‘Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know;
Such harmonious madness
From my lips then would flow
The world should listen then as I am listening now.

P.B. SHELLEY: TO A SKYLARK

GENERALLY speaking, theme is what a book does teach, and such a didactic approach has got two fold diversion—major and minor, out of which, to analyse the latter one, is in no ways, inferior to uplifting the lid of Pandora’s box, for innumerable ephemeral and entomological themes come out of it and flutter their pinions, circumambulating the opening hole; these comprise the counter—reflections of the shadows of girlhood and womanhood, peeping into a woman’s inner life, mother daughter relationship, a voyage from margin to centre, revelation of consciousness from feminine to feminist, gender construction and discrimination, a prospice to a new world order, remedial potencies, traumatic taciturnity of a housewife, echo and articulation of an uxorial voice, journey towards self, matrimony and orgasmic erotieism and sense of ‘an awful moment’s surrender’ leading to existentialism and ‘gradual extinction of personality and so on; however, in the brief span and space of the present context, some selected ideologies, such as fragmentation and reconciliation, revolt, self belief and self confidence, shame and guilt, have been made to touch the fringe of the wavy bed sheet of the sun ‘in the yon western tent’.

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

ROBERT BROWNING : RABBI BEN EZRA XXV

THE aesthetics of fragmentation and reconciliation can be understood well, when damsel, making a terracota pitcher is visualized; what she does, is that she breaks a mirror into pieces, and, with the help of some adhesive, she fixes them, some triangular, some round, some pentagonal, some hexagonal, around the neck of the pitcher, and provides them with a sort of Kaleidoscopic ornamentation, by virtue of putting these fragments together into an artistic whole; this is what Shashi Deshpande has done in her novels, at first she breaks the ego or Self of a character into pieces and then she puts them together by adopting a sort of reconciliation; later on, this reconciliated self attains its own beauty, in which even the cleavages tell their own tale, and the broken and abandoned chasm of the past finds a new meaning.

A free and autonomous being like all creatures—(a woman) finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other.

—Simone de Beauvoir

Since the dawn of independence in India, there is seen Indo-Anglian fiction the emergence of a new interest in the plight of Indian women in a rapidly changing social milieu. Several writers have made conscious and sustained attempts to analyse the predicament of women from various angles. With a gift for sharp psychological insight into the subtleties of human mind and society and aided by a richly evocative, unassuming and unpretentious style. Shashi Deshpande is perhaps ideally suited to tread the labyrinthine tracts of human psyche and creditably represent it in fiction. Her novels particularly The Dark Holds No Terrors and That Long Silence—are an education in the psyche of men and women who lose their capacity for rational thought on being subjected to traumatic experiences.
Shashi Deshpande’s concern is to explore the fundamental cause of the fragmentation and the dichotomy of her characters and explore what happens in the psyche of these heroines in the process of individuation. Deshpande’s protagonists suffer from ‘ego-inflation’. Ego-inflation is the result of ‘Ego-self’ separation in Jungian terms. Ego (conscious) is born out of self (unconscious) when the child is born. The birth of child is also the beginning of “Ego-self” separation. Prior to the birth of child all is merged with the self (unconsciousness) as the myth of Abhimanyu, who learnt the art of Chakravyuh in her mother’s womb; indicates. Ego is completely identified with the self, which is “the centre and totality of being”.

The female characters of Deshpande stand at the crossroads of traditions. They seek change out within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them but merely to make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They perceive it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it. Soon thereafter, they realise that are restrictive set-up is replaced by another “new bonds replace the old, that’s all”. Her women protagonists are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role of wife. They do not accept to be considered merely as the objects of gratification. They challenge their victimization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Yet their concept of freedom is not imported from the west. They believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of family relationships.

When her novels are read between the lines it is revealed how poignantly she expresses the frustration and disappointment of women experience social and cultural oppression in the male dominated society. Roots and Shadows, her first novel, highlights the agony and trauma experienced by women in male-dominated and tradition-bound society. The novelist expose the absurdity of rituals and customs which only help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This slow how a woman
grow from ‘self surrender’ and ‘self abnegation’ to assert the individuality with newly emerged identity. The Dark Holds No Terrors rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife existence is to please her husband. It reveals a woman’s capacity to assert own rights and individuality and become fully aware of her potential as a human being. That Long Silence traces the passage of a woman through a labyrinth of doubts and fears towards her affirmation. Viewing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on men for the subjugation of women. She observes that both men and women find it difficult to outgrow the images and role allotted to them by society.

The delineation of swings of mood is evident from the novel That Long Silence, which reveals the see – saw moments of joy and despair, the fragments of feelings perceived and suppressed, the life of sense as well as the heart – wringing anguish of the narrator protagonist Jaya, a house wife and a failed writer. The novel depicts the life of Jaya at the level of the silent and the unconscious. The domestic tempest, arising out of Jaya’s husband being accused of following corrupt practices, makes the family leave the Churchgate apartment at Bombay for an old flat at Dadar. The children go out for a holiday. That gives space to Jaya for self-interrogation. Traditionally, a woman has an identity only as ‘husband’s wife or father’s daughter or son’s mother. ‘The real picture, the real ‘you’, never emerges’. The individuality of Jaya can not be defined. She can be defined only in relation to others. That a woman is always defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her is true of the Indian women in spite of legislations and many safeguards provided. Shashi Deshpande is aware of the many constraints presents in the Indian society and she defines freedom for Indian socio-cultural milieu. In traditional Indian household woman was assigned a secondary role. In Jaya’s house it was ordained that the girls clear up after the meals. “Why can’t one of the boys do it? Jaanu or Sridhar? Why does it have to be me and Veena?”2
Mocking faces were the only answer to the question raised by a girl. Not only men, but also women in the family systematized the procedure. Jaya remembers Mohan’s reaction when she remarked like a stupid that his mother was a cook:

His anger had at first taken me unawares. Then, getting the feel of it, I had met his anger with my own, deliberately using it as a weapon. Raging, furious, I had flung accusations wildly at him. (81)

Mohan is aghast when Jaya hints that he should cook during her confinement. After that she tried to fit accordance to Mohan. Mohan’s tastes are the determining factor of Jaya’s life style. She has cut her hair short and follows the modern trend in dressing. Her original style of writing has given place to fashionable and frivolous writing. “Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced, I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that” (144). Her decision to write for a woman’s magazine under the mythical name of ‘Seeta’ is nothing but her attempt to gain cheap popularity and to please him. The tyrannical footprints of father are followed by Mohan; for the simple reason that ‘chutney’ was stale, his father became furious and threw the plate at the wall and went out. His obedient wife suffered in silence and started grinding chutney afresh. The reaction of Mohan after his narration is quite revealing. “God. [...] She was tough. Women in those days were tough” (36). Even after having discerned the despair in the hearts of ‘wounded women’, Jaya, being motivated by the ideal ‘hate sin, not the sinner’, continued working of her ‘man’ who was responsible for wounding her. Her struggle continues; her weapons are ‘silence and surrender’. When Jaya knows that to Mohah, anger of a woman makes her ‘unwomanly’, she had learnt to control her anger. She understood that ‘the duties of a woman’ are the most important thing for the woman in her family. She thought that her Ai had not prepared for any of the duties of a woman’s life, as in Mohan’s family there are clear-cut rules for the women. She is unaware that she should take “Mohan’s shirt and sew on the missing button” (83).
She understood very well that ‘a stitch in time saves nine’, whether it was a button missing or the thing alike, she had to exhibit sorrow and guilt on her face; whenever there was any praiseworthy job, she would wag her tail.

In a way, the protagonist, Jaya, is any modern woman who resents her husband’s callousness and becomes the victim of circumstances. By implication the character of Jaya represents modern woman’s ambivalent attitude to married life.3

The concept of sheltering tree created a ditch of misconception between Jaya and Mohan, as Ramukaka told her that “the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you” (138). A lot of advice was showered over her to be true and faithful to Mohan, but there was nobody to tell what to do when marriage was over; her only solace was her Ai, who had learnt to live without Appa. Jaya emotions are analyzed in the novel as Adele King says,

*That Long Silence* is Deshpande’s finest novel so far because it analyses emotions within rather unexceptional situations and because it creates more detailed pictures of an extended family with its odd misfits, its petty bickering over money, its jealousy over affections, and of a marriage in which there is no right or wrong. The scene in which Mohan accuses Jaya of indifference to his plight and in which she is uncertain and confused about her responsibility is especially powerful.4

Shashi Deshpande makes use of apt imagery to describe Jaya’s unhappy married life or partly happy married life as Jaya thinks of Jeeja, her maid;

I envied her single-mindedness. She knew what her purpose in life was; it was to go on living. Enduring was part of it and so she endured all that she had to (51).
She is surprised as she sees ‘no anger behind her silence’. She thinks that it was Jeeja and her life who saved her from the hell of drudgery. She is unable to bear “all those agonies...for days I had been unable to get out of mind”. She considers girl infanticide to be more an act of mercy than “this prolonging of it for years and years”. About their relationship in Bombay, she says: “In fact, we had stopped speaking, expect for the essentials of daily living” (55).

Jaya is not the only sufferer, there others too sailing in the same boat such as her mother-in-law observing formidable silence, she envisages, bitter struggle in her silence, the only refuge of suffering women. “Silence and surrender, I am woman and I can understand her better; he’s a man and he can’t” (37). Her interpretation and understanding swells from an enduring and introspective self. She is reminded of her own advice to her brother’s wife who is moulded in the tradition nurtured by patriarchal society.

Go home like a good girl, Asha, Go back home and obey your husband. And never mind whatever it is he has done, he’s your husband, after all, and a husband can do no wrong (115).

Swinging between developing crisis and conflict, the plot of the novel presents even the resolution in an utter form of culmination. In the novel, the marital role of a woman is well defined. Here, marriage is compared to a children’s game of playing ‘tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor’. In real life the labels later change to “doctor, engineer government official, college lecturer” (91). Jaya thinks, “marriage never ends, they cannot—they are state of being” (27).

A mighty sense of reality is displayed when Shashi Deshpande explores man-woman relationship; she exhibits what actually happens in life when a well educated girl with literary sensibilities faces situations, utterly different from her idealistic views. When the cement of love is not there, wife and husband are estranged and marriage comes out as an utter failure. By implication, the character of Jaya represents modern
woman’s ambivalent attitude to married life. It is only by negating her own personality that a woman, who is powerless in the patriarchal order, can survive. The reconciliation with Mohan made Jaya realise that Mohan supported the code of conduct for married woman in strict accordance with the deeds of his mother, who never raised her voice against her husband, however ill treated she might have been. As it was quite natural about the worn-out relationship, there was total misunderstanding between the two. Jaya attempted to sketch a picture of that time:

Each relationship evolves its own vocabulary. Ours had been that of the workaday world. The vocabulary of love, which I had thought would come to us naturally and inevitably, had passed us by; so too had the vocabulary of anger (116).

The conjugal quarrel between Mohan and Jaya resulted into a clash of ego, and a genuine hostility between husband and wife. As he told that he had allowed her to have her way in most things letting her do what she wanted, Jaya retorted: “Except when it inconvenienced you” (120). Mohan could not digest these words and challenged Jaya who had many things to say but could hardly utter any word.

The job I wanted to take, the baby I wanted to adopt, the anti-price campaign I’d wanted to take part in... But, even as I listed these to myself, it came to me that perhaps it had nothing to do with Mohan, the fact that I had not done these things, that I had left them alone. Perhaps I had not really cared enough about these things myself. Instead I said, and my voice sounded sullen even to me, “I’ve done everything you wanted to me...And now I thought, I must add: I’ve sacrificed my life for you and the children. But real bitterness clawed its way through this self-mockery, and I was conscious of having been chained to his dream (120).

Her silence, with all its gravity, culminates into her determination, never to laugh, but she laughs hysterically when Mohan, involved in a bribery
case and was on the verge of facing prosecution and was dismissed from job, fiercely accuses her for all his non-missed ventures. The hysterical laugh lands her in an awkward and despairing situation. Her experiences the torture of loneliness and long silence when her hysterical laughter makes Mohan desert her. Rahul’s disappearance when he had gone on a holiday tour along with Rupa and Ashok causes additional despair to her. She had laughed at Mohan hysterically: She thinks,

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. When finally I recovered myself I was alone in the room. Silence flowed into it. I wiped my face and tried to realize what I’d done (122).

Deshpande’s portrait of Jaya becomes significant since the novel ends with the reunion of the couple, not their estrangement. Jaya does not follow the way Kusum, her cousin, who had chosen death. She introspects that her failure as wife is due to her mother’s failure in teaching her womanly duties. She was never told how to suckle her own child. She comes to know that her son keeps away from her. This causes failure as mother and as wife as well. She recalls Mohan’s complaint that she had never stood by him at all. As a writer also, she fails because the editors reject her writing. They complain that she has not shown enough intensity in her expression. When Mohan is no longer around, she 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. She feels that she is secure only in the care of Mohan. His absence and walk out makes her wade through the waters of uncertainty, the life of her boat has become rudderless and others are no substitute. The sense of morality became the prime concern of Jaya, when she had experienced the trauma of what she has done so far and what she should have done but did not. Sigmund Freud observes in this regard:
Ill-luck—that is, external frustration—so greatly enhances the power of the conscience in the super-ego. As long as things go well with a man, his conscience is lenient and lets the ego do all sorts of things; but when misfortune befalls him, he searches his soul, acknowledges his sinfulness, heightens the demands of his conscience, imposes abstinences on himself and punishes himself with penances.5

Sharing financial responsibility also becomes her primary concern for accumulation of wealth is not the desire of her husband only, but it is also necessary for maintaining a social status. Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors interestingly also has the same feelings because she earns most of the money in her household, but feels guilty of undermining her husband’s self confidence because of her position and income. Jaya moves to accept mutual responsibility in marriage, painfully, she realizes that she has tried to make Mohan the scapegoat for her failures as a writer and blame her parents too like “glowering teenager” (53). She considers her husband to be a ‘sheltering tree’ and by doing so, she tends to underrate her responsibility.

‘To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive’, at least this ideal preached by R. L. Stavenson is true so far as the female protagonists of Shashi Deshpande are concerned, for marriage would provide them respect, security and status in the society but, unfortunately, they get disappointed and subsequently disillusioned. Deshpande celebrates the major exploration of her heroines by transcending the boundaries of the female gender; she creates initial revolters but final compromises like Jaya in That Long Silence. The entire enthusiasm of Jaya is melted into thin air when she moves to Dadar flats, and Mohan’s telegram clears the gloomy atmosphere around Jaya. He gets a reprieve from the charges of corruption levelled against him. Rahul arrives bringing cheer to Jaya who had all the while walked aimlessly in the bylane of Bombay carrying the heavy load of marriage. “Finally, totally exhausted, I’d gone back home” (191). The ending of the narrative with, “Life has always to be made possible” (193) is a note of hope.
In accordance with Shashi Deshpande’s project of social reform, eradication of poverty, by economic independence of a woman, and provision of female education leading to an intellectual deliverance, are inevitable and indispensable. She is concerned with the duties of a devoted wife ‘Pativarta’ and with these women’s inner struggle to revolt against slavery. But her women come to the point of compromise and avoid all open fights. They practice non-violence and advocate that people should learn to negotiate disagreements and problems. This is seen at the end of That Long Silence where the woman protagonist, Jaya, decides to clarify the matter with her husband, on his return from his self-imposed exile. Shashi brings out the guilt feelings from her protagonists and enables them to move in positive direction to maximize their potential. Neither Jaya nor for creator Deshpande totally advocate western feminism, still they are feminist—Indians in all respects, routed to their conservative culture. It is not a matter of surprise that Jaya and Shashi Deshpande subsist on a compromise in life.

[The woman’s] emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife, in the end is therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife—one who has broken the long silence, one who is no longer afraid of the dark. she is a wife reconceptualised as woman and an individual—a marked contrast to the older generation of women around her with their uncomplaining, unresisting fatalistic attitude. Hers is the dilemma of the new woman that could be resolved. When the claims of selfhood are reconciled with the claims made upon her by the family and society.6

The fragmentation of Saru in The Dark Holds No Terror occurs on account of gender discrimination and the beach of compromise and reconciliation is reached, when the wife ‘decides to give him one more chance. The novel shows how woman’s achievement instead of being respected, brings her into trouble’.7
While Saru suffers discrimination as a daughter, she is in no better position as a wife. The last phase of her life brings her face to face with her own self as also with reality of live. She is a victim of her husband, Manohar’s sadistic torture through physical and sexual violence. In her childhood, she was discriminated against in relation to her kid brother, Dhruva. After Dhruva’s death, she alienated herself by putting a guilt consciousness permanently in her psyche. Her husband proves to be the much needed panacea for her inferiority complex-stricken psyche and love starved body and mind. She becomes restless and alienated, for her mother has fixed her liking and affection towards Dhruva. The partisan attitude of her parents has a devastating effect on Saru. She becomes rebellious in nature. Wheh her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, she mutely watches the whole scene without rushing to his help. Since then, she is haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death. Even her mother finds her guilty. She points out, “You killed your brother”.

The poor sister is accused by her own mother of pushing Dhruva in a pool of water that caused the death of helpless brother; the harsh words of her mother keep ringing in her ears even when she grown up. She hates her mother and rebels against her by going to Bombay to study medicine. There she falls in love with Manohar and marries him against the wishes of her parents. Extricating herself from the clutches of these chains, Saru chooses the western education and becomes a doctor by profession but fails as wife, for her male counterpart is a typical Indian who considers himself the lord and master. She hopes that her marriage would close the painful chapter of her childhood days but she only moves from one prison to another—a worse one. At the very threshold of her husband’s house, Saru is shown to be an unhappy woman. She is so much frustrated that she just wants to live and desires to get away from the house. Because of the rising in her career, Manu develops an inferior complex in himself. The element of love has disappeared from their relationship. She realises that Manu is a sadist and this marks the beginning of their marital discord.
Joining medical profession, apart from enhancing the social status of Saru, ironically takes away the bliss of marital joy; her feelings on being an economically independent individual are worse. In fact, her economically independence, though asserted by feminist, brings no fulfilment to her. Her physical trauma has created and fostered several psychological knot in her personality. Active participation in social activities has become a sordid boon for her. Her child’s birthday party and outing with family are disappointing experiences for her: “I felt a deadly fear... I was isolated from everyone, from the whole world” (112). A sense of loneliness is an integral part of Saru’s self. She abruptly cuts off with Padma, her friend. Companionless, as she is, Saru is engulfed by a gigantic solitude, that has alienated her from family and society as well.

A traditional Hindu woman, like a bubble on stream, appears and disappears soon, for, having been alienated from her husband, when she crosses the threshold of her parental home, she finds that the sense of belonging is slipping under her feet. Initially, as Saru comes to her father’s house, she feels like a ‘stranger’, as Sudama, standing at the gates of the palace of Krishna and Rukmini. She is conscious that she is no ‘Sudama’ in rags, bare feet and filled with humility. But she gets a cold reception at her father’s house. At times she even regrets her visit: “Why had it seemed so important to come here, and, at once? (17) She is only vaguely aware of what she has come to ask for; “It was not to comfort her father that she had come. It was for herself, what she had hoped to find” (37-38).

Her reaction is strange and un-preconceived, as her father asks if something is rotten in her state of Denmark, ‘My husband’? she asked blankly as if she did not know what the word meant (198). She then eagerly tells him about Manu’s brutality and expresses her helplessness. She expects moral supports from her father and she becomes more frantic and requests him.

But you’ve got to help me, you’ve got to. You did it once. And because of you did, I went to Bombay, met him and married him (204).
There is a prevalence of acute confusion upon Saru; she feels that she had done injustice to her mother, husband and children and everybody else. In her home, one day she sees a woman, a widow. She remembers that during her childhood she had seen the same woman in happier days. In those days she lovingly sent her husband off to office. But now the same woman is a widow. The sight of this widow makes her desperate. She feels that, “I’m not that either...I’m just nothing” (135).

The memory of uncaressed children, such as seeing Renu off to school and covering Abhi with a blanket every night, makes Saru restless, however, these thoughts do not compel her to go back to her house as in the case of R. K. Narayan’s Savithri in *The Dark Room*. She takes this opportunity to test, to establish, and to reinforce her indispensability. Saru, it seems, would subordinate all her emotional ties to please her ego. Ignorance of coming out of matrimonial trap is the prime constituent of Saru is tragedy. She seems to be tired of comparing the fearful stranger of the night and the rather pathetic Manu of other times “...he is groping in the dark as much as I am” (96). It is revealed to her that she stands in no better position than others, on account of being over assertive and cruel to her brother Dhruva, to her mother and her husband, Manu; “The deception had cracked so completely... shafts of truth pierced her, causing her unbearable pain”. (212) She realises that her ego is responsible for all the problems that crept in her life. She confesses to her father herself as the mute spectator of Dhruva’s death. Her father advises her to forget. She becomes humble and her father helps him to regain will-power. After a conscious effort in evaluating the relative merits of a love marriage and arrange marriage, she inevitably compromises with her fate of having opted for a love marriage and for which she has herself to blame.

The metamorphosis of Saru occurs, when she determines to abstain herself from the game of hide and seek, as it occurs in the drama of human life. Finally she realizes that if all is ‘alone’ what else is there to fear. By following her father’s advice, she has already broken from her past. Such a realization attains perfection when she thinks:
‘It’s not what he’s done to me, but what I’ve done to him. (216).

The ramifications of Indian culture make her understand that she is no longer, “a guilty sister, undutiful daughter, the unloving wife” (220). The lucid psycho analysis of characters has been brought out by Shashi Deshpande in an utmost convincing manner. She comes out of the veil of woman and presents a fair picture of a woman’s life who encounters problems, because of her marriage—against her parents wishes and her husband who is possessed by male ego. The author gifts her protagonist with a double vision as Sarita is critical of herself as of others. The novelist’s objective is to show that one should take refuge in the self which means that the ‘Self is not metaphysical but psychological’. Sarita, who had once tried to run away from this self because of the pain it had caused her, now is ready to compromise with Manu. Thus, the novel ends in the affirmative note of hope as against frustration and despair with which it had began.

‘Man is born free, but alas! everywhere he is in chains’.

—JEAN JAQUES ROUSSEU : THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The dictum, though meant for man, still retains its inevitability for woman kind, for as a keeper of cottage warm and comfortable, she enjoys no liberty at all, however sacrificing her role in the struggle for freedom might have been; Jean of Arc fought for defending France, but she was burnt alive; the procession leading to the Fall of Bastille during the French Revolution was headed by housewives displaying crumbs of bread; in India the test of a wife’s fidelity was that she should immolate herself on her funeral pyre of her husband; even the world of globalization, the feminine revolt falls on deaf ears, for even today, a woman is identified as the daughter, the wife or the mother of some male being. In a male-dominated society, a woman can only pretend to be satisfied and happy. This idea is expressed in one of Kamala Das’s poems entitled “Suicide”.
But
I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role
of a happy woman,
Happy wife.

This pretence leads to frustration and suffocation, as a result of which
the boredom and frustration makes characters like Kate complain:

I am sick of being the victim
of trends I reflect
but don’t even understand.9

Kate appears in Jane Wagner’s recent feminist play. Pretence of delight
results into the feeling of being a victim and finally a woman realises
that she should definitely have her own identity.

In India many writers especially Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi
Deshpande and Kamala Das took up the cause of women in their
writings. A study of recent Indian-English fiction reveals that the female
protagonists are quite conscious of their identity and are no longer meek
and submissive. Deshpande’s heroines are bold enough to revolt against
such a marginalization as is revealed in The Dark Holds No Terrors and
That Long Silence, which present a changing role for women. A
consciousness of rights has ignited the spark of revolution in women’s
protest; some significant women novelists have projected mighty,
determined and assertive heroines.

Kamala Das’s My Story is an expression of her dislikes for the
conventional and traditional role of a woman; while she raises her voice
against male-domination by establishing her identity through literary
writing. Veena Paintal’s heroine, Charishma in An Autumn Leaf walks out
of her unhappy married life and finds a dignified place for herself in
society; it is her desire to have a husband in the form of a companion
who would treat her with equal respect and love. Shashi Deshpande’s
heroine Saru, in _The Dark Holds No Terrors_, escapes from the matrimonial trap; after a lot of struggle and unhappiness she makes a room for herself. The sense of revolt, which arose out of a lack of belongingness caused by her ‘unwanted ness’ motivates her to marry Manu, even though such a match is outright rejected by her parents. In the light of psychological perspectives, her character is indicative of the desperate consequence of gender discrimination.

Saru’s feminism springs out as a reaction to this discriminatory psychological set up of society at large and her parents in particular. She has a deep-rooted mentality of an unwanted child for her mother wants that she must adopt the patriarchal atmosphere while the daughter always has been against her. Her mother’s hatred for her and preference for brother, Dhruv is clearly evident from her actions. This creates a rift between the mother and daughter and forces Saru to tread on that of rebellion. This bias is no deeply engraved in her mind that all her future actions are marred by this. A sense of insecurity leading to the wrong choice of partners and sometimes landing her into unwanted situations makes her indulge into those acts which make her accuse her mother in moving against the flow, Saru drains herself emotionally and physically.

The spirit of revolt asserts itself, when one’s self comes under the disastrous impact of unwantedness; people with low self esteem feel isolated, unloved, incapable of expressing or defending themselves and too weak to confront or overcome their deficiencies. They are afraid of angering others and shrink from exposing themselves to attention. Maternal differentiation between the boy and the girl for whom she has equally suffered and taken equal pains, leaves a female child in wilderness with no beacon light to guide her. Much ink has been wasted by psychologists in defending the rapist male than in having a compassionate attitude towards the woman seduced. Nevertheless, the study of the mind of a physically assaulted woman is definitely being deeply probed now-a-days. Such a women is broken mentally; she is a pessimist to the core; she hates touch; she abhors men, each one of them; she is haunted by
the traumatic experience; she is, definitely suspicious; she is revengeful her feminism would definitely be of a destructive type.

A perfect revelation of Saru’s character tells that her present existence is shaped by her childhood and social stereotypes prevalent then. Social prejudices have damaged Saru’s personality to a big extent. Every suggestion of her mother which differentiated her from her brother made her contemptuous of her femininity. Even the onset of biological changes, like menstruation, is unbearable for her. She prays to God that it should not happen to her any more and save her from being ashamed of herself forever. The rejection by her mother during the early formative years leads to psychological insecurity in Saru. She is prone to constant and recurring fantasies. Her acts of defiance, caused by an instinct of revolt, engulf her mother as a young girl, and then as a child, she hated her, she wanted to hurt her, wound her, and make her suffer. Saru gets hurt when her mother says: “You will never by good looking. You are too dark for that”.

She hopes for a miracle to happen and that one day she would grow up and be beautiful. The rigid code of conduct prescribed by the domineering mother makes her grow more wild and defiant. Later, she goes to Bombay to study Medicine in spite of her mother’s opposition. Luckily for her, her father encouraged her. “Standing up against her, asserting her will against her...” that had seemed impossible. But she had done it. I won that time. But I was not alone then. Baba was with me. He helped me without him, I would never have succeeded. Now I wonder whether his was a fight for me or against her. Whether he used me as a weapon against her? Whether that hurt her more than my own rebellion did? (139).

Inspite of her father’s seemingly villainous appearance she takes her sugar coated revenge on her mother, at least she feels so by another more shocking decision in choosing Manohar, a lower caste man as her husband. By breaking away from the barriers of caste system, she frees herself from the matriarchal and patriarchal tyranny.
Thus, the little rebel of Yore who used to resent her mother’s gender bias mutely, becomes overtly defiant...\textsuperscript{11}

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). She thinks that she is ‘unhappy and destroyed’ in her marital life because her mother has cursed her.

Saru’s life after marriage is a bliss for a career oriented woman enjoying the recognition of her individual ‘identity’. She becomes an object of admiring attention of her neighbours who come to her regularly for advice and help. The social acceptance and recognition she gains as a doctor and the demands on her time cleave a wedge in her relationship with Manu. The disillusionment in her marital life makes her look for other avenues. Her affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao are temporary substitutes for her unfulfilment marital life. It is the possessive instinct of a woman, that erupts in Saru, when she is flirted by Boozie, but, out of a sheer neglect or indifference, Manu does not resent it, is reflect in the contempt for her husband, she becomes more and more resentful of her husband, who deliberately closes his eyes to Boozie displaying his affection towards her in public at the inauguration in her consulting room. Saru’s stay in her father’s gave her a chance to face her own self. Her return to her parental home could be interpreted as what Kristeva calls,

the refusal of the temporal order and the search for a landscape that would accommodate their need.\textsuperscript{12}

An analysis of her life, comprising sorting out problems, review of crisis, is assisted by Saru’s homecoming. Out of the swirling restlessness Saru emerges as a whole woman who is not dependent on any one outside her. Deshpande rejects the western notion of a woman’s emergence in terms of separation from her husband for an existence without any relation to male and society, a life isolation is no existence at all. While Sarita frees herself from the dependence syndrome, her final disposition in the novel does not suggest that she would lead a
normal life, henceforth, as a responsible member of family and society. The problematic of her life, in the process of search for a feminist space, only brings out the inner conflict of the modern Indian woman who is trying to balance her multiple role as a member of the family, as a professional and above all, as a human being.

Achievement of individual identity and female autonomy must not be the only goal of feminism. After having accorded that autonomy to her, she should be brought onto accept the basic human values like motherhood and responsibility of the family, thereby, of the society, at least on her own terms. There is a need to harmonise the man-woman relationship as equal partners, not as an officer and subaltern.

It is evident, thus, that, while The Dark Holds No Terrors sings of a revolt of a gynecologist against external adversaries, That Long Silence is a type of Arma Virumque Carno, that reverberates within, for the foes are symbolic of interior infirmities possessed by a woman such a sense of competition arising out of academic and financial independence, the mother fixation and titilations leading to sexual aesthetics, eroticism and sometimes a nymphomaniaic attitude; Jaya, a convent educated girl, at the outset, gets herself tied in a nuptial bond with Mohan, without an iota of revolt, but the cinder is kept smouldering underneath her silence, which for a short time eclipses her phylogeny, when she nurses Kusum, a psychic case; finally she decides to break the ice, and does not look for any approval from Mohan’s side.

Walk, and arise your first  
Affirm your decision to be free  
Don’t walk three yards behind  
It’s your place by right  
Mother, Woman  
The Revolution is you.  

— Indira Kukshrestha.

The era of post-Independence India brought certain social and cultural transitions as to make a woman stand it her own feet, but side
by side she finds herself at an avenue, where she cannot see which way to go, for there is no star to twinkle so; thus is born a revolution though in germs to use her tongue, which remained as yet imprisoned in the patriarchal and even matriarchal stone walls that did make a prison for her existence. Caught between the two worlds they need to define themselves their place in society and their relationship with their surroundings. Deshpande's protagonists raise their voice against the straight-jacketed role-models of daughter/sister/ wife and mother, and refuse to be the objects of cultural/social oppression of age long patriarchal society. They being sensitive, intelligent, career-oriented middle class women of a changed time, feel suffocated and engaged in the male-defined codes of life. They rebel against the social taboos, the cramped, wrinkled traditions and values of their ancestors and ceaselessly question the very concepts of love, marriage and sex and feel an urge to redefine human relationship and behaviour. They want to have a place to stand on and strive to attain the ideal of liberty and perfection. Their anger, their resentment against the existing system and tradition does not, however, bring them any content; rather it leads to depression and despair and the sense of meaninglessness. A sense of alienation seems to sap up their energy; the vital part of their being. Their rebellious spirit, the anger which would liberate them, turns out to be the 'demon', the self destructive force.

Jaya in That Long Silence is a convent-educated girl with a sense of being unique; in her childhood, her father's commitment to the demands and encouragement to her inflated ego, on the hand and the traditional archetypes of Sita, Gandhari and Maitreyee which remain in her unconscious mind, and from the other self of her being on the other, create tension in her married life. She feels suffocated and trapped in the traditional Sita-role, defined in patriarchal society; this is evident from her refusal to surrender her name Jaya (victory) for Suhasini given to her by her husband Mohan at the time of her marriage. But she can not afford to insist on for long in her infancy, she was taught that her husband is a tree of protection, a security; therefore she keeps her door
closed from outside darkness and disaster and confines herself in the straight jacketed role of a traditional wife, repressing her resentment. She is “an utter stranger a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motives of her actions seemed impossible”. Hence, her agonised cries—”I can’t cope, I can’t manage, I can’t go on”(70). In such a stifling and suffocating domestic ambience and patriarchal set-up, she finds her female identity effaced. Her feminine dilemma is expressed in her vacillating state of mind : “I could and couldn’t do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly [...]” (83).

As an expression of typical revolt, Jaya’s anger is not a direct outburst. She adopts the silence stratagem and turns the direction of her anger on herself and her anger becomes self-depression and despair depression and despair destructive. Jaya is a modern predicament and she knows pretty well that in order to get by in a relationship one has to learn a lot of tricks. Unlike other married women slavishly tagged to tradition, she has her own say; with a revolutionary instinct she unfurls and unburdens herself to activate the creative impulses smothered within her artistic self.

The act of unburdening herself through self-expression becomes for her a creative process. It is not merely a reliving of particular moments of the past but a coming to term with herself [...]14

Jaya’s revolt takes place in utter tranquillity. The difference in their outlook fails them to understand each other and the lack of communication damages their relationship. Jaya suffers silently. She would not express her feeling lest it should contaminate her relationship with her husband. She had been brought up with love and care. She was a child who used to get angry very soon. But after her marriage she tolerated her anger. She realizes that to Mohan anger made a woman “unwomanly”. Wrathful and taciturn expressionism is evident from androgynous accusation of Jaya from Mohan’s side for no fault of hers; having already subsided the nomenclature of ‘Suhasini’, she is compelled to break her silence, in order to bring out the hidden instinct of revolt,
and to retort back as she cannot restrain herself. She points out bluntly that she has given up writing because of him. The altercation between them reaches to a stage where Jaya for the first time in her seventeen years of marriage, experiences real anger which robs her of words:

But as if I’d been struck dumb, I could say nothing. I sat in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me excruciatingly painful, yet leaving me, cruelly conscious (121).

As a traditional wife she is unfit, so she is afraid of some disaster; Kamat makes her aware of her fear of failure; he stimulates her anger which she has to bring out from the long suppression to articulate her predicament as a female author.

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has depicted different aspects of middle-class woman’s life. Instead of fighting against the patriarchal society and male domination, she has taken a balanced view of life from a woman’s point of view. In recent Indian English fiction, the stress is on the freedom of women. When the feeling of revolt is suppressed for a longer time, ego-self crisis reaches its climactic point (i.e. ego’s identification with self is at its climax) and there is as danger of extinction. Encounter with death is the possibility. It may sometimes lead one to suicide. This stage may also result in the re-orientation of the total personality. A new consciousness may emerge. In psychological terms, a fresh relationship between and self may be established.

Jays emerges as a saviour of Kusum (her cousin), a distant relation of hers. She sheltered her in the Dadar flat despite Mohan’s antipathy towards her as he thinks that Kusum is mentally sick that would effects the life of Mohan’s children too. ‘The children have always been their final argument, their justification for everything. And Jaya was defeated. But she argued that Kusum should be kept in the Dadar flat, away from the children and Kusum began to stay there despite Mohan’s contempt. Not only Mohan but also Jaya’s two brothers and her mother opposed the idea of taking Kusum’s responsibility. Jaya’s failure in making love
relationship is also highlighted in the novel. During the early years of her married life she developed frenzied emotions towards Mohan, though she felt ashamed of her emotional extravagances. She tried to rationalize her feelings in the following way:

...we’re all frightened of the dark, frightened of being alone. And so we cling to one another, saying... ‘I love you, I want you, I need you. Often I had told myself: Love is a myth, without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unendurable. Sometimes, like the time I read an American poet’s confession of her guilt because she just couldn’t get along without her husband, it had seemed hopeless - I would never be able to shake off this monstrous burden (97).

The same experience is revitalized in Jaya, when Mohan angrily leaves the house. She feels deserted. An utter loneliness darkens around her. When the umbrella of silence is removed, death awaits human being to take him into is contact. But she is conscious of Kusum, her alter ego whose madness led her to death. Jaya escapes suicide but goes hysteric. Her exit from the home and sojourn in Bombay street, dissolves the ego inflation and the refuge is provided by hysteria as defence mechanism fails and ends in futility. “Finally totally exhausted, I’d gone back home” (191).

After the breakage of defence mechanism, the gigantic fear is to be faced by her. Now in her terrible loneliness, she realizes and understands what Kamat said to her that “pursuing happiness is meaningless” and loneliness is the essential condition of human existence. Everyone has to fight his own battle. The novel becomes a self-critique of Jaya. She understands that she also contributed to her victimization. Others can’t be blamed all the time. Neither total extinction of the ego, nor complete conformity can bring. Her realization of her true identity. The alter egoistic defence and search for definition becomes autocratic, when Jaya stays at Dadar. “If I have to plug that ‘hole’ in the heart’.
I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase that long silence between us” (192).

Balanced relationship between ego and self can give balanced outlook of life. Anger or protest is not a convincing weapon for fighting our battle and realizing peace in life. She has fathomed the darkness of her self and has learnt to articulate her predicaoment. When she hears the news that all ends up well in the office of Mohan, and Rahul also comes back, she is again in danger of falling entrapped in the prison-house of marriage. She breaks her silence and refuses to be led by nose. Now she will continue as a writer and would not look up to Mohan for an answer he wants.

Thus the novel That Long Silence ends with a sense of compromise and weighty self assertion, suggesting the Shakespearean dictum the rarer virtue is in forgiveness rather than in vengeance; when the torch of revolt is focussed an Roots and Shadows, traditional Indianism and Anglicanised modernity stand face to face; Indu, the protagonist, observes the plights of Akka, and finds that English education has made her stand against superstitions and orthodoxy; she learns that in Indian society, there is no articulation for female sexuality; her biological secretions make her filthy and impious; the social problems arising out of monopolizing monogamy and extra marital relationship alongwith condemnation of maternity instinct are enough to fill the mind of a woman with the stuff of revolt.

…I must take steps to educate myself.  
You are not the man to help me there.  
That is something I must do on my own

— Henrik Ibsen

As Indu has received modern education, she has become conscious and aware of age long rotten notion and voids in the life of a woman; it is a cursed spite that the feminine world is out of joint and Indu is born to set it right. This crusade at times makes her feel alone and alienated. This new woman is Indu, the woman protagonist of Shashi
Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*. Indu an educated young woman, is highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent and complete in herself. She brushes aside all the age-old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society. She is brought up in an orthodox brahmin family headed by Akka (the mother surrogate in the novel). The novel begins with the heroine’s return to her ancestral house.

Indu’s mother belonged to a different caste which has not appreciated by her father’s family. As a result her father, Govind, developed revulsion and resentment towards them. After the death of his wife, he left his motherless daughter at the disposal of his family. Indu undergoes a type of brainwash from the female members of her family that, in the capacity of a woman, she has to conform to a behavioral pattern to be followed by a woman, but Indu resists it:

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. Why? I had asked.  

Modernity has been inculcated in her mind key English education, which had set her apart from the family she swore that she would never pretend to be what she was not. And so it appeared as if she had been accumulating. “I won’t since her birth. The exaggerated importance assigned to a woman in terms of virginity is also responsible to a great extent in enforcing strict restrictions on her movements as soon as she reaches the age of puberty and as the girl matures her mother’s authority weighs more heavily upon her. Indu bitterly recollects how cruelly the feminine subservience was thrust upon her:

... I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, badly, cruelly, how I could have a baby. And I, who had all the child’s unselﬁshness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it. (79).
She continues her struggle for her womanhood. She hates the utter femininity of the girl’s hostel where she resides. She develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother and has a apathy towards bearing a child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. Simone De Beauvoir observes:

For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feeling of shame appear. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on.\(^\text{16}\)

The career of a journalist, adopted by her, is abandoned by her out of disgust for writing about women only and their problems and starts working for another magazine. As Indu explains the reason for shift.

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 key. I couldn’t go on (78).

In her dream world, she imagines, there will be a new environment where nobody, especially people like Akka, can exercise their wills on her. She broke away from her family out resentment and married for love in order to assert her freedom. The family four—generations of them—lived together in the ancestral house built years ago by Indu’s great-grandfather. Feminine apathy becomes evident, when the antiquity in a domestic aspect is traced in the form of a family over which ruled like a tyrant ruthless, dominating, bigot and inconsiderate Akka.

The Marlovian dictum, ‘he loved not who loved not at first sight’ and Shakespearean proverbs ‘and therefore Cupid is painted blind’ echoed in Indu’s psyche, when she chose, loved and married Jayant. And it was she who proposed to him. That was yet another way for her to fight against her womanhood. She speaks against the traditional mode of settling marriages when she sees Mini being pushed into an incompatible
marriage by their elders, she accuses, “You’re leaving out that great
incalculable human emotions (99).

The domestic boundaries were broken by her, when she married
Jayant. Jayant, in spite of his seemingly western style of life, behaves no
different from an average. Indian male. She feels that there was some
thing shameful in total commitment. Consequently, she learns to repress
her sexual desire to maintain the status quo in her marriage. She finally
recollects that she has surrendered herself to Jayant step by step, not
mainly for love but to avoid conflict and that she has along tenaciously
to Jayant, to her marriage not for love alone, but because she is afraid
of failure and moreover, she wants to show to the world and her family
that she is a success. Further, as a enthusiasm to writer and working in
a magazine, she loses her enthusiasm to write on being forced by the
editor to suppress facts and present a glossy picture to the readers. The
editorial attitude makes her full of wrath and she gets hurt when her
husband, instead of supporting her, asks her to compromise and
commands her not to resign her job.

The stay at ancestral house makes Indu review the past and learn
there from how Akka’s life is of frustration and disappointment. Indu’s
decision to cut off all family ties in a conscious choice to break out of
the confining cage of subordinate womanhood. “...years of blindfolding
on obscure your vision so that you no more see the choices” (125). She
gains a perfect knowledge of her own shortcomings in terms of being a
complete woman in the eyes of those conventional women who have
their own standards of judging people.

Nothing about me...my academic distinctions, my career,
my success, my money...none of these would impress her...
I had almost forgotten this breed of women since I had left
home (116).

As members of the subordinate sex, women are characterized
obedience and submission, and under male dominance they have to
develop “a tendency to prevail by passive means”.17 She refuses to be
a mother of a child, though she acknowledges the truth of the maternal instinct. She does not welcome a child wholeheartedly.

Having children...it isn’t something you should think and plan about. You should just have them. And yes...end up like Sunanda-atya. Pure, female animal (115).

Female sexuality is feared as a threat which undermines a woman’s own honour and that of her family. Religious tenets and cultural ethics have always emphasized the child bearing function of woman and condemned her pursuit of sexual pleasure. Woman is, therefore, enforced to be sexually passive and submissive even towards her own spouse and as a quester for sexual satisfaction, woman is not ethically accepted. Her extra marital relation with her cousin Naren is based upon her understanding that her sexual individuality is repressed in the clutches of marital rape:

I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought, and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don’t need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado (152).

Naren has created a world of his own out of a detached solitude, and Indu also wants to step in his shoes. Indu experiences a sense of freedom in her relationship with Naren. The newly acquired sense of freedom that Naren’s friendship gives her makes her give into her natural impulses. She who had rejected Naren in the beginning when he tried to make love to her saying she is essentially monogamous. Her extra marital relation with Naren is a revolt too against tradition. Love has become a meaningless for her, as it is a matter of books and movies, real life is based upon matrimonial bondage and worries. To her “The sexual instinct...that’s true” (158). She tries to prove to the world that she is first and foremost an individual, who is capable of making her own decision and achieving success. It is a fear of suppression by the
patriarchal society that makes her fight, turn aggressive and assert herself. “I would be most emphatically myself. Indu”. (143)

Until and unless the roots, which are the source of her fears are not uprooted. Indu cannot achieve fulfilment, she therefore decides to destroy the roots, eliminate her fears, confront her problems with courage and what she feels is right. She also learns to see life in a fresh light. Indu extends support to Vithal, an orphan, living with the family. In fact, Indu seems to be grown up with better understanding of the situation than that existed earlier in the family. Though overcome by a sense of desolation and bereavement, she reminds herself that she must not allow soft feeling to come in her way of doing. What she thinks was the right thing to do “...On era ends so that the other might begin.”

However, having understood that the ultimate glory of a woman is in becoming a wife, not a beloved, Indu makes a retreat to Jayant. She also decides not to share with her husband her affair with the dead Naren as she thinks that this has nothing to do with Jayant. She returns “home”, to Jayant, now

...equipped with that quality of courage, necessary to face the challenge of identity crisis that her marriage with Jayant had always posed – returns to suffer, to question and to find roots.18

Commenting on Indu’s decision to start writing according to her own wishes and not to use Akka’s money to enrich herself, Usha Tambe says, “The important point is that she is making independent decision”.19 The Western values have been accepted by Indu in order to make a quest for liberty, so that her personality may be developed, inspite of an incessant growth of conflict between tradition and modernity; this ultimately results in her emergence as a human being evolving basically as a woman of determination not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society. S. P. Swain appropriately sums up Indu’s growth when he comments thus:
The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self’s roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother, and a commercial writer.20

Shashi Deshpande is one of the famous contemporary Indian novelists in English. She deals with the inner world of the Indian women in her novels. She portrays her female protagonists in a realistic manner. Doubt, anxiety and often a feeling of void of values push characters in her novels to intense self-examination. The women are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles position and relationships within their given social world. In the extended families, Deshpande presents two or three generations live together. She presents the modern Indian womanhood in her novels. She tries to project that tales about women, had been narrated from masculine view should be retold from feminine view, for a woman advocating womankind is quite different from a man narrating a woman’s tale. Better education and employment opportunities have created a new awareness among Indian women.

In recent Indian-English fiction the heroines are quite sure of themselves, of their rights and their place in society an existentialist awareness has liberated them from submissive silence; it has created difference in their attitude in comparison with the heroines of earlier fiction. The Dark Holds No Terror, Shashi Deshpade’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 parent’s house fifteen years after. She left home with a vow never to return. Her relations with her husband are strained and she
returns for some solace but she gets a chance to review it along with children, parents and Dhruva her dead brother.

During her childhood days, Sarita, the protagonist, a victim of gender discrimination, which hinders her self confidence; she is shocked to see that Dhruva, her brother receives all the care and attention only because he is a son, and the age long old taboo is still at work in the family that no daughter can replace a son. Her childhood jealousy comes to the forefront when she pushes him from her father’s lap when he was hardly a year old. He had been completely loyal to her in all respect, always running after his beloved Sarutai. But she spared no occasion to assert her authority over him on every little opportunity:

Just these years between them. But what immense advantage those three years gave her. She had ruled over him completely. No dictatorship could have been more absolute. 21

Her relationship with Dhruva forms the battleground on which she is fighting for a space of her own as a challenge to patriarchy. Before the very eyes of Sarita, Dhruva drowns in a pit full of muddy water; her desperate attempt to save him reflects her concern for her brother, but she vehemently denies any knowledge of him when asked by her parents. Inevitably, she is confronted with her mother’s hysterical accusation:

You did it, You did this. You killed him
I didn’t. I didn’t know. I never saw him. (191)

Her mothers indifference prohibits her from attending the medical college, but, having persuaded her father, she is successful in joining the medical academies and profession; she becomes a sincere scholar to whom, “College meant lectures in the morning, practicals in the afternoon, exams every six months and medical college at the end of two years” (44). But as of fate would have it, she encounters Manohar and falls in love with him. Manohar was. “One of the known names” (43) in the college of his cultural activities. Saru marries Manu against her parents’ wish, and becomes a successful and reputed doctor; she wishes to outshine others and considers it to be an achievement. Her socialising with Boozie the
fairy father is a calculated move to maintain her significance in the society. Her inclination to be popular is not through dedicated service but through available means including economic criteria. When Sarita attaches values to material prospects, her husband’s place in her life becomes relatively insignificant; her love for power is the undercurrent of her life, which is identical with her relationship with every character in the novel. She first views her mother as rival in the game of power. The mother had appeared as an authority and posed a threat to her individuality and self-will. Similarly, she views her husband also there is something in the male, the new thought, that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. She recalls an incident which leads to her loathing towards Manu. It was on the day when they had been watching a TV programme. She recalls:

(Manu) had been sitting with his feet up on a stool, ...soft, white, unmarked and flabby. Like his hands. And his laugh ...it was rather silly. A kind of bray, almost. Why had she never noticed that before? And had he always picked at his ears that way, deftly, rather stealthily?...It was like seeing a man she had never seen, never known ...now that she knew him, she rather despised (134-35).

Sarita’s solitude indicates inner disintegration, which is caused by her ego and dominating nature; a set of values based on monitory power and social status was brought to her be education and social status. The wholesomeness in life for Sarita is possible if only integration takes place. In other words, she has to accept her children, her husband and her duties of a mother and wife. Escapism is not a permanent solution and the real solution has to be sought from within rather than escaping from the dark or cursing the darkness. Darkness without terror in shown by lighting a candle and declares that the dark holds to terrors.

When we first see Saru in her husband’s house in Bombay, she is show to be an unhappy woman who feels
There is this strange new fear of disintegration. A terrified consciousness of not exiting. No, worse. Of being just like a ventriloquist’s dummy, that smiles, laughs, and talks only because of the ventriloquist. The fear that without the ventriloquist, I will regress, go back to being a lifeless puppet, a smirk pasted on to its face (22).

The simplicity of her needs makes her live in such a manner as to get away from this house; that’s why she decides to get away from “This hell of savagery and submission” (28).

Her self belief is shaken, when, unable to confront Manu, she comes back to her father’s house after a decades, but here too, she finds a sense of indifference; though the prodigal daughter goes with trepidation unsure of reception, yet she is least repentant, least changed, always on the defensive. It is guilt totally devoid of remorse. Her probing into the universally relevant issues of human relationship, man’s tragic aloneness, makes Saru, the realist to see the ultimate human reality in the carnal existence. She realises that the suffering of multitudes does not mitigate one’s own suffering and that a woman is doomed to sit and watch happiness recede from her, all by herself. She understands. “that’s what all of us have to face a the end. That we are alone. We have to be alone”.

Saru places her trust in self-confidence and the possibility of human interdependence. The perfect partnership between Madhu and the father is a demonstration of the meaningful interdependence and interaction. It is a perfect pattern where they make no demand on each other. She thinks logically and her self-confidence is revealed when she says;

All right, so I’m alone. But so’s everyone else. ...we have to go on trying. If we can’t believe in ourselves, we’re sunk (220).

The feeling of having a room of her own is accentuated when the brother of Madhava is lost and his parents are after him to find his
brother (Madhava is a young boy who stays with Saru’s father). He gets frustrated and irritated by their constant messages and cries out: “I can’t spoil my life because of that boy. It’s my life, after all.” (208). These four words keep echoing in her mind almost haunting her, “And yet they would not leave her alone. She went back to bed, the words going on and on in her mind”. (208).

In accordance with Saru’s philosophy, the ultimate reality is one’s self, one’s own self. Gradually, the need for quest aries. Saru laments, “It’s all a question of adjustment, really. If you want to make it work, you can always do it.” (118). Saru parents an analysis of her share in her marriage turning out to be a disaster.

My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood (217).

The complexity of situation to be undertaken is her own creation and hence she alone can solve it; the darkness of mind ceases to remain terrible the moment Sarita decides to face the situation. Sarita wants to set things at any cost to her advantage. To attain that end in view, she becomes so desperate, seeks her inner strength the moment she realises that she is the master of her own destiny. Once the realisation comes, all other things that cause problems melt into thin air because of the mental equilibrium attained through the realisation. It is augmented by the individuals attitude reflected through a prisoner of mind towards life assuming a social responsibility to tell others how to live.

Sarita in The Dark Holds No Terrors depicts the journey of modern woman towards financial independence, emotional balance and social recognition.22

Saru realises that she had been a puppet in the hands of destiny. Because she had made herself one, because she had been afraid of proving her mother right. This is a significant step in the revitalization of her relationship with her husband.
The emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife in the end is, therefore, not a rebel but a redeemed wife...one who is no longer afraid of the dark.23

The stumbling walls of Self belief and Self confidence emerge out of the coral rocks of a new atlantis, when the novel That Long Silence is explored with a cathartic methodology. It presents an account of how Jaya, a housewife and a writer, is married to Mohan, who, having been accused of corruption, goes to Dadar flat, where he may remain unknown; Jaya is given to realize how she had made a number of compromise; in the end her self confidence makes her determine that the fearful silence must be broken in order to conquer male domination.

That Long Silence could be read as crystallization of memory and catharsis. It is an autobiographical narrative of Jaya. The novel achieves greater credibility from the fact that Jaya, the protagonist, is a very well-read person, possessing a literary sensitivity which corresponds with her fictional role. Articulate women character are obviously difficult to create, nurtured as they are in the culture of silence. The author has managed to overcome this difficulty by endowing her protagonist with abundant creative talent. Possessing the consciousness of social milieu the narrator unfolds her story.

Ostensibly, she relates it as the story of a particular couple, but the power relations in the patriarchal structures, and gender differentiation with all its ramifications, and the typical travails of the woman struggling to define herself take on the dimension of the condition and place of the Indian woman in society.24

Jaya like Saru of The Dark Holds No Tennos analyses herself and emerges with self-confidence. Alongwith her brother, she was educated in a convent school and she could develop her individuality under the patronage of her father because he gave her the name ‘Jaya’. He had very high opinion about her daughter that she would come out as
victorious: “You are not like the others. Jaya”. It was unfortunate for Jaya that her father expired at an early age when she was yet to be a graduate. She had never developed a cordial relationship with her mother who often quarreled with her husband and so she preferred to stay in hostel, friendship in her bereavement, to staying with her mother who hardly felt the loss of her husband. It was the demand of the situation her elder brother was persuaded to marry off at the earliest opportunity so that the task, left unfinished by her father may be completed at the earliest. She was selected by Mohan as his bride. Achievement of the self confidence appears to be a game of hide and seek for Jaya and Mohan, when he demands the keys, she refuses to hand it over to him; she opens the door herself symbolising her refused to be servile, she is aware that, “it was not he who had relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him. (9)

In the company of her neighbours and servants, she feels the ease, and is prepared to look at herself with almost objectivity and examine her relationship with her husband. Ruminating on the past, she realizes how she wasted away the most valuable time of her life in arranging and re-arranging things, dusting, polishing, washing, ironing, cleaning the fridge and changing the sheets. The disclosure from the pages of her diary causes her astonishment as to how she had spent her life engrossed in such trivialities as what she bought, how much she paid for it, the dates the children’s schools had begun, the servants absence, the advance payments they had taken etc.

Swinging like pendulum between desire and disgust, she constantly tries to bridge the gap between the mythicized wife and mothers and her own experiences of being a wife and mother and is often racked by pangs of guilt and inadequacy. To fashion herself according to the edicts laid down by the women’s magazines, she religiously follows their advice; “I felt nothing but pity for the girl who had sat and creamed her face at night, rubbing the cream in circles as she had read she should” (96). She becomes monotonous, because household deeds are to be repeated
again and again on one hand and she has to face emotional solitariness on the other; she find family unendurable,

I had to admit the truth to myself—that I had often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony... for us, there was just living—one foot in front of another, one foot in front of another, until death came to us in a natural form (4).

To her life has become futile, for it is built around the needs of a husband only. “The truth was that we had both lost the props of our lives.” (24)

However, emancipated from her daily burden of repetitive chores, she also gets a first hand experience of a strange sense of undulated freedom,

And yet I had a curious sense of freedom. There was nothing to be cleaned, nothing to be arranged or rearranged...I was free, after years, of all those monsters that had ruled my life, gadgets that had to be kept in order, the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and curious that had to be kept spotless and dust free, and those clothes, God, all those never-ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again (25).

A perusal of her diaries reveals that her mental agony and emotional turbulence have not been reflected in this chronicle of daily events. She realizes that the essential core had been left out...As also the question that had confronted me everyday- ‘Is this all?’ The biggest question facing the woman of these diaries had obviously been what shall I make for breakfast/ lunch/tea/dinner? That had been the *last motif of My Life*. (70)
Self confidence is restored when Jaya’s creative self is revealed in her attempts to write stories. Her creativity provides her an outlet for her frustration; Mohan takes pride in his author wife, but wants her to write non-controversial middles only. Jaya wants to develop into an unrestrained individual who is not encumbered by the superficial restrictions of her milieu, yet not at odds with its basic prohibitions. Kamat points out that it was her fear of failing as a writer that kept her away from her profession. At this stage, Jaya makes up her mind to live her life by actively participating in it and not by running away from it. Finding out the answer to all her pending question she frankly confesses it, “And so I have crawled back into my hole. I had felt safe then, comfortable, unassailable. And so I had stopped writing” (148). Having presented an analysis of all activities, she understood, “Self-revelation is a cruel process” (1). She also finds that, The ghost most fearful to confront is the ghost of one’s old self (13).

The introspective instinct of Jaya makes her realise that she has failed as an author and that is because she has made enormous sacrifice on her profession and her aspiration to see that her marriage is not jeopardised. She knows that she does not speak in her true voice or present her personal vision. And her past is visualised in a detached way.

This was what I saw, the ghost of a woman who had scrubbed and cleaned and taken an inordinate pride in her achievements, even in a toilet free from stains and smells (13).

This woman is an alter ego of Jaya, for she has by now deviated from this earlier self of her. That earlier self which developed after her marriage is better identified by the name ‘Suhasini’ given to her by Mohan at the time of marriage. She equates ‘Suhasini’ to the sparrow in the bed-time story of the crow and sparrow.

To the utter surprise the victim in the story, the crow is male and the victorious sparrow, a female. The aim of Shashi Deshpande is to
emphasize that the sparrow is the ultimate loser, because there is no such things as safety and the female cannot be safe even if she is devoid of all moral values for the sake of maintaining her family safe. Equating ‘Suhasini’ to the sparrow in the story, the writer reveals the inhumanity and deceitfulness of the traditional role of a woman as a mother and a housewife, a role glorified by the society and accepted by the gullible women folk:

I have a feeling that even if little boys can forget this story, little girls never will. They will store this story in their subconscious, their unconscious or whatever, and eventually they will become that damnably, insufferably priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their babies...and to hell with rest of the world. (17)

Shashi Deshpande is a spokesperson of women who go unsung and unnoticed by the society, and who need to be projected as rare specimens (who have evolved themselves from utter subjection to the freedom of the spirit at least) and celebrated. Silence was there in Jaya’s life. It was a forced silence when she had refused to communicate openly with those around her for, she feared that she would hurt them. She has not been successful in her chosen career because she had to stop her chosen writing as Mohan objects it.

Jaya was, not so afraid of darkness and insects; she remembers the peculiar exhalération she had, while moving in a company car that passed through the “shouting, gesticulating menacing looking” laboures who were on strike. This boldness and fearlessness was due to the influence of her father. Jaya says, “Appa (father) never had any doubts, he often told us, about the fact that victory would come, nor about whose victory is was going to be.” (15)

Jaya got encouragement from Kamat; her feminine virtues were disapproved by Kamat, the lonely, elderly man of literary sensibilities, who happened to be her neighbour; she is reminded of her conversation with Kamat one day, and her real motive that led her to be moulded
as a woman, is exposed: “And when I had been praised for anything, I’d been so ridiculously pleased, ‘I almost wag my tail, like a dog that’s been patted by its master,” I had told Kamat.

Don’t try to act the martyr now. It’s all your fault. Your really enjoy it, don’t you?

What?

Making others dependent on you. It increases your sense of power. And that’s what you really want, all your bloody looking-after-others, caring-for-others women (84).

Her capability for self-analysis paves the way for making an independent choice; Kamat inculcated confidence in her mind and asked to take herself seriously; he once told her,

Why didn’t you use that anger in your story? There’s none of it here. There isn’t even a personal view, a personal vision. I’ll tell you what’s really wrong with your story. It’s too restrained. Spew out your anger in your writing, woman, spew it out. (147)

The publication of ‘Seeta’ column was looked down upon by Kamat as an ‘obnoxious creation’; it was further held that Jaya was meant for something higher; she feels that love is more powerful than gratitude, for such a love falls outside the conventional boundaries. Her fear impels her to run away from the place the moment she sees Kamat’s dead body. Though she has cordial feeling for him, she avoids to speak out; after alleviating deep rooted fear, she writes:

The loneliness of a man facing his death—is there anything like it in his world? His pain filled this room and we could both of us feel it, Mukta and I. The fellowship of pains seemed to blind us together; we were like two patients in a hospital, suffering from the same diseases, lying on the adjacent beds (186).
Jaya was unmindful of Kamat’s death but the way of she left him. She herself was not commendable, as knew the real cause of her behaviour, the socialisation of which occurs when Mukta had asked her if she was afraid of Mohan while leaving Kamat, the truth occurred to Jaya: “Stumbling over the words, I suddenly realised—it was not Mohan but marriage that had made me circumspect” (187). Jaya puts a question mark to her internal psyche whether the kind of life she has been leading at all be accepted.

...what do you want?...Just to live. To know that at the end of the day my family and I are under a roof, safe, enclosed, in a secure world. If it’s dark outside, what does it matter? I can close the door and windows, switch on the lights and the darkness will recede (181-82).

Adele King observes;

In a self-referential parody, Deshpande makes Jaya a writer of woman’s magazine fiction. In Jaya’s stories they lived happily ever after although she knows the falsity of the view of life. Also, the mixture of surrealism and fantasy in some of the experiences the writer undergoes is an important aspect of the making and unmaking of fictions in That Long Silence.²⁶

Jaya’s self-confidence makes her conscious of female sexuality, when she is given to understand that neither the stronger, nor the fairer sex needs a total elimination from the succinct of a healthy domesticity or social existentialism; the solution of problems is to be achieved through mutual and reciprocal discussion.

The woman has over the centuries developed an ethic that is appropriate to the world view that is emerging out of the new physics: they see in terms of relationship and in terms of environmental of human values for centuries. Their
primary value is a reverence for life. This ethic must become the governing world ethic.27

The auto-analytical methodology provides Jaya with a sort of process to acknowledge and confess her flaw, as she did not like the very idea of making Mohan a scapegoat; at this juncture she understands that her journalistic role of ‘Seeta’ is the fundamental cause of domestic break up:

Why had I suppressed that desperate woman? And now once again the man Nair and his family come back to me, that family that bound itself together and walked into the sea. We’ve been like that, all of us, bound by fear. Yes, I have been scared, scared of breaking through that thin veneer of a happy family (191).

She became fearless because the panic was gone. The disappearance of panic made her fearless. Her own self is revealed to her only after she was left to her introspection in the Dadar flat.

The truth is that it was Mohan who had a clear idea of what he wanted, the kind of life he wanted to lead, the kind of home he would live in, and I went along with him. But I cannot blame Mohan, for even if he had asked me—what do you want? I would have found it hard to give him a reply. Maitreyee comes to my mind now, Maitreyee who so definitely rejected her philosopher husband Yajnavalkya’s offer of half his property. ‘Will this property give me immortality?’ she asked him, ‘No’, he said, and she immediately rejected the property. To know what you want... I have been denied that (25).

Her thought process is going on,

I’ve always thought—there’s only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices. Yathocchasi tatha
kuru—I had seen the Sanskrit words in Appa’s diary after his death ... What are Prophets and Masters for if not to tell you what to do? But now I understand. With this line, after all those millions of words of instruction, Krishna confers humanness on Arjuna? ‘I have given you knowledge. Now make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire (191-92).

Like the warriors of Mahabharata assembled at Kurukshetra, the characters, created by Shashi Deshpande, have to make their choice and wage their battles on their own accord, none else can do it for them; the consequence may be in the hands of some celestial Power, but it is the individual self, that is held responsible as the dispenser of destiny. Knowing this unconsciously, people are afraid to change themselves. They live in a set mode and refuge to come out on an adventure of the spirit. In the words of Mukta, ‘People don’t change’. As Jaya herself feels,

It’s true. We don’t change overnight. It’s possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this; life has always to be made possible (193). Through these two novels Deshpande defines woman as a subject in her own right; Jaya and Saru strive for and obtain a certain autonomy, they have realized their immense potentialities for action and self-actualization. Their return home is not defeatism but the triumph of the independence of woman, for it has made them learn to live in society; their perception is expressed in the words of Virginia woolf in A Room of One’s Own: ‘There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind’.

Having developed an autonomous personality, based upon self confidence, self realisation, these women have found an articulation, and have become part and parcel of domestic and social existentialism. The process of self-discovery is illuminating and it is a cathartic experiment. It is a rebirth and a resurrection of self. A new Jaya is born
out of an ‘agonizing and despairing Jaya’. Self cannot be cut into pieces, a Jaya of Mohan or a Jaya of her own. She pledges to live a ‘whole’ life retaining all that did not fit in the straitjacket of ‘wifehood’. She decides to give her own answers to Mohan, not the answers expected by him. The ending of the narrative with “life has always to be made possible” (193) is a note of hope and affirmation, reverberating the theme of faith in one’s self, culminating into self confidence.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande has enabled the reader to undertake an astronomical voyage through a galaxy of minor theme towards a nebula, where the new solar orbit is yet to be born with the cooling and soothing revolution of lunar orbits of a practicable philosophy and code of conduct that is to provide womankind with a new existence and make our terrestrial surface better inhabitable.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER-VII

MINOR THEMES

(1) Theme of Fragmentation and Reconciliation.
(2) Theme of Revolt.
(3) Theme of Self-belief and Self-Confidence.
(4) Theme of Shame and Guilt.
(5) Post-modern and Post-colonial Arguments.