of responsibility for her own depressed state.

Some critical comments have been made on Shashi Deshpande’s novels such as: 1) The novels are difficult to read as several characters appear and disappear and
seem to serve no ostensible purpose. 2) Deshpande's style needs a lot more exercising and experimentation 3) The plot, too, would be better if some of the fringe characters were left out 4) In Deshpande's first novel *Roots and Shadows*, even a family tree on the introductory page does not really make for the concept of the novel.

The presence of many characters in the novels makes difficulty for reading the novels. It can be stated that since her novels are realistic and based on real life situations, the presence of several characters was necessary. Over the years her style has matured as she became more adapt in her writing skills. The fringe characters presence was felt necessary by Shashi Deshpande in her novels because that in her opinion makes the novels realistic. Deshpande's convincing portrait of the protagonist with their veneer of middle-class respectability is commendable.

6.6 CONCLUSION

A close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals her deep insight into the plight of Indian women, who feel smothered and fettered, in a tradition-bound, male-dominated society. She delineates her women characters in the light of their hopes, fears, aspirations and frustrations. These women are aware of their strengths and limitations, but find themselves thwarted by the opposition and pressure from a society conditioned overwhelmingly by the patriarchal mind-set. She highlights their inferior position and the subsequent degradation in a male-dominated society.
Shashi Deshpande's protagonists' quest for identity gets largely accentuated due to their frustrating experiences born of the prohibitive nature of the Indian patriarchal society. In her novels, the host of male characters – husbands, lovers, fathers and other relations – display different aspects of patriarchy and oppression. The older men, particularly the fathers, are broad-minded. The male friends are "feminist" in their approach and sympathize with the protagonists' lot. Deshpande's male characters only serve to enable the protagonists to define their identities more fully.

Shashi Deshpande keeps her narratives female-centred and gives an intimate insight into the psyche of the middle-class Indian women who feel oppressed and hemmed in by their patriarchal socialization. She provides new ideals for a better man-woman relationship, thereby broadening the scope of woman's existence. She not only presents a feminist insight into patriarchal values, but also prescribes a balance between tradition and modernity as a working philosophy for the contemporary woman in her novels.

Deshpande's women protagonists are victims of the prevalent gross gender discrimination, first as daughters and later as wives. They are conscious of the great social inequality and injustice towards them, and struggle against the oppressive and unequal nature of the social norms and rules that limit their capability and existence as a wife. Fettered to their roles in the family, they question the subordinate status ordained to them by society. Deshpande has made realistic
representation of the Indian middle-class women and her sincere concern for
women and their oppressive lot is reflected strongly in all her novels.

The women protagonists in Shashi Deshpande's novels go through a thought process
after which they see themselves differently. There is a change in their mental
attitude, which is spelt out in a change in action. We feel that the revolution comes
not out of escaping the situation, but facing the situation with a different idea of
"what I am"...this is the biggest revolution. I know what I am now, I am going to
live my life knowing what I am. There is no better revolution than that. This is what
her women characters state.

By liberation, Shashi Deshpande means being humanitarian, being aware of
responsibilities and duties refusing to give in to oppression and cruelty.

Her protagonists, in moments of crisis look to the past; they are shown going to their
parental home. Reasons of disorder in the family life are given in her novels in
various ways. The novels can be seen as different expressions of the problems in real
life situations. To that extent, the novels can also be seen as realistic.

The concept of sisterhood is more prominently seen in two recent novels — The
Binding Vine and A Matter of Time. Whether it can be seen as a solution to end male
domination in the society is an important question. Sisterhood cannot be seen as a
solution. In India the male and female worlds were separated until recently. What
the women were doing the men did not generally know. Cooking and bringing up children and childbirth were part of the woman’s world and it was the women in joint families who supported one another in times of trouble and illness. There was some cruelty too between women but more than that was the support which showed a bond of sisterhood. However sisterhood has never solved the problems of women, but has only been a comforting balm. Companionship between men and women is the only solution to the problem of women, sisterhood is only comfort.

Shashi Deshpande’s emphasis on sisterhood is coupled with the idea that the institution of marriage needs to be seen in a different light in the modern context. Her novels suggest ways of adjustment by the heroines to the issue of marital problems and their different expressions.

Shashi Deshpande occupies a place of pre-eminence among the contemporary women novelists concerned with women’s issues. Deshpande’s creative talent and ideology have established her as a great feminist writer genuinely concerned with women’s issues and anxieties.
Chapter – VI


8. Ibid., p. 28.


12. Ibid.


23. Ibid., pp. 169-175.