‘Sometimes, in summer, we slept in the courtyard. We could lie in the dark and watch the stars come out. And everything was so quiet that when we spoke, the words came out soft [....] There was so just a silence. I wonder whether I’ll ever hear silence again.

— Shashi Deshpande : ‘Can You Hear Silence’.

SUCH at least is the destiny of a woman in the likelihood of a military subaltern, a term of Latin origin comprising the Prefix ‘sub’, meaning ‘below’ and alternus, meaning alternate, who is meant to obey and work that never to speak, so far as Indian society is concerned; it is out of this framework that Shashi Deshpande has created a galaxy of female characters comprising Jaya in That Long Silence, wherein the woman, by virtue of maintaining a life long silence in her marital life, aims at a subalternity, by suppressing her desire, Saru, who, in The Dark Holds No Terrors, is the indicative of subalternity as she is the silent victim of gender discrimination before and after marriage; Indu of Roots and Shadows becomes the emblem of subaltern slavery incapable of liberating herself from the shackles of a traditional society; and Madhu in Small Remedies observing subalternity as an expanded metaphor engulfing the lots of Savitribai, Leela and of her own self. The term ‘Subaltern’ has been borrowed from history. A group of Indian histories called the ‘Subaltern Studies Group’ coined and introduced this term. Ranjit Guha, the editor of Subaltern Studies, wrote in his preface to first volume that this series of historiographical writing concentrates on the subordinate groups. This is a sort of acknowledgement of their claim for making history, because until now only the elite have been represented in history. He uses the word ‘Subaltern’ to define “the general attributes of subordination in ‘South Asian Society’, whether this is expressed in term of caste, class, age, gender and office, or in any other way’.¹ For Guha, the term ‘Subaltern’ indicates a heterogeneous group.
Spivak upholds this idea, but she is also critical of it, for she thinks that the gendered Subaltern has no place in the construction of Subaltern groups.

‘Subaltern’ commonly refers to the perspective of persons from religions and groups outside the hegemonic power structure. In the 1970s, the term ‘Subaltern’ began to be used as a reference to colonized people in South Asian subcontinent. ‘Subaltern Studies’ began in the early 1980s as an “intervention in South Asian historiography” while it began as a model for the subcontinent, it in a speedy manner developed into a ‘Vigorous postcolonial critique’. ‘Subaltern’ is now regularly used as a term in history, anthropology, sociology, economics, literature, philosophy, and other branches of study, the term ‘Subaltern’ is used in postcolonial theory. The exact meaning of the term in current philosophical and critical usage is disputed. Some thinkers use it in a general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes a person rendered without agency by her of his social status. Others, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak uses it in a more specific sense. She argues that subaltern isn’t.

Just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who’s not getting a the pie... In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference. Now who would say that’s just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It’s not subaltern... Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated against minority on the university campus, they don’t need to word ‘Subaltern’... They should see what the mechanics of the discrimination are. They’re within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.²

Antonio Gramsci has the credit of being the first writer to make use of the term ‘Subaltern’ in a sense other than military terminology, for it is
believed that he used the term as a synonym for proletariat, possibly as a codeword in order to get his writings past prison censors, while others believe his usage to be more nuanced and less clearcut. In several essays, Homi Bhabha, a key thinker within postcolonial thought, lays stress upon the importance of social power, relations in his working definition of ‘Subaltern’ groups as “oppressed, minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: Subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.”³

Boaventura de Sousa Santos uses the term ‘Subaltern cosmopolitanism’ extensively in his book Toward a New Legal Common Sense published in 2002. He refers to this term in the context of counter-hegemonic practices, movements, resistances an struggles against neoliberal globalization, particularly the struggle against social exclusion. The term has been used by him interchangeably with cosmopolitan legality as a diverse normative framework for an ‘equality of differences’; in this context the term subaltern is used to denote marginalised and oppressed people(s) specifically struggling against hegemonic globalization.

The conceptual analysis through a series of definitions being over, there arises a question mark of utmost significance, as to who the subaltern living entity is, and where does subaltern consciousness come from; this aims at two alternatives, the one depicting the plight of the proletariat against the luxuries of the elite, while the other, in a typical Indian context laments upon the miseries of womankind, who has to suffer right from the cradle to the grave, the pangs of ‘gender subalternity’; in the corollary to the well known concept of second class citizens, Simon De Beauvoir comes forward with her theory of the ‘second sex’, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a pioneer among the defining authorities on ‘subalternity’ in Indian context, comes out with her thesis the immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband is a horrible instance of the muteness, indecision, and inaction of a subaltern and gender-discriminated woman.
Thus the term ‘Subaltern’ indicates a heterogenous group. Spivak upholds this view yet she thinks that the gendered subaltern as a subaltern has no place in the construction of other subaltern groups. In her, ‘Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography’, she discloses “the discrepancies in the work when one reads against the grain.” The underlying idea of Spivak’s thesis is that the Subaltern Studies Group has overlooked the subjectivity of the woman, while trying to restore consciousness to the subordinate. Actually, there are moments when a woman can be seen identical with ‘effaced identity’; but these have not been given enough consideration; the female subaltern consciousness has been completely neglected. Her argument is that;

Male subaltern and historian are here united in the common assumption that the procreative sex is a species apart, scarcely if at all to be considered a part of civil society. It is this concern that makes her ask the question ‘can the Subaltern Speak? in an essay entitled ‘Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice.’ The latter part of the title refers to the tradition of Sati—the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. The women were forced to become satis. From their inability to make themselves heard, Gayatri Charavorty Spivak draws the conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak, cannot make herself heard and therefore keeps herself apart from those who take part in the speech act. She points out that there is a difference between the idea of substituting and that of representing who represents the subaltern—a group comprising of ‘subsistence farmers, unorganised peasant labour’. In accordance with the findings of Spivak, the gendered subaltern is not at all represented, the issue of female subalternity has been raised, because any other form of exploitation is doubly complicated within the patriarchal social structure. The representation of the subaltern means learning to speak to them; this new learning involves unlearning many things which we have unconsciously imbibed through patriarchy.
The concept of the gendered subaltern makes Spivak assert that event of political independence brings about a change in the power equation. Those who were ruled now become the rulers. In this new nation, however, there is always a space that connects this space and the culture of imperialism. This space is also out of the reach of organised labour and is described as the habitat of the subaltern. Spivak also makes differentiation within this space as well. This space can mean a space of silence, of an incomplete speech act. In her ‘A Literary Representation of the subaltern: A woman’s text from The Third World (1988), Spivak describes the silence as well as the solitude of the subaltern woman. She asserts that a text from the ‘third world’ can bring elite methodologies to crisis; it is also told by her that she approaches the text as a teacher and not as a historian. In subaltern historiography, the historian creates a place for subaltern. The feminist literary critic focuses her attention on the subaltern of the subalterns, who has been denied subjectivity. These two positions do not annul each other. It is true that the historian and the teacher of literature have somewhat different attitudes towards history and literature, and they can bring one-another to crisis.

The most important feminist of the West is Simon de Beauvoir (1908-86). The emerging feminists were inspired not only by the ideas in The Second Sex but even more so by De Beauvoir’s personal life. In her personal life, De Beauvoir lived with her lover and comrade Jean Paul Sarte—but she never married him. Even more inspiring was her decision to deliberately remain childless, so that she could dedicate herself to the cause of women’s liberation, for which she had to teach, travel, write or join a political movement. All this made her a role model of the liberated women who exemplified that if a woman was determined enough, she would live life on her own terms. She pointed out that womanhood as we know it is a social construct; that the inequality of the sexes is not nature’s design, but a result of various social forces. In her introduction to The Second Sex (1953) de Beauvoir wrote,
Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being...For him, she is sex—absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with references to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the other.\textsuperscript{6}

Thus the term ‘other’ which was elaborated upon by the feminists, was originally introduced by Simon de Beauvoir; she argues that “one is not born but rather becomes a woman.”

Physical weakness as contrasted with masculine vigour is the prime limitation of womankind; the values reflected in art, literature, religion and culture are prescribed by man, not by woman. Consequently, man remains at the centre, driving woman to the margin or periphery. Simon de Beauvoir considers the question as to why, in spite of so much injustice, woman does not stand against male sovereignty. She concludes that in order to fight male-domination it becomes a desideratumprimum for women to organize themselves into a unified whole. However, women do not have any concrete means through which they will be able to achieve such a unity. Normally, it is shared histories or common religion that bring people together; this is not applicable to women, though they share their womanhood, yet it is equally true that they are dispersed among their male counterparts. It is true that both man and woman are interdependent on each other, but man possesses the power to gratify himself through his actions, while a woman, by virtue of being handicapped becomes dependent upon man; her rights are recognized only in principle; better jobs, higher salary and opportunity to march ahead are reserved for men only. A fundamental question has been raised by Simon de Beauvoir as to how did the inequality begin, and why should man have won from the start? She refers to the seventeenth century feminist Poulain de la Barre who says, “Being man, those who have made and compiled the laws have favoured their own sex, and jurits have elevated these laws into principles.”
The essential difference between the orisons offered by Judaic man and woman in a synagogue is that, while a woman is conditioned to accept the role assigned to her in this ‘totus mundus historicus’, a male creature expresses his gratefulness to Jehovah, for not making him a woman. Thus the male uses religion to brainwash the woman into accepting her subordinate position as if commanded and desired by God Himself. With the industrial revolution, women entered the field of productive labour and their claim to equality acquired an economic basis. However, man began to consider woman as a dangerous competitor and became even more aggressive. From such examples, Simon de Beauvoir concludes that today’s so-called ‘inferior’ woman is the product of centuries-old discrimination.

History is full of inequality and injustice meted out to a woman even the working woman has to reconcile her career with her marriage, man has been kept from such a destiny demanding sacrifice and surrender. In spite of her outside work, she has to do household work for the family. De Beauvoir rightly says that even after the attainment of equality. Woman’s world would remain different from man’s, ideological that the realization of woman’s suppressed potential would be in the interest not only of woman alone, but of entire humanity.

That a certain lack of self identity is the major problem to be faced by working women, looked down upon as some subaltern being, is evident from the novels, written by Shashi Deshpande; for instance Indu (Roots and Shadows) is a journalist, Jaya (That Long Silence) is educated and a writer, Urmī (The Binding Vine) is a college teacher, Saru (The Dark Holds No Terrors) is a doctor. Of course in these novels there are working women too. Some of them like Nirmala and Janakibai (The Dark Holds No Terrors) make a guest appearance and that too for a very short time, women characters such as Jeeja, Nayana, Tara, although victims of patriarchy, are still economically independent. Salu and Shakutai (The Binding Vine) can be called gendered subalterns, although the latter develops her own voice with the aid of Urmī. Deshpande’s novels reveal the inability of the woman to speak and the positive movement is always a march forward towards
speech, towards the fragility of _That Long Silence_, which is the story of its protagonist Jaya who belonged to a middle-class family in North-West India, a family that was not ready to give equal status to man and woman. It was her father who gave her the name ‘Jaya’ that meant ‘winner’, for he had cherished sublime dreams from her daughter and could leave no stone unturned to inspire her with his conviction that she was not like other women and that she must be a splendour in the firmament of time that may be eclipsed but is extinguished not. It was bad luck for Jaya that her father expired at an early age. Jaya’s mother had learnt to live without her husband and after her husband’s death she went back to her parental house at Ambegaon, as if her twenty years with her husband in Saptagiri had been only in interlude.

It was the natural and inevitable demand of the situation, that, with a view to finishing the unfinished task left by her father, Jaya persuades her elder brother to get her married to a suitable groom at the earliest; and it is coincidental that the proposal comes from Mohan, who wanted to have a convent educated girl as his wife; the rejection of such a groom, in the thought-process of Jaya would have been nothing but a sheer instance of insanity. At the time of marriage she was given a new name ‘Suhasini’, and surprisingly her personality got changed after marriage.

...When he wrote my name it had been ‘Suhasini’, not Jaya. And if I disowned the name, he had never failed to say reproachfully, ‘I chose that name for you’.7

Jaya puts heart and soul together to adjust with such a traditional mould; she seeks to become a smiling, placid motherly woman, a role suggested by the mellifluous name, ‘Suhasini’. The underlying credo is, ‘Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you’re safe’. (p. 17) A husband in such a scheme becomes a sheltering tree’. Jaya reflects; “After so many years, the words came back to me. A Sheltering tree. Without the tree, you’re dangerously unprotected and vulnerable” (32).
And since a husband is the saviour, a woman should never complain or protest. Mohan’s mother does not do so, inspite of his father’s piling humiliations upon her. “He saw strength in the woman’s suffering silently” (36). The ideology of matriarchy compels Mohan to a certain type iconocratism. Mohan’s sister Vimala, too, suffers without complaining. An ovarian tumour makes her give up the ghost. As Jaya reports, “She sank into a coma and died a week later, her silent intact” (39). The other women in his household accept their roles with acquiescence too. Jaya, after a visit, reflects: “They had been a revelation to me, the women in his family, so definite about their roles so well trained in their duties.” (83)

Whereas, a woman, right from her infancy is conditioned to consider marriage as the only goal of her life, it is but natural that she becomes a victim of an ingrained and unbreakable social structure; nurtures and dreams of marrying a prince riding a white stallion with whom she will live happily ever after, but she has to face the stark reality of the game awaited before the prime of her life: “...for women the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws’ home. Wait until you have kids (30).

The idea of marriage providing protection to the wife is the prime concern in Indian society. The husband shelters the wife who is thought to be physically as well as mentally inferior to him. As Minh-ha says,

...difference reduced to sexual identity is thus posited to justify and conceal exploitation. The Body, the most visible difference between man and woman, the only one to offer a secure ground for those who seek the permanent, the feminine ‘nature’ and essence, remains thereby the safest basis for racist and sexist ideologies.  

If some ornithological verisimilitude is to be earmarked, Jaya’s matrimonial bliss comes in comparison with that of a sparrow, and reminds the conscientious reader of what Hamlet exclaims, ‘there is a destiny, even in the fall of a sparrow’. She has built an edifice of security around her
husband and children believing it to be a burrow into which she can crawl, reptile like, and feel safe. Over the years, she shapes herself “so resolutely to his desires” that in the end she is left with no identity of her own, “Just emptiness and silence” (p. 144). She like, Gandhari of Mahabharata “symbolically bondages her eyes and grows blind to his weaknesses. Like Sita who followed her husband into exile, she follows Mohan into concrete jungle that is Bombay” (11).

Jaya, the only daughter of unconventional family, loved by her father and adored by her brothers was brought up differently. The disparity in their background leads to a clash of expectations. The first conflict of ideas takes place when Jaya was pregnant and, repulsed with the odour of cooking oils, asks Mohan to cook. This made Mohan feel insulted, for he was asked to perform a non-masculine deed, hence Mohan tries to laugh it off; Jaya’s insistence flares up into fight in which Jaya responds in an equally ill temper, as she had always done at her father’s house. Mohan, shocked at her display of anger. Jaya is made to feel that her anger shattered the image of a submissive wife which was created by his mother, about whom he had proudly told her, “My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her” (83). Jaya realised that Mohan believed in patriarchy and “to him anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’” (83).

Through Jaya’s character and role Deshpande expresses an ambivalent attitude of contemporary educated independent-minded Indian women, who can neither reconcile themselves to a new situation when their husbands ignore them and crush their ambition in life, nor can they cast off the serpentine coil of husbandry;

If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly, I did not want to know anything. It was enough for me moved to Bombay. (61-62)
Jaya passes through a plethora of self-doubts, fears, guilts, anger and silence towards articulation and affirmation. According to Suman Ahuja, while reviewing the novel in The Times of India observes that Jaya:

Caught in an emotional eddy, endeavours to come to terms with her Protean roles, while trying albeit in vain, to rediscover her true themself, which is but an ephemera (...) an unfulfilled wife a disappointed mother and a failed writer.9

The plight of the heroine is brought to the fore and the cause of which is forcing her to come out of the shell, she has chosen to live all these days. Jaya is capable of making someone a scapegoat for her failures, as she finds faults with her husband for her failure as a writer; at one stage she tells her husband that she gave up writing because of him, she remarks; “I had known then that it hadn’t mattered to Mohan that I had written a good story” (144). Thinking Mohan as her only career and so in spite of her best judgement she gives up writing fiction and settle down to writing middles to newspapers which pose no problem to any one. The stories under the ‘Seeta’ column were appreciated by the public and Jaya became famous as a female writer, but she was not happy inwardly, she knew that her ‘Seeta’ column had nothing to do with reality or with her real self. Jaya is an example of modern predicament and the stream of consciousness that ensues out of it is a silent brook of thoughts and feelings. She knows pretty well that in order to get by a relationship one has to learn a lot of tricks and “Silence is one of them (...) you never find a woman criticising her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage the relationship.”10

Jaya’s surrender to Mohan is without an iota of revolt’ she wants to his will she never says ‘Yes’, when her husband asks her whether he has hurt her: “(...) in the emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit of being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him (48). A dominating husband and a suffering wife—that is her relationship with Mohan. In her there is an interior desire for creativity and fulfilment but this creative expression in her is inhibited due to lack of privacy, of sheer
physical space to reflect the work in. Virginia woolf, the pioneer of stream of consciousness novel in English, attributed woman’s lack of creativity to her not having a room of her own. Nayantara Sahgal recalls that until she wrote *Rich Like Us* in United States on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, she never had a room of her own where she could write undisturbed and “where there are no interruption”. In case of Jaya a powerful pressure from family and society stifles her creativity and puts a barrier before her literary activity in subservience to her role as a housewife. Feminists like Helene Cixons and Luce Irrigarary identify the feminine at levels of silent and unconscious. Jaya says, “like a disease, a disability I had to hide from everyone” (97). Her urges are silent and mute pinings passively manifested in moments of crisis and in “chaotic sequence of events and non-events” that made up her life. She was silent because, It was so much simpler to say nothing. So much less complicated” (99).

Deshpande’s protagonists are symbolical in their socio-familial import; Jaya is a woman, who adjusts and accommodates, unlike the modern women who find themselves, “forced into the background by the claims of culture” and hence they adopt “an inimical attitude toward it.”11 She does not possess the qualities expected from a woman of the traditional Indian Society where the other sex is confined to the hearth and man to the external world, where woman is follower and man the leader, where woman is the sufferer and man the ordainer; all this made her believe that there is pain in hostility, and rebellion is anguish and agony. Hence, she adopts a subaltern and subservient attitude: “Two bullocks yoked together (...) it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?” (11-12) Jaya pines for social communication but the society is impervious to her spiritual need. Such a society as a mirror is always treacherous for it fails to show what we want to see beyond our visual perception.

There develops disheartening silence and a type of stale familiarity between the husband and the wife. Mohan’s queries remain unanswered
by Jaya for she is unable to find a word of response. Her inner turmoils are so tense and acute that words fail to articulate. She is incapable of giving expression to trouble for she is a woman, who faces the suffering of her life and the opposition of the milieu in the true spirit of ideal Hindu womanhood, where obedience and loyalty has degenerated to the state of canine subservience; this had made her life chaotic. The discord in their temperament outlook is so wide that they fail time and again to understand each other and having failed to discover the truth, she remains silent and reticent revealing her most entirely and private thoughts in her writing. Mohan wonders as to how could women be so rebellious and esoteric, so angry and recalcitrant:

A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There is no room for despair, either. There is only order and routine—today, I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after, clean the fridge. (…) 147-48).

As its is declared by Manu, the law giver of Hindu religion,

Day and night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family; in childhood to the father, in youth to her husband, in old age to her sons [...]¹²

Keeping aside their sense of liberty and emancipation, women have to pay for happiness, that is why De Beauvoir emphasises that such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too sublime for anyone, because the kind of self-contentment, serenity and security that marriage offers woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness and eminence: “She shuts behind her the doors of her new home, when she was a girl, the whole countryside was her homeland; the forests were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space…”¹³ It is sexual maladjustment in marriage that, apart from being extremely personal affair, manifests itself in Jaya’s taciturnity. Her romantic longings of adolescence are transformed into rigid rules and rituals by tradition.
Deshpande presents Jaya as a voluntary victim, as she frantically tries to please her husband, even by trimming her hair, because he has a longing for her. Slowly, painfully, she learns what is expected of her. She learns how keen, sharp and difficult a woman’s role is. Once Jaya’s Ramu Kaka excitedly showed her the family tree prepared by him. He was proud to proclaim that he had gone back nearly two hundred years to trace the line of their ancestors. But Jaya was shocked to find her name missing.

But Ramukaka, I’d exclaimed, “I’m not here!” “You!” He had looked up, irritated by the interruption, impatient at my stupidity. “How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family. You’re married, you’re now part of Mohan’s family. You have no place here...But I had said nothing—neither to Ramukaka, nor to Mohan. Ajjı should be pleased with me. I had learnt it at last—no questions, no retorts, Only silence (142-143).

This fact reveals the utter lack of importance for women in Indian social setup.

Shashi Deshpande presents an analysis of the problems faced by the Indian women belonging to different strata of life. There is a galaxy of innumerable women characters in the novel, as they are denied proper attention and opportunities, and suffer from insecurity; childless Vanitamami suffers from insecurity in a male-dominated society. “If your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it; take up a hobby instead—cats, may be, or your sister’s children...” (31).

Deshpande’s understanding and command over psychology is blended with her feminist stand point. On account of Mohan’s mother and sister, the surrounding had become more cruel and suffocating. Mohan is unaware of the facts about his mother’s death which were told to Jaya by Mohan’s sister Vimla. She says that her mother always remained pregnant and she did not want the last child. Being desperate, she went to a midwife to get her aborted, and suffered a painful demise. Mohan’s father was an addict
of alcohol and he would come home late every night compelling her wife to wait with hot meal to serve him.

A significant woman character in addition to Mohan’s mother, is his sister Vimala who also died in silence. She was suffering from an ovarian tumour with metastases in the lungs, but she did not tell anyone about her sickness. Jaya’s Ajji is another subaltern female character in the novel. Jaya describes her as:

Ajji, a Shaven widow, had denuded herself of all those things that make up a woman’s life ...Ajji herself sat on the bare ground and slept on a straw mat at night. The bed was a memorial to grandfather and the chairs meant for any male who, wearing trousers, could not sit comfortably on the ground (26).

So far as the working class career oriented women are concerned, the picture is hardly better; though they earn money doing odd jobs all over the day, they are prey to all sorts of maltreatment, and are burdened with frequent pregnancy against their will. Nayana and Tara are such typical Indian women who cling to their husbands despite their various tortures simply because they owe their ‘Kumkum’, the mark of married women, to them. Nayana, the maid servant craves for male child, “Why give birth to a girl, behnji, who’ll only suffer because of men all her life?... No, No, behnji, better to have a son.” And here, she was again saying confidently, “this time it will be a son. He—he says he’ll throw me out if I have another daughter” (28). The elderly woman Jeeja is markedly distinct among the lot. Jaya refers to Jeeja’s ‘reticence’ or ‘Stoicism’. Her philosophy of life is scarcely distinct from that of other character, as Jaya is astonished to see no anger behind her silence. When asked by Jaya, she expressed her feelings which reveal her sympathetic understanding of others including her husband who appears to be the inherent cause of her suffering.

The metaphor of silence under which the novel is organized helps to impose a quietude and discipline : the inner dynamics of a self cut off
from human communication. *That Long Silence* is not an intrusion into the cosmos of silence but a silent communion with the oppressed self straining for articulation. Through the image of a woman crawling into a hole, Shashi Deshpande is adept in narrating the woeful plight of Jaya, unprotected and unshelled as the protagonist remarks:

> Distanced from real life. Scared of writing. Scared of failing. Oh God! I had thought... Even a worm has hole it can crawl into. I had mine—as Mohan’s wife, as Rahul’s and Rati’s mother (148).

Modern novelists of Indo Anglian Fiction, such as Deshpande tend to depict the oppression of women with greater self-consciousness, a deeper sense of involvement and often with a sense of outrage, zeal for depicting while earlier writers of fiction had deified and eulogised women’s suffering but the writers of the later part of the post independence era have unpalliatively presented their suffering with a compartively more firm realism. But Shashi Deshpande “Overdose the theme of women suffering so that the novel is in some danger of turning into a sociological tract.”¹⁴ While the predecessors of Shashi Deshpande were content with depiction superficial matters or succumbing to the ideology preached by Feminism, she studies facts and projects the ‘silence’ of all sort of women facing different types of problems; William Walsh considers, “the combination of the analytical and detached,”¹⁵ a particular and unusual quality of the novel.

Deshpande has made the story self-propelled without the novelist acting as a meddler and as an omniscient narrator. In fine, she has tentatively succeeded in introducing, “the reader directly into the inferior life of the character without any intervention by way of comment or explanation on the part of the author.”¹⁶ If Jaya in *That Long Silence* is the victim of subalternity, caused by a Phallicentric macrovesom of a traditional Indian society, Indu of *Roots and Shadows* falls a prey to hystericocratic subalternity, for she represents the lost of Indian womankind that has to suffer a number of humiliations from a matriarch Akka, who, by virtue of being a staunch disciplinarian, is totally against woman’s entering the external world. *Roots*
and Shadows projects the educated women who are unable to enfranchise the traditional background in which they are reared. The crux of all the prevailing problems of women is their subjugation which is always present in the form of silent servitude. The novel begins with the heroine’s return to her ancestral house. The parental home initiates her into an understanding of the meaning of human life. The protagonist has to raise the banner of revolt against Akka, her conventional world, her rigid values and marries Jayant. Ironically she realizes the futility of her decisions: “Jayant and I (...) I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasise.” In Roots and Shadows, Deshpande has displayed a series of girl children, where each girl faces a different problem within the family circle. Since her infancy, the psyche of a girl is moulded in a particular fashion to inculcate in her personality of feminine qualities. Simone De Beauvoir writes: “...it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature (...) described as feminine.”

The concept of दोषा नगर or the ‘Big House’ a bastion of social system from whose unseen presence the leaves dead are driven like ghosts from enchanter fleeing, makes Shashi Deshpande depict and narrate the uncommon experience of a woman, Indu, the nuclear character, who has to undertake an arduous journey across the masculine world. In this house nothing is as obvious as the division of male and female worlds. In regard to code of conduct, beliefs, customs, and role allocations women appear to have been born into a taboo world, discriminating them against the male world in clear terms. Indian women may be placed under three categories, those who follow tradition as a virtue; those who realise what is good but still are unable to come out; those who are independent. The first group comprises the uneducated they bank upon age-old beliefs and superstitions, and it would be hard to change them. They are sentimental and egoistic but they are not wise. In the novel Narmada (Atya), Kaki, Sumitra, Kamala, Sunanda and Kaku are remarkably traditional in their manner and outlook. Akka, too belongs to this class but without selfishness,
narrowness, poerlessness, longour and mawkishness of any one of them. Akka, who is the youngest sister of Indu’s grandfather.

The nymphomania of Akka knew no bounds, for she seduced Kaka, even after he had become a grand father himself, to a “red faced stuttering school boy by her venomous tongue”. Akka returns to her parental home as a rich widow after the death of her husband and since then saddles the whole family by establishing herself as a dictator and treating her family members as puppets; the giant of child marriage devoured the self of Akka, as she was married at a tender age of twelve and that too to a man who was old enough to be her father; this indicates that child marriage stifles her childhood which expounds to her the real trauma of being a girl; soul of a child whithers when she has to tolerate the scathing and bestial sexual advances of her husband.

The troubles of a child bride did not end here, as Akka’s husband was a wealthy man and he kept mistress; Akka as a married woman was expected to bear children but she faces many miscarriages due to ‘the kind of life she led. A woman is expected to keep her requirments at a subaltern position as contrasted with those of her family. Akka had to endure and submit to insults, injuries with a stoic patience no complaint whatsoever was ever made by her. Her husband becomes obsessed with a woman and this obsession further deteriorates Akka’s life.

In the second galaxy, no star shines as brightly as Mini, educated and to some extent aware of the peculiar situation in which she is placed, she is deeply bound by tangles of her society out of which she can not come out with her independent voice as Indu can. Mini’s obedience, silence and submission never allow her to go beyond the rules and regulations set by the family for girls; while following these rules Mini too accepts that the life of a girl is devoid of ‘choices’. Indu states;

Inner strength…I thought of the words as I looked down Mini’s bowed head. A woman’s life, they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, specially in this house, I had seen
the truth of this. The woman had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered have they been born without wills, or have their will atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality with a grace and composure that spoke eloquently of that inner strength (6)

Mini’s lackadaisical face makes Indu understand that she found the match incongruous. But in order to save her father from further complexities of her marriage, she poses a likelihood of agreement and decides not to show her disagreement. Women like Mini are toned and conditioned to intermingle their aspirations and desires with those of their family. Vrinda Nabar comments:

Moreover, even if we concede, that the girl is an alien in her father’s home, it is man-made laws and social strictures that make her so. Right from birth, a girl is made to feel like a bird of passage in her father’s home.19

Regarding a woman’s role playing, Rose Marie Tong observes:

Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive economically and/or psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing.20

It is an irony that the Indian women have been accepting their husbands with their flaws and trying to live up to the norms and conduct set by them, as they have to transform and mould themselves. Although these feminine qualities are imposed on them yet they find it difficult to liberate themselves from its bondage. “What choices do I have, Indu? ...Surely it is this, this fact that I can choose, that differentiates me from the animals” (125). Identical with Mini, Indu too was advised by the elderly women as a child to inculcate in her the cherished feminine qualities as it is the sole path to survive in male dominated families. A woman’s
mind is shaped by hammering constantly that she is weak both physically and mentally and is subordinate to man, in *Roots And Shadows*, the dominant culture and the marginalized culture are displayed in the form of suppression of the latter by the former. Thus subalternity becomes the psychology of unconsciousness that subjects a woman to hold her tongue as she fails to identify herself with the masculine idolatory. How for these positions are proven in feminine text can be seen here:

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. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. And... I had watched them and found it to be true. There had to be, it not the substance at least the shadow of submission... Then I had met Jayant, and I found out that he too expected me to submit...(158)

Virginia Woolf’s remark is worth considering:

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.  

The political metaphor of a ‘class two citizen’ finds its appropriate example, when it is expanded to the concept of subalternity, requiring a woman to live under the same roof and provide sexual content and warmth to her husband; thus she awaits a comparism with thing ‘edible’ or something that provoked strange feelings of awe when encountered as if one saw, say, an aeroplane. Indu does all the activities which her husband would like. She herself notices:

can’t blame him. It is not he who has pressurised me into this. It is the way I want it to be...Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own (49).

Moreover the uncompromising Indu surrenders at times before Jayant if only for show. Tong observes :

A woman may say that she diets, exercises, and dresses for herself, but in reality she is probably shaping and adorning her flesh for men. A woman has little or no say about when, where, how or by whom her body will be used.22

She learnt the things like deception and hypocrisy. “Her desire to assert herself had driven her from affection to hypocrisy.”23 As the realization of Indu is, “I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see... I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bit of garbage.” (38) That she had faded far away, dissolved and quite forgotten her identity by intermingling her self, torments her psyche with fear; the unpremeditated paradox is. that she is not happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot leave without him. She leaves one house and enters another to be independent and complete. She speaks about her own imperfection thus :

This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it...that was somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone. (34)

Two sexes are different from each other though one has the necessity of the other. Simone observes :

...this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them; women have never constituted a caste making exchanges and contracts with the male caste upon a footing of equality.24
An infirm female identity like Indu is denied any direct impact upon an impervious and indifferent husband, so far as her emotional urges are concerned; instead it is Indu who has to cater to the needs of his inner urger and drives. Ann Foreman’s women experience themselves as the fulfilment of other people’s need:

Men seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women; for women there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structures of her oppression.25

In a post marital situation and existence Indu realizes that Jayant’s expectations were the same as any stereotyped Indian male, would be possessed with, in continuation with tradition that a women should be passive and not demonstrative of her love and emotions, causes a miraculous surprise to Indu whose response to his love was unacceptable to him. As, “It shocks him to find passion in a woman” (83). She confesses to Naren. Such women leave behind the conventions and take the initiative to join modernity are destined to be caught into a labyrinth; an ideal woman is regarded the one who doesn’t have her own independent identity: “A woman who sheds her ‘I’, who loses her identity in her husband’s” (54). Indu too tries to trim herself up to please Jayant and to please her narcissist self. She loves being ‘looked at’.

A women’s role is not only confined to the centripetal needs of the family in which she lives but also to its centrifugal needs. In such a situation, she has to become ‘a society lady’, as Shobha De would put it. After marrying Jayant Indu found the other part of herself in him but she was many a times haunted by an ‘usual feeling of total disorientation (38). An outsider, she remains untouched by the milieu. The disorientation and isolation from which Indu suffers, is to be traced out in the novel references to her ‘loneliness’ suggested through the images of ‘dust’ and barrenness and ‘dark room’ as she states that she “tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and myself. I had pulled in my boundaries... ‘I am alone’” (10). She confesses to Naren; As a woman I felt hedged in by my sex. I
resented my womanhood because it closed so many doors to me (79). Such an evidence is reminiscent of the Biblical dictum, ‘From dust thou sprang, to dust thou returnest’.

Even in her professional life too, she has to curtail her freedom and submit to the dictates of the editor; forced to find relief in conscious acts of submission, Indu excepts too much from Jayant which result in frustration and lastly says: “I am grading expectations down. Each month, each day, I expect less and less and less from...Why can’t I compromise for what he can give...deep affection, yes: total, absolute commitment” (55). The spider’s web, meant to enclose a woman’s life, self and independent identity, is woven by lovers and finally by themselves, by personalities that have hypnotised themselves into accepting confinement—personalities not capable of exorcising. Prema Nanda Kumar is some kind of desperation says:

Here are a legion of Indian woman who form a colourful quilt, so typical of the spreads found in middle-class household...what a varied stuffing. Women dying suddenly, women dying slowly, women dying as young mothers, women dying as grandmother, women with too many children, women with no children, women who are crazy, women who are pseudo-intellectuals women who are practical, women who are psychos, brother’s wives, husband’s sisters, abandoned wives, widows etc...26

The suppression of women, culminating into subalternity is in no ways inferior to the subterranean winds that may cause a volcanic eruption and subsequent earthquake; such at least ins the vision of Shashi Deshpande, who opines that for a tradition oriented Indian girl marriage is a मूर्तिदृष्टि making her so ‘dependent’ lest she should be a spinster, who in Indian society constantly humiliated. Thus woman is defines as;
Women is the silence of the ‘unconscious’ which precedes discourse. She is the ‘other’, which stands outside and threatens to disrupt the conscious (rational) order of speech.27

Likewise Indu’s mother belonged to a different caste which was not appreciated by her father’s family. After the death of his wife, he left his motherless daughter at the disposal of his family. Indu is shocked to see the rigidity in her father’s attitude which made him unconcerned about his fatherly duties. “But that, perhaps, was because I was a girl. If I had been a son (...)” (163).

Claiming a comparison with Sally Saton, ‘who ran naked with sponge’, as depicted in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, Indu also, at the very threshold of puberty, made to realize that it is the sanguinary secretion that keeps a woman far from a man, so far as piety is concerned, for, in accordance with the traditional taboos and social norms, a woman is branded as an untouchable and impure creature during ‘those days’; Shashi Deshpande focuses on the customs and rituals meant for women which expects them to perform ‘fastrs’ and ‘prayers’ to earn eternal wife-hood as well as peace and harmony for their family. Indu too perceives the women of the family involved in various rituals to ensure longevity of their husband’s life such as the fact of Kaverdhootu. She is also expected to perform them to secure good fortune, hence Indu accepts life as a curse without a husband. ‘The True Woman’ Simon De Beauvoir remarks, ‘is an artificial product that civilizations makes, as formerly eunuchs were made. He presumed ‘instincts’ for coquetry, docility, are indoctrinated, as is phallic pride in man.”28

The satellite subalterns in the novel are like Kaka Narmada Atya, Atya, Vithal, Kusum, Sunanda etc. Kaka had been finding it difficult to maintain the house as well as the marriage of Mini. Akka, while she was alive used to help others refused to help because they didn’t live in the house. Narmada Atya, a poor childless widow had come to live with her brother in her father’s house, for such a house only could provide her with
security. Sunanda Atya had an irresponsible husband who had long periods of joblessness. She lives in the house because of this reason. Kusum, niece of Akka’s husband, an orphan who had been with Akka for years. Kaka found Vithal outside a shabby restaurant scavenging in the dustbin. Realising from his sacred thread that he was a Brahmin, he brought him home. Now he stayed at home, doing odd jobs being fed like any stray animal. He is possessed with a keen desire for study. Vithal read on steadily with great concentration during the hours that he could from house work in moonlight. He does so because like Mini he has too no choice.

While the subalternity existing in Roots and Shadows aims at revealing that the labyrinth of patriarchy, androgenous monopoly and filial blackmailing ensnares an average Indian woman at every step making her conscious that, by virtue of being every inch a woman, she cannot wear doublet and hose around her effeminate mind and heart, the well known dictum of bad men having good wives, as preached by Francis Bacon exhibits a subalternity, wherein the windmill of matrimony, like a rolling machine goes on grinding the grains of womankind to pieces, so as to make her incapable of raising her voice forever against the domineering jurisdiction of masculine tether, so far as The Dark Holds No Terrors is concerned, for the protagonist Saru’s return of a prodigal daughter is of no avail. Shashi Deshpande’s novel The Dark Holds No Terrors has a beginning in that the protagonist, Sarita or Saru, comes back to her family home overtly to look after her widower father but covertly to escape from the nightmarish brutality her sadist husband, Manu, inflicts on her every night. Living in her father’s home she reflects on the events of her life and novel gets unfolded through her memories of the past, which continue to be compared and contrasted with her present stay.

When Saru reaches her father’s home after a gap of fifteen years, her father welcomes her “like unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. Beginning with this traumatic experience the novelist unfolds the narrative through the stream of consciousness peculiar to Saru. She recalls
that her problems had started right from her childhood. They became quite serious after her brother Dhruva’s death which is referred to in the novel by A.D. (After Dhrua) which symbolises the prelapsarian and postlapsarian life for Saru. The demise of the child overshadows all other memories of her life as if that was the point of her fall which sounded the death knell to her existence. She remembers how she was treated second to Dhruva.

It was his brother who dominated her everywhere. There was always a puja on his birthday but none on her birthdays. After his death her birthday was not celebrated. She recalls: “My birthday was passed over in silence, both at home and at school.”29 The accusation of Dhruva’s death and consequent curses from mother’s side, “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive and when he is dead” (191). This leaves a traumatizing effect on her. She had become a nonentity long before she left her mother’s home. Veena Das quotes as informant saying that:

Daughters are comparable to something kept in trust her another (amanat). You have to care for them, love them, and you will be held responsible for them but you are destined to lose them. Once a daughter is properly married and goes to her own house it is like a debt that has been paid.30

In this way a girl is a victim of two fold adjust: first in her father’s house, and then in her father-in-law’s house. Being an unwanted child to her parents, she has inherited a psychology which does not allow her to displease anyone. Her mother is the cause of mother fixation towards the son. The male child is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give “agni” to his dead parents. Being an unwanted child is the root, the origin of Saru’s tragic tale which is beyond the purview of Shakespearean aphorism, ‘Sweat ar the uses of adversity’. The need of parental love is essential for the well-being of an individual’s mental health. Right from the beginning of her life, she does not belong to any place or person. She is denied a co-existence by her mother and thereby, by her father in such a
manner of totality that sense of being permanently rejected showers frost on her hope, curiosity and sense of expectancy. The growth of Saru stands upon the podium of her womanhood that consisted of feeling impure and ashamed of one’s sexuality and living with the sole purpose of getting knotted in the bond of matrimony.

This is the plight of not only Saru but millions who are cursed to be born a girl. The fault lies with their gender, not with them. When the extremely personal biography of a particular character is taken into consideration, it becomes expedient that every individual fantasizes about sex. The personality of a female infant is crippled by a series of discriminating socio-cultural values, attitudes and practices, as are visible in the novel, when Saru is shown as suffering are from gender discrimination right from her birth. The Ovidian dictum ‘amor omnia vincit’ attains it veritibility from Saru’s love affair with Manu, the glass of fashion and mould of romance, emancipating her carnal and psychic self from the monolithic existence in her domum maternum (mother’s house); it is here that a suppressed girl finds her identity as an individual, by virtue of regonition of worth and admiration of merits from a male sex; this makes her feel that to some extent the clouds of subalternity are getting scattered. The mental confession prevails permanently in her mind. Whys and hows never leave her;’ how could I be anyone’s beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could without (66).

The irony of fate is that he neither allows her to lead the life of a simple housewife, subordinated to his superior wisdom, nor does he (Manu) tolerate her higher status. The very existence of a girl is subordinated to the fact that she must someday please and serve, obey and sacrifice for her man. Saru’s personality is continually being eroded by the fact that she is mere girl. It is as though the very purpose of her coming into the world is gone—She has failed to her man; her wrath is a reaction against this social injustice she advises the girls is Nalu’s college:
If he’s an M.A., you should be B.A. If he’s 5’ 4” tall, you shouldn’t be more than 5’ 3” tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. (137)

One just cannot undo all the mental feeding one has received since one’s birth. All this brainwash cannot be wiped away on the spur of a moment, for it has descended from prenatal and post-natal existence of a girl; in accordance with the view point of Manu, the legislator of the Indian orthodox culture, “A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in (her) house.”31

The financial ascendancy and economic superiority of Sarita, renders Manu dwindle into insignificance. He thinks that the only way he can retain his potency and masculinity by metamorphosing himself into an active Cupid committing marital rape with her ‘in tenebrae nocturnae’ (darkness of night). Being victimised by Manu, She starts on a quest for home arrives at the same home she had earlier rejected. ‘Home is the place’, writes Frost, in his poem entitled, “The Death of a Hired Man”, where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in, ‘Saru is taken in’, but finds herself still ‘a homeless refugee’ a fleeting interruption.

It is the thought of children who are leading a miserable life for no fault of their that prevents her from seeking a divorce. Saru’s attitude towards her children is invariably conditioned by her past and even love for importance. The courage to admit to herself that her orbit comprises her children her home, her practice, her patients and that very definitely Manu is out of it brings enormous relief. She is also aware that “there was only the relief that comes from surrender to pretend any more, not to struggle – it brought nothing but solace” (179). After marriage the clash of ego became inevitable because that’s why Saru is tortured by Manu. She is going through quite an abnormal pattern of life. It may be termed a hypocrisy or pretence, but duplicity beyond an extent eats and chews off the real worth of a person. Like Echo in the Narcissus myth, Saru transforms
herself into a shadow; her sensibility and smartness are inadmissible to an orthodox society; this is the reality of an Indian woman; the more capable she is, the more she will be chided and condemned by the society. The sentiment of pathos reaches its culminating point when an adult Saru regrets the rituals that she has missed during her pregnancies; her mother never came for the ceremony when a pregnant woman is made to sit, and is offered sweets and cothes; “Suddenly at the sight of the two, the mother and the daughter, she had tears in her eyes. I never had this. So many deprivations, she wondered now...why had that one hurt so much?” (57) Saru’s entire personality, at times, seems to be an open wound, she’s bruised all over, hurt all over, aching all over.

The quest for liberation and identity has made Saru realize that she has merely exchanged one role for another and in the process has become just a ‘ventriloquist’s dummy’. Prema Nandakumar writes “Sarita can’t forget her children or the sick needing of her expert attention and so she decides to face her home again.”32 Her father, after listening to all the failure in her adjustment with her husband, turns his back on her pretending to put rice on the stove. Now she suffers from both plight as well as guilt consciousness. The upside down alteration—this terrible thing destroys their marraige. She realises that the very notion of equality is ‘but an empty vaunt’, “a+b they told us in mathematics is equal to b+a. But here a + b was not, definitely not equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible” (42).

It was this kind of binary opposition which was pointed out by Helence Sixous, who decoded the implicit political ideology underlying such metaphor as Activity/Passivity, Father/Mother, Head/Heart, Man/Woman, High/Low, Superior/Inferior, which are ‘hierarchized oppositons. She observes:

There is an intrinsic bond between the philosophical and literary (to the extent that it signifies, literature is commanded by the philosophical) and phallocentrism. The philosophical
construct itself starting with the abasement of woman. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order which appears to be the condition of the functioning of the machine.\textsuperscript{35}

Saru is not the sole sufferer in this androcentric world; others are also sailing in the same boat; her grandmother had been deserted by her husband but “had never, so she had heard, complained, It’s my luck, she said. My fate. It was written on my forehead (62). Saru’s mother did not have a room of her own. The silence demarcates the confines and outlines the margins. This suggests that “women constitute a muted group, the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, the dominant (male) group.”\textsuperscript{34} Saru thinks her mother to be a lucky woman because she died S\textsuperscript{ubhaga}. She asks Saru: “why am I, a fat, old unwanted woman left alive when he (her husband), so useful, so much wanted was taken away? Why am I alive when he is dead” (77). This shows that widowhood is the worst calamity a woman has to face. As T. N. Madan observes. “The death of a child may be seen as a personal calamity but the death of a husband is seen as altering her the social identity of woman.”\textsuperscript{35}

The lack of economic independence of a woman has made Shashi Deshpande realize the predicament of a woman, as a subaltern creature in a made dominated society. The stream of internal conflict, too continues its incessant flow in the psyche of Saru throughout the entire novel; all biological dread and psychological differences get subsided in her self. Now she must step forward and open the door of all human relationship as an enduring persona. A woman’s identity is defined by others in terms of her relationships with men i.e. as daughter, as wife, as mother for she does not have an identity of her own. Yet Saru’s final words to her father, was

Oh Yes, Baba. If Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can (221).

It suggests that she has overcome her earlier hesitation and now is capable of facing her husband and asserting her own rights and individuality while
her achievement of autonomy and restoration to the pride of her profession is a welcome change in her person, her complete transformation is deterred as no positive hint is given regarding her willingness to accept the social responsibility by returning to her husband and children.

In spite of suggesting that the curse of subalternity is irrevocable, as in case of Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, however economically independent a woman might be, Shashi Deshpande tries to trace out that a literary career too, is insufficient to meet the jaws of the subaltern Dragon, as it happens in *Small Remedies*, wherein the stories of Leela, a trade union activist, and Savitribai Indorekar, a singer from Gwalior Gharana, have been juxtaposed, as seen through the spectacles of Madhu, who, having been alienated on account of his father’s concubine, tastes the forbidden fruit of sexual pleasure from a consoling male being; later on she adopts a career of a biographer, who is destined to pen down the textual trilogy of Savitri Bai, Leela, Meenakshi and finally of her own self; thus the hillock of subalternity is ascended to its penultimate height. Madhu’s father, being a widower and bringing up a daughter on his own with only a male servant at home, and openly indulging in a drink or two every evening, obviously stood out in a conservative place like Neemgaon. But, looking back, Madhu realizes that while people were willing to overlook her father’s eccentricities and his foibles they were not so generous when it came to accepting Savitribai, “...being a man he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted, without open censure or dissatisfaction.”36 Her girl coupled with the knowledge of another woman in her father’s life alienates Madhu. In her grief Madhu is guided by an uncontrollable impulse that makes her body respond to the comforting embrace of a friend of her father’s. His effort to console her leads to a sexual encounter between the two. But immediately after the incident Madhu goes to Bombay to see her dying father; and the sorrow that engulfs her after his death, obliterates incident from her memory. Having no knowledge of any relative Madhu’s troubled when she knows that her father left her in the care of an aunt.
The novel presents a realistic plight of a middle class Indian woman whose psyche is torn between two roles—traditional and modern, between inner duties and outer duties, between family and profession. Madhu an ordinary middle class woman is ready to earth and face the crises of life silently and internally. The novel has covered the lives of four women, Savitribai, Leela, Meenakshi and Madhu. At the very outset of the novel there is the description of Bhavanipur, a small village, where Madhu, the narrator comes to write biography of Savitribai Indrokar the “grande dame of the Gwalior gharana” (28) while thinking about the biography Madhu shifts from past into present and from presents into past. Savitri Bai challenges the Indian tradition and law books especially Manu Smriti. Manu, ‘Narshada and Yajnavalka’ have established strict laws for the women. Women are considered as Sudhra, polluted untouchable and marginalized, just a shadow of man, no dreams of her own, no desire of her own, no life of her own. Manu—an ardent supporter of patriarchy and an advocate of male-dominated society in his law book, Manu Smriti declared that:

पिता रक्षतु कौमारेः
पति रक्षतु योयने
पुत्र रक्षतु बाचकने
न स्त्री स्वातंत्र्य आहति।

In her childhood the father looks after the girl. In youth her husband, in old age her sons’, a woman is never free.

Madhu—the journalist of the City knows Savitri from her childhood as Mumni’s mother. From those days she is impressed by Savitribai’s personality. Savitribai narrates the story of her childhood to Madhu though she is a girl-child, she is treated as a ‘precious jewel’. Usually in those days girls were considered as the burden on the family. But Savitribai is fortunate enough to be born with a silver spoon. As a child she is influenced by her mother’s songs. She challenges the notion that ‘father is the head of the family and he decides everything in daughter’s life. The father’s will or husband’s will is the will of God.’ Manu says,
“three persons a wife, a son and a slave are declared by law to have no wealth exclusively their own.” She enters a new world, when she marries Brahmin of Pune, Sadashivrao in the new environment she leans her to music in many a secret hours, and soemtimes gets an encouragent from her father-in-law. The women in the family start gossiping, but Savitribai has shown enough courage. She has developed a relationship with Gulaab Saab—a tabla player during her course of learning and one day elopes with him and broke all the barriers of caste and marriage codes. A relationship like theirs in patriarchal Indian society who bound malign Bai’s character, “A woman who’d left her husband’s home—what morals would she have, anyway!” “Professional singers were expected to accept a man’s protection. So why not Bai? Women can never be free. Is that it?” (224). Savitribai’s father-in-law has a mistress but nobody can ask him because he was the head of the family. But what about daughter-in-law’s relationship with a Muslim man. As Madhu thinks;

For Bai to develop a relationship with another man, a tabla player, a Muslim—this must have been not only unimaginable, but the height of criminality. Did any one blame father-in-law for this?”...that he had a mistress was accepted, a wife from one’s own class, a mistress from another—this was normal (220).

She is a lone traveller in the journey of life. It was after her separation from Gulamsaab that she appears again as a married woman wearing her old mangal sutra alongwith following other nuptial traditions. Her efforts signifies that she may have achieved her dream but her life. Bai strives to find her struggle to regain the identity by ignoring a part of her life. Madhu thinks;

I see the artist, the woman in search of her genius, of her destiny. But the artist was born of the woman. First there was the woman and then the artist (133)
Simon De Beauvoir asks the question in her book *The Second Sex*, “what is woman? How is she constructed differently from men? Answer: She is constructed differently by men”. Beauvoir celebrates the difference between man and woman.

Madhu’s ideal of living is Savitribai, but her maternal lamentation knows no bounds, when Aditya, the son of Madhu and Dr. Som, breathes his last, shattering the sole ambition, the welfare of a male child, cherished by his mother. However, the peace and happiness that she had been enjoying are interrupted by Madhu’s revelation of a past incident. A painting at an exhibition brings back to her mind that one incident from her past—her sexual encounter with her father’s friend. The knowledge that he committed suicide suddenly fills her with guilt. And in a state of shock she tells Som about it. The emotional bond, the trust between she and her husband has gone. Som though an intelligent man guided by the society, questions Madhu’s chastity, her serenity. It doesn’t matter that Som himself had a full-fledged pre-marital relationship. It is a typical situation where a man may have any number of affairs but excepts his wife to be a virgin. Madhu expects her husband to be a friend to understand and share the truth of her life. After this incident Madhu and Som become strangers to each other. His disappointment in loving and marrying a girl who had lost her chastity is the result of his traditional belief. As N. K. Jain points

...Sexual purity both pre-marital virgin and marital fidelity
(...) are cherished Indian values sanctified by tradition and particularly enjoyed upon women.38

Though honest and innocent Som puts Madhu on trial because she is a woman. From the days of Ramayana male-dominated society ask the proof of woman’s chastity. She has to face the ordeal of fire to prove her chastity even in twenty first century. Som and Madhu’s relationship is marred by distrust as he tells her, “If you could keep such a thing from me, how can I believe anything you say, how can I ever believe you again?” (259) Since that day Madhu’s impeccable world comes crumbling
down like a pack of cards. Troubled by his parent’s behaviour Adit comes to interrupt one such fight during which he finds his father banging his mother’s head against the wall. Later Madhu cannot recall exactly who had shouted at him to go away. Aditya in a state of shock walked out—never to return. His death in a bomb blast engulfs them in grief and emptiness. Madhu’s world is shattered. But with reality comes alienation, of having lost her role of a mother and that had been her occupation for seventeen years. Tony, Rekha, Ketaki, Chandru, Som all try to bring her out of her cocoon but nothing in life interests Madhu any more. Madhu’s attention is diverted from her grief when Chandru coerces her into taking the job of writing the biography of Savitribai. Madhu making his residence in the house of a young and loving couple Lata and Hari, she accepts the change in herself. Hari who reveals Madhu his connection with her mother and begins to call her ‘Kaku’. Leela was a fiercely independent and strongly committed to the communist ideology. She had participated in the Quit India Movement but was critical of Gandhi’s principles of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. Bai’s life makes Madhu compare with Leela. She was taken as her defiance against the traditional role of a woman. As a punishment she was married to a man of average income. But her marriage proves to be a blessing in disguise for her a her husband Vasant encouraged her to study and fulfil her dreams. However, his sudden death closes all doors for her happiness but did not go back to her father and began to teach. While working for the patient of T.B. She meets Joe. Leela’s marriage to Joe had brought emotional security to her and Joe. Therefore, Joe’s death leaves an emptiness in her and as Madhu notices; “Something has gone out of Leela, though a—passion, a force, a fire” (149).

Madhu comes out of her reminiscence of Adit as Hari quizzes her on the life of her aunt Leela. Madhu while writing the biography of Savitribai, is also aware of Savitribai’s past and her daughter Munni, is unable to digest her indifference to her daughter more so, because Madhu herself, is a doting mother, grieving over the death of her son. Madhu’s ambition is to make the name of Savitribai ‘in black ink, still shine bright’,
provided, she is able to pay the price in the form of revelation of her
dughter whose memories, she had successfully obliterated until then.

Munni, the illegitimate child of Savitri Bai and Gulam Saab, is
alienated in her very childhood because of her parents unusual relationship.
Society was not ready to approve a married Brahmin woman living with
a Muslim tabla player. Munni, however, desperately hankered after the
name her mother had left behind and went to great lengths to dissociate
herself from her father and after a while, her mother, Bai had found
conventional life stultifying, but Munni yearned for it all her life. Sense of
belonging becomes dominant in Munni, when she begins to believe that
her real father was not Gulam Saab, but Savitribai’s husband, who was
resident of Pune. She tries to detach herself from the illegitimacy of her
parents’ relationship. Her imagination helps her lead a life of illusion and
she creates stories to convince others of her life separate from Bai and her
lover. Munni develops contempt for her mother and detests everything
about her. However, year later it is her light gray eyes that make Madhu
recognize her in a bus Munni’s childhood is spent in her struggle to attain
a respectable status and somehow she even succeeds in doing so. She is
accepted by Bai’s in-laws and after marriage becomes a common middle-
class woman named Shailaja Joshi.

Thus the bastion of subalternity is broken into. Yet her past, the
illegitimacy of her birth catches up with her. Madhu’s recognition of her
after so many years pushes her a few step back in her struggle. Her death
in to same bomb blast which killed Aditya and her recognition as, Shailaja
Joshi, only child of Savitribai Indorker, neutralizes her life long struggle to
attain an identity separate from her mother. Thus, in death Munni, is once
again identified as the daughter of the woman she detested. That Shashi
Deshpande is capable of creating lago and Imogen as well as evident by
the fact that writing of people like Savitri Bai and Leela, people who dared
to be different, she has also created characters like Munni who desperately
seek the approval of society. Madhu herself is a victim of sorts of
exploitations which the reader in aware only towards the end of the novel.
She had been brought up as a child by two men her father and Babu, a male servant, but she had no complaints to make against them. On the other hand, she felt pity for the children who seemed to be constantly harassed by their mothers.

The theme of subalternity has been dealt by the versatile genius of Shashi Deshpande with ‘a calm of mind, all passion spent’, and the novels written thereupon have a tranquillizing impact upon the mind of the reader as if she ‘had emptied dull opiate to the drains’; That Long Silence enables Jaya to hold her tongue throughout life, as the world is not fit to share the plights and sorrows of woman’s heart; The Dark Holds No Terrors puts a woman in an abyss of predicament, where, on account of ripening darkness and immumerble terms, the instinct of fear has gone for ever, leaving ‘foot prints on the sands of time; Roots and Shadows depicts that subaltern roots of a woman’s existence may be buried deep, but the credit of sheltering tree must go to the man; and in Small Remedies, their is no Qvidium Remedies Amoris to put the feminine nymphomania oriented sexuality of a woman.
REFERENCES

1. Ranjit Guha, Preface: Subaltern Studies, 1, VII.


CHAPTER-V

THEME OF SUBALTERNEITY