CHAPTER IV
WOMAN IN MODERNITY

Women have been pilgrims in darkness living without a face and without being heard for centuries. Though men and women are inseparable in worldly life and the bond between them cannot be severed, women have been undergoing oppression and suppression in the hands of men. They have been confined to their homes, considered fit to do household chores and the outside world has been deemed to be the domain of males. However the darksome days have started to disperse and a new era has begun and it has dawned upon them to search for their own word, name, reality and individuality, to discover their own history – the history that will not only chronicle their degradation, their anguish, their tears but also tell about their triumphs, their hopes and their dreams.

Anthropological, historical and cultural studies are male centered where women are considered non actors and their image has been carefully built up as ordained to perform in private space. They are rarely shown as playing pivotal roles in social and historical developments and they are relegated to an obscure position. They are considered as naturally weak requiring to be protected by men. Even proverbs and folk tales depict them as weak entities feeble in innate strength and frail in emotions. They are considered ideal home –makers. Limits have been set for them and they should not transgress the boundary lines, for they are considered sacrosanct. Even qualities have been differentiated into masculine and feminine and ascribing feminine qualities to a man amounts to demeaning him and attributing certain masculine qualities to a female is a credit to her. Women are depicted as symbols of beauty and objects of attraction by the male dominated society. They are not noted for their potentialities but are admired in terms of their external appearance and they lose their significance with their fading beauty. Such conceptualized thoughts
about womanhood are embedded in the minds of the people. The concept of womanhood is viewed from the male’s angle and constantly defined in terms of his desire and continuously described in consonance with his imagination. Kate Millett points out in *Sexual Politics*:

> Under patriarchy the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized world are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture—in regard to the female were also of male design. The image of woman as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the “otherness” of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is “other” or alien. (46-47)

The position of woman is always modulated by male subjectivity and mutated according to the needs of men in society. Her virtues are defined from the male point of view. The virtue of being submissive to men has its own reward and just by serving her husband, woman could attain sublimity. She has no liberty to voice out her thoughts but is compelled to act as per the direction given. The woman is never allowed to be a subject in her own right. The marginalization, insecurity and segregation experienced by women have been effectively depicted by the women writers of India.

Woman in modernity passes through a process of transformation which signifies a change from bondage to freedom and self-development. The word ‘modernity’ does not mean shirking one’s responsibility at home and in society. It denotes the situation which enables a woman to defy servility and establish her identity. It does not include gross violations of the basic culture of the society.

Modernity does not simply mean the treatment of woman on par with man. It stands
for enjoying her freedom which she naturally has like any other man. It does not indicate fighting for her space in the society but connotes the freedom to utilize her existing space by all means. Equality stops with equal treatment of woman with man but modernity leads to development of her potentiality, creates awareness of her identity and makes her realize her own self.

Her space in all fields, whether as a home maker, maid servant, employee, artist or professional, is limited. The patriarchal influence constricts the space that she needs to prove her worth, restricts her activities which throttle her freedom and inhibit her progressiveness. Githa Hariharan in her article *New Voices, New Challenges: Concerns of Contemporary Writer* in Litterit expresses her anguish about the repressed space of women as follows:

> We are constantly being informed that our individual and national lives occupy a larger space, a global space in which we must think and work and compete, we also find, in the day-to-day real world we occupy, that our spaces, as our spaces as writers, artists, citizens are shrinking all the time.

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A modern woman confronts customs not for just claiming equality but to prove her worth. She is aware of the male – female dichotomy and longs for love and worldly pleasures like her male counterpart but rebels against her exploitation. She rises to the occasion and evaluates herself. She rejuvenates herself to live her life with full contentment.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels represent the contemporary woman’s struggle to define and attain an autonomous self hood. Her female protagonists free themselves from the blunt traditional constraints after a long and bitter struggle. Saru in *The Dark Holds No)*
*Terrors* thinks that profession is her boost. She knows that her involvement in her profession gives a sense of confidence and courage to face life. She says, “Perhaps my ventriloquist is my profession. For, as long as there is a patient before me, I feel real. Between patients there is nothing. And yet I find myself taking more and more time between patients these days” (TDHNT 22).

When she falls in love with Manu, she doubts her state as “How could I be anyone’s beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted and an appendage one could do without” (TDHNT 66). This thought portends the height of her inferiority complex and insecurity and she craves for someone to take care of her. The tradition in which she has been reared has taught her that she has to dependably do odd chores and wait on the male members of the family and fuse her fondness with the feelings of the family. Though custom loathes women selecting men as per their wishes, she delights in being a darling to Manu, a man of her choice. Her inclination for Manu is born not only out of infatuation but also with the trust of having empathy.

During the initial stages of her marital life she believes that she is enamoured of an enchanting man compatible with her taste and trend. She feels elated for having a compassionate husband. She feels proud that she is the luckiest woman on earth. She marries Manu with a longing to gain importance and to enjoy the love that she did not get in her parental home. She believes that Manu is her redeemer, her romantic hero who rescues her from her unpleasant maternal home. She stays in a dingy one-room apartment having corridors smelling urine and the rooms with their dark sealed in odours but her room brings a real breath of fresh air for her since she is with her Manu. The apartment has people of mixed lot, women with inquisitive, unfriendly eyes and men with salacious stares yet she considers the apartment not as a mixed blessing but a real blessing and it seems to be a
heaven for her. But very soon she realizes that her happiness is only an illusion. At one stage Saru laments that the independence she has got through the negligence of her parents and the consequences of her love marriage do not give her pleasure and peace rather make her realize that she is the root cause for her suffering. This thought gives her the stamina to face her life.

It is my life. It’s my life. Four words forming a sentence. Go on saying them and they become meaningless, a jumble of sound, a collection of letters. And yet, they would not leave her alone. She went back to bed, the words going on and on in her mind. It was maddening. She tried to turn her thought to other things, to go back to that childhood fantasy of her, the friend would never fail her. But it was no use. That friend had deserted her. We are alone. We have to be alone. (TDHNT 208)

Saru’s life journey is from being a non-entity to become an entity. She has been controlled by her mother and has never enjoyed freedom but her profession as a doctor gives her self-identity. Though born and bred in a traditional family she disenfranchises the conventional role of being meek and mild and achieves everything by her own effort.

From the marital lives of other women, Saru realizes that marriage is not a guarantee for conjugal contentment. She comprehends the change in her life and realizes that the traditional imprints in the mind of Manu have made him cohabit with her in conflict. As long as she was a medical student, and her husband the bread winner of the family, there was peace and happiness in the family. But when she becomes famous as a lady doctor, disaster begins in her marital life. She recalls, “He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (TDHNT 42).

This reversal of roles is hard for Manu to accept. When Manu was earning she felt
comfortable with their way of life. His income was enough to meet their ends. But when she has become an added earning member she begins to miss even small things at home. She wonders Manu’s acceptance on her suggestion to have a better life style.

I had begun to wonder at his acceptance of our shabby way of living. For me, things now began to hurt… a frayed saree I could not replace. A movie I could not see, an outing I could not join in. I knew now that without money life became petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way became unbearable. (TDHNT 92)

Gradually her status at home and society goes ahead of Manu. She becomes a successful doctor whereas Manu is an underpaid lecturer in a college. But her accomplishment brings discontent at home. In a tradition-bound society like the one in India, the institution of marriage has its own restrictions. Any economically independent woman should undergo the manacles of marital bindings and live with the fear of hurting the ego of her husband. Saru realizes this as,

\[ a+b \text{ they told us in mathematics is equal to } b+a. \text{ But here } a+b \text{ was not, definitely not equal to } b+a. \text{ It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible. But is that the only reason, or would it have happened in any case, what happened to us later, he being what he is and I being what I am? I have a feeling I will never know the answer to that one. } \]

(TDHNT 42)

The ego clash is brought out to light after her interview for a magazine. When Manu was questioned “how does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (TDHNT 200), he laughed with Saru and the interviewer. He took it as a discrediting question and felt degraded. He carried sexual assault on Saru in the night and
gave vent to his hurt ego. But the next day, Saru found that Manu behaved totally ignorant of the happenings of the previous night and appeared very normal in all his actions. When one of his colleagues commented that they were lucky enough to go for a costly trip which he could not afford to, his wife immediately replied that he should have married a lady doctor. Manu once again gave vent to his frustrations that night by means of his beastly behaviour. She is unable to tolerate his duality of pretending to be ignorant of what has been happening in the nights and behaving normal with his routine in the mornings. This pushes Saru to revisit her parents’ home.

Though Saru is well aware of male chauvinism and its consequences, she shatters Manu’s ego by her economic dominance. In her talk to the college girls on the topic ‘Medicine as a profession for women’, she sums up,

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A., You should be a B.A. If he is 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, if you want a happy marriage. Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it is not worth it. He’ll suffer. You’ll suffer and so will the children. Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage must be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense, rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it’s unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales wilt in your favour, god help you, both of you.

(TDHNT 137)

She understands the genuine reason behind the cruelty of her husband. To overcome the tortures of Manu, Saru thinks of quitting her profession. In her perplexed state of mind,
with the mental agony posed by her personal life, she reaches her parental house. She avoids talking about her husband to her father. Her loneliness there teaches her to accept the reality in life. She realizes the truth of life and decides “My life is my own” (TDHNT 217). She becomes aware that her profession is a part of her life and she cannot sacrifice her profession for the sake of her struggle in life with Manu. She realizes that her financial dominance damaged Manu’s male ego and realizes, “It’s not what he’s done to me, but what I’ve done to him” (216).

In her childhood, she witnessed the life of her grandmother who was deserted by her husband and treated as a burden by her own people. This has created awareness in her mind that she should be economically independent. She realizes that only her profession gives her courage to survive all the traumas in life. Saru’s stamina to overcome the obstacles is her profession and the societal status she gets from it. It is only her profession that provides her respect in the society. The character of Saru brings forth the idea that the modern women should be economically independent, emotionally balanced and socially recognized.

When Saru comes to her parents’ home, she analyses her life with her parents, brother, husband and children. She recognizes her detachment with her husband and children. She realizes that she discards her responsibility as a mother. She finds it hard to devote more time to attend to her husband and children. To be plain she understands that she has failed first as a wife and then as a mother.

When she receives a letter from her husband telling his arrival, she undergoes a traumatic experience. She has been receiving letters from Manu but she has never opened them. Finally her father tells her about Manu’s arrival by reading the letter. For an instant she gets an idea to escape from that place to avoid meeting Manu. She feels “the desperation of a trapped animal” (TDHNT 195-196). She is in a
confused state and is unable to react to the situation. Suddenly she feels “as if she was vouchsafed a vision” (TDHNT 200) and realizes that she is the cause for her suppression.

Her confusion mounts and her bitter emotions increase. She does not want to meet Manu but at the same time she wants a permanent solution to her problem. She is in a dilemma. She knows that she will not get any solution without meeting him. Initially she tells her father not to open the door when Manu comes, so that he may go back after being tired of knocking at the door. But after a great trial of self evaluation, she asks her father to make Manu wait for her and goes to attend a patient.

She feels that she has made herself a puppet in the hands of others. She realizes that she has not tried to establish her rights as a daughter to her mother, as a wife to Manu and as a mother to her children. She recalls Madhav’s (a boy who stays with her father) words: “I cannot spoil my life because of that boy (his brother Sathish). It’s my life after all” (TDHNT 189). These words generate a spark in her and give her a new courage to face life. She understands that it is difficult to swim against the stream of life and so she does not want to liberate herself from the bonds of a family life. She also wants to retain her status as a doctor in the society. So she decides to meet Manu.

Saru’s life is a journey from self-alienation to self-identity. It is also her journey from frustration to confidence. Her father’s advice to her to lead the present life with determination makes her face the world of reality. He says, “Don’t turn your back on things again. Turn mind and look at them. Meet him” (TDHNT 216). She emboldens herself to face her husband. She decides to live her life with confidence. The fear of darkness or the unknown fear in her mind gets dissipated and she gets ready to face her life.

My life is my own… Somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet,
standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because, I made myself one. I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of. (TDHNT 220)

Thus Saru becomes aware of her limitations as well as her capabilities both in the family and the society. She realizes that she has her responsibility as a doctor to serve the society. She becomes conscious of her identity as a potential individual. She gets ready to face the challenges that come in her way. She decides not to retaliate but to live her life. Thus she starts a new life where there is no darkness to be afraid of. Thus her quest for identity starts from her childhood and she overcomes the limitations imposed on her. After her protest at various levels, her self-realization helps her to find out her identity.

Shashi Deshpande gives it very plainly that the life of a woman is her own and she must develop a thinking that she is not a dependent but an individual and she has to develop herself to face her problems with courage. The modern woman is more than a mere mother, a sister or a wife. She is a multifaceted individual capable of playing any role and she needs a strong mental stamina and will power. Her identity is no longer subservient to her male counterpart.

Saru realizes that she is no longer a puppet in the hands of others. She is a human being throbbing with life with a reawakened individuality. She regains confidence and awakens to the reality that she has to overcome setbacks in her life. “Her own body felt insubstantial. There was a feeling of weightlessness that made her almost euphoric. Even her fear faded into insubstantial ghosts” (TDHNT 219).

Realization of life clears away the problems and brings mental equilibrium. Now Saru’s realizations of self and life make her ready to face everything daringly. Her stamina
to face her life gives her a social responsibility to tell others how to live. She realizes that one has to be self-sufficient and self-confident and need not look for a refuge outside. She understands the reality of life that one comes into this world alone and goes out of it alone. The period in between is short. “And all those ties we cherish as eternal and long lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop” (TDHNT 208).

Saru is not philosophizing anything. She tells ‘I am a realist. We are realists. We deal with the ultimate reality. Human body” (TDHNT 208). She gets a new vigour to overcome her identity crisis. She represents the middle class working woman in modern India. She rebels against the tradition but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality.

According to Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the character of Saru,

…stripes herself of self-deceptions, guilt complexes and emotive illusion, and Shashi Deshpande’s language itself flickers like a candle and blobs of remembrance melt and form icicles of furrowing thought. Saru cannot forget her children or the sick needing her expert attention and so she decides to face her home again. In this unpredictable world, even total despair can open up a new spring of elemental self – confidence. (758)

In That Long Silence Shashi Deshpande depicts the rebellious and aggressive behaviour of Jaya, the protagonist of the novel. The dark room of silence is lit not by a candle of tolerance but by the fire of egoistical assertions and emotional explosions.

In the beginning, the novel presents the agonizing loneliness of Jaya, a married traditional woman. She has the haunting question of her relationship within her family. Initially she surrenders herself to the opinions of her husband. But her stay in the Dadar flat makes her visualize and reconsider her life. She understands that she lives and restricts herself to satisfy the needs of her husband.
Jaya remains an embodiment of patience, endurance, devotion, integrity, rebellion, defiance and disobedience. She finds it difficult to put together the different discordant facets of her personality. The young bride Suhasini is unable to match herself with the matured Jaya who encompasses varied qualities. The tradition bound docile woman in Jaya is irreconcilable with the individuality seeking Jaya. In Jaya’s view the “poor idiotic Suhasini” (TLS 17) believes in security, while the mature Jaya sees security nowhere.

Jaya the mature woman has to play two roles: one that of a loyal wife serving her husband and children and keeping her mind off the personal life, like Gandhari blindfolding her eyes and the other one of a modernist wife, befriending her husband’s officer for the protection of her husband. She plays the first role well, but in the second she fails miserably. Mohan’s insistence on her playing the second role leads to misunderstanding and rebellion. It is the second role that goes against her and provides sound logical basis for her contemptuous laughter when Mohan accuses her.

Though Jaya’s disgusted laughter is a vent out for her suppressed feeling, it damages the ego of her husband Mohan. His miseries increase manifold and at the height of humiliation he deserts her and goes out. Jaya develops hope that Mohan will come back soon. She visualizes her future life with her husband and children. Jaya makes her mind up positively for reconciliation. Her decision to come out of silence and step into a balanced fulfilled life is the right turn in her life. This kind of self-actualization is the main quality in every modern woman who wants to lead the right kind of life. Modernity in woman does not mean avoiding familial responsibilities and escaping to enjoy the dreamt life, without any values. Women of modern era understand their limited liberty and choice and become an existential companion for men.

The self-alienated Jaya’s creative urge and artistic zeal free her from her cramped and
damped domestic and societal roles. They relieve her from the emotional turmoils. At length she resolves to break that long silence of seventeen years by putting down on paper how she had been suppressed.

I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I am Mohan’s wife. I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible. The child, hands in pockets, has been with me through the years. She is with me still. (TLS 191)

She is not a patterned woman of the traditional Indian society where woman is chiefly confined to the hearth and the man to the world, where woman is the follower and the man the leader, where woman is the sufferer and the man the ordainer. “She does not want to be a Sita ‘following her husband into exile’ or a ‘Savithri’ dogging Death to reclaim her husband or a ‘Draupadi’ stoically sharing her husband’s travails” (TLS 11). She believes that there is pain in hostility, and there are anguish and agony in rebellion. Hence, she adopts a subservient attitude.

No what I have to do these mythical women? I can’t fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together…it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different direction would be painful; and what animal would voluntarily choose pain? (TLS 11-12)

Jaya attempts to demystify her actions through the animal imagery of “two bullocks yoked together” (TLS 11). But she does not feel safe when yoked. So she flounders to break from the yoke. “Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, you are safe. That poor idiotic woman Suhasini believed in this. I know better, now. I know that safety is always unattainable. You are never safe” (TLS 17).

A modernist trait of Jaya’s temper is her agnostic treatment of religion as symbol of
tyranny and violence. “So many chariots of Jagannath promising us Moksha. But there was no moksha any more” (TLS 113). Moksha is a Sanskrit word which denotes the liberation of the soul from finite existence. Jaya, begins her life afresh understanding the fact that “life has always to be made possible” (TLS 193). She wants to lead her life peacefully but not in fragments. This is the wisdom Jaya has learnt through the tribulations of her life. She utilizes the opportunities that she gets to establish herself. “I’m not afraid any more. The panic has gone” (TLS 191).

In this connection T.M.J. Indra Mohan says,

Jaya stands for revolt against oppressing social customs that throttle women in our society. Through the process or reliving the past in her mind, Jaya gets the guidance for future. She breaks herself self-imposed prison wall of mind and chooses to remain in the family at the same time comes out of the confining slots allotted to her by the patriarchal society. Jaya looks for happiness and self-fulfillment within the family itself. She is confident of her individual powers to face any situation and hopeful of the change in Mohan’s attitude, moves beyond the cultural stereotypes. (117)

Jaya is probing and quite protective of her autonomy. Her revolt is in silence. Her husband Mohan mentions that women are being treated very cruelly by their husbands and they undergo sufferings silently because of their inner strength. Jaya passionately ruminates over his opinion as, “He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender” (TLS 36).

The novel does not depict Jaya’s life as a total dismal and a hopeless struggle. It suggests ‘hope’ and ‘change’ for the better. “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 possible” (TLS 193).

Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan points out the change in Jaya revealed through her writings:

She now re-evaluates her life. She chooses to operate within the self imposed
limits of the family, resolving to change her life by renegotiating the power
relations and improving the interpersonal relationships within it rather than
through the instrumentality of her writing. (81)

The concluding lines in the novel _That Long Silence_ give the sum total of the novel
as well as of life:

I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to erase the silence between us… we
don’t change overnight. It’s possible even over long periods of time. But we
can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is
anything, I know it is this – life has always to be made possible. (TLS 192-
193)

Jaya, the protagonist represents the modern young women with education and status
in the society. She realizes that it is impossible to break herself free from the strangulating
hold of tradition. She writes on the lives of women who have lost their identity under the
weight of male domination. She wants to insist on the need of rapport in the man woman
relationship. She observes that both men and women are the products of the same society
but they find it difficult to play their allotted roles perfectly without a better understanding
between them.

In a recent interview to Anna Rego for _The Hindu_ Shashi Deshpande expresses her
strong opinion of gender roles and the roles essayed by women as:

I write about women as they are, not about stereotypes but about real People.
…Oddly enough, my mother was highly educated but chose to live a different life. She shunned her educational background and was a deliberately submissive housewife. She chose to embrace the traditional role of wife and mother, because in those days society wasn’t too accepting of educated or career-oriented women. But my sister and I were very career-minded and at a certain level I believe my mother resented us for that. (7th April 2012)

Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* presents the labyrinth of the conflicts of the Indian women. The novelist traces the battles of woman in her relationship with man and society and the characters’ search for identity through a lacerating process. The novelist has embedded the narration with mythological stories which are related to the real life of the characters.

In the beginning of the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the protagonist Devi views herself as a hesitant, self doubting person. Her brief sojourn in America is, to her, a dream in which she is no longer the ‘weak, dog-paddling Devi,” but an invincible individual, a victor and “an uncompromising survivor” (TFN 9). She refuses an offer of marriage from her black American friend Dan because she feels their relationship as “the blurred regions of fantasy” (TFN 6). The justification given for the relationship is as this, “Dan was Devi’s answer to the white claustrophobia of an all-clean, all American campus” (TFN 3).

Devi’s return to India in deference to the wishes of her widowed mother shows her respect for her mother. Her mother Sita is made to feel that she has not made a mistake by sending a young unmarried girl to America. Devi meets six bridegrooms in three months and finally selects Mahesh, a Regional Manager in a Multinational Company, as her life partner. Devi tries to fit herself in the role of wife and daughter-in-law just as her mother did
years ago. Sita has succeeded in reaching her goal of wifehood with a dogged determination and uncompromising self-discipline, leading her husband more like a “conductor” than an “accompanist” (TFN 103).

Mahesh remains a shadowy stranger and views marriage as just another necessity while Devi feels that her heart remains untouched and not even sought for. Mahesh feels thankful that “Indians are not obsessed with love” (TFN 55). Devi is of the opinion that her education has not prepared her for “the vase, yawning chapters of her womanhood” (TFN 54) and so she is defenceless against Mahesh’s supreme confidence and superciliousness. Mahesh has scant regard for her desires, like learning Sanskrit or taking up a job. When she wants to learn playing cards so that she can be with him, Mahesh disapproves through an inward movement of his lips “weaving a cunning cord around her vulnerable neck” (TFN 56). Her freedom being thwarted and the gaping emptiness threatening her very existence, she seeks refuge in the stories of Baba, her gentle father-in-law, and in his sweet wisdom.

Her grandmother’s stories initiate her into the numerous unfathomable possibilities of womanhood and her father-in-law’s stories define the limits of wifehood. Fed on the stories of virtuous wives who were instrumental in making their husbands walk on the spiritual path, Devi wishes to pull out all the obstructing weeds from the garden of her life. But she fails to perforate the grey, impenetrable walls that Mahesh has built around him. Therefore she symbolically decides to grow “a garden of weeds” (TFN 58) instead of clearing them, so that she too might survive like the weeds against all odds.

Devi becomes restless because of her husband’s insensitive and unaffectionate state of mind. She feels lonely though she is blessed with everything and she is deprived of emotional security from her husband. She feels comfortable to a certain extent with Baba’s
stories since they remind her of her grandmother’s mythological tales but his departure to New York to visit his daughter creates a halo in her life and she shelters herself in the hands of Mayamma, the servant maid of the house. According to Devi, her marital life is sustained by culture and not by mutual love. She firmly believes that true love should be an adhesive between a couple and not the societal norms. She has doubts, regrets and a sense of unhappiness as she feels that Mahesh could not understand her feelings. She thinks that she is after all leading a contented life with comforts at her disposal but feels dejected due to his coldness.

Her urge for revenge is manifested in different forms. She grows wild in her fantasies and imagination. She is more concerned with the emotional rapport between a man and a woman. The moment she realizes that her husband is not suitable to nurture her inner life she floats in clouds of alienation. When Mahesh compels her to have a baby, she feels frustrated and humiliated and she slowly withdraws herself from the responsibilities of a dutiful wife.

Devi finds solace in the company of her neighbour Gopal, a musician. She turns herself to the “blissful numbness” of his music and it opens a way out of the “lush prison” (TFN 78) around her and she elopes with him. The elopement is a protest against Mahesh and a kind of punishment to him. But soon she realizes that Gopal’s love is just physical and does not care for her emotional needs and she feels that their inner selves are not united. The affair with Gopal is very short and she gets disillusioned with his activities and moves away from him. She comes back to her mother with a hope that she will accept her.

Devi’s education in America makes her a woman of strong will. Instead of bearing every distress silently, she acts quickly with impulsive actions. The extreme loneliness and
solitude in marriage does not drive her to any psychological disorder. She realizes that it is impossible for a woman to lead a married life without love and sharing of emotions. Her decision to live with Gopal and later to leave him shows her individuality and reasoning ability. Devi compares her life with that of Mayamma, a battered wife and mother who suffered at the hands of a domineering mother-in-law and animal-like husband and son.

Devi’s mother Sita achieves her goal of wifehood and motherhood with a single-minded devotion. Sita gives up her love for Veena and her dreams of becoming an expert in playing it and cuts herself off from the link with the past in order to be a perfect housekeeper and a blameless wife. The attainment of these goals too is rather superficial as over the years of her intense struggle Sita has distanced herself from her “dreamer” husband and “elusive” daughter.

Sita is a woman who lives in a traditional set up but has modern thoughts and stamina to withstand pressures and not to submit herself to them. Both Devi and her father allow themselves to be ruled by Sita but not without resentment and anger. Sita’s husband dies alone as if he does not want to share with her even his last struggle. She struggles alone to find a match for her daughter Devi, which she thinks is the prime duty in her life. Her survival is far more efficient than Mayamma’s because of her painful efforts in the right direction. A symbolic correlative is seen in the way she trains the jasmine creeper to grow horizontally, filling its specified spaces on the supports provided, without allowing it to grow upward as is its nature.

Condemning Mahesh to a lonely life without wife or child, for trampling on the marital vows, Devi goes away with Gopal hoping to fuse her own emotional voice with his music. Through an image of peacock and peahen, the novelist unveils the disappointment of
Devi in her relationship with Gopal: “The peacock danced, its crowned head still and self-absorbed, its plumage on exhibition. The male danced, ostensibly for the peahen, dowdy and offstage, blending into the background, dull brown against brown” (TFN 129).

She realizes that Gopal is a beautiful oppressor, who cannot see beyond the passions of ragas (musical notes). Along with this disenchantment, realization dawns on Devi that all through her life she has been running away from her trails, America, the house of Jacaranda Road, Mahesh and Gopal. She has had enough, roaming in search of love. She realizes that she should find her own authentic “self” and secure a firm holding in her life.

Devi analyses the life patterns of Sita, Mayamma and her own self and comes to the conclusion that all the three have done enough tight-rope walking. She concludes that it is the time for her to stop the struggle for balancing herself and to stand erect freely in all her dignity without any attachment. In a symbolic gesture, Devi throws her peacock-coloured Sari over the mirror to blot out the myriad reflections of herself. She is no more a reflection. She is no longer on the run. She is a survivor now, bent on becoming a conqueror. She goes back home to join her mother with an offer of love. To her pleasant surprise, Devi finds her mother’s garden “wild and over-grown” not pruned anymore but “lush in spite of its sand-choked roots,” and hears the “faint sounds of a Veena, hesitant and child-like” (TFN 139) welcoming her into the house. Her mother’s warm gesture is a clear indication to Devi that they are going to be true to their own ‘selves’.

In recent days, women are conscious of their rights and position in society. They are aware that silence does not protect them. They have a different attitude when compared to that of the previous generation. Women in modern India are quite sure of themselves. They are conscious of their position and status in society. They are conscious of their existence and do not want to remain servile to others.
In Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe*, when Akhila’s father died in an accident and her brother questioned her as to what they were going to do? She replied, “Cremate him and then… and then we’ll find some way to keep ourselves afloat and alive” (LC 57). This harshness in her voice shows her resolution to face life and to handle the situation better. Her anger at her father’s careless attitude towards traffic and even towards domestic responsibilities makes her stronger.

Margaret Shanthi, a chemistry teacher who is a fellow passenger in the coupe is the best example for protest against suppression in marital life. Due to traditional manacles and social restrictions she could not get divorce from her husband Ebe. Though her community gives her freedom, it has its own restrictions on marriage and divorce. But her wounded heart wants to take revenge on him. She uses her knowledge of chemicals to punish Ebe. With her tongue tickling cooking and excessive use of fats she makes Ebe bloat in size. He loses his energy for doing his regular activities and it ultimately results in his loss of romance. She feels satisfied with what she has done to him. She exploits his desire towards tasty food and shatters his confidence by effecting change in his physique. He never forces his desires on her like before and she becomes the winner. She succeeds in her plan of avenging him by making him fat but he feels like a normal man. She makes him lose his extra-ordinary power and command over others by cooking of varieties of food and by speaking with concern. Initially Ebe was very proud of his physique and health and enforced his power on others and humiliated many people to feed his ego. But after getting inflated by her tasty food, he loses his confidence and becomes polite and moderate.

When she advises Akhila, she tells,
Akhila, if there is one virtue I have, it is immunity to what people think of me. Naturally this makes them dislike me even more. People don’t like to think that their opinion of someone means nothing to that person. And when it is a women… the thought is intolerable. But like I said, I don’t care. I’m not saying that you ought to think like I do. But you’ll discover that once you stop worrying what the world will think of you, your life will become that much easier to live. (LC 136)

She further adds, “Just remember that you have to look out for yourself” (LC 136). Thus her opinion about life is portrayed very clearly. She feels that everyone should lead the life to the fullest contentment. There is no need to think of other’s needs and please them. Life is precious for every individual and should be lived to get personal satisfaction.

Prabha Devi, another passenger in the coupe explains how she had a wrong notion of modernity and how it was shattered. Prabha Devi used to dress to show herself off with a view to creating an impression on others and wished to be the centre of attraction. Her attractive way of dressing induces Pramod to misbehave with her. When she protests against his lustfulness, he accuses her of tempting him. She is shocked to hear his words and realizes her fault. She starts spending her time with her family dutifully doing her role as a wife and a mother. She takes her children to the swimming class and gets an urge to swim. During swimming she finds that her monotony has evaporated. She feels rejuvenated and believes that she has not yet lost her charm in life. Thus modernity does not lie in pomp but exists in the development of progressive ideas, the power to withstand adversities and the ability to go to the bottom of problems and work out solutions.

Sheela, another fellow passenger, only fourteen years old, admires her grandmother’s modern outlook. Though her grandmother suffered from cancer, she did not want anybody
to pity her as a patient and she exuded self-confidence. She had a penchant for perfection at all levels. Once when she was asked whether anyone was going to bother about her, she immediately replied that she did not aspire to gratify others but desired to satisfy her own self. She advised Sheela,

You mustn’t become one of those women who groom themselves to please others. The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror, your reflection make you feel happy. I tried to teach this to your mother and aunt. But they are silly women. They don’t understand what I have been trying to tell them. You…you, I hope won’t be such a fool. (LC 68)

Though Sheela’s grandmother belongs to the older generation, she is modern in her outlook. She believes that one’s outfit speaks about one’s inner self. She is very much conscious of her appearance and stresses its importance to Sheela. Every night she stands before the mirror and beautifies herself. Her smart appearance boosts her self-confidence. On the death of her grandmother, Sheela puts make-up on the dead body which invites harsh criticisms. She believes that her grandmother is a harbinger of modernity and she adorns the dead body as a mark of salutation to her grandmother’s modern ideas showing contempt for others condemnation.

Akhila’s role as the breadwinner of the family is appreciated by people who are close to her. Karpagam, Akhila’s friend comments that they all admire the way in which Akhila has taken charge of the family after her father’s death. Karpagam says, “…when the head of a family dies, the family dies with him, my mother would say, unless there is a daughter like Akhila” (LC 199).

Akhila moves to a new house and she permits her sister Padma to live with her along with her family. Even though Akhila supports Padma financially, Padma dominates her and
Akhila loses her privacy. Karpagam advises Akila to get rid of Padma and not to bother about others’ opinion. She advises her to accept life as it comes and not to waste it by giving importance to others’ opinions. When Akhila hesitates to come out of her shell, Karpagam reveals that she has lost her husband some years ago and is now living alone.

The Indian tradition prohibits a widow from wearing colour sarees and kumkum. But Karpagam does not follow these traditional norms. When Akhila enquires about her family’s acceptance, she sternly says that she least bothers about other’s opinion. Colourful dresses and jewellery are not a marital privilege and she has been using them since her childhood. So they are not connected with her status of life as a widow. “…who made these laws anyway? Some men who couldn’t bear the though that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other men” (LC 202). These words trigger Akhila’s self-confidence and kindle in her the desire to live her life.

Marikolundu, one of the six passengers in the coupe is the real modernist. Akhila and other women in the coupe do not involve Marikolundu in their talk. But when everyone has got down from the coupe, Akhila starts her conversation with her. Marikolundu says that they have not involved her in their discussion as if she does not have any problem to share with them. She tells that she is not rich or educated like them but the gravity of her hardships has more intensity than their distressing problems. She remarks that all the women in the coupe have secured lives and they are making fuss of little things in life. She tells Akhila that they have not faced real tragedy in life and they do not know how the world is cruel to women.

Marikolundu expresses her view to Akhila that women are highly talented. She says, I’m not telling you that women are weak. Women are strong. Women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to
seek that vein of strength in herself. It does not show itself naturally. (LC 209-210)

Marikolundu had a pleasant childhood but the sudden demise of her father made the family move towards Chettiar Kottai. Her mother joined there as a cook and made Marikolundu as her assistant so that after her, Marikolundu could get her job.

While Marikolundu narrates her story to Akhila, she tells,

…but you know what, the heart is a glass bangle. One careless moment and it’s shared…we know that, don’t we? And yet we continue to wear glass bangles. Each time they break, we buy new ones hoping that these will last longer than the others did. How silly women are. We should wear bangles made of granite and turn our hearts into the same. But they wouldn’t catch the light so prettily and sung so gaily…(LC 216-217)

Marikolundu began her life in the Chettiar Kottai as a nurse for the baby of Sujata Akka, the daughter-in-law of Chettiar. She narrates how her life was marred by a series of harrowing experiences: abandoned by the lady doctors breaking their promise of providing training to her to become a nurse, subjected to rape and a forced motherhood, exploited by Sujata and thrown out, selling her illegitimate son Muthu to the rapist Murugesan and her trauma on seeing Muthu lit the Murugesan’s pyre without knowing that he was his real father. Her heart burns on seeing Muthu as she realizes that he is not the root cause for her suffering. Her hatred towards him vanishes and her motherhood blossoms. She says,

All I wanted was a measure of happiness. All I wanted to be was Muthu’s mother. For so long now, I had been content to remain a sister to the real thing. Surrogate housewife, Surrogate mother, surrogate lover. But now I wanted more. I wanted to be the real thing. (LC 268)
She decides to shower her motherly love on her son and lead her real life. After listening to the stories of her fellow passengers, Akhila breaks her shackles and decides to take her life in her own hands. She gets an awakening that if one decides to look at one’s own self insulated from the surrounding situations, one becomes stress-free. In this connection, it is worth quoting Anjali Misra’s view in The Times of India as:

Awareness that we suffer from stress. Awareness that this stress is caused by the fact that we become the situations that take place around us. Awareness that this habit can be changed…we, in actuality, are not the situation or the feeling or the thought, but are only witnessing them. (11 March 2005)

Akhila relives her past experiences and considers them as passing clouds. Instead of regretting for her present situation, she decides to begin her life anew. In Kanyakumari, she books a call to Hari, her lover with the determination to resurrect her life. Akhila has discovered that she can have her life as she wants it to be. She has no more fears. The novel is open ended without mentioning whether Hari responds or not to Akhila’s call. His response is not crucial to the theme of the novel but the awareness acquired by a stifled soul to come out of its manacles and its determination to restructure the life are of great significance. All the characters, except Akhila and Marikolundu, in this novel rebel to signify their existence to prove their identity without deviating from the basic norms of the society. Akhila decides to renew her life by confronting the conventions. Marikolundu is forced to accept the aberrations. The concept of modernity differs with different characters due to their different situations.

Nalli in *The Hills of Angheri* by Kavery Nambisan strains a lot to get concurrence from her father and relatives to opt for medicine. Her dream of becoming a doctor is due to her hero Jai. No one stands with her but everyone comments on her desire and criticizes her
decision. She does not bother about others’ opinions and she is stubborn in her decision. She is self assured that she could establish herself as a dexterous surgeon. To become a doctor she has to convince not only her family but also her relatives and villagers. Her father being more concerned about her health condition dissuades her. He tells, “I have never heard of a woman surgeon. Surgeons have to operate all day and even at night. A surgeon should be strong” (HA 176). Her father takes her to Sardar, his close friend and requests him to advise Nalli to give up her idea of becoming a surgeon. Sardar tells her with very little delicacy that she is not suited for surgery. Doing minor cases and leaving behind complications for the seniors to manage is all very well, but being a surgeon means doing everything on her own. It demands certain manliness, an aggressive faith in oneself. Anatomy or pathology might suit her better, with fixed hours, holidays and no night calls.

While Jai is a student in medical college, he has dreams of constructing a hospital in Angheri for the poor village people. Nalli supports his idea and wants to associate herself in the service of the poor people of the village. After completion of their studies she proposes to execute the plan but Jai withdraws from it. But she is not at all distressed by the discouraging words of Jai. The whole village believes that her getting of a doctor degree is just an adornment to her and soon she will become the wife of somebody. In the life of girls demolishing their dreams in the name of marriage is quite a common occurrence. It is not uncommon for the parents to blunt the desires of their daughters and to curtail their ambitions at the budding stage because they bring their daughters up with the predetermined purpose of serving their husbands and their relatives as their prime duty. Once they marry off their daughters, they feel relieved but it becomes a dead end to the development for the girl.
Nalli struggles a lot to fix herself up with the medical students. She boldly moves with the boys there and changes herself to accustom to the life in hostel. The change in her dressing sense and appearance make the people of Angheri confirm the change in her character. Her change from an orthodox village girl to a modern medical student is not acceptable even to her father. But Nalli neither bothers about others’ observations nor takes pains to give clarifications. Her silence signals that her change is drastic. She changes her love for her village and forgets her dream of constructing a hospital in the village.

After her medical course, she wants to go for a higher study in surgery. Her father is initially against it but is convinced by her stubbornness and Jai’s success as a renowned surgeon in Mumbai. So he sends her to England to finish her surgery course and does not expect any financial support from her in return. Through the training she has in Liverpool, she learns fast and gains confidence. She becomes bolder to fight against racial discrimination from an odd patient who does not want an Asian to treat him. She also gets accustomed to the rules and regulations of the foreign country.

Nalli analyses the difficulties in her profession and recalls her own failures and fears and wonders why she becomes a surgeon at all, when she has to die so many deaths in a single life. She proves herself as a good academician by presenting a paper among famous surgeons who publish academic papers. She says, “I spoke as I had planned, faultlessly, moving my eyes towards the projects no fidgets and stammers. I was proud to be among surgeons who wrote academic papers” (HA 239). She proudly says that she has reached a stage in her career where she knew how to make use of her faculties. She says, “I diagnosed with my eyes… nothing else” (HA 244).

When she returns from abroad, she reveals her plan to start a hospital at Angheri with
the money she has saved. She has planned to build a small hospital with five beds and has also intended to start surgery later. She has a proposal to develop the hospital with the help of loan from the bank. But nobody at home including her mother supports her. When she announces her opinion of opening a small hospital, Vishnu, her cousin interferes and says, “There’s been a lot of talk going on here, I might as well tell you. Most people in the village feel that you’re not competent enough to handle a hospital” (HA 293).

She comes to know that the village lacks confidence in her ability. Vishnu further adds, “It’s not that we believe you’ll do such a thing. But – you’re a woman. It’s difficult here. It will be better for you, and us, if you work elsewhere” (HA 293). She is unable to digest the rejection meted out to her by the villagers. She meets the Vaidyar, the village doctor, in the village who really knows the worth of her and shares her feeling of hurt with him. He advises her, “Why should you let other people decide your worth? he asked. You know how good you are” (HA 294). He further convinces her, “It is their ignorance that makes them say these things…. Go as far away as you dare, find a place where the people need you. And dip your hands in work” (HA 294).

Nalli wants her village to accept her service and to understand her. The villagers fail to appreciate the noble intention behind her option for medical profession. With hurt feelings Nalli goes to Keshavganj, four hours south-east of Delhi and makes her mind up not to return to Angheri with the idea of constructing a hospital for the poor. In the hospital at Keshavganj she desires to do well but feels frustrated at the condition of the hospital. She presents her views to Big Swami, who administers the hospital, about the shortage of drugs, the poorly trained staff and the ill-equipped theatre but she does not get any positive response. Inspite of her struggles there, she desires to help the people who come for treatment keeping in mind the people of Angheri. She is unable to separate herself
from the simple and poor life of the villagers of Angheri.

Her frustration makes her leave Keshavankanj and join a private hospital in Madras. Initially she feels comfortable with the job. Later she realizes that there is no recognition for her and her dedication turns into dejection and it causes confusion and makes her tender her resignation. In her heart of hearts she is still the village girl Nalli who wants to work for the poor of her village.

Jai wants to have a change in his profession. He wants to quit Bombay as he is fed up with the form of life there, the congestion and the competitive profession. He plans to work in Madras with Nalli but she has no inclination to go after money and fame and serve in cities where a handful of doctors like Jai practise to gain popularity. He tries to persuade her to put off her pertinacity by citing the lack of facilities at Angheri and attempts to influence her to make her mind up to work with him in Madras. He says, “I won’t let you down. I want to help the village. But let the economy pick up, let the roads improve. Let the people feel they can afford us” (HA 388).

The commercialism behind the profession is well focused by the words of Jai. But Nalli does not have proclivity for the popularity and the prosperousness of city life. If she were self seeking like Jai she would have settled in any one of the hospitals where she served, she would have attuned herself with the corruption there and would have established her name among the successful doctors of the city and would have indulged in luxury.

Nalli’s detachment towards the city life is evident when Jai says that he is happy that she has got a place in Madras. She says, “I haven’t found anything. Seven months in Madras and I’m tired. Don’t bother trying to convince me that I’ll make it. …Everything I say, everything I do – I can see the discomfiture in the faces of others…” (HA 390).

Nalli is aware of her failure in persuading Jai to work for the poor of his village. His
line of reasoning reveals his unconcerned attitude to her idea. “…Villages belong to the
past. In a village you can’t be anyone important. Even when I visit, I get sick of the petty
problems and inconsequential politics there” (HA 388). Nalli understands that Jai has
limited himself by his limitless ambition.

Nalli learns many things from her failures and she does a sustained
self-introspection to develop herself. Once, after a surgery at Keshavganj, she recollects her
mistakes.

Back in my room, I pulled out my diary and began to jot down all the errors I
had ever made in my surgical work. When I finished, I had filled three pages. I
stared in disbelief and despair. Once again, serious doubts assailed me. How
did my work compare with that of other surgeons? What would my grading
be? True, I did well most of the time, but in a profession like a surgeon’s were
so many errors permitted? I, who never forgave Chellaiah the driver for the
way he had wielded the steering wheel of the bus the day my father died, how
was I better than him? (HA 363)

Nalli feels settled in Madras professionally but not mentally. She finds her mood
swinging from high to low and she understands that she has gained acceptance in Madras
and it is easy to go ahead. But her longing for professional satisfaction frustrates her. She
asks herself, “For how long would I continue to walk in and out of wards which smelt of
fever, pain, humiliation and death? I picked up my diary and read my first entry, made when
I was sixteen, full of impudent idealism…”(HA 390)

The self-introspection of Nalli gives her a clear idea of the path that she has to travel
to fulfill her ambition. She walks on the terrace which is very narrow for walking. But she
feels she can adjust to it, she says, “The terrace was too small for walking. But that night I
walked, unmindful of the confined space, until it felt like some vast avenue” (HA 391). She reminisces about her childhood and the poverty ridden life of Jai. She discerns that since Jai had a childhood with only the streaks of poverty, there is no use in expecting him to return to Angheri to serve the people there. She decides to go back to her village and live there with the limited set up like walking on the small terrace. She makes her mind up to serve the people of Angheri though they do not have faith in her and are not ready to provide her a place to construct a hospital and give her recognition. She decides to work for them and gears up to face humiliations or adverse comments.

Thus she proves that the purpose of education is not to make money but to provide service to mankind and the professional satisfaction culminating in peace of mind is of prime importance. If Nalli had the earnest longing for establishing herself as an adept surgeon she would have ensconced herself in the city and would not have returned to the village to serve the people. Modernity does not lie in the city life and she is confident that her modern thoughts may change the attitude of the villagers and she will get recognition very soon as the small terrace gives her space like a vast avenue.

The word ‘Modernity’ here does not mean that women should shed all their responsibilities and enter into a new world where there are no norms or value set for their life. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande have education and financial stability to run their life. But still they are not ready to move away from the customs of the society. Both Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors and Jaya in That Long Silence accept their lives though they struggle for a long time with the dilemma whether to thrash the norms of the society or to abide by them. It is clear from their stand that after so many confusions and quandaries in their mind, they remain in their same domestic arena with new stand of enlightenment and empowerment. They prepare themselves to face problems with their limitations and they
convince themselves that nothing is going to be achieved by quitting the relationship or by blaming others. Their self analysis gives them the stamina to overcome their past sufferings and move to the next stage of life.

Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night* by Githa Hariharan returns to her mother after a long journey of trouble in life. She even leaves her husband and goes with Gopal with the hope of getting emotional support from him but very soon understands that the tinsel life with Gopal will never give her any recognition. She might have got the chance of fulfilling her physical pleasures but she would never get acknowledgment from the public. She has to hide herself behind the screen when Gopal is in the lights of fame on stage. She feels this as a humiliation to her self-identity and she decides that she will not get any pleasure by sacrificing her dignity. She shirks her relationship with Gopal and walks towards her mother’s house with the hope that her mother would understand her in a better way. She might have decided to go back to her husband Mohan and apologize for what she has done but she knows very well that reunion will never give her a peaceful life and her husband may humiliate her in future. Her mother Sita is also a woman of strong will who withstands all the struggles in life and as she has lost all relationships except Devi she decides to begin a new life with her daughter. She knows the pain of negligence and the hurt of humiliating words. The novel ends with a hope that both Sita and Devi will start living their life for their sake and not for fulfilling the needs of others.

Akhila’s struggle in *The Ladies Coupe* shows her height of compromise in life to convince others and to help her other relations at home. She sacrifices her life and pleasure in order to settle her brothers and sister. But in turn she does not get any recognition from them; they extract her work and her money but never think of her needs. Her decision to go to Kanyakumari alone and to make a call to Hari with whom she had been very close earlier,
to renew the relationship, reveals that she wants to lead her life at least at this later stage. Her decision is not going to disturb the other members of her family except giving them a sense of guilt that if they had arranged for a normal life for Akhila she would not have gone to the extreme level of violating the cultural norms. Her financial stability and job security give her confidence that she can lead her life according to her desire.

All the characters in *Ladies Coupe* strive to be independent in their own ways for attaining self-satisfaction. When they want to revive their life, they get stuck in a tight spot whether to give in to the cultural norms or go against the conventions. They choose the way that suits them best to move to the next stage. Nalli in Kavery Nambisan’s *The Hills of Angheri* understands that her education should not lead her to a self-centered life but enable her to prove her worth to her family and to her village.

These women do not show their protest in the initial stage because culture has moulded them to undergo suppression silently. The patriarchal society has prescribed silent suffering as a virtuous quality for a woman. After several trials and tribulations, they are in a dilemma whether to abide by the tradition or to take a stand against it. They find themselves in a tight-corner which causes emotional stress and when they realize that they could no longer put up with the noose of tradition tightening around their neck they go up against it to establish themselves. As they have their roots in the Indian tradition, they do not adopt hostile approach towards men. From the unfolding of events in the select novels it can be seen that they are not fighting for sharing power with their male counterparts either in the family or in the society, but they are evolving as self-confident individuals from being timid entities. Their compromising character evolves into assertive trait and it leads to their progress. Due to their endurance they do not make it as a man-woman conflict. They are quite conscious of their responsibilities and contribute their mite to the
family and the society and live their life fulfilling their desires. A modern woman is one who understands her responsibilities, utilizes the opportunities and proves her potentialities. She does not complain against the external sources of restrictions but insulates her own-self from the dispiriting limitations and attains self-realization.

Thus all the protagonists evolve progressively into modern women and the way in which they establish themselves varies according to their family background but they do not ape the western culture and wish to live independently free from the familial bonds. Indian women have different ethos, different history and different social background and they invariably have an inclination to family life but the traditional family life is acceptable to them as long as they have their space to express themselves. Janaki is gifted with a fully satisfied married life because her husband pampers her and takes extra care for her in every moment. Akhila is embarrassed at her parents’ closeness and their pleasure in each other’s presence and the love between them is on equal sharing. Friction arises only when one’s love has a domineering effect on the other and there is no level playing field. Expressing one’s individualism is a fundamental instinct inherent in every soul and when it is suppressed in the name of culture discord develops. Saru and Nalli want to establish themselves as doctors and Jaya wishes to express herself as a writer but they face hurdles. Akhila has no avenues to fulfill her desires and has no authority over her dependents, inherent with her status as the bread-winner for her family. Though Margaret Shanthi has all comforts, experiences emptiness because she has no way to give vent to her energy. Prabha Devi has materialistic pleasures but feels dreary because she has no means to express her individuality. Marikolundu has expectations of becoming a nurse but is deceived. These women rebel against the force that blocks their path to self-expression. Saru crosses the caste barrier and marries a person belonging to a caste considered lower to
None of the ladies longs to be a member of a permissive society and they do not clash with the originators of patriarchy but conflict only with their attitude and this gets manifested in the form of modern women versus men and modern women versus women of older generation. The masculinity of a male does not digest the independence or social status of the female and the malevolence in him makes him resort to aggression physically or mentally to subjugate her but modern women do not cave in to the male’s hostility. They feel hurt but they do not become violent against the aggression. They hanker for their unrestricted space like their male counterpart remaining within the family unit. Saru, Jaya and Margaret Shanthi continue to live with their husbands as confident individuals. Saru decides to serve the society and do her duties as a wife to her husband and a mother to her children with no expectations from her husband, since the substance of marriage has disintegrated according to her. She has progressed as a benefactor to her family and the society. Jaya revalues her life and resolves to balance the power relationship with her husband. Her quietness does not smack of frailty but a revolt in silence with the hope in certainty for a change in him that will take some time and her insight of the man woman
relationship displays her progress as a matured home administrator. Margaret Shanthi does not feed her husband’s ego for a contented life but feeds his appetite with tasty foods and deflates his ego. She deftly grabs freedom from him without his awareness and refines him and she has progressed as an authoritative wife. Sheela has not attained the age of marriage and emulates her grandmother in modern outlook and does not hate family life. She extricates herself from the confining customs and is undoubtedly a progressive girl. Circumstances do not provide Akhila, Devi and Nalli the opportunity of living a family life. They do not aspire for a joint life devoid of love but thirst for a conjugal life with liberal love rather than custom as the confining cord. Akhila has a longing for Hari, Devi had eloped with Gopal expecting a companionable love and Nalli sets her heart on Jai. But they profess to assert their space in the society rather than preferring to be vulnerable to their beloved. Akhila breaks off her ties with her family and wishes to resume her relationship with Hari as a mark of her self-realization. Devi severs her ties with Gopal when she realizes that he is also of the same stuff of a patriarchal male. Nalli gets rid of her love for Jai when she perceives him as egocentric. She sacrifices her love to serve her village. Marikolundu is the only woman character who, because of her forced motherhood and destitution, does not have the determination for a conjugal life but she resumes her life with the new found love for her illegitimate son. These women have not got rid of their womanhood but have awakened to their exploitation in the name of tradition and have asserted their individualities. Thus they have progressed into modern women.