



Mannu Bhandar

1931

MANNU BHANDARI

2.2 LIFE AND WORK

In post independent Hindi literature many new women writers emerged and attracted the attention of readers and critics but after initial shining some of them did not make writing of their successful career. Many women writers have entered the arena of literary writing. Several highly talented writers have enriched Hindi literature with their creative writings. To name a few Usha Priyamvada, Malti Joshi, Dipti Khandelwal, Mridula Garg, Mannu Bhandari, Shubha Verma are some of the most accomplished contemporary Hindi women writers. Their writing reflect how modernism, contemporary social situations and currents and cross currents at life have molded their writing and subject matter as well as impact on them. Moreover these women writers have written about Indian women, their pains, conflicts, predicaments against the background of contemporary India. They have focused their attention not only on the outer situation and conflict but also on inner turmoil of modern women. In this reference writer like Mannu Bhandari deserves special attention. Her contribution to the world of fiction dates to the 60s. She has written in and experimented with varieties of genres of literature like the short story novel, political novel, literature for children, drama, screen play, and dialogues for film etc. Mannu Bhandari has also chaired the directorship of *Premchand Srujanpith* in Vikram University, Ujjain. In 2008 Mannu Bhandari was given for her autobiography *Ek Kahani Yah Bhi* the prestigious Vyas Sanmaan for year 2008, which is instituted by the K.K. Birla Foundation and given every year for outstanding literary work in Hindi authored by Indian citizen.

Born in Bhanpura, Madhya Pradesh on 3rd April 1931, her father Sukhsampat Rai Bhandari was social reformer, freedom fighter and the producer of Hindi literary Dictionary. Bhandari as a creative writer contributed Hindi literature with six novels, nine short story collections, two full length

plays, one collection of one act plays, three works for children, screen plays and dialogue writing.

Bhandari lives in Delhi. Literature was a common fare at her home from her early childhood as her father, Sukhsampat Rai, was an activist and literary person during freedom fighting movement. She finished her intermediate education at Ajmer. She got her bachelor degree from Calcutta. As she did not pass her B.A. with Hindi, she did her M.A. in Hindi from Kashi Hindu Vishva Vidyalaya. She started teaching at 'Baliganj Shiksha Sadan' in Calcutta for nine years. Teaching is her most favorite job so this may be the reason that many of her protagonists are teachers. She taught for three years in Rani Birla College at Calcutta. From 1964 onward, she worked as a teacher in Miranda House College at Delhi. She stated about her interest that : 'I write occasionally out of my hobby but my original line is teaching.'

Her first story was published in 1954 in *Naya Samaj* but she acquired fame as a story writer after publishing her second story '*Mai Haar Gai*' in '*Kahani*' magazine. Editor Bhairav Prasad Gupta encouraged her for ceaseless writing.

In 1957 '*Mai Harr Gai*', the first collection of short stories was published in India. Since then she brought out eight other collections of short stories. During those days she came into contact with eminent writer Rajendra Yadav and their friendship turned into marriage in November 1959. The following are her sole contribution to the Hindi literary world.

Novel:

- Ek Inch Muskan (with Rajendra Yadav)(1961)
- Aap Ka Banti (1971)
- Mahabhoj (1979)
- Swami (1982)
- Katha Patkatha (2003)

Play:

- Mahabhoj (1983)
- Bina Divaron Ka Ghar (1965)
- Pratishodh tatha Anya Ekanki (1987)

Autobiography:

Ek Kahani Yah Bhi (2007)

Works for Children:

- Aasmata (novel)
- Aankho Dekha Jooth
- Kalva
-

Short Story collections:

- Mai Haar Gai (1957)
- Ek Plaite Sailab (1962)
- Yahi Such Hai (1966)
- Tin Nigahonki Ek Tasvir (1959)
- Trishanku (1978)
- Meri Priya Kahaniya (1973)
- Pratinidhi Kahaniya (1986)
- Srestha Kahaniya (1979)
- Sampurna Kahaniya (2008)

Bhandari's work has been translated into various Indian languages. Her famous novel *Aapka Banti* has been translated into Gujarati, Marathi and English. Niranjan Sattavala has translated it into Gujarati. In Marathi, Indumati Shevade has translated while Jai Ratan has translated it into English. Whether she writes short stories or novels or dramas, Bhandari writes mainly about 'everyday India'. A society in which we breathe, a culture to which we belong. Her major concerns emerge from our own environment, from our immediate world, holding up mirrors to our own lives. She does not simplify India but presents India as it is to her reader. Even though her writing is very Indian in its framework, the themes honour no borders. True, she writes mainly about women, but it is the human being that lurks behind her characters. Madhuri Bajpayi rightly says, 'Mannuji is post independent writer who presents woman in a very new look. We get portrait of intellectually developed woman in Mannuji's works'. (Bajpeyi p. 14)¹⁸

Bhandari's first novel *Ek inch Muskan* is jointly written with her husband Rajendra Yadav. They serialized this novel in twelve episodes from January to December in monthly magazine *Gnanodaya* during 1969. The passages relate to male character Amar were written by Rajendra Yadav and passages and dialogues related to women characters Ranjana and Amala were written by Mannu Bhandari. It is a very famous novel whose first episode had been written by Yadav and ended with the last episode by Bhandari. This is the story about a well-known and sensitive writer Amar who is inner conflicted between wife and lover and at last chooses to live lonely life after the inner turmoil.

Aapka Banti is Bhandari's second novel which moves round a child named Banti. Shakun, Banti's mother divorced her husband Ajay and Banti lives with her mother. Shakun marries second time and Banti goes to live with his father. Ajay also has second marriage so Banti cannot live with them, at the end he is sent to boys' hostel.

Mahabhoja her third and second individual novel is based on her own short short story 'Alagav' which is included in her *Trishanku* short story collection. The theme of this novel is social but the setting is political so it is categorized by many as a political novel. Bhandari pictured fudal system spread in the villages of India and through this system the poor farmer and form-workers are tortured ruthlessly. This novel represents contemporary political realism. Later Bhandari herself transcreated this novel into full length drama for stage performance and the drama, like novel, tasted the fruits of success.

A well know Hindi film 'Swami' was based on Bhandari's *Swami* novel. This novel was based on a short story of famous Bangali writer Sharat Chandra. Bhandari transformed this short story into long successful novel by depicting the inner dual and turmoil of Saudamini. Saudamini, the central character of novel, cannot forget her lover Narendra and decides to leave her husband Ghanshyam and run away with Narendra. But at the end leaves Narendra and comes back to her husband.

'Bina Divar ka Ghar' is Mannu Bhandari's full length drama which moves round two couple's extra-marital relations and problems arising out of them. Shobha and Ajit and Mina and Jayant are married couples. Jayant has extra marital relation with his stenographer. So tension arises in his marriage life. Shobha is a working woman which her husband, Ajit doesn't like. So cracks are created in their marriage life. Bhandari throws light on the matrimonial problems of young couples engulfed in the labyrinth of unfulfilled desires. Bhandari has her own beliefs about writing. She says:

An unavoidable condition for writing is 'objectivity'. When you objectively analyse the things and situations around you, your total view point is entirely changed. Every person has his/her own pains and problems and writer is lonely during his/her writing process and the writer

shares his/her feelings of loneliness through the medium of writing with readers. I accept that writing taught me to be objective at my personal pains and problems'.
(sarika)¹⁹

Mannu Bhandari has her own measurement towards life. She believes, 'modernism is a kind of logical point of view which reflects in person's thought, behavior and functions'. ('sarika' p-16)²⁰

2.2.1 As a Short Story Writer:

Mannu Bhandari is considered eminent woman writer in post independent Hindi literature by most of the critics. She was also considered the short story writer of Nayi Kahani movement. Most of the women writers expressed their sexual complexes in the name of authenticity of experiences. Dr. Paresh considers these stories as a 'horse of day dreaming'. Mannu Bhandari's short stories also have the authenticity of experiences but it is not limited up to individual or personal but it has been also colored with authenticity of time and sensitivity. Chatting with Ajit Kumar she clarifies her creative process:

Sometimes some brilliant idea excites to write but it is not possible for me to shape it into a short story until it has totally woven with life. Situations, full of heartbeats of life, thoughts or problems encourage me to write.
(Amitabha)²¹

The subject matter of her short stories has been selected from the realistic events in which women have been sexually, emotionally, mentally as well as economically exploited, in which woman has not been considered as a 'person' by so called hypocrite modern society. The prevalent note in her stories, one finds the image of 'new woman' in some of her characters who try to break the ages old shackles and come out of the exploited situation. Bhandari has expressed the experiences of female psyche in her stories.

With the first published story in 1954 she got fame by her second story '*Mai Haar Gai*'. This story established her as a short story writer in Hindi literary sky, up till now she had written 51 stories. As a writer, Mannu Bhandari contemplates and meditates over her subject matter before writing. She does a lot of home work to write. Before expressing her view about the theme of her works, she collects related information, visits the place if it is necessary, even meets people and then from the gathered material and with the help of her creative imagination she presents before us her fictional works. She believes in actual description and presentation of her subject matter. Thus, after much contemplation and work, Mannu Bhandari presents her collected material in the forms of literature i.e., short-story, novels or one-act plays.

Her intensive reading of books started at a very young age with the motivation of her father. While doing M.A. in Hindi, she had visited the different places with a view to know the sociological problems of women who have been put in such conditions. Thus in her novels and short stories, Mannu Bhandari has depicted vividly the realistic condition of women. She has been presenting in her works, in her own way, the different social problems like corruption, exploitation of lower class, unemployment and the problems of women, their sensibility and experiences.

Mannu Bhandari believes that a writer should study the different facts of society properly and objectively to present the realistic picture of society with the help of the work of art. According to her if this cannot bring social

reformation it ignites the spark of fire in the heart of sensitive reader. Mannu Bhandari with her fictional work, has proclaimed the indignation made against women possessing the secondary place in the society.

2.2.2 Women Characters in Her Short Stories:

Some critics consider Bhandari's stories as an expression of an individual consciousness but they open on so vast canvas and touch universality that they became the stories of social awareness. Her stories depict Indian woman's destiny with reference to different social and individual situation and evaluate accordingly. The stories of Bhandari effectively present a disturbed but a brave feminine psyche in the new ethos. She has created a working woman who stands in the contrast at higher class family's woman. Woman, educated or uneducated, married or unmarried, wife or lover, in most of the situations, is under miserable condition. Bhandari develops story around a woman's problem in such a way that the problem doesn't belong to woman only but it becomes the problem of society.

Mannu Bhandari takes us to the strife-riddle world of material disorder and violation of moral code. Sometime women are shown as troubled by the double roles; her role as a working woman and that of a house wife. Some of women characters are presented in a very psychologically miserable condition - threatened and crushed by her husband, husband's family members, middle class working woman, problems of spinsterhood, showing resistance against rape or physical tyranny, falling victim of sexual harassments in the society and even the economic dependence of woman have been skillfully delineated.

Some of Bhandari's women characters are rebellious in nature. They raise a voice against injustice and exploitation, they possess self-respect and freedom. They seem to build their own existence as a 'human being'. Such women wish to do something in life and are aware of their own

status. These women with self-awareness do their best to maintain their dignity and respect. Some of such portrayals resemble Nora of *Doll's House* by Ibsen. These women seem to have developed self-assertion and self-respect. They are very conscious about their rights. Moreover some of the women characters are modern, educated, intelligent and economically independent. Their educational progress and economical self-reliance help them to establish their independent identity. This transformation in the social status and role of woman is seen in her literary works.

If sociological view-point is applied to her short stories, the portrayal of woman seems to be subordinate. From her short stories it becomes clear that in marriage, family, education, either in the presence or absence of her husband in profession or in any field, the decision of women depends upon the decision of others. Mannu Bhandari has shown her as a dependent person. They do not seem to possess 'the room of their own'. Such characters are passive and follow the way shown by others.

An in-depth reading of Mannu Bhandari's short stories reveals a deep understanding of the female psyche. Most of her stories are women centered, dealing with woman in different roles – wife, mother, daughter and as an individual in a society conditioned by the rigid codes laid down by patriarchal society. Her short stories are, therefore, true to life and representative of the dilemma faced by modern women.

2.2.3 Style and Technique:

Style and technique are important aspects of creative writing. Mannu Bhandari adopts different narrative techniques in her writings. Sometimes she writes from the omnipresent and omniscient point of view while at other times the first person narration is employed by her. Sometimes one finds an artistic combination of the first person and the third person

narration coupled with flashback device. The first person narration allows the author to probe deep into the mind of the protagonist. The writer can very easily explore fears and frustration with this mode of narration and whenever Mannu Bhandari wants to tell story objectively, she chooses third person narration.

Bhandari explains the use of language in her fiction writing:

... Either I write short story or novel or drama, from the beginning, I believe that transparency in language is the fundamental and compulsory tool for the language of fiction. The function of language should join the reader immediately and directly with the story and not creates hurdles in his way. Some people believe that simple, clear and direct language fails to disclose deep and complex threads of sensitivity and fine layers of meanings. But hasn't been Jainendraji's language destroyed this belief? I will add that to write in simple language is the most difficult task to achieve. I don't dare to claim that I have achieved that stage but my efforts are always in that direction' (Bhandari)²²

About the place of Mannu Bhandari among the modern women writers in Hindi literature, Dr Paresh rightly remarks that,

Mannu Bhandari has a distinct place among

women writers. One of reasons is, she has a right and balanced language to express her matter. Her language makes us feel very personal and neither is it shocking nor does it have mixture of impressionistic flavor. (Amitabha)²³

Moreover devices like interior monologue and stream of consciousness too have been employed by the writer in her stories to penetrate into the memories and recollections of the her characters. Sometimes her stories do not progress chronologically, but instead move back and forth thematically, gradually relating one incident after the other until the entire story is revealed.

Bhandari never resorts to any personal commentary and explanation. It must also be observed that irony, satire or even humour which are the ingredients of great works of art are used to portray effectively her characters' psyche. Gifted with a natural literary bent of mind, Bhandari has matured with experiences in life and readings. For her fictional concerns and art, she has carved a niche for herself among Hindi women writers.

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III Woman Portrayed in the Short Stories of Shashi Deshpande

Introduction:

Society, no doubt, plays a vital role in the shaping of an individual's traits. Without society, the identity of an individual comes into serious questioning. Hence shaping or molding to the societal norms and conventions become very crucial for an individual in order to survive. Shashi Deshpande depicts woman in myriad roles - wife, mother, daughter and individual in her own right, which reveals Deshpande's instinctive ability to articulate the feelings of the contemporary, urban, educated upper-middle-class woman who is caught in the transitional period between tradition and modernity. Deshpande not only articulates a thematic and technical maturity but also effectively communicates an intensely apprehended feminine sensibility. It is a difficult job, indeed, to give voice to women who themselves are not sure of their own suffering and who stand in an unenviable position today. They are acutely aware of the marginalization of their individuality but are condemned to live the life of silent suffering. Sunita Reddy too expresses similar view that 'In many ways, their condition is even more pitiable than that of women of earlier generations who unquestioningly accepted their secondary position in society.' (Reddy)¹ The stories that are discussed under the following sub-topic portray the patriarchal culture within which the life of daughter becomes marginal.

The focus of her stories has been on the lives of Indian women, especially the middle class women. Her stories are a self-analysis and a self probe into the existential problems of woman. Deshpande's introspection and psychological probe make her distinct in revealing the sub conscious and unconscious psyche of her characters. She portrays the traditional and tabooed Indian society that provides little scope for the independent growth of a woman. Her female protagonists are sensitive, self conscious, brilliant and creative. In many of her stories she has not given names to her protagonists.

This makes us feel that this could be any one of us. She uses pronoun for them instead of proper nouns. Deshpande says :

I call myself just 'novelist and short story writer'. Truth is, I am a story-teller. I'm deeply interested in human beings, in the human condition. Through the stories I tell I am probing into this condition. I am asking those questions most of us ask ourselves sometime or the other-about life, about death, about our relationships with one another, with society and our moral values.
(Deshpande)²

Moreover Deshpande is seriously concerned with realistic perceptions of family role-relationship. She has dealt with various facets of human relationships most intensely because the traditional heritage of India gives great importance to the family unit. Thus while exploring the role-relationships of a woman in Indian society, Deshpande in her short stories offers readers an intimate and domestic chronicle of the inner world of women and the pain of coming to self knowledge. Her stories are about the personal journey of woman; the protagonist learns as she undergoes the crisis. Her stories depict effectively a disturbed but a brave feminine psyche in the new ethos.

3.1 Girlhood and Adolescence

Shashi Deshpande deals with the problem concerning the marriage of girls in Indian society. They are portrayed as crushed under the weight of a male-dominated and tradition-bound society. Deshpande has attempted to give an honest portrayal of their sufferings, disappointments

and frustrations in some of the short stories. The marriageable girls in these stories are shown operating within the framework of a male dominated and tradition-bound society. Through these examples Deshpande raises the issue of arranged marriage or lack of feeling in a union which sanctified the lifelong partnership of man and woman. It is to be observed, however, that Deshpande desists from making hysterical anti-dowry statements and instead tries to look at the problem without any preconceived ideas. She lays bare the hypocrisy and double standards practiced by society. The protagonists of the following stories are unable to defy social convention and seek a compromise as a way out of their dilemma.

Rashmi, Chhaya and Megha are the young school-going adolescent girls in *Can You Hear Silence?* It is the wonderful story of emotional picture gallery of a middle girl Megha, standing on the threshold of transition in age and the working mother and busy father are the other members of the family. They are living in a small house with no partition walls but a thin curtain to separate the drawing room and bed room. The daughters sleep on the sofa alternately.

Rashmi is younger enough to feel the lack of attention of her parents but not matured enough to understand it so frequently she behaves oddly with her parents, especially with her mother.

Rashmi has to be rude to mummy these days. And papa says, 'Now Rashmi, that's not the way to talk to your mother,' she burst out with, 'you hate me, you're all against me,' and stamps out. And papa says with a sigh, 'Growing pains.' And mummy says, 'it pains me too.'(32/1)

For days together Chhaya doesn't see the father who is not home till

late in the night, for he is working hard for living. Her father promises, 'And I have to work very hard for a few years. Once I get going, I'll be able to spend more time with children.' (28/1) One day with their mother children met their father but Chhaya didn't recognize him. 'There is papa,' where? On the other side of the road. But Chhaya keeps on saying, where? Until he came right up to us'. (29/1)

When the parents are together they talk in whispers, unless of course there is something disagreeable leading to quarrels. In the beginning it sounds softly but slowly the tones rise up and her father's voice gets louder and Megha prays her mother silently:

I close my eyes tight, I feel cold. Don't make him angry, Mummy, I pled. It's terrible when he is angry. He doesn't see us, he doesn't look at us, he goes about as if we're all ghosts. And Mummy does look like a ghost.
(33/1)

Their nocturnal behavior determines their interaction next morning. Megha takes so many impressions during day time but the impressions during the quarrels between parents are more powerfully registered in her mind and that also create her emotions like fear, doubt, irritation etc. in her personality. Being aware of the relation between her parents, Rashmi, one day announced that 'I'm going to sleep in the gallery from today.' (34/1) Rashmi has sense enough to understand the behavior of man towards girls. They went to shop for a chocolate where a stranger gave chocolate to Megha and she took it but Rashmi walked fast by holding her hand and went out of the site of that man and said, 'Why did you take chocolates from him? Don't you know better than that? Taking things from a man! Don't you know what men do to girls?'(31/1) This is the world where girls have to be cautious in each and every dealing with men.

The knowledge about men is got from Rashmi and the information about the relationship between man and woman is got from her classmate Suchitra. Who utters, 'There is silence. But the silence seems even more terrible than the angry voices. May be, it's better than those whispers,' (34/1) Megha, lying within the audible distance, tries to plug her ears from the husky 'middle of the night voice'. This silence is terrible. When she removes her paining fingers from ears, 'the whispers from the other side of the curtain remind her of what her classmate Suchitra had narrated in a nasty way.'

She hates the parents, herself and Suchitra, wishing she had a room of her own and at last she was drifting to sleep. She dreams of a room with a tilted roof, rain falling on it with a soft patter, where she can hear the other type of silence. Shashi Deshpande has masterly portrays the pictures of three girl children of different ages and through these pictures she tries to show how female psyche is created not only by mother and father but also by education, environment facilities and so many other factors. All the three girls have different demands and different emotional needs which were partially fulfilled by their working parents. The story not only present the picture of three girls but also show the mental turmoil of a working woman who has to balance between home and office, but it will be discussed further under different title.

The story has a voice, it is not silent. it speaks of desires and emotions, some hidden or half-revealed and some loud enough to avoid. It provides an insight into often forgotten aspects of human feelings and relationships which weaving a magical web of emotions.

The dreadful cold, hazy fog of loneliness doesn't encircle the lives of grown-ups only. Rather, it is, not the age of an individual that cower upon him this feeling of aloofness, in the story 'The Shadow', there is the inhumane abandonment of a child by her entire family. We find her helplessly trying to make a little space for herself in their hearts but remains deprived of the love and affection which is the primary need of a child.

The girl child is made to feel that she is different from her brother and sister. It is not only that she looks different but something else which

she cannot get hold of. Though a child still the girl knows that she is sent to the school which is inferior to the one where her brother and sister study. She dreams of going to just another such school,

Of having a uniform like them. And shoes. And red leather satchel that she could carry on her back, instead of the cloth bag she carried slung over one shoulder. (143/1)

The reason behind is beyond her comprehension. Her other two brothers and the sister enjoy all the pleasures of the childhood and she is always denied any participation. Her presence is felt like a shadow moving around. She has a well-conceived awareness of her 'Unwantedness' ever since she was young-very young. As the author writes, 'She had lived in a silence and solitariness for so long that it seemed to be the only way of living.'(142/1)

We find in her an unquenching thirst for recognition by her father who never talks to her, never looks at her face, never plays cards with her and always leaves her behind while he takes: the other three for swimming. The girl being denied a room sleeps in the small veranda of her parents' bedroom and tries to comprehend 'the strange words loaded with impossible meanings' (145/1) - the words like 'Dishonor, Fault, Punishment And the only idea she could make out of them was that she was the one who was connected closely with all these heavy words, the words, her mother, utters,

'One moment of weakness and you want to punish me for it all my life? And an innocent child as well? Just because she was born?'(149/1)

Her mother, she had observed at times, had never taken her side outside that bedroom. She dares not show any love towards her before her husband and

other children. As if, she is bearing her as 'a beast of burden', 'a guilt', reminding her of that 'moment of her weakness', or 'probably a sin'. Probably, this guilt' do rises the little girl for her justice and dignity of existence, her existence becoming a maze of questions in an alien world.

'I don't understand, I can't understand, she thought in despair, I was born. How can that be a wrong? And how can I put it right?'(149/1)

Her anxieties for 'putting it right' make her so pathetic, so forlorn. A father with a sadistic disposition and 'a guilt - ridden mother' avoiding her questioning glances and innocent 'whys' as the mother is incapable to answer her 'whys'.

The cause of her marginal existence is a big question for her. But she tries to combat with this alienity much courage, struggling hard to break the cocoon that her father has built around himself, whenever she tries to approach him. She fights to break the indomitable silence looming large over her by poking a demand before him, to become a little fatherly towards her, to include her whenever he takes the others for swimming. This is a significant step for it was important to enforce her presence even though it proves futile.

The discourse between them shows the gravity and toughness mountain of ice refusing to melt 'Papa', she said, standing before him resolutely 'He didn't reply. 'Papa', she said again and loudly as if speaking to a deaf man. He looked up in surprise. I want to go swimming.' (147/1) Her heart was thudding madly, her voice quavering, but her eye were steady, their chin determined. You can't'. His eye had gone back to his newspaper. Why can't i? Tell me why?'(147/1) It was as if all the whys that had been gathering inside her since her birth had exploded into a large one that could not be left unanswered. A look of distaste, crossed his face, but he replied, 'I could not manage three children'.

I can manage myself. 'No, you can't. Not till! you learn swimming. But how will I learn if you never teach me? Don't try to talk smart. His face frightened her, but she stood her ground. She could not give up now. I want to learn, she said and it surprised her that her voice came out so thin and quivery. That's enough. Stop that nonsense. (147/1)

His voice was cold. It was like having an ice cube pushed down the back of her dress. At any other time it would have scared her into a terrified, submissive silence. Now, it shattered all her composed resolution. She could do nothing. She could not move him. She would never be like the others.

I want to go. I want to go. I want to go. She began to scream, unable to control herself. She went on repeating the words in the midst of her tumultuous sobs, while the other two children stared at her aghast, astonished by her behavior. The mother rushed in saying, 'What is it? What's the matter? What's going on? As she saw the man and the child confronting each other like two antagonists, there was a flash of goodness on her face, a brief flicker of joy that turned to dismay, then anger. The father retreated behind his paper and said, dully and indifferently. Deal with her yourself. You can see she's hysterical. (148/1)

The mother appears to be happy since the hysterics of the child are revolutionary. She knows that this forbidden daughter of hers too has tremendous talent as she had seen her stealthily practicing the dancing-steps.

And under severe restrictions, she doesn't shower her love towards her in an open manner. May be the sight of this daughter increases the mother's awareness of her sin. So, the girl remains a born outcast, as if an emblem and product of sin who has no right over the family or home. As regards the father, we find no change in his conscience.

Thus with all such incomprehensible thoughts, she decides to please her father by succeeding in her study. But to her great sorrow, it too does not work. She had longed to see the expression, the response, she had so desired. For the first time, she is full of hatred anger towards him. But with these feelings there arises a positive feeling of self-assertion in her when she says to herself, "Whatever they say, I was born. And I am, I am'.

(150/1) The words fill her like a triumphant, resounding cry. Perhaps the writer wants to mean that the girl will no longer remain in shadow as soon as she gets the light of her existence. And the end of the story suggests that it is the beginning of the knowledge about her.

The patriarchal consciousness that 'she is not his', doesn't allow the child to enter inside the cocoon and the crude patriarch also cannot tolerate the mother becoming a little compassionate towards her as she is a result of the transgression of social laws. Here we also come across a pitiable helpless mother who cannot do against her husband's will. One moment of weakness made her entire life weak and made her helpless miserable creature in her husband's house and each moment of present life looks like a payment to that moment of past.

The patriarchy wants you to maintain it and praises this submissive silence because they are always afraid of the 'voice' - 'a woman's voice' which can reveal a whole lot of atrocities and questions that are ever unanswered.

The story *It Was Dark* depicts the plight of an unmarried girl whose life has been marginalized after having been molested by an unknown young man, resulting in her illegal pregnancy and leading to a great shock. The story makes us aware of the trauma the parents undergo when their young daughter is kidnapped and raped.

'Silence' and 'the feeling of isolation' predominates the house. The effect of the rape on the girl is heart-rending, it has turned her into stone and just 'lies in bed and stares at the ceiling,' neither wants to meet anybody or talk anything. The girl has blank, unseeing eyes.'(127/2) It appears as though she has seen a solar eclipse with her naked eyes and spots have appeared before her eyes, like clouds. More spots and then more clouds leading to darkness. The eyes which had turned to face her mother return back. The mother forces her daughter to tell her all that had happened and also about the man, and as if trying to ward off something, the girl moves her head violently which causes a wavering of her two thick plaits. The only words the girl utters are; 'It was dark'(131/2). The silence in this story is of a different kind. It is the silence, the feeling of isolation, of a kidnapped fourteen-year-old girl brought back home after three days of abduction. It is the fear of being alone.

The story highlights maternal anxiety of medical termination of pregnancy and paternal worry of handling the police case, and so on. The parents have to face this because only her menstruation can relieve them of their worst fears. They will have to go for MTP. The innocuous sounding words are most obscene when used by the father for his fourteen-year-old daughter. The parents have to face not only the grief of the daughter and the risk of pregnancy but also the censure of the society, hidden behind the ugly mask of sympathy.

Deshpande evocatively brings out the despair of the mother who feels guilty for having never built a wall round her daughter. In Indian society, the girls have to live under so many margins. The mother remembers her own youth when she was marginalized with list of 'don'ts and do's '. But she decides that she won't let her daughter live behind walls. However, the daughter was told about few things when she grew up. But despite, her knowledge of biology, the daughter is sexually abused.

The incident tosses the mother back to her own past when she was just eleven and had to see what the suitor had willed her to see. As a girl

she was frightened to see a man exhibiting himself. And after that the fear of such violence had always been a part of her, 'the fear of invasion'. (131/2) Since then this fear continued even after her marriage. Submission is the answer she was taught and it made things easier. She remembers her mother whisper to her with her face turned away in embarrassment: 'You must submit.' (131/2) The directive had left no choice with the woman but to submit herself to her master. As a wife, she had done what was expected of her and helped to make things easier. Does she imply that even after marriage, sex by husband at times can be a rape? Thus in a male-dominated society, the girl is taught to surrender to the male desires is also highlighted in the story. But the protagonist of the story wants her daughter not to submit to such dehumanizing attitude of the society.

Shashi Deshpande has given convincing portrayals of daughters from middle class families. She has tried to show the Indian woman in her home who has no voice even in the decision about her marriage. Marginalization of woman as daughter is clearly indicated in these stories. She is sexually stereotyped by the conservative attitude. She is psychologically accustomed by the norms laid down by the traditional culture. These characters, though urban and educated, are firmly rooted in India with the weight of centuries of tradition and culture behind them. It would be wrong to think Shashi Deshpande as vocal feminist. She writes about the dilemmas faced by womenfolk but without a plea for radical change. Reconciliation, stoicism and self-denial remain the major governing principles of her women characters. (Singh)³ That is why they cover their real feelings or attitudes. They are too weak, too docile to shake off the shackles and this is what heightens the problems for most of the women characters in Shashi Deshpande's stories.

Deshpande feels strongly about the degradation that women experience and continue to experience and the subordination and inequality. As a writer, she highlights the secondary position occupied by women and their degradation which is inevitable in an oppressively

male-dominated society. She gives us a peep into the state and condition of the present-day woman who is intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under the weight of male chauvinism.

The next story *The Pawn* presents a meek, docile picture of a girl who represents all those Indian women who are covered with thick, slack layers of convention, ignorance and reticence in literature as well as in real life and who have no autonomous frame of existence.

The young girl in the story *The Pawn* is compared with the pawn. She comes to Bangalore with her parents to see the city during their journey to Madras. Ramaswami, a distant friend of their relative is supposed to take them around. He is the narrator of the story who finds the young girl as a pawn with her parents because she walks discreetly with her parents, saying nothing, just walking quietly with her heavy lids screening her eyes, looking aloof and unconcerned and unsmiling.

The girl follows her parents unquestioningly. From the story it becomes clear that she neither speaks nor asks anything. Every decision is taken by her parents. The narrator, a young man finds her totally unattractive because she is: 'Short. Thin. Nothing anywhere one could appreciate. And that dull look on the face.' (32/2) He finds something mysterious about her face which is 'a closed room' for him. But during the lunch she offers the narrator her wisp of a smile that catches the corners of her mouth, 'curling and lifting it exquisitely.' (34/2) Suddenly, Ramaswami, the narrator finds it beautiful. There arises a joyous feeling within him as he is fascinated with her smile. He starts taking interest in her. Even the girl seems to be accepting his feeling in her. Gradually, Ramaswami develops a soft corner towards her and each time he feels 'a peculiar melting sensation' (37/2) in him.

At the end of the day, while departing he promises the girl that he will write to her and her father. He feels sad as the train carries the girl away from him. But sadly the romantic memories about the girl remain with him for a couple of days only. He considers it a romantic dream and nothing more.

It was all a dream and what have dreams to do with reality? After all, what I did know of her or she of me? And what I could tell my parents about her? That she had a beautiful smile? I knew what my mother would say.. This isn't the way things are done. And she would be right. Damn it, I didn't even know her language, nor did she know mine. (38/2).

With these thoughts he removes his feelings towards her from his mind thinking that he is ' a sensible young man. Not a damn fool.'(38/2) There lies the irony when he considers himself a pawn and not the girl. However, the writer makes it very clear that once again the girl is been played with. The boy played with her feelings for a day. He was not sincere in his feelings towards her. The boy seems to forget her easily but what will happen to the girl when she keeps waiting for his letter? She is again made the pawn by the boy.

3.2 Daughters and Young Girls

In recent times, the traditional notion about womanhood is undergoing a change. The changed climate of familial relationship is also influencing the role of woman as daughter. Under the impact of changing socio-cultural milieu, the woman as daughter is likely to have a different pattern of role sets which may be quite different with that of their traditional role-sets. Moreover, under the changed circumstances, ' the role-taking and role-performance as well as the attitude and aspiration of the girl are likely to reflect the characteristic features of newly emerging urbo-industrial social system'. (Ross)⁴

The story *I Want* shows the girl, Alka bending to the will of

elders. Deshpande ironically presents the true facts of marriage in a middle-class family with orthodox attitudes in India. As if marriage, plays a role of full stop in an aspiring girl's career. This is aptly illustrated in the story.

The story revolves round the protagonist Alka who has crossed the generally accepted marriageable age. So she is expected to marry the first man who agrees to marry her. Her opinions are never taken into account first by her father with regard to her marriage, and later by her fiancé with regard to her career. It appears that a fairly good deal of self-searching in *I Want* where a twenty-seven year old woman Alka is subjected to 'the insolent stares, the impertinent question' (144/2) by the groom's party. Alka hates to be exhibited and inspected again and again. But she cannot protest lest she should bring a bad name to her father. The earlier refusals from the groom's party have brought an air of disappointments and hopelessness in the family atmosphere. The fear of remaining a spinster in Indian society is a constant humiliation. Alka too carries this burden of inferiority which bends her by ashamed when she faces remarks like, 'A daughter of 27 and not married.' (143/2)

This shows that in conservative family, a daughter is considered to be a burden till she gets married. Alka lives constantly under the shadow of guilt and shame for being the cause of her parents' anxiety. Her relationship with her parents becomes 'fragile, explosive and delicate, as if labeled 'Handle with care.' They were nervous and uneasy with me.' (144/2) Alka feels guilty for being a burden on her parents as if being an unmarried is a criminal act. She suffers the pangs of unfair treatment netted out to her due to unmarried state. Now she is not even informed of the imminent inspection. Her parent says nothing to her.

Alka feels much uneasiness, consternation and hopelessness. She ruminates: 'The woman in me was outraged and protested. I crushed her. She had no place there. None at all.' (145/2) She is terribly stirred within and remarks: 'Sometimes I feel we are all doomed to be strangers to one another, forever sealed in separate glass jars we call 'self'. (144/2) What

keeps Alka apart from the common women is a strong sense of 'self' that she wants to preserve at all costs.(Dwivedi in Pathak: 277)⁵ When her mother tries to marginalize her with do's and don'ts keeping in mind the approval of the groom's party, Alka's individuality cries within herself.

I suddenly felt fluid, as if I had no shape of my own. As if I was capable of taking any shape. But I was 27. I had a shape and form I had to preserve. A self I had to treasure. (145/2)

Obviously, she is a woman of consciousness and conscience who wants to discover her integral identity. But as regards her marriage, she has little or no choice of her own; her parents are there to safeguard her interests. Without asking Alka they settled the things with a boy who is a man of 'I want', a selfish, self-assertive type. He expects her to resign her job and confine herself to home. Total authoritarian male-mentality is found when he puts before Alka his expectations.

You know my job has long odd hours I'd like my wife to be home whenever I return. She should be able to manage everything. I may have to entertain often. She must like people. I want a wife who can get on with everyone ... I don't want my wife gadding about the place, leaving everything to servants. I want her to do most of it personally. I want (147-48/2)

Alka was so astounded with his self-centeredness. Instead of asking Alka's desires, he discloses his list of wants. She thinks, 'I would say nothing until he asked me. Surely it was important for him how I felt?' (144/2) But the boy seemed to be least interested in Alka's feelings because 'he had

the mould all ready. All I had to do was to fit in. ' (144/2) Alka kept silence which was 'a loud cry of indignation.' (148/2).

This is a true picture of an dictatorial patriarchal family where woman becomes just a fluid with no shape, no form of her own. Moulds of demands are kept ready by the male member of the family. She is supposed to take the form according to the requirements and demands of the conventional pattern of her gender roles.

Alka, a woman of consciousness gets irritated and resolves to assert herself. Being a thinking woman, she has her own desires to fulfill. Though she does not want a husband having a four-figure salary or a car, she still desires a man who '...hears my voice when I speak. Who understands me even when I don't....'(150/2) She thinks that now it is time to tell everyone what she wants. But to her great sorrow, Alka comes to know that her father has fixed up certain preliminaries without asking her. Horrified she asks, 'You didn't ask me. Both of you. Why? Didn't you think I had something to say? It's my life, isn't it? ...Baba, are you promising me happiness?' (149/2)

To these questions of Alka, her father brushes aside her unexpected reluctance to do so by pointing to her position as a girl who having crossed the marriageable age has no chance of getting married. She is also expected to give in to his wishes and express no such desire which might jeopardize the proposal. Her opinions and aspirations therefore remain unvoiced.

Alka feels that the burden has fallen off as soon as the groom's family accepts her. The burden of inferiority, of being unwanted, aged and despised. But still there is no joy in her heart.

Uneasiness, like a dark cloud, loomed over me, erasing all the colours of my day, turning it gray. It wasn't the marriage that I shied away from. It was something else that troubled me. Her

words.. ' It's settled. They've agreed.' It sounded so simple. Like a simple equation. But it left out one factor completely... me. (143-44/2)

Alka is reluctant for this marriage because she knows that will force her to erase her individuality.

Later, on reflection, Alka submits to her parents' wish and decision. Her wants began to dwindle, as she has a job she could have stood her ground and refused to give it up; but for the sake of security she sacrifices her careerist aspirations. With pain she thinks, '27. Time to forget dreams and compromise for security... I surrendered my illusions and reality.' (150/2) It is just another stage in the life of a woman where she is forced to sacrifice a part of her. Alka, thus, becomes a wife, not by choice but by compromise. What makes matters worse for Indian women is that they are choiceless. Like marriages, their decisions are made in heaven - in their husband's mind. As *Roots and Shadows* puts it,

Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country.... What choice do I have? Surely it is this, this fact that I can choose that differentiates me from the animal. But years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no-choices. (Deshpande)⁶

This is exactly what the protagonist of this story thinks and then submits to the choices of her father. Finally, her marriage is settled. They have agreed to the proposal. Her parents feel a great relief as if their responsibility is unburdened. In a typical Indian set-up, daughter is considered

a burden to be eased, a problem to be solved, and a responsibility to be dispensed with. Shashi Deshpande very well presents this fact in the above discussed story.

The story *Intrusion* presents the conservative attitude of middle-class family with three marriageable daughters. No one asks for the choice of the eldest one, the protagonist of the story. Her consent for the marriage proposal has been taken for granted as there are two more marriageable daughters in the family.

In the marriage-market a girl is treated like a consumer item which is ironically indicated by Deshpande. If she can fit in to groom's requirement table, she has more chance to be selected but at the same time she has no right to have a requirement table and demands at all. Her will and requirement has no place and not at all considered important. In this story, the groom's party had agreed to the proposal because she fulfilled their requirement of 'a simple but sophisticated girl who can entertain and mix with foreigners for their son is working in a foreign company.' (203/1)

Critically, in a conservative middle class family, the girl has no freedom to voice her desires. Her individuality is thus, put into the margins. She becomes just a puppet whose invisible strings are in the hands of conservative traditional attitudes. Thus, the dreams and desires of young girl are ruined by traditional marriage patterns.

The protagonist recalls that her mother-in-law had been searching for a 'simple but sophisticated' (203/1) girl for her son working in a foreign company. 'No one had asked me if I [the protagonist] had agreed,' (203/1) reminisces the frustrated bride. A girl's frustration and zero identity and nonexistence in society structure, is pinpointed by Deshpande. Submissiveness or docility perhaps, is what aggravates the problems for most of the women characters in Shashi Deshpande's stories which makes them mask their real feelings or attitudes, since they lack the will to shake off the shackles. (Geetha)⁷

It is seen that in a patriarchal Indian middle-class family, a

daughter's sphere of life and activity is marginalized. She has to follow the conventions quite submissively. She is made to live at the margin, never becomes the subject. She has to follow the path decided by the elders.

An Awakening is a pathetic story of a young girl's sudden awareness of the harsh realities of life. Deshpande very sensitively depicts the dreams and aspirations of a young girl on the threshold of life who is forced to come to a compromise and take on the responsibilities of her family on her young shoulders.

The protagonist, Alka's father who has started as a portal clerk continues to be one without any change. Hers is a lower middle-class family of six living in a *chawl* with 'meaningless jumble of people milling round.' (116/1) Where nothing is private, not even your thoughts.' (117/1) Alka is not content with the life she lives. She doesn't want to ruin her life by being just a typist. She constantly blames her father for giving her this trivial life.

.....he's.... A blind fool. And it isn't optimism but idiocy. If only he hadn't been so smugly content with what he is, with what he has, maybe we'd have got out of here some time. I can't forgive him for being what he is; I'll never forgive him.
(115/1)

The poor man helplessly stomachs all the taunts of her daughter who is insensitive to his feelings and the realities around her. She adamantly holds on to her hopes.

Alka is a girl who desires something more from life, 'something beyond and above this shoddy way of living.' (117/1) What keeps Alka different from the ordinary conventional woman is her desire for meaning in life. She wants to live a meaningful life. She nurtures a strong aversion for the life which her father is leading 'having achieved nothing, been

nothing... He said nothing that was not trivial, did nothing that had any meaning '(119/1)

Alka is a brainy girl who 'will make something of herself' who has some guts, some spunk in her. Alka dreams of passing the examination with distinction and going abroad for further studies, and come back and take up a job: 'Put up my hair and wear glasses and crisp ironed sari like the girl I see on the bus stop every day.... And live in a house with a room of my own. A house that smells nice. '(118/1) But Alka's dream world never turn into reality when her father dies leaving for her 'Only duties uncompleted, responsibilities badly shouldered and empty tears.' (119/1)

Alka's world shatters and breaks not 'into pieces, but into dust, into nothingness.' (118/1) She is now a woman with a million unfulfilled dreams. She realizes that she was dreaming of impossible things. Realising that now there is neither escape from this dull, meaningless reality nor any other alternates. she starts shouldering her father's burden with contempt for him. The 'shoddy way of life' which she has resented so much is now she has to put up with and she takes up the job of a typist but hates herself for what she has become.

However, guilt and pain surmounts her when on seeing her father's letter to his brother, she realizes how insensitive, she has all along been to her father's love for her and to his abject condition: 'Tears roll down. But they were not the tears of childhood. They were the first tears of adulthood, bitter, salty and painful.' (120/1) Having to shoulder the family's burden after her father's death, Alka becomes aware of the reality of her situation which has the effect of dissipating her resentment against the world for making her give up her dreams of being different from others and freeing herself from the automation of her painful past.

This is what the awakening of a young girl in the story who is abruptly ushered into the adult world and made to conform to what is ordained by society and family. Here Alka gives up her resentment against the world and accept the reality. There is the awakening of the realization of her

responsibilities towards her family, as if awakening is not possible without pain.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt very minutely and delicately with the daughter father role-relationship in both these stories. There is the awakening in the protagonist of both the stories. In *An Awakening* Alka give up her resentment against the world and accept the reality. There is the awakening of the realization of her responsibilities towards her family. In *Shadows*, the little girl comes to an understanding and is able to cast off the burden of her being different. She too accepts the reality which leads to ascertaining herself.

Thus the portrayal of woman as girls in the short stories of Shashi Deshpande presents the picture of a marginal girl who has no freedom to voice her desires. Deshpande gives a true picture of the authoritarian family where woman becomes just a fluid with no shape, no form of her own. Shashi Deshpande in these stories focuses on the sacrifices which Indian girls have to make in her marginal sphere of life. These sacrifices made by them in the matter of their marriage are all dictated by their anxiety to avoid commotion of their lives. Moreover she writes about the dilemmas faced by women folk but without a plea for radical change.

The daughters and young girls in these four stories show no sign of intimacy with their mothers. Who are unable to tolerate such indifferent, rude attitude and try hard to bridge a gap in which, after some realizations they get success in reuniting. The reasons behind the antagonistic behaviour of these daughters are varied. There are lack of understanding because of generation gap, less education on mother's part, so incapability to accept new ideas, insecurity arises out of husband's death and fancy wayward ways of daughter under the impressions of pseudo modernism - all these and other hidden reasons work behind the indifferent attitude of daughters towards their mother. Strong influence of father is the other point to be observed in some of these stories. The gap between the daughter and the mother is removed only

after the daughter either passes through some crises or is exposed to some bitter reality which cannot be shared with father. However, in some of the stories, the daughter is so-self centered and reactionary that the union with mother is nearly impossible.

The immature daughter is presented in the story *Madhu* who is unaware of other's feelings. Madhu has no intimacy with her mother. She never shares anything with her. In fact, she treats her mother like a stranger. Her mother's pain is revealed when she says,

‘There's Madhu... treats this house like a hotel. A place to eat and sleep. We can't even ask her where she's going or when she'll return home. She flares up. And no help at home at all.’ (95/2)

Madhu is portrayed as an unconventional girl not only in her nature but also in her looks and dress. She is scrawny, the boyishness of her figure accentuates by the heavy, rather masculine jeans she wears, incongruously, and however, she has a gloriously long plait hair that falls below her hips, which is the only feminine trait in her. According to the narrator, ‘Madhu, I had realised, was one of those rare Indian females who look better in trousers.’ (96/2)

Madhu's parents are anxious about their daughter's wayward ways. It hurts to find how little she cares for them. The eternal cry of the human parent is put in the following words of Madhu's mother when she says,

‘God knows what's wrong with them. Or maybe something is wrong with us. But what? We give them everything and expect so little ... just a bit of affection. But no, they can't even give us that. Do they ever think of us at all?’ (96/2)

There comes a change in such an indifferent attitude of Madhu towards her parents when her father suffers a serious heart attack. At first, she takes the news with the greatest composure. But then she gives way to her agonized thoughts into sobs. She starts understanding the value of relationship and her duty towards her parents. She cannot bear the thought of her father's separation from her even in a dream.

The picture of casual, careless and impertinent young daughter is seen in the character of Madhu in the story of that name. She is shown intolerant of her parents and even shamelessly takes advantage of them. Deshpande has given an unconventional image of a daughter in her. She always finds her parents obstructive and suspicious. She says, 'I have to face this how, what, where, when every day of my life. It's too boring.' (183/1) Thus, she rejects the age-old traditional values represented by her mother.

The story depicts the transformation of a wayward daughter into a mature one who realizes that 'sacrifice' is a noble virtue in human beings and in a mood of remorse remarks: 'I'll sacrifice something I like very much and maybe I'll get the other thing' (100/2) She sacrifices her long hair in order to get something which she loves more, i.e. her father's good health. This is, of course, a vague and superficial realization on her part, and a belated one too.

The daughter's attainment of puberty that ends her unnatural estrangement from her mother, who has had to suppress her maternal instincts, constitutes the theme of the story, *Why a Robin?* The story presents the hostility of a twelve year old daughter towards her less educated mother. Asked to write a composition on a Robin, the daughter seeks in vain help from the mother who cannot rise up to her daughter's expectations. The daughter, more close to the father, like him, ignores the mother who can tell her something about 'the peacock' but nothing about the 'Robin'. 'It puts distances between them' (45/1) Disgusted at her obtuseness the girl turns to her father with a sense of surety. The daughter's tone lacerates the mother and leaves her as if with 'bleeding nicks' all over.

'The 'peacock', stands for antiquity and the past tradition brings out the plight of the traditionally educated or nurtured mother in the story, since 'robin' on which the daughter wants to write stands for modernity.'(Geetha)⁸

The situation changes dramatically, however, when the daughter clings to her mother for comfort and security, on attaining puberty, thus giving a new meaning to the mother's life. This time it is the mother she wants to comfort and nurse her. The womanhood brings them closer. Sudden flush of blood and abominable pain frightens the woeful daughter who has suddenly grown to womanhood. The daughter's fears are allied by the mother who talks to her gently, 'trying to make her feel it is natural, a part of growing up, something to be welcomed, accepted.' (51/1) The bridge is built between the two due to the realization that both suffer similarly in life. The episode unites the daughter with her mother.

The daughter in the story *My Beloved Charioteer* is a widow who has confined herself in a jail of gloom and remains all the times in her pains. She remains a sort of foreigner. The death of her husband has left infinite bitterness in the daughter, Aarti. The tragedy in her life makes the daughter bitter towards,

'Why don't you go out? I had asked her once. Where?.... There is nowhere I want to go. Everywhere I see couples. I can't bear to see them. I could murder them when I see them talking and laughing.' (185/1)

her mother who silently suffers her daughter's indifference towards her. She is unable to lift up her sorrow which she never reveals. She never shares anything with her mother and she even hides her sorrow. The

mother is full of pity for her daughter who could turn happiness into a wrong. The daughter keeps a distance. While the mother enjoys the company of her grand-daughter, to lessen her sorrow, she takes refuge in her father's room. 'For Aarti, it was always her father ... Even after his death; he can give her something I can't.' (187/1) It suggests the strong influence of a dominating father upon a growing daughter. At this time the mother opens her daughter's eyes to the true character of her father which results in the reconciliation of the daughter with her mother.

'Deshpande in the stories not only stresses upon the darker experiences of a woman's life but also emphasizes the significance of the mother's role in motivating a daughter to live and rise above the debasing sentimentality.'
(Adhikari)⁹

The widow daughter, living with her mother, is again analyzed in the story *And Then*. The unconventional picture of daughter emerges in the story when she goes abroad leaving her widowed mother alone. The mother remembers that on her first day in school, the sobbing daughter had entreated: 'Amma don't leave me here and go, take me with you, I want to go home with you.' (174/2) Now it is mother's turn to plead pathetically: 'don't go away, don't leave me alone and go away, don't leave me alone here, I'm frightened'(174/2)

The daughter, Anju is so self-centered and ambitious that she wants to live her life independently and is not concerned about her widowed aged mother. She is so determined to go away that nothing can change her decision. The mother remembers her grandmother who had six sons and two daughters and who had never stopped working. The mother very clearly tells Anju that she is selfish and doesn't think of anyone but herself. Anju shocked her great by replying:

'Selfish? Maybe. But I'd rather be selfish than become like you.... Amma, would you really like me to sacrifice myself for you? And become bitter and hate you and myself for it? No, Amma, I can't, I won't do that. And it's my life after all. Let me live it the way I want. '(175/2)

Anju doesn't even listen to the mother's argument that she should get married first. Generation gap, personal ambition or insensitivity on the part of daughter? Call it what we may. The daughter goes away leaving the mother behind.

The recurring theme in the above discussed stories is daughter's hostility/antagonism towards her mother. The causes vary from case to case. The mothers try to forge a relationship with their impervious daughters who are reconciled to the situation at the end. Even the reconciliation which comes to this relationship differs in each case. In *Why a Robin*, it is daughter's growth to womanhood which brings her closer to her mother. The adolescent girl is harrowed by this sudden change in her female body. She is helped by her mother to accept it naturally. The dramatic conflict that harrows the adolescent girl at puberty: she cannot become 'grown-up' without accepting her femininity; and she knows already that her sex condemns her to a mutilated and fixed existence, which she faces at this time under the form of impure sickness and a vague sense of guilt. In *My Beloved Charioteer* it is the mother's bold revelation of the true character of her husband brings her daughter near to her. To set her own image in her daughter's mind, she breaks her father's image first. The careless and impertinent daughter of 'Madhu' understands the value of the relations when her father suffers a serious cardiac problem. *And Then* depicts a selfish and ambitious daughter where There is no hope of reconciliation in this relationship. The story is about the filial ingratitude on the part of the daughter summing up it can be said

about these stories that Deshpande has given some convincing portrayals of girls and especially her relationship with her mother.

The themes of these stories are very sensitive enough to show that the operative sensibility in Shashi Deshpande's stories is distinctly female and modern. She is a sensitive writer of the contemporary Indian life who deals with the themes such as frustration, guilt, loss and loneliness. As G.S.Amur remarks, 'She is at her best when she works out her themes in terms of intimate human relationship, generally within the family.' (Amur)¹⁰ Truly, Deshpande uses the story as a medium of moral and psychological analysis and her focus is almost invariably on the inner life.

3.3 Wife and Life partner

The Indian social set up that boasts of having close familial ties has grave rigidity of norms and values to give freedom of choice and this rigidity creates a wall between acceptance and non acceptance of an individual by the group. As a result, an individual's life may become an aimless wandering in search of relations that may fill his physical, mental and emotional sterility. As Sashi Deshpande herself comments,

But sometimes with the family we are not completely ourselves. Like I said, we are continuously restricted by roles. I am so much the wife and mother that I may not be able to express myself my whole self. It's very rare with a marriage partner.(Deshpande)¹¹

Shashi Deshpande has carved a niche for herself in articulating the bitterness and desolation of her women characters, enters into a broader arena and grapples with the complex theme of alienation in her short-stories. existential aspects are interwoven in the total framework of her stories. Its emphasis on the alienation of man from an 'absurd' world, his consequent

estrangement from 'normal' society, and his recognition of the world as negative and meaningless - presents the sensitive individual, fragmented and spiritually destroyed by the particular social conditions of life, which is complex enough to make him obsessed. This particular phase of existentialism – 'the one alone,' the man who has no record - seems to be the theme of some of the stories of Shashi Deshpande.

3.3.1 Alienated wife:

The central theme of husband-wife relationship with which Deshpande deals is governed by the existential tones. Her stories generally centre round family relationships particularly the relationship between husband and wife and the wife's dilemmas and conflicts. Her main concerns have been the anxiety and boredom of housewives living claustrophobic life with their husbands and children. According to Ram Sewak Singh and Charu Sheel Singh,

Her philosophic stance is existential but the treatment is psychological. Various shades of marital relationships interest her discord, separation and depression as much as love, loyalty and levels of understanding.' (Singh)¹²

The theme of husband-wife alienation and marital disharmony, though not a new theme gains depth and meaning in these stories. This alienation results from lack of communication and temperamental incompatibility between husband and wife. Due to the indifferent and insensitive temperament of the husbands, the wives feel isolated. They remain untouched with the care, warmth and love of her family, especially her husband. The sense of isolation pervades the thoughts of the protagonists of these stories. They feel discontent with the dull routine of

the days and the unchanging pattern of their life. The woman's great disquietude, alienation and frustration are beautifully suggested in her stories.

Loneliness is not something unique, but is, in fact, a characteristic of the society of our time. Today, many individuals feel alone, unrelated to others, unable to communicate with those around them, unable to feel at one with them. This problem of an individual who feels emotionally and spiritually alone creates the backbone of Deshpande's themes. The inner yearning of the lonely and alienated female characters for understanding and affection is beautifully depicted by Shashi Deshpande. The moving description of loneliness leaves a lasting impression on the reader's mind. All the protagonists in these stories suffer from a sense of isolation that is not merely physical but also emotional. This estrangement from which they suffer is, in fact, the consequence of the absence of desired relationships rather than the absence of contacts, the lack is not of company but of companionship. They find themselves alone and anxious in a world in which they lack emotionally satisfying social affinities.

The story *An Antidote to Boredom* tries to define and analyze the cause of the shattering of moving apart of two married lives. It is too much of togetherness that can harm a relationship - too much of everything but love and excitement. Here a wife dissatisfied with her existence as a wife of an indifferent man and finds herself involved with a young widower. The theme of the story is isolation and monotony. It depicts the ennui of a wife who starts feeling a kind of gulf between herself and her husband due to the schedule he rigidly sticks to. The wife gets bored of her husband's passivity, his blindness and his stolidity. Dissatisfied with life the protagonist thinks.

Nobody had cared what I wore, how I dressed. My husband denied me nothing; but there was not one sari with association. Not one sari that was special to me because of something we had done together,

something he had said to me. (56/1)

A dull daily routine that a husband and wife take to a mundane adherence. The duties that are to be undergone daily-mindlessly to maintain a mechanical existence. A relationship which is not lived but carried on, just to follow a social convention. Besides the daily needs of coffee, lunch, dinner, a child and perhaps sex at times there is nothing more that is to be shared between the two. There is a total negation of emotional scenes or talks. It is surprising to note that the husband would be painfully, horribly embarrassed if the wife say she had missed him all day. So, the woman searches for the fulfillment from the other. A relationship 'without' marriage gets started as she is aware that she has lost everything 'within' marriage.

Marriage is just facilitating life's needs of fooding, lodging, clothing, defining her as a mother but nothing beyond that. A search for something beyond that will prove to be futile or she knows this fact and has accepted it. The presence of 'the other' helps her to live within the marriage. We find her setting herself, making a space, trying to fit in or fill the vacuum that is inside her, so that the hollowness, the scarcity may not swallow the marriage itself. Her husband has never been demonstrative of his affection towards her. The dull and routine behaviour of the husband is the focal point of the story. They have been married for twelve years. Of the two sons, who provided at once the bridge between the two, one is dead and the other aged five is in school. The wife feels discontent with the dull routine of her days, the unchanging pattern of her life. She reveals her hatred for imperceptiveness in the following way:

I had felt in him incapacity to receive and for that I hated him at times, though I knew I wronged him by that. For he was not a wicked man, not harsh nor cruel. Only unperceptive. And dull. And dullness is to me an unforgivable crime. (58/1)

On the contrary, there is the boundless capacity for loving and giving in the wife which remains unaffected. For her the word love is used only in books and movies, not in reality. In her case it has been proved to be an illusion. 'And now the word was stored away at home, a skeleton in the cupboard.' (59/1)

On the pretence of visiting her son to his school she continues meeting 'him' and this thought of meeting him 'kept her keyed up to a more intense 'pitch of living,' As she admits, 'His frank admiration was as refreshing to me as cold water on a hot day. Until then, nobody had cared what I wore, how I dressed?' (56/1)

The devaluation by the husband sets in her a craving for a new relationship outside marriage and this new relationship gives her everything that she hungers for; love, attention appreciation and understanding. It comes as a shock to the reader when she mentions the physical involvement with her husband 'as a habit with him, a body to be loved once or twice a week, so that love-

Making became just another chore. Dull, like treading a path one has walked, many a times; wondering thinking about those women who did it for money and did have same feeling of being cheated of being defrauded of something that was the right of our womanhood.(57/1)

Unlike other protagonists of Deshpande it is not her desire to establish her individuality, talent and capacity in any other world of business or education that is the cause of discord in this marriage but her intense desire of giving, and loving and the failure of her husband to receive and reciprocate.

As she says,

How often had I felt in myself a boundless capacity for loving, for giving? But I had left in him an incapacity to receive and for that I hated him at times.(58/1)

Trying to overcome this marital discord becomes a necessity for the harmony of her own self and thus she doesn't foster any sense of guilt. Though aware of social repercussions, they prefer to remain silent. This relationship imparts an inner fulfillment which is absent in relationship with her husband.

The uncompromising stance that she subsequently assumes is ventilated through her dialogic imagination. Such women are alienated from the product upon which they work, i.e. their body. Tong observes: ' A woman has little or no say about when, where , how or by whom her body will be used.'(Tong)¹³

The protagonist feels that there is no affection at all between them; the only thing holding them together is habit and a child. There pervades dull barren silences between them that she feels life 'yawning and yawning. Face-splitting yawns. (59/1) But she goes unnoticed, her excitement, her restlessness, even her boredom and discontent too has passed him by.

The demon of discontentment' brings her to 'strange situation, sitting with a strange man in his car, exchanging pleasurable glances with him.' (59/1) For the first time she finds that a kiss which is a 'preserve of the young or of people in books and movies... something to be indulged in behind closed doors, prelude to something else.' (60/1) can open new vistas of pleasure and excitement. She feels that life can be lived at an intense level in the pleasant company of that man. '... it was more often joyous, exciting. And the thought of meeting him kept me keyed up to a more intense pitch of living. His frank admiration was as refreshing to me as cold water on a hot day.' (57/1) She feels being wanted. 'There was a sweetness in our relationship that made it impossible for me to wish it away.' (57/1)

Though the wife is enjoying his company, she is constantly nagged by the doubt whether she is merely seeking an antidote to boredom in her affair. She develops, however, a feeling of guilt towards her son, though not towards her casual and indifferent husband.

'No, there's no guilt. Why should there be? As long as his world isn't disturbed, at least obviously, he doesn't care..... I felt no guilt towards my husband, because I would be depriving him of nothing, nothing he wanted.' (57/1)

At other times she experiences a conflict between her fidelity to her husband and her infatuation for the stranger. The moral sense, in her, tries to refrain her from proceeding any further in this relationship. She tries to ignore the feelings of passionate desire between them because she knows how it would be afterwards.

I would never be the same again. I knew I would sit in my own home feeling an interloper,....making me feel a criminal .. The very thought of it made me guilty towards Rahul. (58/1)

Overwhelmed with such feelings of guilt and shame, she once plans her holiday with him during her husband's ensuing tour to Delhi. It is at this juncture that the husband invites her to join him during that trip. Startled at the unusual invitation, which would result in the miscarriage of the anticipated pleasure with the other man, she evasively replies: 'Next time perhaps. I don't feel like this time.' 'If I were you, I would make it this time.' (61/1) But when her husband, cool and composed, hints at his being aware of the goings-on between her and the stranger, she retraces her steps, as

it were, and resumes her role of a docile wife. A flood of shame and guilt sweeps over her with a revelation that she was pursuing the mirage. She suppresses her desire for adventure so as not to disturb the even tenor of her life. She lets the opportunity go, bitterly regretting it later that 'it had been no mere antidote to boredom, but the best part of my life.' (61/1)

G.S.Amur considers this the best story in the collection *Intrusion and Other stories*, who has prefaced the book says, the story 'dramatizes the suffering of a woman who makes an unsuccessful attempt to escape from the prison of her fixed role as wife and live a life of spontaneity.'(Amur)

¹⁴ In the story, the phase of protest manifests itself in the excitement experienced by the anonymous wife and in her invention that life can be lived at an intense level. The figure moves on, almost in ecstasy, justifying her thoughts on personal grounds. At no point in the story is the wife assailed by doubts and misgivings. Till the end, she argues for the legitimacy of her need 'to rebel against her dull existence and the only pressure that may counteract her need derives from her fear of further isolation.' (Seshadri)¹⁵

It can be said that the middle aged wife of this story is one who goes against the norms of the society and temporarily strays from the fold but she has no regrets for her act. Worn out by the automatic questions and answers of her husband, she finds solace and happiness in the company of a widower who cares for her. The husband and the wife are completely estranged though they live under the same roof. She recollects that neither her smile nor her tears are ever noticed. (53/1) She is ignored and taken for granted. Does she feel any guilt? 'No there is no guilthe doesn't care.' (57/1) To him love-making is a 'chore', something 'dull'. She drifts into the arms of another man. But is the decisive step taken because of boredom as the title suggests? No. It is ironically worded. Her feelings are made amply clear by the closing thoughts of the protagonist in the story: 'And as if a dam had..... I let it go.' (61/1) The feeling

of loss is evident. She oversteps the boundaries of societal and moral propriety because she is neglected, because she has to shed tears for her dead child in secrecy, because there is chasm between her and her husband. No Savitri would stay in this manner. Her attempt to satisfy her emotional needs is a clear defiance of the sati image that insists on the negation of the self. Her defiance is short-lived but she rises against the oppression and neglect practiced by her husband. Again, it must be noticed that she returns not because she is afraid of the conventional morality but because she realizes that her husband in his own callous way 'cared' for her.

At last we find her vainly trying to escape from the obligations which life imposes. She is bound to learn to tolerate the dull and boring life and live an unfulfilled relation with her husband. Her search again remains unconsummated. She cannot walkout of the relationship as marital bonds are not easy to break. As Sashi Deshpande herself comments,

But sometimes with the family we are not completely ourselves. Like I said, we are continuously restricted by roles. I am so much the wife and mother that I may not be able to express myself my whole self. It's very rare with a marriage partner. (Deshpande)¹⁶

Relationships outside marriage provides a healthy understanding of their emotions and feelings to Deshpande's women, despite attaching a high value to male friendship, her protagonists treat marriage with a sacredness and want it to be successful. So, they remain creatures of conventional morality. They are fairly abused, misused and ill-used. But they believe in conformity, consistency and compromise for the sake of retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of familial concord.

The protagonist in the story *The Valley in the Shadow* is a physically challenged woman who is married to self-centered person. Mamta, being physically handicapped, experiences an acute inferiority complex. She feels ashamed of her awkward walk. She remembers that even as a child she had noticed, 'how people looked at my legs first and then, very perfunctorily, at the rest of me.' (194/1) She has been labeled with the disgusting identity, that of a crippled one. She hates the word which seems 'to have nothing to do with the real me.' (193/1) The protagonist remembers how it was a matter of great worry for her parents to get their crippled daughter married.

Who will marry her?' my mother had moaned as I grew up. But my father had gone on doggedly with proposals to young men, never hiding my disability, so that each time the matter ended there. (194/1)

In Indian society, it is a matter of great burden for the parents if their daughters physically challenged. In the marriage market she proves to be defective commodity that fails to meet the groom's high expectations. However, in the story, the girl gets married. But to her great shock, she realizes after marriage that he had married her for money, 'not just the money my father gave us, but the money I earned each month.' (195/1) Deshpande thus exposes the hypocrisy of the male mentality.

At a resort on holidays with her family, she feels it all the more as she watches her husband and child enjoying themselves:

I who could neither walk, run, nor enjoy like the others? I carried my inability to enjoy with me wherever I went. (194/1)

The female protagonist can be compared with the valley on which 'the sun resolutely refused to brighten. 'All day it remained untouched by the Sunshine, while the peaks on either side glowed triumphantly.' (192/1) Just like the valley, she too is in shadow. Due to her physical disability she is unable to join the company of her husband and her son. While they go out for enjoyment the whole day, she remains at the hotel. She remains untouched with the excitement which her husband and her child share with each other laughing, running and clamoring all the day. As She cannot follow them her pain is very acute. The word 'crippled' makes her feel that she is different from the normal people. This sense of seclusion and non-belongingness colors the thoughts of the protagonist. People have never seen her but her legs with awkwardness, sympathy or condescension.

The protagonist recollects her memories how it was a matter of great worry for her parents to get their daughter married. Once a young man had consented to meet her and she had thought that perhaps he would see her and not her legs. When he agreed to marry her she had thought he had seen her. But she was wrong. After the birth of the child, a son, he started avoiding her. He seemed uninterested in her. To know the reason she had gone to him and tried to tell him without using words.

Gently, and yet very firmly he had put me away from him and said, 'It's better we don't.' 'Why?' I had asked him stupidly. And he had said, ' After all, we have a son.' (194/1)

Mamta is working as a government official. The man has married her despite her physical disability because of her ability to earn at regular interval of one month with regular amount. Again she is earning more than him. Moreover, his male-ego would not feel inferiority or humiliated due to her being crippled. The story presents clearly the typical male-mentality which

pervades in the conservative society like ours.

This way, the protagonist remains untouched with the care, warmth and love of her family, especially her husband. Since the day he had turned his back on her, she had closed her mind to him. 'That night I had shut out forever all human hopes of any human contact.' (195/1) She remained in shadow. But one day the shadows had lifted. As she came into contact with a man, a stranger at resort on holidays. She thinks, 'And I wondered... had I got away at last from the bitter woman who dragged her resentment with her...'(196/1) The man communicated with her without any awkwardness, sympathy or condescension. It started her.' It gave me a strange feeling as if I was flooded with sunshine.'(194/1) She felt as if the sunshine illuminated the valley. She felt a strong attraction towards him. Though it was one sided, she once entered into the hysterical fantasy of a teenager.

The fantasy had been so strong I could almost feel the taste of his lips on mine, the smell of his cigarette in my nostrils. For moment, revulsion against my own self filled me... (197/1)

Soon she felt ashamed of her fantasies she had woven round him, she with her crippled body. '.. what the hell is wrong with me, a 30 year old woman with a responsible job that I should behave like a hysterical adolescent ? (197/1)

The story ends with an optimistic note. Suddenly compassion flowed into her for her husband. '... it was as if the shadows had lifted.' (199/1) So that, somehow, it suddenly seemed possible to talk to him. The feeling of isolation was receding gradually. She was coming out of the shadow. At last she had got away from the resentment she carried about her due to her crippled body. Now she was uncaring of how she looked. 'And now, I had a feeling that if the valley was in shadow no longer, if the sunshine

fell on it, perhaps even its bitterness and aridity would look beautiful.’(199/1) It is important to note that each of her stories ends on a note of determination by its protagonist who resolves to take the reins of her life into her hands. ‘Deshpande may be shy by nature but that ‘she lacks popularity’ because of ‘the conventional attitude to her themes’ is untenable.’ (Gupta)¹⁷ Her attitude in her woman oriented stories is anything but conventional. Though she has declared clearly that she is not feminist yet her sympathies are quite convincingly with the women who are treated unsympathetically in a marginal culture. Otherwise there is no point in articulating the psychological ordeals undergone by her female characters.

Smugness is another trait woman has come to acquire over the centuries of subordination in society. This idea is brought out very well in *The First Lady*. The protagonist of the story is a fatty, old woman of nearly seventy. She finds life quite boring, dull and meaningless, though she is the wife of a Gandhian leader with three children and all the comforts of modern life. The story is presented with flash-back technique through the memories of the past.

Coming from a rich family, the protagonist falls headlong in love with a young Gandhian patriot lecturing in public meetings. ‘His white Khadi clothes and his burning patriotism had given him a romantic halo to ‘brushed away her father's fears.’(14/1) She marries him against her father's wishes, giving up silk saris for simple Khadi wear, without a pang. ‘Adjustment had not been difficult for her. (14/1) She adapts herself to the family milieu of her in-laws, where even asking ‘for a cup of tea, particularly during pregnancies... would have been blasphemy.’ (14/1) As a traditional wife she starts living life full of total submission changing herself according to the new environment.

Sadly the wife was living under the delusion. After wedding, there was no time for regrets, not time to think, no time even for love. Swept away by the agitation of the struggle for independence the husband had been frequently in and out of jail, leaving the house-hold and other

responsibilities to her shoulders. But this illusion breaks when she realized the truth that,

‘...the passionate and dedicated face she had fallen in love with was incapable of loving another human being.’ (15/1)

By the time she realized, they already had three children. After this, she finds life becoming dull and petty.

At this juncture another man, the husband's devoted disciple, comes to stay in the house. Her deprivation makes her sensitive to his admiration of her beauty ‘through surreptitious looks and nebulous signs’ (15/1) In the hearts of her heart she desires him ‘to touch her, hold her (and) have her’ (15/1) However she felt ashamed of her desire. The young man dies, however, in a police firing. In her old age she laughs at her lusting for him. Like Keats' bold lover in *Gracian Urn*, he lives in her mind eternally young and always loving her and she can have the satisfaction that he did not live long enough to see her aged and fat. Illusion triggers another illusion.

She watches her reflection into the mirror on the verge of seventy, trying to remember her face when she was young. But she failed to visualize herself. This suggests that the protagonist is aware of the loss of her identity. She is trying to search her real self which is vanished by the post marital responsibilities. Now the wife prefers to live in ignorance as far as the husband's politics is concerned, but it becomes exasperating when her blunted sensibility refuses to register in her mind even the thrill of independence in 1947. It takes a very long time for her to realize that her husband is a seasoned politician. She gradually comes to know that he is living a pompous life with illusion about himself. But she had some pricking of conscience about destroying his illusion about himself, ‘especially the one that he was indispensable and powerful.’ (11/1)

Everything seems to her quiet deceitful and superficial. She thinks with a touch of petulance,

'I don't want to smile and fold my hands and mouth inanities to people I don't care for. And who care nothing for me either. Only for what I am.' (10/1)

For her the celebration of the Independence Day is one of the 'formal, dull functions. Cold and correct. And meaningless... (11/1) The protagonist knows that her husband has been exalted and uplifted and that now he has become selfish and self centred.' And that's why 'want' and 'have' have become the keywords instead of 'sacrifice' and 'self-denial'. And 'I' is the invariable prefix.' (14/1)

The protagonist gets tired of such life which is full of sham because 'it relates to nothing but one's own petty concerns.' (13/1) Once she had tried to say this to her husband who aggressively replied, 'What's wrong with being comfortable?' (12/1) The protagonist ponders over this questions and thinks,

'I love my comforts too.. But the whole price has not yet been paid. For me, this is part of the payment for those comforts, these public functions that I'm finding more and more irksome.' (13-14/1)

The protagonist thinks that they put on masks on such celebrations. They hide their real faces. She gets distressed of life because 'there's no truth in anything we do or say.' (13/1) It becomes very difficult for her to live such a double and false life. But for her husband everything is easy. 'I can't do this as well as you do. You do it as if you were born to it. And perhaps you were. Who knows?' (14/1) It is difficult for her to keep up the pose all the time the polite masks, the soft murmurs and all these performances. She is fed up of this public look. For the public she is a dignified wife of a successful Gandhian patriot. *The first lady* the

magazines called her. Even sometimes, 'Our gracious and dignified first lady'.(10/1) But no one knows the reality that how much she suffers losing her real self for this hypocrite life. Dissatisfied with the life she outpours herself in the following manner,

'Gracious and dignified! No, I'm only a tired, old woman, whose feet swell up to grotesque proportion after an evening like this. And then the doctors come and look concerned and murmur comfortingly about exertion and strain, about medicines and rest. When they know, and I know, that the real trouble is I'm too fat. And I'm fat because I eat too much. And I eat too much because I'm bored. And I'm bored because there's no truth in anything we do or say.' (14/1)

Such futile, meaningless and false performances are hateful to the protagonist because under such falseness, they hide their selfish motives. The celebrations on the occasions like one such give them a chance-

'...to show others how important they are. That they belong. All that they care about a job, a contract, a position, profits. And then she realized how much she despised them – these people, her husband too, and yes, even herself.'(12/1)

Looking sadly as her mechanical and dull life she thinks that 'it had not been the beginning but the end of the glory' (13/1)

Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. Hear it looks unambiguous that marriage suppresses and binds woman. It leads her to aimless days indefinitely repeated, life that slips away

gently toward death without questioning its purpose. Such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high, for the kind of self-contentment and security that marriage offers a woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness.

Another shock comes from her husband's one-sided decision to observe celibacy. Which harangued her when he said, '... since we don't intend to have any more children...' (15/1) And even quoted to her his entire master's principles that the purpose of sex is procreation. She was deprived of pleasure and she had agreed. In fact, she herself had succumbed long back to 'self – denial.' The above discussed point shows that woman is considered nothing more than just a breeding machine.

One point which is common in these three stories (*Antidote to Boredom, The Valley in the Shadow and The First Lady*) is the depiction of the monogamous nature of women characters. In these stories, the protagonists share a greater level of compatibility with a man other than her husband. This compatibility often leads towards physical attraction. But Deshpande's women do not overstep the limits of propriety. Deshpande's protagonists finally try their best to conform to their roles, and the stories end with an optimistic note with the possibility to some positive action in future. Here we come across the psychological depth of all the three protagonists' mind through first person narrative technique. The writer emerges in them as a bridge-builder between the old and the new, between tradition and modernity. For his and for portraying the basic reality of Indian society and the place of women in it with a sensitive and authentic manner her stories are of immense value.

Cultural alienation is the theme of *The Ghost*. The story is about a woman who enjoys to be socialized. Shashi Deshpande employs the third-person narration effectively in the story, *The Ghost*, which centres on the nostalgia and the anguish of an Indian woman in England who suffers from a sense of alienation and rootlessness.

She comes to England after marriage. It is for her 'a grey world.' She associates the colours with hopelessness and despair. In a spurt of anger she

thinks, 'Even a fog would be better than this nothingness.'(151/2) The wife in the story feels utterly isolated in this 'hellish place'. She feels nostalgic for the warmth of her country, for the old song from an old Hindi movie and even for a curious medley of smells. 'Jasmines in summer. The night queen. Ripe mangoes. Fresh ghee, liquid and brown, Spices.'(156/2) What tortures her most is the silence,

A sepulchral silence; It feels her with uneasiness. At times she hungers for company, for conversation. Even some brief moments of contact mean much to her. She thinks, 'Noise, any noise, was welcome. (154/2)

Once when her husband had gone North for a seminar. 'She had lived with silence for a whole week?' (154/2) The only words she had heard had been.... 'Ta, love. Sorry, dear, we don't have that. How many bottles, darlings?' (154/2) She wishes to keep the silence away from her. It is the T.V- the faces on the screen – a woman smiling – a man working – that appears more real than those walking like ghost on the streets. The music and the dancing, singing boys and girls on the screen, keep 'the sepulchral silence' away and she does not feel alone.

'She sat down to watch. The room was filled with noises. No more silence. It became warm, peopled by faces that were more real than the rows of blank faces outside. These people- they were all her friends. She was not alone now, because they didn't exclude her.... she was part of them, a real person, not a ghost whom people looked through.' (157-58/2)

The protagonist feels a sense of non-belonging in this grey silence. 'A grey fog that cut her off from everything.' (157/2) She feels as if she is a ghost who moved invisibly in a grey world people by blank-faced strangers.

'It frightened her, the way people looked past her, through her, over her, beyond her. The Tube particularly terrified her. Rows of faces ... all blank. So many eyes that never seemed to rest on her; or, if they did, registered blankness.' (156/2)

Nobody ever notices her presence or rather her existence. The problem of alienation is clearer when the protagonist that she is 'sniffing and snuffling, walking like a brown ghost among people who don't know I exist.' (152/2) With this painful experience of non-belonging, the protagonist feels to be deserted, 'deserted not only by others. But by all the myriad beings that had \gone into the making of her.' (154/2)

Moreover the protagonist is keenly aware of the humiliation meted out to immigrant like her. She remembers that she was once humiliated at the England Airport. The man there had said, 'Bloody women. Why the bloody hell do they come here?' (153/2) She lost her nerve at that. She says, 'Never let anyone know your humiliation. Never reveal how shamefully, humiliating you are. How utterly lonely.' (155/2)

The sense of loneliness can be a problem in one's native place but it is worse in an alien land. which is clearly depicted here. Whether it is the self service departmental stores or streets, people just walk around you, without looking at you. The experience is the same at the doctor's clinic. The protagonist of the story develops a habit of talking to herself. At home with her husband dead tired after the day's work, her frantic overtures are often ignored. She would pass her hand over her own body initially softly and later fiercely for reassurance that she was real and alive. She cannot understand

even the type of English the Britishers use. She feels totally lonely and dejected here: 'The colour, she thought bleakly, of hopelessness and despair. Through the images of 'bleak colour' and 'fog', the woman's great disquietude, alienation and frustration are beautifully suggested in this story.

Consequently the psyche of alienated self is brought home to us by a conscious effort on the part of the writer to describe the contributory factors to it. Deshpande lays much stress on them so much so that sometimes a certain contributory factor looks like the theme itself. For example: we notice an elaborate description of the break-down of channels of communication between husband and wife. This snapping of communication link is mainly by the incompatibility of temperament between the two. And this phenomenon of dissimilarity in attitudes, resulting in unsatisfactory relationships, runs through most of her short stories.

Furthermore, this theme of husband-wife alienation is governed by existential tones. The existential perspective on the theme of individual and society is evident. The existential thinker deals with the themes like alienation, despair, frustration, anxiety and the emotional life of the individuals. In the words of F.H. Heinemann, 'The problem of existentialism is in a narrower sense expressive of the present crisis of man, and in a broader sense, of the enduring human condition.' (Heinemann)¹⁸ In this respect, Deshpande is essentially an existentialist writer as she is seriously concerned with this 'human condition,' and also shows profound skill in exploring the 'emotional life' of the people in the stories.

Women have been explicitly expressing themselves through these roles where their pronouncements are framed within the parameters of masculine domain, but in a very subjugated and suppressed form because they are positioned below the males and never on the equal level. However, the role of a wife changes the position symptomatically and supposedly the woman confronts her counterpart in an equal parameter. In a country like India, the wife has been always assumed or seen on a sublimated pedestal

theoretically and culturally, but sexually and temperamentally her role is more paradoxical than the role of her as a mother or a grandmother. She becomes a sedate puppet on the hands of her patriarchal husband.

Deshpande portrays this with sheer clarity and preciseness. In *Travel Plans* and *Death of a Child* are few of them where the role of a woman as a wife has its own attribution despite its freedom and choice of possessing a particular pattern of life. Considering wife as nothing more than objectivity, the masculine sexuality neglects the feminine satisfaction and its possibility of existence in a social framework. The feminine sexuality has revelation of fixed parameters and a compulsion of accepting the supremacy of masculine domain is a prominent characteristic of patriarchal society. In such a masculine-dominated culture, the position and status of wife is just a crude demonstration of suppression and subjugation. What is more visible is just an apprehension of assumption, that wives are sufficiently acknowledged and proportionately the husbands are understanding and caring. The feminine experience of being a wife is just a vindictive role of freedom and liberty only within the boundaries of domesticity. Deshpande clearly shows these in her stories. Especially *Death of a Child* has a tremendous replica of reality and truth of the brutal patriarchy:

cannot isolate the child from the rest of my life. I cannot imagine that the main purpose of my life is to breed. 'Simple? Yes, any cow, any bitch can breed,(62/2)

The most influential characteristic of social roles is the authoritative attribute of social control and manipulation that the males have predominantly undertaken. The femininity coherently exists within this domain and attribute and such an acceptance of the supremacy of the counterpart is considered to be the strongest trait culturally and traditionally. Such pseudo traditional and cultural attributes of the males are basically puritanical inhibition and temperamental subordination of the females. The way Nitu wrestles to the

position and status she deserves in the matrimonial relationship with her husband, is a constructive psychology of feminine character. The strongpoint of this trait of Nitu is the interpretation of coercive sexual submission that most of the wives in this country undergoes. The creation of such a spectrum by the orthodox patriarchy simply reestablishes the sequestration of women through a vulnerable weapon of bearing a child. After the matrimonial alliances are conformed, every female undergoes physiological, psychological, and in some cases spiritual, exploitations. These exploitations are ramified in a severe form just on the name of human social organization by the virulent patriarchy. Deshpande portrays this very magnificently in the submission of Nitu into her husband's desire of aborting the child in her womb. The subtle hostility that her husband flounders seemingly becomes a permanence of staunch oppression by the masculine world. The yearning of conceiving to the desire of giving birth to a child of any wife in this country prolifically doesn't depend on their willingness. *Death of a Child* depicts a picture of such a shrewd reality where any women can never emancipate as a wife to her so called pseudo-caring husband.

Travel Plans formulates this in a distinct parameter where wives are never taken into consideration, whenever some decisions are to be made. The vivid re-enactment of accommodation seems to be maneuvering most of the time by the husband whether Shriram or Damodar. Both the husbands have a similar way of controlling their wives and strategically confine them to the acquiescent world of domesticity. Beyond the limitation of this world, neither Deepa nor Veena gets to proliferate in their own self-conscious and self-assured way of life. Rather they get metamorphosis into their own matrimonial mechanisms that have been framed by the manipulative patriarchy. No wife utters a word against this sort of incompatible and insatiable relationship with her husband. Infact the wife deconstructs her own individual existence and accepts the metamorphosis that her husband pronounces. She is being compelled for such a deconstruction and strangely this characteristic is appreciated by a labeling of tradition and cultured.

3.3.2 Sexual Predicament

Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on woman by the male species merely to show the basic animal instinct and strength of brute force. This violence and condemnation become worse when it occurs within the sanctity of a marriage. This happens with the protagonist of certain stories of Deshpande. In some of her stories deal with the theme of 'legalized rape', that is, the rape in marriage which is normally not discussed or even not accepted as being a problem. She brings out the cry of rape and anguish of wife with her intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she has married. They experience disillusionment in sex and suffer a silent humiliation. That is to say that the physical relationship between husband and wife, is again the case of a dominating husband and a suffering wife. All this certainly doesn't show a natural and harmonious relationship between the two when we see that one is unable to express his or her real feelings to the other. It obviously shows a forced relationship and not a natural one.

This age - old cry of woman suppressed under the pretense of marriage has begun to find an outlet recently. Indrani Jaisingh, an eminent lawyer for women writes:

It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence [of rape] as her consent is assumed. In this respect, the woman's movement has consistently demanded that the law of rape be changed. A recent judgment of court in England indicated that rape within marriage can be an offence. Several states in the U.S have

specially amended their original law to make it an offence.(Jaising)¹⁹

In India, however, woman is still suffering from this enforced act of man upon her. In Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, whether it be a love-marriage or an arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her. Sex as a 'male feeling' has been the major theme in literature for a long time but the suffering, the desperation of woman because of sex has not been projected forcefully. Deshpande's stories convincingly present the decline of spiritual element in sex and a growing confusion and complexies regarding sex in marriage. The predicament of the Indian wife in Shashi Deshpande can be viewed from two angles: manifest and latent. These women characters are unable to escape their culture-bound roles. There is no way out of their nature-bound roles, especially their role as sexual partners. Their predicament is patently domestic/professional, but latently sexual.

The Intrusion which earlier provides the title to the collection stories, brings out the discord between couple on the honeymoon trip in a rest house near seashore. The story records the horror of a newly married woman whose husband is crass and insensitive towards her feelings. Shashi Deshpande very sensitively touches upon the delicate issue of 'legalized rape'. The sex hungry, bodily oriented husband in the story brutally violates his wife's body to exercise his conjugal rights while she is totally unprepared, mentally as well as physically, for it.

Before exposing the mysteries of her body the woman wants to know all about him to create mutual trust. But there lies a painful silence, an embarrassment between them because they scarcely know each other. The protagonist wonders windily, desperately. 'What could we talk about' as they are yet strangers to each other. The silence makes her uneasy and nervous. But he is unaware of her feelings. She feels that 'They were not friends, not acquaintance even but only a husband and wife.' (204/1)

The concept behind the honeymoon trip is to increase friendly intimacy and establishing amiable acquaintance rather than unleashing the thorn in the flesh. The lack of mutual understanding or patience results into unpleasant abortive attempts. The two are keyed up for different experiences. The husband in the story is very impatient to use his conjugal rights over his wife. The wife is painfully aware of 'a secret smile, a smirk on his face.... (202/1) She is conscious of an unreasonable pang of irritation against him. She is feeling discomfort as there is something insinuating in his tone, something eager and excited about him that put her off. The distasteful but meaningful whispers from her husband aggravate the sickening feeling as 'those furtive touches and glances from faceless, nameless men in crowds'(204/1) did. He seems to be totally unaffected of her nervousness, fear and her feelings. She can clearly read him

....the slightly glazed look in his eyestold me how unaware he was of everything but what was to happen between us, making us truly husband and wife. (204/1)

Despite the fact that her marriage has brought about a break with her past; she looks upon the man married to her as one who can be admitted into her life only by getting to know him intimately. She wishes to talk to him, to sit with him the whole night, 'so that in the morning we could smile at each other like old friends.' (207/1) But the husband is all keyed up for a different experience and for him other things would come later. While for the wife he is yet a strange man in a strange room. He is a nameless stranger to her whose accosting her by name has 'a proprietarily air' about it. That's why the male character is nameless.

Although she has read the wedlock guide book openly to the blush of her mother and the erotic images emerged in her mind, she recoils at every caressing initiation made by her husband. She is yet

unenthusiastic for the first sexual overtures. The insensible husband gets angry when he realizes that she is avoiding him. On asking why she is behaving like this, the wife can stammer only this – ‘We we scarcely know each other.’ (207/1) At this the flabbergasted husband says with a shrill voice, almost with a note of hysteria in it.

Know each other? What has that to do with it?
Aren't we married now? And how will we start
getting to know each other if you put on such a
touch me-nottish air? (207/1)

The woman stands silent, angry, hurt and crestfallen. She feels as if she has committed a crime. She wants to reveal that,

I want to know all about you ... What you think,
what you feel..., do you like the things I do...? I
wanted to tell him how shy and frightened I was
about exposing the mysteries of my body to him
and how homesick I was for my mother's face, my
father's laughter and my sister's chatter. (207/1)

The woman can't say about these things because she is on the emotional plane while her husband is totally on the physical level. She stammers as she tries to explain, she almost burst into tears looking at his angry face suddenly she feels a constriction in her throat, a longing for all the things she has left behind her forever. She wishes that she could be back home, wishing she were anywhere but here. Angrily she thinks, ‘How can I, with a man I scarcely know? It's not fair. It's indecent. He should have given me some time. (208/1) With such thoughts she drifts off into sleep. At midnight drowsily, out of a confused dream she feels that the waves of the sea are pounding on her. Suddenly she wakes up

to realize that it is not 'the sea that was pounding my body but he, my husband, who was forcing his body on mine.' (208/1) Everything is so sudden, so violent that her voice gets strangled in her throat. She is too frightened to speak and can do nothing. The writer reveals the painful situation of the wife in a very touching/ sensitive way. She is virtually raped when she was asleep:

There was no talk, no word between us just this relentless pounding. His movements had the same rhythm, the same violence as the movements of the sea; yet, I could have borne the battering of the sea better, for that would hurt but not humiliate like this. (208/1)

As it was all over, she 'gave a cry not for the physical pain but for the intrusion into my privacy, the violation of my right to myself.' (208/1) The husband thus, brutally takes his wife when she is mentally unprepared for it, which is tantamount to a 'legalized rape.' The woman cries within herself, but feel helpless as it seems to be sanctioned by marital convention. The feeling of humiliation and hurting emotionally is very deep because of her awareness of individuality. The social norms are so blind and so strong that she can neither protest against it nor pass a verdict on it.

Either it is due to the ultra sensitive wife or the insensitive man, the pillars of the family life topple down before even they are properly erected right on the first night. The story truly presents a picture of a helpless, trapped wife whose circumscribed position and a zero existence in society, is highlighted by Shashi Deshpade.

The constant reference in the story about the place being 'furtive' where 'other women came with men, where girls with bold faces and experiences appeared very often to use the 'greasy and grubby' pillows',(202/1) uncovers the nauseating associations of the bride. The

juxtaposition of a clandestine sexual affair and the first experiences of sex of a married woman with the unknown person, now called husband, unveils Deshpande's attitude to the whole situation. A married woman taken forcefully by the husband amounts to legitimized rape. It is nothing but the negation of self – hood. In a woman's life it begins when the marriage is arranged and continues till her husband finds her sexually attractive.

Deshpande's self-aware protagonist discloses the situation and the reader dissects the experience. Despite the limiting experiences one feels that a woman can hope to rise if she is conscious of her loss and her servile condition.

Deshpande etches the dark pictures of an incompatible married life that is more a rule than an exception. The widowed mother of the story *My Beloved Charioteer* discloses to her widowed daughter the oppression she experienced throughout her married life of twenty five years.

He was your father... but what was he of mine? I lived with him for 25 years. I know he didn't like unstringed beans and stones in his rice. I know he liked his tea boiling hot and his bath water lukewarm. I know he didn't like tears. And so, when your baby brothers died, I wept alone and in secret. I combed my hair before he woke up because he didn't like to see women with loosened hair, because he hated to find stray hairs anywhere. And once a year he bought me two saris; always colours that I hated. But he never asked me and I never told him. And at night ... I scarcely dared to breathe; I was so terrified of disturbing him ... (188/1)

The realization that it is the inescapable 'feminine destiny' to suffer secretly for the sake of material and moral security which is brought back home to the protagonist in the story.

In fact, the female protagonist in the story redefines the Savitri image. Once she had expressed her desire not to sleep with her husband but alone. She knew not 'how I [she] had the courage.' (189/1) Being instructed by her mother-in-law about her wifely duties, she had succumbed. But she had shown her independence by revealing her desire to own herself. Of course, ultimately, she went to him when he said, 'come here' left 'when he finished, if I didn't get out of his bed fast enough, he said,' 'You can go.' (189/1) She knew that she was no better than a slave. After his death, she remembers him not through his plus points but through his dislikes. To her, he was a tyrant and nothing more. During the span of 25 years with her husband, She looked after each and every need of his. However she received no credit for this and was dominated by her husband all her life.

The point of interest in the story is that despite the sexual and emotional oppression by her husband, the protagonist is not broken. She had the inherent strength to fight the vicissitudes of life through silence. Thus, Deshpande in the story not only stresses upon the darker experience of a woman's life but also redefines the Savitri image because no Savitri could have ever dreamed of uncovering the repulsive picture of the husband

The question of how far a woman has free will to act on her own is the theme of the story *A Liberated Woman*, the title itself is ironic. It is a story of the catastrophic result of a marriage between a popular woman doctor and a mediocre college lecturer, because of the wounded male ego. Deshpande apparently felt that she could not do justice to the theme within the framework of a short story. Hence, she subsequently expanded the same on the large scale and wrote a novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*.

We come across the entire matter through the conversation between

an aged man and a woman who are good family friends and have met after a lapse of twelve years, the author projects the picture of a woman who is fettered by her marriage to a sadist. Initially, theirs has been a love marriage and the person with whom the wife has a conversation is their college teacher. The wife's taking up a job as a doctor induces an inferiority complex in the husband and he reacts in a crude way by indulging in sadistic activity. With enormous scorn she says: 'He's mediocre Shelley... And now he can't forgive me for succeeding when he's failed... A sadist... that's what I have for a husband.' (40/1)

It is seen that the reversal of roles apparently is difficult to accept for her husband. He gradually undergoes a change from that of a romantic hero quoting Shelly to his beloved, to a morose husband uncomfortable with his wife's social and financial status which grows far beyond that of him. She is a busy, successful doctor in contrast to her husband who is an underpaid lecturer in a second rate local college. She establishes herself as a career woman and her profession satisfies her ego, but this brings her no happiness at home. Her dilemma is contrary to her economic independence which brings fulfillment to the woman. Betty Friedan, for example says: 'For woman, as for man, the need for self- fulfillment- autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self- actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted.' (Friedan)²⁰ Shashi Deshpande, however, proves that in the institution of marriage, an economically independent woman is still bound in shackles and must forever live in fear of hurting the ego of her husband.

The gap between the wife and her husband gradually grows wider, and one unfortunate incident blows the hidden fire of inferiority complex which changes the husband into a wild animal at night when he begins to physically abuse her in the privacy of their room. A journalist comes home to interview the wife for a magazine, innocently asks the husband: 'How does it feel when your wife provides not only the butter, but most of the

bread as well? (41/1) That night the husband gives vent to his feelings by attacking her like a wild animal. The husband takes revenge for his humiliation of his inability to bear the financial burden of the family. He now turns a sadist, torturing her in bed at night in all possible ways and inflicting bruises upon her tender body. The wife reveals her nightmarish experience in the following words.

'It was too ghastly. Shameful. Humiliating...
'(41/1) 'It's his way, the only way, perhaps, of taking revenge on me for what I've done to his male ego. Oh yes, I can reason it out coldly, logically enough in the daytime. But at night, I become just a terrified animal. I can't scream, because the kids in the next room may hear. I can't cry, the kids may hear. I can't fight back, either, he's too strong for me And so I just endure.' (41-42/1)

The situation seems all the more terrible for the wife when her husband behaves that nothing has ever happened. He is perfectly normal in the morning and shows as if he was in total ignorance of his own actions at night. It is easy to identify the consequences of the shattering of the male ego. The story in reality presents a stark picture of the gross inequalities prevailing in our society: the superiority of the male in a marriage, if it must survive. The wife's bitter realization that a woman must necessarily remain a step behind her husband is revealed in her imaginary speech she wanted to give in a girl's college. She sarcastically sums up the conditions necessary for a successful marriage:

'Listen, have you seen really old-fashioned couples walking together? Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? I

think that's symbolic, you know. The ideal Hindu wife always walks a few steps behind her husband. If he earns 500, she earns 400. If he earns 1000, she earns 990 or less... No. It isn't just money. It's other thing too. Never overtake your husband in anything.' (40/1)

Here Shashi Deshpande tries to repudiate the myth that woman finds fulfillment only in marriage. She, however, does not go to the other extreme of proclaiming that all unmarried women are destined to be happy.

The wife in the story then prepares herself for leaving her job and remaining a mere housewife. But the husband would not allow it to happen as he got used to comfortable parasitic living.

Have you gone crazy? Do you know how much I earn? How do you suppose we will living on that?
(42/1)

When she consults her elderly friend, he advises her to divorce her monstrous husband. But she refuses to do so for the sake of their children who will suffer, if they are separated. She even refuses the help of a psychiatrist who may cure her husband of his sadism. It is obvious that she is much too considerate to want to hurt his feelings. Her friend is puzzled by her attitude in voluntarily denying herself a release from her intolerable situation. Later, he happens to read a magazine in which she has been interviewed; he is shocked not so much by the photograph showing 'her cool, poised face' as by the title of the published article, 'A Liberated Woman.' The title of the article is ironic in that she does not break away from her unbearable married life. The story-writer comments:

But what really astonishes me is her feebleness,

her attitude of despairing indifference. Surely she, an educated, earning, competent woman, has no right to behave this way ... to plug all her escape routes herself and act like a rat in a trap. (44/1)

The lady has obviously chosen to suffer rather than incur the abhorrence of society, in which respect she is more or less like the wife in 'A Day like Any Other.' The interviewer calls her 'a liberated woman', but in reality she is totally helpless in the given situation.

The analyses of these stories show that the marriage in male - dominated societies turns out to be physically and spiritually dissatisfied for the female partner. It creates confusion in her mind whether to take up the path of submission or rejection because both end in discontentment. If viewed critically marriage is found to be degenerating in which there is no involvement except in sex and everything goes on mechanically to carry on life. As a result marriage becomes meaningless and sex alone seems to sustain the man - woman relationship.

The women protagonists in these stories are unable to cope up with this situation, but they keep a terrified silence over it and this intensifies the sexual stalemate. Their silence against their sexual predicament only reveals the modern woman's dilemma - of knowing the psychological nature of the problem but hesitant to take it out. The struggle of these women to give shape and content to their individual existence in a sexist society culminates in a crisis and ends in compromise. (*My Beloved Charioteer*) The realization that love has no place in their world drives them to the extreme stance of seeing only deceit, treachery and humiliation, all around. They also begin to see how sex becomes a symbol of power and authority and marriage, another kind of enclosure. (*Intrusion*) Marriage proves to be another trap and woman feels like a caged animal. Making enormous sacrifices on her profession, the protagonist begins to understand that marriage obstructs their growth as individuals. They see

marriage only in terms of the dark rooms where terror awaits them. (*The Liberated Woman*)

The women protagonists of these stories are portrayed as representatives of the oppressed womanhood who suffer insults, injuries and sexual humiliations in marriage. Deshpande has presented not women who revolt openly in the beginning and later on reconcile to the situation, but a kind of women who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Their inner turmoil is so bitter that they are unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not to be frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her actions by the society. They are unable to unfold the truth. Their image becomes like that of a bird who has got wings and knows that it can fly, but somehow, does not. In the same way, the protagonists of these stories are aware of their abilities and they know that they can expose them openly, but somehow, they do not. The realization that it is the inescapable, 'feminine destiny' to suffer secretly for the sake of material and moral security, is what is brought home to the protagonists in these stories.

3.4 Woman at the Work

The working woman is a comparatively new phenomenon in Indian society. Traditionally, her role was confined to the household work but the education of the woman and the changing concept of work as well as the pressing economic needs and the changing concept of work-values have enabled the woman to seek employment opportunity. Career is the sphere in which a person's individuality is expressed and rewarded. T. Ashoka Rani says that,

A woman's commitment to a career reflects her desire to fulfill her own potential. It amounts to the rejection of an identity based solely on a relationship

– as a mother, wife or a daughter.’(Rani)²¹

This extension of the role of the woman has resulted into many conflicting situations and new demands in the field of marital adjustment, familial life and social participation. The work career not only provides a new status in the family and demands new adjustments in her personal and social life. This aspect of working woman is delineated in different ways by Shashi Deshpande in some of her short stories.

The contribution of So many factors has made the growth of the newly emerging middle class working women in India. Let us examine how these factors are presented in these stories of the fact if she wishes to be independent and to contribute become a wage earner. By earning she can increase not only the family's welfare, but can attain her personal status and an independent social identity. Rajgopal in his study 'Indian women in the New Age' points out, 'Women are gradually realising that they have personalities of their own as human beings and that their mission in life does not end with becoming good wives and wise mothers.' (Quoted in Jain)²² The same attitude of woman is very well brought out in the story *it was the Nightingale*.

'It was the Nightingale' is a story of a wife sacrificing her conjugal bliss for the sake of preserving her identity. Like Saru, in *The Dark Holds No Terros*, Jayu in 'It was the Nightingale, 'is a career woman. Here, the protagonist, lovingly called Jayu by her husband, is all set to go abroad for a couple of years to pursue her career. She knows that her husband is not happy with her going away but has put on a facade of 'understanding- but- not caring' (63/1) attitude.

Jayu realizes that it is not quarrels that shatter a marriage, it's doing things separately. Being away for two years she will not be able to share her experiences with him and vice versa. Each experience may act as a brick that can ultimately become a wall between them. She wonders: 'Can we stand

two years of separateness?’ (64/1) Thus, the story explores man-woman relationship on the emotional level through the strong longings of a lady for her husband. Though Jayu is aware that the long separation will be equally painful for both herself and her husband, she is determined not to let the opportunity go. She justifies her decision by saying, ‘To me, our lives are intertwined, yet they are two different strands.’ (66/1)

Jayu knows that if she gives in once, her fate would be similar to that of her mother who denied herself of everything for the sake of her family. The wife values free will in preference to self-abnegation that strips one of everything leaving behind a void. Having decided to give a preference to her career, she feels that she would not like to miss the chance. She does not want to be just a wife and mother. The husband however feels that she should have bothered more about the family and their plans for having children than about her career – like his mother did. But Jayu is not a conventional woman who tries to fix in a traditional role of a woman. She is a new woman who thinks that, ‘New child will have to wait. We will not let it born yet.’ (65/1)

Jayu is a woman who can see beyond the rigid fixed frame of the family. She is an ambitious careerist wants to sustain her separate identity: ‘To me, our lives are like two lights that shine more brightly together, but to keep my light burning is my responsibility and mine alone.’ (66/1) But for her husband it is not ‘pride or ambition, but obstinacy’ that is her real vice. With a typical Indian Mentality, the husband tells Jayu that an Ideal woman is one is totally selfless, totally loving and sacrificing. For him, his mother is the ideal woman.

The Husband's mother is like Saru's friend Smita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* who is concerned only about him. She had told Jayu umpteen times ‘ I never went even to my mother's house once after my mother-in-law died, because if I did, who would look after him?’ (66/1) While, Jayu's awareness about her ‘self’ does not allow her to erase her individuality for the sake of family. She does value and love her family but she doesn't

want to earn glory of womanhood by sacrificing her identity. Jayu feels sorry and even contempt for her mother who

....had nothing of her own, who tried to live her life through her husband and daughters.... Who tortured herself and tormented us. Who made her own hell and gloried in it. (67/1)

absence she is certain to feel – ‘He does not know, he will never know, how I fought myself. How I have longed to give ambition and success the go-by and stay with him.’ Jayu has nurtured such a savage in her which ‘destroys all such self-destroying doubts.’ (65/1)

‘And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay, And follow thee my lord throughout the world! ‘All my fortunes? That's easy. But all myself? (69/1)

Though emotionally dependent on her husband, she is opposed to the social stand of woman for whom, ‘Life held nothing, literally nothing, apart from husband and children.’ (66/1) In trying to assert her will, she foregoes the comforts of a home and suffers the pain of separation from her husband which shows that she is an unbending egoist, an ambitious and career-minded woman. Thus, the story portrays man-woman relationship on a different footing all together. It seems to be written in contrast to *A Wall is Safer*.

She is strong enough to define herself and vindicate her stand. She has the courage to define herself, to go abroad for higher studies despite her husband's mild objections who thinks that all this hard work is unnecessary for the young wife. She takes the bold step because ‘that's how I wanted it.’ (67/1) She can feel the reproach in him but she still goes out on her voyage to seek selfhood. She refuses to sacrifice her in-law had done to her

conventions. Deshpande is convinced that women have the capacity to determine their priorities for self - discoveries and still continue to weave the fabric of family harmony. Living only through one's husband and children as Jayu's mother did, one is bound to feel shackled and bitter and yet the question of a woman's ambition is always sidetracked. Conventionally, the ideal woman for a man is one who is 'totally selfless, totally loving.' (66/1)

Another most important reason of women's working outside is the economic need. Today, in a middle class family the husband's earnings are inadequate to meet the bare necessities. The family needs more money than that one person can earn. With this additional role, she has to perform her dual role at one time, i.e. role of a house-wife and that of an employee, It is very difficult to carry out both the responsibilities at home and at the job, especially for mothers of young children. It creates a lot of conflict and confusion in her roles. This role conflict is faced by the protagonist of *Can You Hear Silence?*

The stress and strains of a working woman in her family situation is her been analyzed in the story 'Can You Hear Silence?' The protagonist is a mother of three daughters who has to take up a job out of economic necessity because her husband's income is insufficient to make both the ends meet. She cannot afford to be a mere housewife.

We have seen that the family of five, husband wife and their three daughter lives in a single roomed flat of an apartment located in a very crowded and noisy area of the city. Both the husband and wife work hard so that they can purchase a big house in some quitter area. The father goes to work early for the whole day and comes home late at night. Sometimes there are days when daughters don't even see him. The wife is fed of such life where she cannot spend enough time with her family. She knows that they both have got to struggle for some time. But frustrated wife once throws questions at her husband, 'How long? My God, how long?' (29/1) The husband tries to cajole her and children by saying that, 'I have to work very hard for a few years. Once I get going, I'll be able to spend more time with you

children.' (29/1) At this the wife retorts very sharply that 'By which time the girls will wonder who you are when they meet you.' (29/1)

The suffering and anguish of the mother is revealed in this sentence. Her discontent in her present situation is explicit. She herself remains at her work place the whole day. Moreover the conflicting role expectations which an Indian middle-class woman faces is very well brought out in the story. She contributes to the maintenance of the family and at the same time she fulfils all the family duties playing the roles of a wife and a mother. Her work at home starts from early morning with fetching the water and preparing breakfast and cooking and getting her daughters ready for schools. She has to tolerate not so satisfied work of her maidservant and even her arrogance because she cannot do without her. She is so burdened with conflicting roles that her dreams, feelings, aspirations remain unexpressed.

The protagonist longs for a quieter place where she can provide her daughter with beautiful surroundings. She in fact longs to hear the silence. She once tells her daughters about her beautiful home. Her desire for one such place is seen in the following words:

I had a beautiful home... It had a tiled roof. Do you know how friendly the rain sounds when it falls on a tiled roof? And how gently it slides off from it on to the ground? It's a steady drip that can you to sleep...
....Sometimes in summer, we slept in the courtyard. We could lie in the dark and watch the stars comp up. And everything was so quiet that when we spoke the words came out soft, as if we were afraid of hurting the silence ... you can't imagine how soothing that sound is ... I wonder whether I'll ever hear silence again.' (31-32/1)

The mother is doing this economic activity simply because she

wants to get out of this place and for their better livelihood. Moreover she wants to provide adequate accommodation facilities to her daughters because they are the young school-less existence in the cramped quarters. To create a so-called privacy for her and her husband, they have arranged a curtain partition in the room. Thus, the story unfolds the problems faced by the lower middle class people residing in quarters with inadequate living facilities. Because of their belonging to lower strata of middle class they helplessly dwell there keeping the genuine pain, grudge and frustration within themselves.

The protagonist of the story is lost in the biting and painful pangs of her married life, which is nothing but the sum total of dull, dreary routine. She seems to be the member of lost paradise and wants to regain it by helping her husband economically because she wants to 'hear the silence again.' Thus there is a submerged pathos in the story of lower middle class people residing without adequate living facilities.

In *Wall is Safer* though a career-conscious woman, Hema gives up her profession for the sake of her husband's successful agricultural research-oriented ambition. She sacrifices her law education in a remote place playing a good house wife's role. Hema gets used to mechanical life remaining busy with cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing and helping the kids with their lessons. To break the monotony of life Hema visits the few houses in a nearby area. She gets used to 'the monotonous grind of the conversation... '(100/1) but she cannot get used to is the way she felt when she was with them. She felt as if her own reflection sliding past her in a continuous series. She thinks 'so many identical reflections of my own self... they make me uncomfortable.' '(100/1)

Though outwardly she says that she is all right as she is, '...After all, I'm a good housewife now' '(100/1) inwardly she longs ' to be one of those women who carry their work about with them....a writer, a painter, a musician...' (101/1) as well as is eager 'to have the house and the day to myself once more' '(101/1) It pains her to think that she is there, 'not out of

choice, but because there was none.'(101/1) She is, as Sushma bluntly says, 'And here she is, the woman behind the successful man, the one to whose support you owe everything. The devoted, self-effacing wife...' (100/1) Truly, Hema goes on effacing herself. Moreover, she is painfully aware of this fact. Here arises the quest for identity.

'For some reason I think of the cry of the newborn. A triumphant assertion of being. Existing. And I also think of how there is no difference, none at all, between the cry of a female baby and a male one. When does it become a virtue to stifle that cry?' (100-01/1)

It is a bitter fact that in conservative society of India the profession of husband what matters most while that of a wife is taken for granted. Hema in the above words raises the feminist question. Why this discrimination prevails in society? Why only the woman has to stifle her ambition? And why this stifling becomes the virtue? Why this sacrifice is demanded from woman only?

The protagonist stifles her ambition because she doesn't want to disintegrate her family. She thinks if she continues with her career,

'... it means two establishments. Money problems. A week end... no, a vacation marriage. The children without their father for months. Me without a husband for months. He without a wife and children for months. So....?' (99/1)

Vasant, a typical Indian husband asks Hema to change the profession and join some teaching in any nearby town. At this time Sushma retorts that she is a lawyer and not a teacher and asks him if

he would change his profession overnight. She makes a valid point here challenging most men's attitude towards their wives' career. Hema was just giving up safeguarding her marriage. Her husband is totally indifferent towards her profession. It pains her. She wants to say that she is a pure professional like him. 'I'm a lawyer, not a social worker.' (100/1) She doesn't want to be bitter or ironic so she says that she is all right as she is. Though inwardly she bitterly envies Vasant when he comes home, tired, satisfied and full of what he has been doing.

Formerly he used to share his day with me. Not anymore. I wonder why. Maybe, it's because I have nothing to offer in exchange. The small cash of my day seems trifling in comparison'(101/1)

The protagonist never reveals her inmost desires into plain words because she doesn't want to threaten the tenuous peace she has built round herself.

It is an interesting story, about a marginalized woman. Three women characters, Hema the wife of an agricultural scientist, Sushma an advocate and unmarried friend and Sita the maid-servant are defined differently. Deshpande does not preach but the uncovered facts make the conclusions inevitable. The contrast between failure and success is too obvious to be ignored. Shusma is happy as a career woman but Hema, self-exiled from her work-world for the sake of her husband's 'satisfying job', repeatedly thinks, 'I am here, not out of choice, but because there was none.' (97/1) Sometimes she is soothed by the quiet of the country life but 'more often, however I am angered that it makes so many years of my life take on the grey colour of futility.' (98/1) Here, Sacrifice brings in no satisfaction. The brewing frustration makes her realize that as a wife, she has been hedged in by the patriarchal norms. Her diminishment as a person is disturbing. Trapped in family duties, she lacks the strength to fight

for her cause.

It is taken up by Sushma, the common friend. The typical male attitude is revealed when the husband as a solution to Hema's frustration glibly says, 'She can teach.' (99/1) It is Sushma who hits back, 'For god's sake man she is a lawyer not a teacher. Would you change your profession that way overnight?' (99/1) His reply is, 'It is not the same.' (99/1) The conversation crystallizes the male attitude that always demands a woman's sacrifices of the self; she is not expected to assert and demand but give eternally. Her feelings, ambitions are inconsequential.

The self - effacing Hema is surprised 'by a fierce surge of longing to be one of those women who carry their work about with them – writer, a painter, a musician.' (101/1) Her craving unfolds the bitter truth that her authentic existence has been jeopardized. Sita, the maid's plight is more serious. Her original name or identity is forcefully altered to pair well with her husband's name, Ramchandra, though he is nothing less than a scoundrel. Ironically, his name is left untouched.

A woman always has to adjust to the changing circumstances. Her triumphant assertion is consistently stifled; her identity is crushed or effaced by the male-centric culture. An eternal truth is being re-established by Deshpande that women are tutored to feel happy as long as they agree to remain in the periphery, satisfying the demands of men.

The story does with the reference to the barbed wire fence that is being erected around Hema's house for safety purposes. The maid's innocent remark, 'What is the use of barbed wire? They should have built a wall. It is safer.' (102/1) is pregnant with double meaning. The casual remark provokes Hema to reflect, 'With a wall you can't even see what's on the other side. But suppose the dangers are inside? What do you do then? (102/1) The closing question compels the reader to ponder if it is safer for a woman to build a wall round herself and be circumscribed or better to enjoy the untrammelled spirit of liberty without being restrictively anchored to familial responsibility. To Hema, physical walls can do nothing because

the feeling of frustration lies within. The real terrors are inside us all the time. The dangers can be on this side of the wall as well. But be the dangers from within or without, situations despairing or destabilizing, suffering physical or psychic, Deshpande does not let the family disintegrate. None of her protagonist walks out like Ibsen's Nora. Whatever be the cost, the family ties are not severed. Though the bridges are broken, they are not demolished. In some of the stories she hints at the missing links and the need for mending them.

Deshpande in *Wall is Safer* deconstructs the belief that a woman is always happy behind the safe domestic walls. Hema, trapped by the male hegemony does not resort to open revolt but falls back upon introspection, apparently silent, to communicate her disquiet as a marginalized woman. Through circumlocution, Deshpande articulates that Sushma is neither a 'have not' nor a loser. Her stories reinforce the idea that she writes about the feelings of middle class woman 'not as their champion but as their articulator.' (Futehally)²³ But it must be added that she feels very strongly about the doormat condition of women. Her rejection of the stereotyped existence is clearly registered in this story. The title is used literally and metaphorically. It is a physical truth and also a symbol of woman's confinement. The protagonist of the story emotionally seeks freedom and self-expression but physically she is incapable of putting in the struggle.

One more story which highlights the false standards of a husband towards his cripple but working wife is *The Valley in Shadow*. Just after the birth of their first child, a son, the husband withdraws himself. He starts showing indifference towards his wife. Gradually, the wife realizes that he has married her not out of sympathy, not even for having a son but for the usual reason ... money.

Not just the money my father gave us, but the money I earned each month. And even if I was earning more than he did, the fact of my being

crippled leveled out the difference between us so that he did not have to feel humiliated as he would have with any other woman. (194-95/2)

The wife in this story is working in a government office. She is earning more than he does. Here we can compare this story with the story *A Liberated woman*, where the humiliated ego of a husband is seen due to the greater prestige of his wife. But in this story the male ego would not feel inferiority or humiliated because his wife is a cripple. But her harassment is of different kind that is, not to have physical relation with wife after the birth of a son. In these two stories we can see that working women pass through two ends of sexual harassment. On one end it is painful to be with her husband at night in the bedroom while on other end husband is not with her in her bedroom. This psychological pain and trauma is beyond expression. Thus his male-ego is safe under the guise of his so-called generosity towards a physically disabled wife.

The foregoing discussion can be summarized thus: Shashi Deshpande in these stories projects the Indian society which is witnessing a great change in the social fluidity and intermixture of social groups. She tries to say through these stories that the woman, whose status and role traditionally was well defined and almost fixed in the family situations, is now experiencing the impact of change. The reader gets the picture of what change in the status-role sets of women have occurred and what conflicts and restraints as issues of adjustment have been introduced in her status and role under the overall process of change.

As it is seen in these stories, sometimes the family conflicts force women to work. Out of economic necessity, they accept their extra familial economic role. Alka in *The Awakening*, the mother in *Can You Hear Silence?* and Pramila Auntie in *The Cruelty Game* work either to help the family financially or to gain economic independence. In some of the stories, the protagonists are ambitious and in order to gain social

prestige and recognition they work. The daughter in *And Then* and the wife in *Liberated Woman* are career-conscious women. However in order to fulfill their dreams, they meet with conflicts. But very easily casts off her traditional boundaries as she is shown very much selfish about her career and does not bother about her filial responsibilities while the wife suffers a lot due to her husband's inferiority complex. She can neither give up her job nor can she break the marital bond. Her situation is very pathetic. Moreover the protagonist of *It was the Nightingale* too is career conscious woman who wishes to utilise her talents and develop her personality. From this example, it can be said that Shashi Deshpande is convinced that women have the capacity to determine their priorities for self-discoveries and still continue to weave the fabric of family harmony.

However, through some of the stories Deshpande shows that the change in the conservative attitude towards working women is slow. Traditionalism still rules their attitudes. The mother in the story *And Then?* wants her daughter to get married first before she goes abroad to pursue her career. Pramila Auntie is very much criticised by the women of her in-laws when she takes up a job after the death of her husband. In spite of sarcastic remarks of the family, she does not give social status of the wife is not tolerated by the husband. It hurts his male ego. In another story, the wife though a career-woman has to give up her profession for the sake of her husband's successful agricultural research-oriented ambition. It is a bitter fact that in a conservative society of India the profession of husband what matters most while that of a wife is taken for granted.

Another point of observation in these stories is that for fathers and husbands the family roles of the woman have priority before all other roles which she may take up. This is very well brought out in the story *I want...* It seems that the role conflicts will not become manifest as long as the woman agrees to subordinate all other role to dominate family roles, e.g. as long as she subordinates her education to the role expectation 'marriage', (*I want...* and *And Then?*), as long as she does not put her career above her duties as

housewife, wife and mother. (*It was Nightingale and Wall is Safer*)

‘As soon as the woman does not recognize the unconditional primacy of the family roles, but pursues her extra-familial activities *independently* of these roles, open conflicts between the woman and her role senders are bound to emerge’.
(Mies)²⁴

It can be summed up from the study of these stories that role conflict is faced by most of the protagonists. Some of them subordinate their professional role while some of them assert their individuality.

3.5 Mother: the Care Taker

Shashi Deshpande has dwelt on the native cultural scene and presented a faithful picture of familial, marital and filial bonds in the Indian society. She paints human misery within the confines of social, cultural and humanistic perspective. Family relationships are at centre point in most of her stories, especially those which exist between husband-wife, daughter-father and mother-daughter etc. According to her, everybody has to live within relationship, for there is no other way. ‘It’s needed,’ she told Vanamala Viswantha.

‘It’s necessary for women to live within relationships’.
But the ‘rules’ should not be ‘rigidly laid’, for that would make one only ‘unhappy’. ‘This is what I have tried to convey in my writings,’ she added.,’
(Viswanatha)²⁵

Undoubtedly family is the nerve centre of all human activities in the fictional

world of Shashi Deshpande. Most of her short stories have as their central theme the family relationships such as husband-wife relationship, father-daughter relationship and of course mother-daughter relationship.

The portrayal of women in its true essence is what Shashi Deshpande has attempted in her collections. All her characters seem from the real life- from ordinary women in ordinary situation to women in urban situation, from mythical women of legendary importance to women of daily-life participation. She says that women can never be categorized in any classified group or name. For women in India, there is only one truth she is either a grandmother, or a mother, or a wife, or a daughter, or a friend. She has to exist with a relation to her counterpart, always negotiate a balance between the relation and the self-image. Shashi Deshpande in this collection explores these complex and real relationship. Her characters have analyzed their mere equilibrium of tradition and modernity, and expressing their insecurities and fears and desires.

The role of a mother in the world of male dominance depicts the pseudo-togetherness trait of patriarchal masculinity. The fulfillment of passivity and perishable aspirations has been inherently subservient in the framework of female suppression and their sexual decadence in the patriarchal society through such pseudo-attitude. However, the assumption of mother as a timid, docile, passive has always been the symptomatic overpowering masculine nature. The males have emphatically pronounced their power and superiority without even complementing the creative and cultural role of the woman as a mother.

In the stories discussed under this title, Shashi Deshpande has depicted different aspects of mother's life. She has given conventional, suffering picture of mothers as well as strong, determined and assertive picture of mothers. In other words some of them cannot raise their voice against the straight jacketed role-models of mothers while some of them revolt against social taboos, the cramped, wrinkled traditions and values of their ancestors, and ceaselessly question the very concepts of love,

marriage, sex and motherhood, and feel an urge to redefine human relationship and behavior.

3.5.1 Conventional Mother:

Shashi Deshpande evocatively brings out the despair and anguish of mothers in the following stories which present the agony of isolation the mothers feel from their daughters for one or the other reason. Moreover the sense of loneliness of mother constitutes the theme of these stories. Deshpande very skilfully gives voice to the terrible emptiness faced by the mothers in these stories. Mothers' disquietude, her solitariness is pathetic. What tortures her most is the fearful silence. One of the stories portrays pathetic picture of a mother who feels utterly helpless to shower her motherly affection on her daughter while in another story the mother is relegated to an insignificant position by her children. Her marginalization is demonstrated through subtle situations. According to T.N. Geetha,

Shashi Deshpande's stories delineate the social and moral restrictions which Indian women have to contend with in life even after attaining motherhood with the result that they undergo the trauma of bearing and rearing children even when they are neglected and ignored by their own grown up and mature children. (Geetha)²⁶

In other words the primary focus of attention in the following stories is mother - her loneliness and isolation from her family especially from her daughters as well as her tensions and irritations, pains and anguishes.

Why a Robin? is a highly sensitive story of a mother who feels isolated from her only daughter who has more in common with her

father. Because of her innocence and ignorance, the less educated mother feels isolated from her husband and her only daughter. The mother is worried and perplexed since she cannot rise up to her daughter's expectations. The daughter remains estranged from her mother who wants to fondle her but is 'afraid of being rebuffed.' She knows she would get no response.

I don't have the key to open up this beautiful child, though she is mine. I don't have the key to her father, either. It is as if I am, in my own house, confronted with two closed rooms. I am condemned to sit outside and gaze helplessly at the closed doors. (47/1)

The mother suffers from a sense of guilt for being a 'total failure- as a wife, as a companion as mother.'(48/1) The mother longs for a better and closer relationship with her daughter. At the same time there is a perfect understanding between the father and the daughter and the mother feels estranged from these. She is isolated since she is ignored by both her husband and her daughter: 'I am conscious of an ache within me, an ache I cannot dignify with the name of grief.'(49/1) She finds it difficult to communicate with her daughter.

As a mother the protagonist feels herself to be 'helpless' for she cannot cope with her daughter's fits of excitement, her questions, her rage, her tantrums and her ideas. Seeing the daughter fills her with the same delight she experienced on seeing the beautiful peacock. She then decides that bridges have to be built. 'They do not come out of nothing, they have to be created.'(50/1)

However, the situation changes dramatically, bringing the mother and the daughter close to each other, when the daughter, on reaching the brink of womanhood, seeks comfort in her mother's company. Joy

surfaces through the scrum of the mother's distress; there is a hope that the girl needs not the father but the mother. The mother feels joyous and exalted at having found the key to her daughter's heart. The mother allays her fears:

I talk to her gently, trying to make her feel it is natural, a part of growing up, something to be welcomed, accepted. (51/1)

The mother gives up the idea of self-abnegation. And the distance between the mother and the daughter is bridged when the realization of the sufferings of life unites them.

The story *Madhu* narrates the wayward ways of a young girl of that name, driving her mother to fury and irritation and her father to the hospital with a severe heart – stroke. The mother - daughter relationship is far from being loving. Madhu's carelessness and indifference torment her mother. The mother's care and concerns seem obstructive to Madhu, who has her own ways of living life. The mother's pain is revealed when she says, 'She never seems to have much to say to me. If I ask her anything, it's interference. Or boring.' (94/2)

The mother longs for the company of her daughter who doesn't share anything with her mother. She wants to be her friend. But Madhu keeps herself detached because she thinks that her mother always misunderstands her. Mother-daughter hostility in the story becomes clear from the following passage:

It's funny when your daughter treats you like a stranger. Almost an enemy And I was so happy when Madhu was born. Even happier than when Vinay was born. She'll be a friend, I had thought. Company. We'll do things together. Now the only thing we do together is fight. (94/2)

However, towards the close of the story, Madhu learns that 'sacrifice' is a noble virtue in human beings and becomes a mature girl with understanding.

A helpless, pathetic picture of mother is seen in the story *The Shadow*. Here a helpless mother can't do anything against her husband's ruthless treatment towards her daughter who is the outcome of her 'one moment of weaknesses'. The mother feels helpless as she dares not go against her husband who shows complete indifference towards her child. The agony of the mother is very sensitively brought out by the writer. The mother is paying terribly for committed adultery. She suffers miserably on seeing her child being punished because of her fault. Her husband treats both of them callously and remains totally indifferent to them. The mother admits her fault and she is paying terribly for that one moment of weakness.

'One moment of weakness and you want to punish
me for it all my life? And an innocent child as well?
Just because she was born?'(149/1)

Her mother had never taken her daughter's side outside the bedroom. She dares not show any love towards her before her husband and other children. As if, she is bearing her as 'a beast of burden', 'a guilt', reminding her of that 'moment of her weakness', or 'probably a sin'.

furthermore she has not kept her husband in dark. She is ready to suffer any punishment from her husband but she being a mother, cannot tolerate seeing her child being punished for no fault on her. Her cry for mercy for her child is seen in the following words when she asks her husband,

I'll lie on a bed of nails all my life, But she... that
child. I can't bear to see her. Have you no pity?

What wrong has she done? (149/1)

All her appeal falls flat on her husband who cannot forget that his wife has committed adultery and thus has brought 'dishonor' on him. In order to punish her, he callously neglects the child who craves for the father's love which has been discussed earlier at length.

The husband is a hypocrite as he does not cut off the relation with his wife but accepts her with her child because he fears that his social prestige may get harmed. Moreover he is selfish as he needs someone to look after their own children. But he has not forgiving her out of his house but by remaining cruelly indifferent to her innocent little girl.

The mother's condition is very pathetic as she cannot go against her husband. She has accepted her fault and repents very much for that one moment of weakness. Her child is not given equal rights. She is treated differently. She has to suppress all her maternal feelings towards her child, she pleads her husband for mercy. The agonized cry of the mother is felt in the following words.

.. 'The fault is mine. I admit it. But, oh God, haven't I paid for it ? One moment of weakness and you want to punish me for it all my life ? And an innocent child as well? Just because she was born?(149/1)

However, all her plea fall flat on her husband who adopts a revengeful attitude towards her. On the other hand, the girl though a child feels that it is only she who makes her mother sorrowful but yet cannot get hold of the reason. It feels her mother with bewildered grief when she flings the question of her being different at her mother. The mother feels utterly helpless to give the answer to any of her questions. Thus, the story very sensitively brings forth the mother's agony as she has to crush all her maternal feelings for her child born out of wedlock. Her utter helplessness

is seen when she cannot shower her mother's love and warmth on her.

Deshpande focuses on the motherhood beyond these struggles. In her story '*And Then...?*', she portrays another aspect of woman, mother as nurturer and caregiver. The role of a woman in this form is the most pure and serene, divine and blissful, innocent and mature. The predicament of the widowed mother and her sense of loneliness is the theme of the story '*And Then*'. Aiji, the mother, is excluded by her son and daughter. The fearful emptiness enters her life with the husband dead, the son settled away and the daughter determined to go abroad. She is unable to bear the isolation from her children who have decided their ways of life in their own way, not thinking about their mother.

Asha, the protagonist continuously nagging for something or rather is responded always with a peace and tranquil attitude of Aiji, the mother. The patience, the tolerance, the constant attention towards the child may have been the traditional temperaments of a mother endorsed in the periphery of patriarchal domesticity, but the mother of Asha, Aiji, seems to be beyond the definition of domestic femininity.

She longs for her daughter's company but she is too selfish to sacrifice her life for her mother's sake. The impulse in the mother wants to cry out – 'don't go away, don't leave me alone and go away,... I am frightened ...' (174/2) But all her pleas die unspoken because her daughter is determined. And she goes away leaving the mother behind. She is filled with thoughts of terrible emptiness which brings fearful silence in her life. The mother's predicament is very well depicted in the following passage:

....Anguished cries and moans seemed to seep through the silence of the night as if all the cries I had stifled through the years were coming back to me My mind jumped from fact to fact, from emptiness to emptiness..., it makes no difference to anyone

now, whatever I do or don't. Then ... fear and loneliness came whistling in through the bolted doors. I could smell both, I could feel them about me, I could almost taste them. At the moment, I longed even for the extremity of my grief of those early days. That sorrow had been a companion keeping loneliness at bay. It had filled my life, leaving no room for emptiness. The silence was terrible. (175-76/2)

The mother's disquietude, her solitariness is pathetic. What tortures her most is the silence. Indirectly she touches upon her quest for self when she refers to the lines of poetry by Emily Dickinson which runs thus: 'I am Nobody. Who are you? Are you Nobody too?' (176/2)

The son who is staying at Bangalore brings her from Bombay so that she may have change. But the mother feels that she is more a burden than responsibility for her son. He pretends to be caring and sympathetic towards her. With pain she thinks, 'My Vishwa, I had thought and now I am just a burden ... to him. My Anju, I had cried out and she walked away from me without compunction or pity.' (173/2) Moreover, she is relegated to an insignificant position by her son and the daughter-in-law. They refrain from humiliating her but they make it a point to clarify that she need not participate in the serious activities of life. Her marginalization is demonstrated through subtle situations. Bitterness wells up in the mother.

What choice do I have ? Why can't they leave me alone in my dark hiding hole ? Doesn't he know what an ordeal meeting strangers has become for me? It's as if the fort I was so safely living in has suddenly fallen and I've been left vulnerable

and defenseless. And to meet people's pitying looks, their words of sympathy, is like going through it all over again. (172/2)

She wants them to leave her out of it. But they don't do that. And she knows it is easier to give in than to resist. However, she sometimes feels as if 'all the sorrow, all the bitterness I have stored within me will burst out and engulf us all. It frights me.' (173/2)

She has the indistinguishable form of individualization and her assimilation into the sublimated and renounced parameters of household seemingly counter suppresses the patriarchal domesticity. It shows that Deshpande has portrayed the protagonist of the story as a woman who is aware of her 'self'. This awareness leads her to realize that she is marginalized and living a dependent life. She compares her past with her present.

Anju holding my hand Vishwa holding my hand... but that's the past, that's all over. It's I who am holding their hands now. How long can I do that, how long? And yet what else is there....? Finally I calm myself with the thought why am I agonizing?' (179/2)

It becomes clear to her that it is she who has diminished herself by her own ineptitude. The end of the story shows that she learns to voice her likes and dislikes. She regains control by asserting herself, against the wishes of the son - the patriarchal voice.

The charming and loving way, the extended family capacitates and accommodates each other under the same roof can only be portrayed by Deshpande. This pious feeling of tolerance being held by the mother of the family is heart-touching and the way Deshpande illustrates this characteristic of a joint family is imagination and creativity par excellence.

Both the mothers in *Retrospect* and *Lost Springs*, are sheer victims of the harsh cruelties of patriarchal society. Despite showering love and emotional attachment without anything in return, the mothers are marginalised even from free movements in their domesticated space. The mother of the protagonist in *Lost Springs* dies before the protagonist could explore her own world with the help of the mother. Her memories and reminiscences are the only source of inspiring solutions to the gossamer of interrogations of the protagonist. One of the fond memories that the protagonist cherished a lot was the portrait of her mother:

It was after his death that I found my mother's photograph among his few possessions. The picture of a very young woman with a baby in her arms. She had a face of a child herself, untouched by motherhood. Obediently posing the way they told her to, creating a classic picture of mother and child.
(73/2)

The same strong emotional attachment is portrayed in *Retrospect*. However in this case, the sentimental bond with the mother is not with the father but with her child. An immense affinity can be felt in the absence of the mother that the child keeps on lingering everywhere. Even in the absence of the mother, the child feels deeply for the loss. A sense of emptiness created by her absence is being generalised by Deshpande. In this country, every mother and her child is bonded with a divine and blissful love that is felt not only physically but also mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Deshpande portrays this deep attachment in this story:

When my mother died,' he speaks suddenly once, breaking the silence, lost something very precious; I lost my life among women. Some part, I think- dies when we lose that, (11/2)

This maternal love of a child is portrayed more vividly in 'Death of a Child', where we see a dilemmatic mother battling between the husband and her child in the womb. Deshpande makes her readers feel strongly the sensitivity about the condition of the mother. The role of a mother from the period of conceiving to the period of gestation has been felt from the very first line of the story. The sympathetic situation of anxious motherhood gets submerged into the hostile virility of patriarchy. The love of a puritan husband overrules the sensibility of a sentimental mother. Throughout the story, the father of the child consummates emotional manipulation amidst the divinity of a young mother. The male monopolies engineer the maternal bliss into a schizophrenic mentality and this behavioral revelation politicises the perfect picture of an arbitrary characteristics of motherhood. The verbal exchange of an innocent mother with the supremacist mentality of the husband that has been portrayed in the story reveals the disinterestedness and preponderance of human rationality over sentimental innocence and purity of motherhood that we see in the story of *Retrospect*.

This story depicts the polite intervening semantics of female traits in the alfresco of euphemistic aggressiveness of patriarchy. Deshpande very categorically portrays the suffering femininity and faint-hearted emancipation of the women in India not only in this story about a child yet to be born but also about the name and identity that the women in India struggle for.

'*Lucid Moments*', another mother - oriented, touching story, discloses a dying woman's search for her mother's name - the identity, and in the process ascertaining her individuality. the protagonist tries to delve into past and an archaic world where history might be kind enough to formulate the name of her mother and her search for her identity would be accomplished.

The mother is in her mid-fifties and is on her death bed. She is now and again asking her daughter the name of her dead mother. Sujata, the elder daughter knows only this that her maternal grandmother died giving birth to her mother; she does not know anything about her, not even her name. Sujata finds her mother troubling herself with agonized, fruitless search

for her maternal grandmother's name.

In a country like India, the name of the mother is never considered an authoritative need, or for example an aesthetic prestige and status can also be never framed with the maternal identity. Therefore, the name of the mother has been avoided purposely and intentionally; and enunciation of biological and cultural consideration can be possible in this patriarchal society, 'Mother's name...why don't they...?'(25/2)

Shashi Deshpande provides the reader with an insight to probe into a social condition when the mother refers to the pre-wedding rite, in which the priests call out names of the couple's ancestors- father, grandfather, and great grandfather. They don't call out the names of females ancestors. The hint is towards that social condition which condemns a woman to die unnoticed, unremembered and muted as an individual. From all such questions and the search for her mother's name, it becomes clear that the dying mother fears of her being effaced from the memory of the coming generation. She does not want to die unnamed like her mother. Sujata is surprised to learn that even her father doesn't know his mother-in law's name. Deshpande, thus, hints at the zero existence of woman in the society.

The dying mother's wish of having her identity is fulfilled when her grand-daughter is taught that her grandma's name is Sumati. At least for the grand-mother, there is no identity crisis. She is saved from the agony of facing total oblivion by her daughter. Sujata, the daughter gets a photograph of her dead mother's enlarged and framed in order to preserve her identity and assures herself that ' She doesn't need any flowers or *kumkum*. It's enough she's here.'(26/2) and thus wants to prove herself that 'even if they never chant a litany of their names at a wedding, these women are real.' (26/2) With this assertion, the darkness and despair lift and she can imagine her mother's pleasure in their laughter.

Exhibiting a sense of silence has made the patriarchal society subdue the sense of grievance and grudge that had been proliferating deep inside a human being down the ages. Such an expression elucidates the elimination of

fundamental adjustments of the female world beyond biological functioning and aesthetic representation of women in the emancipation in patriarchal society.

It can be said that women characters are portrayed in dismal and dreadful conditions which remind us of the disquietude, frustration and helplessness of the female protagonists in Anita Desai's novels. Deshpande has very skillfully portrayed the struggle of these mother characters to give shape and content to their individual existence in a sexist society. Her philosophic stance is existential but the treatment is psychological. She articulates the psychological traumas undergone by her female characters. The realistic treatment of human predicament in her short stories along with the contemporary angst and anxiety in an existential manner might appear to be depressing, but the final impression of her works is far from being gloomy or depressing. Significantly, apart from a couple of characters her mother characters learn in due course how to arrive at a compromise and find a sense of balance in life. In some of the stories their struggle culminates in a crisis and ends in compromise. These mothers are not heroic but brave enough to make life possible. Nowhere does the writer encourage her female protagonists to rise in revolt against the problems in family matters. Thus Deshpande writes to mirror the universal predicament of Man because she empathizes with human conditions naturally, she loads her dice to uncover the circumstances and experiences of women. Her work originates from women's encounter with self and she does not actually portray personal experiences. The loneliness, the emptiness and the determinism of woman's life are poignantly revealed through these stories.

3.5.2 Unconventional Mother:

The mother characters in the following stories suggest courageously new patterns, other than conventionality, of feminine existence. These stories redefine the lives of women. Shashi Deshpande

has done a commendable job in bringing out the positive and constructive role of mothers in the life of their daughters. Mothers in these stories react against conventional morality which is destructive and instrumental in marginalizing their daughters. By sheer determination they bring their daughters back to the central position of life from the periphery. They, directly or indirectly, teach their daughters that the journey towards the centre can be facilitated by reconstructing the outdated social norms. Thus they prove to be the image of modern mothers who do everything for the sake of their daughters' happiness. In other words Shashi Deshpande does not give stereotypical image to her mother characters. She does not believe in the idealization of motherhood which she exposes in an interview,

It is necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no farther, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I've tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree is the idealization of motherhood - the false and sentimental notes that accompany it.(Viswanatha)²⁷

In other words, Deshpande's mothers lodge their protests explicitly and implicitly against injustices, apathy and humiliation. She is not concerned about the final outcome - triumph or failure. Anita Desai also projects this battling spirit in her women. In one of the talk she says that she doesn't think that the failure is so important. It is the fight they pitch in. Here are few stories where mother characters have learnt to fight against oppression at least for their daughter's sake, despite the cheap manipulations of the andocentric culture that constantly wish to dehumanize women.

'It was Dark' presents the picture of a strong woman who ensures her daughter' welfare, forsakes the conventional attitudes regarding

the problem of rape. At first Deshpande evocatively brings out the despair and anguish of the mother who crushed with the feeling of guilt for having never cautioned her daughter on the dangers that might befall her. The husband accuses the wife of not teaching the girl of the lurking dangers. The mother remembers her own youth when she had been warned: 'Don't – don't – don't – you're female.'(129/2) But when she talked about it to her daughter, the daughter had pitied her. She recollects in the following words.

They had taught me to build a wall round myself with negatives from childhood. And then suddenly, when I got married, they had told me to break the wall down. To behave as if it had never been. And my husband too – how complete, his disregard of that wall had been; I had felt totally vulnerable, wholly defenseless. I won't let my daughter live behind walls, I had thought. (129-30/2)

The mother had thus decided 'I won't let my daughter live behind walls' (131/2) and also because one has to break all the 'walls' as soon as a girl is married. To her tragic fate, her daughter gets sexually abused. The traumatic experience turns the girl into stone; she continues to live without seeing anything. All her solicitations and efforts to make the daughter talk elicit the answer,

It was dark ' , with the eyes gazing blankly at the ceiling. Suddenly, it seems to the mother that 'the enemy was not the dark, It was not being alone, it was the man. (131/2)

To fill the room with brightness, the mother pulls the curtains. Sunlight poured. Symbolically, the removing of the curtains to let light pour into

the room is 'the refusal of the mother to give herself up to the dark forces.' (Suneel)²⁸

The mother's act of removing the curtains shows that she refuses to accept the state of her daughter. Her determination brings the daughter back into such a position where she is ready to fight against subjugation, against the society which dehumanizes woman. Removing the curtains causes a glimmering spot on another part of the ceiling and the girl now turns to her mother. Triumphantly, the mother says: 'She saw me.'(132/2) Thus the story ends on an optimistic note. The blank, unseeing eyes of the girl now come to life and respond to mother.

The constructive image of mother is presented here who reacts against the conventional morality; her commitment to the new thought is endorsed when she pulls back the curtain and 'sunlight poured into the room.' (132/2) Symbolically she refuses to submit before the dark forces of conventional morality that is destructive and is instrumental in marginalizing a woman, in this case, her daughter. By sheer determination she brings her daughter back to the central position of life from the periphery. In the absence of her help, the daughter would have been doomed to eternal marginality.

The truth is Deshpande's women do not feel the need of being Savitris in the changed circumstances of life. They neither practice immorality nor are very rigid about inadvertent lapses. They have learned to fight against oppression at least for their daughter's sake, despite the cheap manipulations of the andocentric culture that constantly wishes to dehumanize women, mother or daughter.

Death of a Child' deals with a woman's problem of having unwanted pregnancy and the grief she feels for having aborted the child. The couple in this story is having already two children so the wife gets restless when she faces the unexpected pregnancy the third time in less than four years. 'I feel trapped. I feel like an animal... It isn't fair.'(61/2) She cannot imagine that the main purpose of her life is to breed 'Procreation has always

repelled me.' (62/2)

The attitude of the husband in this matter is different. He tries to persuade her to let the pregnancy continue with a 'will-manage-somehow' attitude, while the wife is very much aware of the middle-class condition of their life. It will be complicated enough to manage the third child with such financial constrain. They are already struggling with their life with two children. The wife's sorrow is revealed thus – 'I love my two children, but I have never had any milk for them.'(62/2) Inadequacy of the daily need compels the mother to go for abortion. Her husband's very reasonableness infuriates her when he says, 'It's quite simple really – having a child.'(62/2) At this the wife's thoughts turn wild and answers back, 'Simple? Yes, any cow, any bitch can breed.' (62/2)

Furthermore, the protagonist is a personality – conscious lady who is convinced that 'Marriage, child-birth destroys something in a woman. A reserve. A secretiveness. An innocence'. (63/2) According to her children stifle your personality. You became just a mother – nothing more.' (63/2) She wants to reserve some part of herself, her life. She is not ready to slice off her existence nor do wants to go through the whole process again for a third time. She becomes desperate when she thinks,

Years before I can go back to doing anything else.

Years when my actions are dedicated to, not by my will, not by my desires, but by the sheer animal needs of the children. (63/2)

Thus weighed down by the weariness of life, the wife impulsively decides to get rid of her inborn child. After confirming from the doctor, she fixes up the day even. Her husband is unable to understand her situation. On the contrary he puts the whole burden of the responsibility of this act over his wife's shoulders by saying, 'You have to bear the brunt of it... by God, I'm glad I don't have to decide!' (63/2) The wife can feel his eyes constantly,

accusingly on her. He thinks her callous, 'When I kiss and fondle the children, I can feel him wonder – how can she?' (65/2) But she is unable to explain him.

A few minutes before the entry into the operation theatre a strange thought flashes across: 'Out of our dull embraces, made duller by routine and habit, a new life had emerged.' (65/2) So, the product of a dull routine sex must be withdrawn. After the termination comes the cynical thought: 'Congratulations, you have just lost a son.' (65/2) After all she is a woman, a mother; she can no longer suppress her maternal feelings. She is tossed between grief and shame. Guilt fills her psyche. She welcomes it and shoulders the burden with 'a masochistic fervour.' She plunges into chaotic and morbid thoughts. She wails:

I feel a heaviness in my own breasts. There is a hollow feeling within me... I am conscious of a piercing pain in the place he had filled... I feel that the ghost of my dead child walks with me. (68-69/2)

Perceptibly, she has loved her unborn baby and feels guilty of having sacrificed its life for avoiding the pain involved in bringing it up. On ascertaining her individuality by insisting on abortion, the wife feels an acute sense of loss caused by her own willful action. The story beautifully presents a classic case charged with attitudinal irony, 'It's strange that he, a father should feel this way wants another son.' (63/2)

Deshpande is very realistic and unromantic in her evaluation of the institution of marriage and woman's role in child-bearing. Women, the inhabitants of the fourth world, have been tutored to believe that to be wife and mother are her means of ultimate salvation and fulfilment. The mother image is revered all over the world but she is not a true partner in the act of procreation. She is a slave to be acted upon, meant to satisfy the physical appetite of the masters.

In this story, Deshpande takes a revolutionary stand against the

conventional norms of child-bearing and motherhood. Her truthful projection of facts directs the reader to believe that both the partners should accept responsibility of creation and shoulder the ensuing complications. In this poignant story, an educated mother decides to abort the unborn child because it is 'unwelcome' and also because her impending motherhood makes her feel 'like an animal,' trapped' and confined. Her strong reaction is justifiable. The open confrontation is between the role of a mother advocated by the patriarchal society and a desire for self-identity. Her husband raises the ghost of guilt in his wife by commenting. 'How can a mother be so selfish?' (62/2)

In this story, Deshpande scrutinizes the problem that had disturbed Sita, the protagonist of Anita Desai in *Where Shall We Go this Summer*? The question that was raised is: Should an unwanted child be brought into this cruel world?

In all these artistic endeavors many questions are articulated: Do the mothers have the liberty of womb? Is the mother only a breeder? Cannot a woman ask to 'reserve some part of myself, my life?' Why should a woman be made to feel guilty if she decides to deconstruct the stereotyped image of a mother to protect her identity and the welfare of her unborn child? In the story, the mother takes on the rational stance against the ephemeral emotional stance of the father who repeatedly speaks of 'managing somehow attitude'. Deshpande demaximizes a mother, the eternal breeder and nourisher, though she ultimately emphasizes the mother - child bonding. The mother of this story had already played her role satisfyingly by having two children and nourishing them with love and care. It is definitely not 'selfish' to reserve something for her. By asserting a woman's right to be an individual, the protagonist affirms her selfhood and rejects the definition of motherhood pronounced by the males for their convenience.

The story *My Beloved Charioteer* presents the agony of isolation a widowed mother feels from her widowed daughter who remains a sort

of foreigner. There is hardly any communication between both of them. The old lady tries her best to establish a cordial relationship with her daughter in order to shake her out of her stupor caused by the unnatural death of her husband. But she is unable to lift up her sorrow which she never reveals.

And I had been full of pity, not for her, but for Aarti, who could turn happiness into a wrong. But I can say nothing to her. She has never hared anything with me and now he hides her sorrow like a dog its one. She guards it jealously and will not let me approach. And I have kept my distance. (186/1)

Once or twice the mother tried to talk to her. But in response, she got a harsh reply from her daughter who emits bitterness only. 'There is infinity of bitterness in her now. And I cannot help her.'(185/1) The agony of the mother is revealed in the following words:

Nine months I carried this daughter of mine in my body. I had felt within me every beat of her heart, every movement of her limbs. But... and this my doctor had told me then... my pains and shocks could never penetrate to her, she was so well protected. Even now, she is protected from my pains. Even now I have no protection against her pains. I suffer with her, but like all my other emotions, it is a futile suffering. For I cannot help her I can only fumble and blunder and make things worse. (183/1)

This estranged relationship brings loneliness which breeds unbearable silence. But here the silence is friendly with the mother, '.to keep

me company when I was alone...' (181/1)

The story narrates the futile suffering of a pair of widows, mother and daughter, with a bridge of the third feminine generation between them.

Happiness can mean different things to different people. For me, it is this – the beginning of a new day with this child. We talk of so many things.(181/1)

While the old lady and the child feel at home in each other's company, the daughter remains isolated in her sorrow. Bitterness has filled her heart. Once she had burst into frightening, loud laughter, shattering the tenuous peace of the house. On asking she had said, 'Isn't it gloomy here? The right atmosphere for a pair of desolate widows. That's what we are, aren't we? (183/1) Aarti, the daughter neglects herself for days. Her face had the arid look of a desert. The mother rightly thinks that life has been cruel to her. But the mother feels her utter helplessness to bring her daughter happiness. She seems to her like 'a child sulking because she does not have what she wants, willfully ignoring the things she has.' (184/1)The mother is worried to find that her daughter is unable to bear other's happiness. She considers herself responsible for the morbid attitude of her daughter.

We fool ourselves that our children are our own, that we know them. But often, they are as alien to us as baby cuckoos born in a crow's nest. And we cannot escape the burden of parentage. If my daughter is so empty that she can hate people who are happy, the fault, to some extent, mine. (185/1)

The mother feels guilty for not having courage to speak to Aarti 'I am only a foolish, middle-aged woman who to get rid of such painful thoughts, the

mother occupies herself with the work at home and becomes happy in the company of her daughter's child.

Daily chores are not monotonous but soothing....
Now that the day is full of meaning, I wait as a
child myself, for her return from school. (186/1)

While the mother enjoys the company of her grand-daughter, to lessen her sorrow, the daughter takes refuge in her father's room. The thought that even after his death, the father can give her something that she cannot hurt the narrator. It is like having salt rubbed into a raw wound. It suggests the strong influence of a dominating father upon a growing daughter. The mother is an old lady who, unable to bear the isolation from her daughter, makes an attempt to communicate with her grown up, yet immature daughter by confronting with the reality of her own situation about her father. The mother discloses the husband's oppression she has experienced throughout her life, which opens her daughter's eyes to the character of her father which results in the reconciliation of the daughter with her mother.

The notable point in the story is that despite the sexual and emotional oppression for twenty five years, the mother is not broken like the daughter, who neglects her child and herself after widowhood. The mother constantly remains constructive and overcomes the destructive forces of society. She had inherent strength to fight the vicissitudes of life through silence. Deshpande in the story not only stresses upon the darker experience of a woman's life but also emphasizes the significance of the mother's role in motivating a daughter to live and rise above the debasing sentimentality. Furthermore, no Savitri could have even dreamed at uncovering the repulsive picture of the husband. Thus by ripping the veil of misunderstanding the mother and the daughter come to know and appreciate each other. Deshpande stresses indirectly that devoid of selfhood, no woman

can deserve respect from her offspring.

The picture of self – assertive widow mother is portrayed in the story, *Cruelty Game*. The mother's journey from periphery to centre is well depicted in the story. The narrator, Maya feels that Saru's mother is totally different from her own mother who rebukes her often on trivial matters. Saru's mother never says ordinary things like Maya's mother. Maya informs us that Saru's mother is rarely heard saying anything at all. She is portrayed as the silent, composed woman. Probably, her being a widow is the reason for her behaving in such a manner.

Despite the restricted by the conservative society, Promila never let her daughter feel about the marginalised position. In fact, she proves to be the image of modern mother who does everything for the sake of her daughter's happiness. She neglects the sarcastic remarks of the society and celebrates her daughter's birthday. Moreover as a mother she knows her responsibilities towards her daughter and therefore wants to be economically independent. Thus, she breaks the conventional boundaries and not only takes up a job but also decides to remarry. At first the daughter reacts strongly against this decision of her mother but gradually she too accepts it. Thus, the mother indirectly wants to teach her daughter that journey towards the centre can be facilitated by reconstructing the outdated social norms.

In Deshpande's stories, the implications of being a mother and having a mother are quite different. As a mother, the woman is expected to make all types of sacrifices for others. She is the proverbial milky cow but Deshpande deliberately alters the perspectives to reveal implicitly that despite the limiting circumstances the mother can make a successful attempt to rise above serfdom. (Adhikari)²⁹ The same suffering mother can turn into tyrant and oppress other women when she becomes old.

A woman in India exists in so many roles which they might or might not fabricate by their counterparts through a proper societal framework. If we see the role of a grandmother; she leads a life of resignation and ghettos

manifestation. Whether Sham's Grandmother in the *Cruelty Game* or the character of Akka in *Lucid Moments*, most of the portrayal of grandmother in Deshpande's short stories are living in the split of body, mind and soul due to the coveted existence of conventionality and staunch exuberance of patriarchy. This split is seen so "strongly in any grandmother of this country for which their superstitious attributes enhance always. We see this superstitious trait in Akka of *Lucid Moments*. When the protagonist sits by her, a lizard clucks somewhere. Akka at once says 'Krishna, Krishna' to the lizard's cluck. Her inane conventionality compels her to think that this cluck of the lizard has exactitude of reality. A sense of truth engulfs the mind of Akka and she gets terrified. We find this superstitious illustration in the character of Sham's Grandmother in *The Cruelty Game*. In this story the concept of Deshpande's grandmothers seems to have clarity, the usual spatial structure of patriarchal conventionality where the grandmother exists—has crossed the boundaries and defined limitations. It was 'an astonishing sight to see' the grandmother 'out of that place and on her feet'...

Pramila auntie stood still, Sham clutching at her, saying nothing while Grandmother raved on: Until Grandmother, in afresh spurt of anger, moved to Pramila auntie, pointing to her face, screeching, 'Take that off why do you type that, take it off-Grandmother moved closer to Pramila auntie as if she was going to attack her and now Sharu began to Cry, loud terrified sobs ".(222/2)

The raving attitude of Grandmother was a sheer outcome of her staunch conventionality. When Pramila auntie being a widow did not follow the dictums of patriarchal society, and performed a blasphemous act of adorning herself with a kumkum, a small dot, Grandmother flared-up her characteristics of an orthodox custom. Deshpande criticised not only the act of the Grandmother but also the trait of being staunch follower of such a

convention which does not have any strong logical rationality. She says that such a trait of Grandmother is just an outburst of her being victimised all through her life by the rigid and irrational patriarchal society.

Thus the mothers of different age groups in Deshpande's stories, more often than not, fight their own battles. According to Deshpande women without confidence and self-awareness are doomed to lead a life of neglect and inconsequence. The woman must be self-contained and active enough to fight for her wholeness if she wants to wrest recognition from the dehumanizing powers. These stories indirectly concretize Deshpande's conviction that authentic existence emerges from self-affirmation that leads to self-ownership. There always comes a point in a person's life when one may revolt against the accumulated humiliation. The voice of revolt can be aggressive or feeble but each has its significance. Even a feeble protest can form the core round which one can hope to grow and move from the periphery to the centre. In short, these stories are shorn of undue romantic embellishments and portray mothers who - after a long, bitter struggle - are able to free themselves from the stultifying traditional restrictions and can cherish a spontaneous surge towards life. These mothers are quite sure of themselves, of their rights and their existence and are no longer docile and living in silence. There is a marked difference in their attitude as compared to that of the heroines of earlier fiction. They have risen in revolt and are raising their voice against their exploitation. These mothers are all reflective about their condition. Their protest is not for equality but for the right to be acknowledged as individuals – capable of intelligence and feeling. They do not look for freedom outside the house but within, without painting their lives in various artificial shades of sentiments.

3.6 Pain and Predicament of Widowhood

There is the recurrence of the Hindu widow in post independence Indian fiction. It is due to the changing social condition of our society. The Western rationalism and humanitarianism and the spirit of social reform prodded by patriotism turned the minds of the reformers and the writers to the problem of the widow. Shashi Deshpande too highlights the problem and suffering as well as the longings and frustrations of the Hindu widow in the context of Hindu society.

Deshpande has shown the shades in changing attitudes of women. The change in the widow's attitudes towards remarriage is portrayed with a greater awareness in these stories. She shows the widows in conflict. The pain, the frustration and the refusal to accept traditional moral codes laid for the widow is a feature reflected in these stories. They again and again come up against the traditional ideas. To challenge the old ways and choose a new path, both involve pain and friction. Even breaking away process is burdened with frustration and heartache. The conflict between tradition and modernity, family norms and individual freedom leads to suffering. They feel a pull in two directions and that leads to suffering. They undergo a lot of pain even when they decide to break away.

In Indian society, being a widow is a bane of a woman's life. She is put to all sorts of criticism once the shadow of her husband is off her head. Widowhood elbows her to periphery. Her right to entertainment is snatched. Shashi Deshpande depicts in her some of the stories this tabooed society for widows who are beset with existential problems. They suffer boredom, joylessness, lovelessness and alienation in their lives. Deshpande has taken up this problem and shown its depth. However, Deshpande also shows a glimpse of the changing reality in the life of widows who are educated and young with youthful emotions throbbing with desire and struggling to suppress her feelings. The writer has offered a solution of remarriage. Thus reality and reformatory zeal combine in Shashi Deshpande's

treatment of the problem of widow. The writer's attitude to widow can be a useful mark of assessment of new and old values.

The story, *A Man and A Woman* deals with the problem of boredom, joylessness and alienation in the life of a young widow who is unable to suppress her natural physical demands and desires and thus wants to remarry. The story depicts the tabooed society for a widow. Moreover the widow's disturbing influence on the male members is seen in this story. However the final half of the story describes the plight of the young widow.

Lalita, the young widow is marginalized by her in-laws. Her child was just four month old when she lost her husband. She was prohibited from joys forever as her husband is no more. When her child stood up for the first time, she had laughed with joyous surprise which was disliked by her mother-in-law.

I remember the first time he stood up, holding on to a chair. He looked so shocked, so comic, I couldn't help laughing. I burst out and my mother-in-law came out to see who it was. When she saw me... 'My God! Lalita! You!' She said. 'You think it looks nice to laugh like that?' (205-6/2)

At another time she was sharply rebuked when she bought a red and blue sari. She was put in disgrace as if she 'might as well have danced naked on the streets!' (212/2) The kind of circumscribed life she led provided no outlet for her vitality, her energy. To get out of the life full of boredom, she wanted to take up a job but they disagreed saying, 'what will people say? They will say we refused to provide you'. (213/2)

The false sense of prestige of the members of her family is exposed when they say, 'why do you need something? Isn't there Ramesh? And if you need something, there's the *Mahila Mandal*.' (213/2) Thus, the story presents the plight of a young widow who is restricted by the conservative social codes and hypocrisy.

Lalita is subjected to live an isolated life but she is a young and passionate woman who hungers for male's company. At the age of thirty, Lalita is still full of charm and youth; she is created by nature 'for the joy of life, a body for a man's hands.' (207/2) Unable to control her natural physical instinct, relationship with her dead husband's younger brother. However, later she becomes conscious of the enormity of her offence. The pain, the regret of having committed a crime is revealed when she considers herself a sick and tells a crippled friend of her husband that,

'Nothing can convince me that what I've done is not wrong. It wear not for Ramesh, I Would kill myself ... I have to live with this weakness. A slave to my body. I disgust myself. I am dirty, abnormal.' (212/2)

Moreover, she is beset with existential problems. She is a mere B.A. and will not be able to secure a suitable job. Then where should she go? Her parents are dead. And she cannot live with her brother. And as she says, '...I have become incapable of living by myself. (213/2) A similar question was raised by Sita in Anita Desai's novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), When she got completely bored and disgusted with her Bombay life and its sickening surroundings The answer can't be found outside oneself but it can be found within oneself. If one transgresses one's self, one will experience 'a living death' as Lalita in this story experiences. She is overwhelmed by the questions of morality, conventionality and social taboos. She becomes very restless and uneasy.

She was like a restive colt in an enclosure struggling to get out. But there was no gate. She had to jump. And she had lost her legs. Well, if there was no gate, she had to make one. (213/2)

The story becomes suggestive enough when it forwards the idea that an effective 'antidote' to the life of boredom, joylessness, lovelessness and alienation is the re-marriage of a young widow. It is thoughtfully executed. Manu, the crippled classmate and bosom friend of Jayant, comes forward with his proposal to marry Lalita, whose initial resistance to his proposal is nothing but the dread of a tabooed society and false sense of prestige for the members of Jayant's family. However, T. N. Geeta is of the view that,

To avoid giving a direct answer to the friend's proposal, she drags in the society – 'What will people say?' – so as to mask her unwillingness to marry a cripple, though willing to marry.' (Geeta)³⁰

Moreover it can also be assumed that it is the stigma attached to the marriage of a widow that deters her from accepting Manu's proposal and not his unaesthetic personality.

The story *Rain* is about an illicit physical relationship of a wife of a dying man resulting in the remarriage after her widowhood. Radha with his ailing husband comes to her doctor cousin for the treatment. She comes to know that her husband is courting his last days because of some incurable disease. This has tortured her heart for so long that she has now become silent and expressionless as if she has deliberately submerged all her emotions. No one has come to help her because as she says, 'His parents are too old. The others... they have their own lives to lead.' (229/2) Her cousin feels pity watching her struggling alone with the dying man.

Radha is under such a traumatic experience, under 'some crisis, emotional or physical.'(229/2) that she forgets all sense of decency and forges an illicit physical relationship with her cousin who in his early / blooming youthful days had desired her; she was the person around

whom he had 'centered all those vague longings, dreams and erotic fancies that torment a young man'. (228/2) It is as if she wants to escape from the painful reality that is constantly tormenting her. Radha is not conscious of what she is doing under some heavy emotional burden. It becomes clear from the story that even her cousin is stirred by this casual intimacy with 'a woman so unconscious of herself.' (231/2) Both of them become conscious of the reality when the phone rings to inform them that Radha's husband is no more.

When the narrator, Radha's cousin meets her after some time, he is touched to the raw at the very sight of her, 'so ostentatiously widowed, denuded of all her wifely symbols.' (231/2) The minute he sees her, he knows that she is the one woman for him. He puts a proposal of marriage before her. But to his astonishment, she reacts harshly saying that,

one doesn't marry a widow. A Hindu Marriage is a sacrament, you know. It never ends. One belongs for all time and eternity to the same man. (233/2)

She sounds petulant and looks so stricken, so vulnerable and immensely pathetic like a hurt child. In fact, she is shattered from within. She is utterly tired and is ashamed, 'To live here like a young girl. But I'm not... am I? Not anymore.' (233/2)

Radha is an educated young woman and it seems from her speech that she wants to remarry. But she is living within the strict walls of conservative society where it is a matter of disgrace to think about the remarriage of a widow. She gives way to her feelings when she says:

How did they live, those widows, fifty, a hundred years back ? They were wiser, those rules that regulated their lives. They had no choice. They didn't have to think. Like me. The same thought ever and

over again... to live like this forever...' (234/2)

From Radha's utterances, Deshpande wants to highlight the plight of widows. She also wants to say that society was cruel to the widows earlier and the women too accepted their lot because they were not given any choice. But in the modern age, the plight of an educated thinking widow is no less because she is swinging between tradition and modernity. Indian society is still rigid enough not to leave the age's old conventions while the education of women leads them to defy conventions. Radha, initially, rejects the proposal of marriage but at the end she gathers courage to break all the shackles of orthodox society and accepts the proposal. She emerges as a modern woman who takes a bold step. However the end of the story shows that the narrator is suffering from guilt of that rainy night which had scarred him deeply.

The story *Duel* projects the picture of a woman who indulges in sensuality soon after the death of her husband and her children in a car accident from which she alone has escaped. In fact, her act cannot be mistaken as an act of adultery because she becomes so unconscious of herself under the extreme state of grief that as if other woman is working through her body. Though, she is not the woman with loose morals which is clear from the beginning.

The story is about the duel between a married woman and a sensual writer who makes an unsuccessful attempt to seduce her. The woman is totally disinterested in him and shows him no response at all. The writer has a notion that most of the middleclass women put on the thin facades of their morality. He wants to prove this by 'ripping off the thin facades of their morality' (105/1) by leading this woman into an illicit physical relationship. But the woman, though feeling 'unutterably bored' (105/1) with her meaningless life, does not succumb to his proposal. She treats the idea – 'that a woman who is bored needs to have a child. Or lover or a mission in Life.' (106/1)– as a cliché. On the contrary, she believes that life is not lived

only on the physical plane. She thinks that it is pointless to drift into an affair in order to escape the pointlessness of her life. With this thought she puts him off.

However the writer proves to be right when she surrenders unexpectedly. The writer gets puzzled to see her face expressionless. It seems to him that she is filled with some strong feelings which she has difficulty in controlling. The writer remembers that,

It was as if she was simmering behind that placid facade. And there was something else. A kind of rigidity that reminded me of a frightened child. She let me do what I want with her. She seemed totally unconcerned and detached as I went on. It annoyed me. ... As if she wasn't there at all (108-9/1)

It was totally inexplicable behaviour of hers that day that made the writer waiting impatiently for her to return. When she didn't turn up, he went to her home with a sense of defeat and shame only to receive shocking news that,

Her husband? He's dead, Not only him. The children too. And she escaped almost without a bruise. When? Ten days ago.(112/1)

What was bitterer for him to comprehend that she had come to him after the three days of their deaths. It filled him with savage anger and bewilderment. The story ends with the writer wondering about that strange woman who gave herself to him under such strange circumstances.

The problems faced by widow and her daughter in joint family is presented in *The Cruelty Game*. The story narrates the plight of Promila

Auntie, the recently widowed mother and Saru, the fatherless daughter who is teased to tears by her cousins in the joint family. Widowhood, the bane of a woman's life, elbows her to the periphery. Maya informs us that Saru's mother is rarely heard saying anything at all. She is portrayed as the silent, composed woman.

The place as widow is very painful in Indian society. After Pramila Auntie comes to them all the women in the house become friends and form a common front against the widow. They boycott Pramila Auntie and hardly speak to her. However the aunt bears this silently and goes to her room after finishing her work and stays there.

Saru's mother tries to regain her 'self' through economic independence but this too is annoyed by the other members of the family. They start whispering and commenting about a recently widowed woman going out to work. 'It's only an excuse to go out. To avoid working at home.' (220/2) Others feel that it provides her 'a chance to deck herself in new saris.' (220/2) They do not realize that it is difficult for Saru's mother to make both ends meet. Geeta, echoes the opinion of other women in the house when she says, 'But she's a widow. Widows shouldn't wear new sari.' (220/2) Society keeps checks on a widow and snatches her right to wear new clothes once she has lost her husband. A widow is put to all sorts of criticism once the shadow of her husband is off her head.

Once, Pramila Auntie invites the children for the party on her daughter's birthday. The women of the family are shocked to hear of the celebration: 'Party... Is the woman mad? Her husband not dead a year and...' (221/2) All kind of amusement is banned for a woman who has lost her husband. Society least expects such kind of behaviour from a widow whose right to entertainment, in their opinion, is snatched from her soon after the death of her husband. The mother-in-law, the mouthpiece of the oppressive and antagonistic forces, screams at Pramila, 'My son you killed him - enjoying yourself... Take that off, why you have that, take it off' (222/2) because she had put on the forbidden red *kumkum* on her

forehead. Widowhood does not allow Pramila to apply a small dot between her eyebrows. This is the sole right of *suhagan*, whose husband is still alive. Pramila Auntie stands still and does not retaliate against accusation of the mother-in-law.

The widow is generally looked upon as an bad omen in traditional circles. Treating her as a disturbing influence she is made to undergo tonsure and fasting. Even then she is thought to be inauspicious, looked upon with suspicious, scorn and kept as a drudge on the pretext of giving protection.(Shirwadkar)³¹

In this conventional atmosphere a shell exploded when it becomes public that Pramila along with her daughter was shifting to Bombay to take up a job and to get married to her husband's friend. The news runs through the house but with some disgrace tacked on to it. Saru receives the shocking news that her mother is getting married. She strongly reacts to it and says: 'My mother is married to my father. I've seen the photo, I promise you...'
(130) Children's cruelty bait Saru. She is made to feel that her mother's decision is wrong. Saru is brought up in a conventional atmosphere, has not seen a woman marrying twice. The poor bewildered child clings to her grandmother who is a true representative of the orthodox norms of the society. She is pulled apart when the father of the narrator intervenes and shouts, 'Let her go.' (225/2) To everybody's astonishment the grandmother loosens her hold on Saru as if she is loosening the hold of the old conventions of society that are binding the girl. Very clearly, the writer suggests that very often women are victimized by older women who have suffered due to sexual discrimination. The narrator, a little girl is happy to learn that Saru and her mother would have a better future and that they would no longer be victims of the orthodox conventional society.

Deshpande is not interested in giving a mere statement: she offers a possible solution and hints at the means of regaining the self through economic independence. Her second solution of remarriage is also not Utopian and thus cannot be disregarded. The message is quite but clear. The reader should decode the meaning. Perhaps, Deshpande wants to convey that liberation from such exploitation is possible if the woman is economically self-sufficient. Her journey towards the centre can be facilitated by reconstructing the outdated social norms but the first positive thrust come from the victim.

The effects of education on young widow and the clash between old and new ideas are commented effectively by Deshpande. Education has given them courage to express her own opinions. It is an indication that the 'passive feminine' has ceased to exist. Instead we have new women who questions incessantly, confronts her problem inwardly, and analyzes it objectively. This kind of questioning and disparaging of the social institutions of love and marriage justifies the spirit of Deshpande's protagonists.

Furthermore, there is a shift from the traditional 'pativrata image' to that of sexually – emancipated woman. The new women who are coming out of their conservative shells and ready to accept the sexual as well as psychological realities of human life. It is really a sign of radical change occurring in the Indian sexual landscape. The theme of a woman desiring for sex or suffering because of sex has rarely been delineated in the fiction before Deshpande. It is this working of an individual dialectic of the sexual dilemma in her stories that makes Shashi Deshpande a modernist feminist. Tradition, transition and modernity are the stages through which the women in these stories passing. Deshpande convincingly depicts the agonies and sufferings of woman between two worlds. Modern woman is seen trying to throw off the burden of inhibition she has been carried for ages.

3.7 Mythical Reincarnations

Over the years, myths have been reinvested, reshaped, regionalized. We have so internalized them that they have become part of our sub-conscious psyche, part of our personal, religious, and Indian identity. According to Shashi Deshpande,

Myths condition our ideas so greatly that often it is difficult to disentangle the reality of what we perceive from what we learn of ourselves through them. (Deshpande)³²

In fact, myths shape people's minds and opinions. The characters from the epics and *Puranas* have become stereotypes. And these stereotypes have become the ultimate role models in such a way that we cannot entirely dismiss them. The irony is that the role models are held out only to women,

To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi as beautiful as Lakshmi. Nobody expects a man to be a Rama or a Krishna, an Arjuna' (Deshpande)³³

It is because these myths have been created by men. Women writers are now exploring such myths and stereotypes. This phenomenon has been partly influenced by the growing strength of feminist thinking. Through such myths, they rediscover themselves, retell their own tales and find things relevant to their lives. Shashi Deshpande has written a couple of stories based on characters, mostly women, from the epics. Her interpretation is different. She presents the stories from the myths differently by breaking the stereotypical images of the characters. She makes the reader feel the other side of the myth. She discovers from the myths what is relevant to our lives today.

The story of Sita is presented with feminist version in *The Day of the Golden Deer*. Deshpande has lent voice to Sita, the eternally obedient wife of Rama. The writer re-examines this husband-wife relationship and brings in variations to their personalities.

The episode of Sita being deserted by Rama, her husband is presented in this story. Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama, goes with Sita to leave her amidst the forest. In the epic Sita is presented as ever dutiful, obedient wife who has always followed the path lead by her husband and who has never questioned her husband's actions. But Deshpande's version makes the readers see a new vision of the whole character. What stirred in Deshpande was the contrast between the young girl, whose innocence made this going away with her husband a joyous adventure and the woman, older, mature, soon to be a mother, once again getting ready for exile.

Sita in this story breaks the stereotype image of being an unquestioning wife. Here Sita raises questions and even accuses her husband who is known for his righteousness. Thus, Sita breaks the silence. At first Sita does not know the reason why Lakshman has taken her to the riverside near the forest. She thinks that perhaps they have come here for a change out of a placid contentment. Unaware of the situation and the purpose of their coming there, Sita recollects those years of exile. For her they were happy days because they were free and had left all the unhappiness behind. But suddenly, Sita finds Lakshman talking in the formal way and trying to convince her about the duties of a king. And then stammering, nervous, confused Lakshman finally tells her what he has to say, excusing, defending his brother. Only then Sita opens her mouth to ask, 'And since when does a king listen to the gossip of common people?' (134//2)

Sita very sharply reveals her separate identity when she is addressed with her formal title - 'The Queen'. She blazes out,

Queen ! No don't call me Queen , I am no Queen if the king casts me off. I am nothing. No, I go back to being what I was. The daughter of king Janaka. No, not even that. I am just Sita. (65)

Sita neither cries nor reproaches nor even entreaties but only anger comes out of her words. She wants to ask her husband,

I am innocent, I am blameless. How can you do this to me? I have your child in my womb. My child...'(135/2)

Rama, the epic hero is believed to possess all the qualities of a superhuman. However, Sita exposes his wrong action of his killing of Vaali treacherously. Sita thus starts weighing all the actions of Rama from a different angle. She wonders why she had never asked him earlier. 'Was it because I was afraid of what I would learn? (137/2)

Moreover, Sita fails to understand how Rama can abandon her just to please his people. However very soon she gets the answer. The realisation is very painful. Now everything becomes clear to her that her husband is suffering from a passion - a desire to be loved and admired. And for his people's love and admiration, Rama ruined Sita's life. For this passion she was asked to stand on trial to prove her purity. Again for the same passion he is abandoning her.

Sita of this story starts accusing the conduct of Rama. She remembers that when she had to go through the fire, Rama had shown her, 'not his grief at having to be cruel to me, but his pride in having done his duty.'(138/2) Ever since Sita has hated the word duty. She feels being crushed under the chariot of his righteousness. His duty has been her only rival because she is subjected to injustice behind duty. Sita admits that it was her fault for sending Rama after the golden deer and then she had

been abducted. But now she is not ready to blame herself. She puts the whole blame on Rama thus:

The wrong is his and his alone. It is because of his weakness, his belief that he can never do wrong, his desire that he should never be seen to do wrong, that I have to suffer. He believes that his image as the righteous, the perfect ruler should not be tarnished. That is his god. And he has sacrificed me to it (141/2)

This reveals that Sita suffered a great injustice at the hands of Rama. People revere him as the king who put duty before his own happiness because Sita remained silent. She submitted, endured and forgave. But Deshpande gives voice to Sita's anger in this story and one can conclude that Rama failed to perform his duty towards his wife in becoming great in the eyes of his people. Rama of this story is shown as the victim of his own idea of himself, who in order to chase the golden deer of perfection, has ruined Sita's life. Truly from the foregoing discussion it seems that Rama sacrificed Sita in order to maintain his image as a righteous and perfect ruler.

At the end Sita is shown awakening from the illusion. She realises that she was wrong in thinking that she had surrendered the golden deer – the symbol of perfection. Now Sita understands that she has to give up the idea of perfection in any man, in any human. She gives a very sarcastic answer to Lakshman that: 'tell my husband that he could have done something worse. He could have forgiven me. (142/2).

These are the words of a woman with self awareness who knows that she will have to emerge out of the forest of exile once more and will have to fight with the demons of fear, hate, self-pity, bitterness and anger. With this realisation Sita gets ready to walk into the forest, to face the terrible years

that are waiting for her. Thus, by reworking on the myths, Shashi Deshpande destroys stereotypes in the end.

The perception of the writer is beyond the parameters of inquisitions; Shashi Deshpande is framing Draupadi into a symbol where virtuosity and chastity cannot be her traits which the masculine world had conceptualised her into. It's not the perceptions that the writer is questioning, it's rather the parameters where Draupadi had been entrapped and engulfed into is being interrogated. Deshpande wants to know why there is such double entrance in the patriarchal world—one side she is being made the epitome of beauty and on the other she is being questioned for her virtuousness, one side she becomes the symbol of silent submission and on the other she becomes the victim of male gaze. She tries to interrogate the hypocrite patriarchy about the roles that are defined to the female world.

Truly, Deshpande does not just open up a rich world of Indian traditions and mythology but she also provides the blood and flesh so necessary to cover the skeleton the stereotypes had in the epics.

Hear me Sanjaya. is a re-examination of our epic *The Mahabharata* in the most artistic way. Kunti has been considered as the eternally silent mother of the Pandava brothers in this epic. Shashi Deshpande has given her voice to reveal her unfathomable feelings to know reasons behind her actions.

The story runs thus: The epic war is over. Kunti decides to follow the king Dhritarashtra and the queen, Gandhari to the forest. Vidur and Sanjay too accompany them. During their stay at the forest, Kunti takes a walk with Sanjay who had reported his blind king all the happenings of the war. Here lies the irony that the talkative one has lost his tongue and is condemned to listen, while Kunti, the silent one has suddenly found her tongue. In this monologue, she reveals her feelings of why she bore a multitude of disasters in her life and what moved her silently.

Kunti is one of the important characters in the epic *The Mahabharata*'. She plays a major role in giving dramatic touch to the epic story. Her actions shape the story artistically. However, she has not been fully delineated in the

epic. We judge her from her actions only. The person behind the actions is not exposed. Each of her actions leads one to ask what was there in her mind when she had to take few crucial decisions in her life.

Kunti's life is an unenviable one. From Pritha she becomes Kunti as she was adopted by king Kuntibhoja. Only this much is told in the epic while Deshpande in this story reveals the pain and fear of a little girl who was too little to understand this change in her life. Deshpande's Kunti says,

My father gave me away – how easily he gave me away. As if I was a bit of property... And I can't even remember if it made me angry?...But I remember I was frightened. It thought my father had given me away to his friend because he was displeased with me, because I had done something wrong. And I thought- what if I displease this man too? Will he give me away to someone else? And so I did everything I could to please him, I tried hard... never to displease him. (86/2)

Suddenly, Kunti appears before us not as a type but as an individual with flesh and blood. Kunti now feels that she very late in her life realised that she could not easily adapt to the change of her identity. Kunti becomes real to us. She is not just another name in a great epic. Another event which is re-written in this story is that of Kunti's first born son. She gave birth to him when she was unmarried and had to depart from him. She had left him in a basket on a river. Years after, she meets him as a grown up man, Karna by the riverside. She longs to hear from her son the word 'mother ' but he never called her so. The story reveals the agony of a mother who is helpless enough to tell her son the truth of her life.

Kunti feels much pain when she remembers her husband's second wife, Madri. This episode in her life shows how discarded she

felt in the presence of Mandri who was more beautiful than her. She tells Sanjay, 'Do you know how unfair life is to a woman who does not have beauty?' (84/2) Kunti was filled with anger and grief when Madri took all the glory away with her and left her with all the drudgery and responsibilities.

Polygamy being the accepted custom in the monarchical set-up of good old-days, Kunti is said to have welcomed Madri, King Pandu's second wife, as her younger sister without any jealousy or complex. But 'Hear me Sanjaya...' expresses Kunti's modernized mental agony – beauty dethroned by the other woman. Even Madri's leaving Nakul and Sahadev behind is resented:

'Take my sons, look after them', she said. And I was angry. She is escaping, I thought, she is taking away all the glory, leaving the struggle, the drudgery for me. (84/2)

Bring up five children - two of the other woman, is more than a domestic drudgery today.

Even in case of Draupadi, Kunti feels guilty of doing wrong to her. For the sake of her five sons, Kunti took away the joy from Draupadi who has to become the wife of five Pandav brothers. She did it to keep her sons together, to get the kingdom back. She had to become a hard woman as she had to make the choice she did that day. She tells Sanjay that she had to become one such otherwise she would have not survived.

She considers the vows taken by Gandhari as 'futile vows' – vows of blinding herself as the husband is blind. According to Kunti, it was a wrong decision by her. Moreover, she satirises the vows taken by Bhishma who was revered so much. Deshpande's Kunti says that her mothers-in-law suffered injustice silently due to the vow of Bhishma. They are given zero existence in the epic. Their suffering is highlighted by Deshpande's Kunti:

They rarely spoke, except to each other- and that only in whispers- and moved about so little and so silently it was hard to remember they were there. (81/2)

The incident of Amba, Ambika and Ambalika is there in *the Mahabharata*, narrated straight. But Shashi Deshpande gives them a new version. Through this incident, Deshpande wants to say that women are considered no more than an object, a mere breeding machine. Both the sisters are denied meaningful identity in the epic. Even today, the women's condition has not improved materially despite the efforts of feminists and movements like the International Women's Liberation movement.

It is a condition characterized by the acceptance of the dictum that she has to seek the meaning and purpose of existence only within the orbit and ambience of family through passivity which is deeply ingrained in her. (Viswanathan)³⁴

Consequently, Kunti in *Hear me Sanjaya* evolves as a real being who reveals her grief and despair behind each of her action that she had to take in her life. This Kunti proves beyond doubt what a fallacy it is to talk of women as the weak sex. She has done what had to be done. Moreover she also knew well that women were almost always at a disadvantage, that they had to bear silently many injustices in their lives. Thus Deshpande's Kunti emerges as a real woman who touches to our hearts whom we can understand, and sympathize with. Deshpande has put life in the character of Kunti by articulating her emotions in a very moving way. Thus, the writer has broken the stereotypical image of Kunti and has made the readers empathise with the silence of Kunti bringing a new dimension to

the oft-told story.

The story, *Inner Rooms* is about Amba, princess of Kashi from the epic Mahabharata. In fact it was Iravati Karve's reading of the character of Bhishma, the grand old man of the same epic that inspired Deshpande to write this story. Bhishma has always been regarded as one of the greatest heroes of the Mahabharata, the utterly selfless man, the peerless one, revered by everyone in his time. But to quote Iravati Karve,

The Mahabharata does not reveal that there was any attitude of chivalry towards women. But no man had shown the utter callousness that Bhishma had. Yet we cannot say that Bishma committed the cruelty deliberately. It seems that he was indifferent to it. (Deshpande)³⁵

The story reveals the tragic dilemma of Amba, the princess of Kashi, an ancient Hindu kingdom. In consonance with the codes of marriage of those days, she along with her sisters is abducted by Bhishma, the celebrated bachelor, to be given away to his brother Vichitravirya, as bride after defeating her lover Salva, the king of Saubal, in personal combat. Though Amba is in love with Salva, he has through his defeat forfeited his claim on her. Amba does not want to marry Vichiravirya; and so returns to Salva and tried to persuade him to marry her, but he flatly refuses to do so because of his wounded pride. Further, to her dismay, she finds herself rejected even by Vichitravirya who has come to know of her love for Salva, and by Bhishma because of his vow to remain a bachelor. Frustrated, she gives herself up to the funeral pyre resolving to wreak vengeance on Bhishma in her next birth.

Shashi Deshpande presents the above episode from the Mahabharata while highlighting an agonizing existential loneliness of Amba.

The agony of Amba not only spells the inner trauma of Amba but also paradigmatically indicates the predicament of women in general oppression and humiliation and the resultant despondency and hopelessness(Geeta)³⁶

The above incidents are there in the Mahabharata, narrated straight. But Deshpande gives them a new version and narrated them through Amba.

and saw her anger, her utter disgust of the games men play, of her despair at having become a pawn in their game and finally, her decision to kill herself, not as a defeat, but because she thinks that if she cannot control her life, at least she can control her own death. (Deshpande)³⁷

Through the character of Amba, Shashi Deshpande focuses on the plight of women in the male – dominated society. In the story Amba says that at the hands of male chauvinists, woman becomes a mere puppet, 'A pawn in the game, to be moved and discarded as the rules demanded.' (87/1) Even T. N.Geeta is of the view that 'Amba's fate is prototypical of that of the mistreated, humiliated woman suffering at the hands of male chauvinists found in every country and in every age'.(Geeta)³⁸

furthermore the title of the story is very symbolical. It signifies the chambers of passivity which stifle the voice of protest for the sake of social and moral security. It indicates the marginalization of woman within the four walls of the room where she remains confined suppressing her individuality. In short, the woman is supposed to live with many restrictions and prohibitions imposed upon her by the man. 'But gradually, relentlessly... (don't, don't, you cannot)... the world had closed in upon her, pushing her into the women's rooms.'(88/1) Usha Bande too

expresses the similar view by saying that,

Shashi Deshpande makes Amba the representative of all women who suffer oppression and humiliation at the hands of the society governed by male rules. Amba's revolt against the male-order is rendered meaningless; she loses all relationships that would have given some semblance of meaning to existence.'(Bande)³⁹

Here Deshpande touches ironically upon the delicate matter of sex. Sometimes women are considered no more than an object to satisfy the physical hunger of the husband and a breeding machine. The male child is preferred in Indian families because it is thought that he will propagate the family lineage. Amba felt fleeting pity for the sisters she had left behind

in these inner rooms she had escaped from, stoically enduring the nightly lustful assaults of their husband, all in the hope of bearing him sons. At least she had escaped that degradation by rejecting that same husband in an open assembly.(88/1)

At first Amba invoked their rules to aid her. She had been exultant. She was the winner. But the victory had been illusory. Ironically, 'the very rules she had invoked in her favour, worked against her.'(90/1) She was tossed here from there. She was rejected by Salva because he was defeated, by Vichitravirya because she was in love with another and by Bhisma because of his vow of celibacy. Everyone used one or the other code of conduct to cover their real emotions. 'Bhisma was angry, Vichitravirya humiliated, and Salva is ashamed' (90/1) Sometimes meanings and interpretations of words and ideas cannot mean the same to women as

they do to men, because what is really built around is the self-interest of men. Women have not participated in the process of word making. This is what Amba in the story thinks when she asks: '*Honour, dishonour, right, wrong...* what are they all but words used by men to cover their real emotions?'(91/1) Amba wants to say that words are understood in the context of men's lives. They try to deceive with words and ideas which are 'substitute for passions and emotions.' (92/1) And in the game of words, woman becomes a mere pawn, 'to be disregarded, ignored; her will, her determination, had to be set aside as nothing because she was only a woman.' (92/1)

As a result of conspiring circumstances, Amba cannot remain a daughter or become a wife and the 'fact' that she can relate herself to none spells an agonizing existential loneliness. In an utter sense of isolation she renounces the world where 'life was lived according to rules that made no sense to her.'(92/1) She sacrifices the pawn in herself which is the act of her own. 'At least this one thing, would be of her choosing, the way she wanted, at the time she chose.' (93/1) Thus, disinherited, Amba becomes a terribly lonely figure whose only wish is to kill her tormentor. She does not mind if she has to wait for lives to come to have her revenge. In Amba, we see the reincarnation of the 'New Woman'.

This series of incidents is narrated there in the Mahabharata. Shashi Deshpande narrated them through Amba and displays her anger, her utter disgust of the games men play, of her, despair at having become a pawn in their game and finally, her decision to kill herself, not as a defeat, but because she thinks that if she cannot control her life, at least she can control her death. Framed by the cultural context, her women are also concretized through myths, legends, ritualistic manifestation of the social order (like the use of *kumkum*) and various images. She views her women with the help of a microscope and concentrates on their complex psychology that has been perpetually walled by the dynamics of 'don'ts.'

Amba, the legendary character of the Mahabharata in 'The Inner

Rooms' is denied meaningful identity by a constant reminder of 'Don't you cannot. In the name of 'Right Honorable' she is treated most inhumanly by Bhishma, Vichitravirya and Salva. Eventually, they undermine her self-sustaining identity. The pathetic story narrated through Amba's monologues mirrors the unaltered predicaments of women in India. The theme in this way achieves universality. Deshpande suggests discreetly that many women are yet to be touched by the wind of change. Women like Amba can only choose death, not life.

It is indeed a sad commentary on the state of affairs! Even though Deshpande desists from concluding her stories in a mood of despair yet she cannot remain indifferent to the facts of life. Amba's existence is deliberately reduced to nothing by the community of men. She realizes the bitter truth when she finds 'even the dark people of the forest looking through her incuriously.'(93/1) Her status has been so thoroughly decimated that she, the princess of Kashi, is ignored by the 'black people,' the ignorant and the lowest. She decides to burn herself. Ultimately, 'nothing left but silence.' Amba's revolt had been burnt to ashes mercilessly. The reader may take solace from the fact that she had returned eventually to take her revenge against Bhishma. In the final battle, she makes the man pay for his misdeeds.

The agonies of Draupadi are revoked by Deshpande in the story *And what has been decided?* and gives voice to her anguish of being cheated, of having become pawn by their husbands, the Pandavas. Moreover, Deshpande views the agony of a woman in Draupadi who was destined to marry five men.

The episode which Deshpande takes from the epic is that of the end of the thirteen years of exile including the year of disguise. The Pandavas along with Krishna are discussing about the reconciliation ('Sandhi') with the Kauravas. From this discussion it becomes clear that all of them want peace and not war. Moreover Krishna is going to Hastinapur to ask for their right – one village for each of the five brothers. At this decision Draupadi

cannot control her anger and flares up. She does not understand why they are begging for what is theirs by right. She thinks that it is like humiliating oneself by begging and pleading for what is his.

Draupadi fails to understand how her husbands, the Kshatriyas want peace at the price of dishonour, how can they forget their past when they were cheated, insulted and even humiliated by the Kauravas. Moreover she wonders how her husbands can forget the way their wife was treated and the oath taken by them. At this point Deshpande makes the woman in Draupadi realise that 'promises made to women, mean so little.' (240/2) Suddenly the readers start sympathizing with Draupadi who is believed to be an arrogant woman. Deshpande gradually builds her character and gives her individuality by revealing the pain, suffering and anger of a woman.

Finding her husband's unresponsive and passive, Draupadi can no longer control her emotions and anger breaks through her feigned composure and bitterly retorts them that, that is not the language of the Kshatriyas. Krishna tries to placate her and tells her to trust her husbands who will not forget the wrong done to her. Draupadi sarcastically remarks that she cannot trust them because they gambled her away. She was used as an object, a mere property that can be used at convenience. She was made a pawn in the gambling by her own husband, '*dharmraj*' Yudhisthir who is known as a person who has never done a wrong thing neither has he spoken a wrong word. But Draupadi very clearly tells him that 'he did wrong when he gambled his wife away...' (238/2) she was so hurt that day but 'none of them came to me at the end of that terrible day... Not one of them even sent word to me.' (240/2)

Resultantly it is decided, after much debate, by Yudhisthir that 'the Queen wants war and she will have it.' (245/2) In *the Mahabharata* it seems that the Great War takes place because of the strong insistence of Draupadi to avenge the wrong done to her. Draupadi is considered

responsible for taking this deadly decision. But Deshpande's interpretation makes the readers see the other side of this.

This story reveals that they had already decided on war because they wanted their kingdom. They placed the whole burden of blame on Draupadi because they did not want to damage their honour by being responsible for the death of thousands of people in the war. They made her believe that it was her decision to have war. She was thus cheated. The whole episode of the decision on war reveals that Draupadi became a mere pawn at their hands. They played with words with Draupadi and used diplomacy by showing no interest in war. In fact they wanted war but they want Draupadi to take the responsibility of the decision so that their dignity can be maintained. No doubt Draupadi wanted to avenge the wrong done to her but the Pandavas too wanted the war to take back their kingdom. They put on before Draupadi the false mask that they want to go for 'Sandhi'. In fact this way they want to provoke Draupadi who fails to understand their game.

furthermore in the epic, Draupadi has been shown as a spirited woman full of proud but Deshpande's Draupadi is a suffering wife who was deceived by the man Arjuna whom she had garlanded. She recollects the day when she was married to Arjuna but she was asked to accept his brothers along with him as her husbands. She painfully remembers:

It was a brahmin youth I had garlanded and followed out of the *svayamvara* hall. I would have been satisfied to be the wife of that Brahmin boy; but that was not to be my destiny. I became the wife of five men, five princes, Kshatriyas. (239/2)

Deshpande, thus, breaks the stereotype image of wife in Draupadi and makes her character real to us. She becomes a thinking and questioning woman. Deshpande views this character differently and her

interpretation makes Draupadi much more plausible.

How did she making herself available to five man?
How was it to live having no physical or emotional
space for herself. (Deshpande)⁴⁰

Draupadi's pain and anguish of having five husbands and not feeling one with any of them is very well revealed in the following words :

I am Yudhisthir's Queen, not his beloved. He keeps a distance between us... And Bhima treats me like a fragile, precious flower he is afraid to pluck. He cannot see the woman in me, the woman hungry for love, for passion. And Nakul and Sahadev are only boys. But Arjuna... (243/2)

Deshpande's Draupadi feels to be deceived by Arjuna whom she had chosen to be her husband. Her dream was shattered to pieces when she was destined to be the wife of five men. Draupadi says that she had to *bear with* the others for the little time she could get with Arjuna. She wanted to be the beloved of Arjuna but he withdrew himself into his shell because he did not want what he could not share with his brothers. Draupadi of this story is a woman hungry for love, for passion for Arjuna's love but she says, 'Hungers that for me are never satisfied.' (243/2) She was unable to reach to Arjuna's love which Subhadra gets. She envied Subhadra as she was married to one man only. Draupadi stops being stereotype and becomes individual when she thinks,

I have never been in bed with one man; always, every time, I felt the five of you with me. At times I have had a wild desire to ask Subhadra: how is it with him

alone? How does it feel to have Arjuna alone in your bed? How is it to know that his desire for you is a friend not an enemy? (244/2)

Thus in retelling the story of Draupadi, Deshpande raises the question of the place of Indian womanhood in the *Dharma* of the land. Draupadi too asked the same question in the assembly after her husband wagered her and lost: 'What is Dharma? Is it the same for me as it is for men?... Where do I fit into all these games of yours? (Deshpande)⁴¹ Thus, by creating such questioning characters from the myth, she makes them meaningful to our lives.

Shashi Deshpande goes back to the Purana to retell the story of Indra and his wife, Sachidevi in '*Mirrors*'. In the Purana, the victory of Indra against Nahusha has been celebrated. He has been glorified in the poem as the hero who fought against and got victory over the tyrant Nahusha. But through Sachidevi's monologue in *Mirrors*, Shashi Deshpande exposes the real character of Indra from a different angle. Indra of '*Mirrors*' is no hero. As seen by his wife, he is a tyrant, rapist and lustful. Sachidevi kept silence about the truth of her husband's life. But in '*Mirrors*' she breaks the silence.

Sachidevi, in this story, exposes Indra's lustful nature. In the Purana, Sachi withdrew herself behind the mask of the loving wife, into the shell of the dignified, gracious queen, in spite of knowing about Indra's womanising. But Shashi Deshpande has brought out a bewildered woman behind the mask, within the shell. Deshpande shows her in a savage anger, 'I wanted to shout out my rage, to scream, to tear him apart.' (79/1) She feels as if she is not real – 'I was only a painted clay doll. I was not living, I would not die; I would just disintegrate into a bit of colored earth. (80/1)

furthermore Indra emerges as a desperately frightened fugitive who ran away fearing his death because he had killed Vritra and Visvarupa the sons of his enemy who dared to raise his voice against tyranny.

Nahusha took over the throne vacated by Indra. It was then believed that Indra was ashamed of having killed Vritra that he went into hiding to cleanse himself of his sins because he was repentant. But Sachidevi knew the reality. When she went into the hut where Indra had been hiding, she 'knew it was neither guilt nor shame that filled him, but fear.' (83/1) And the readers are come to that Sachi was under the impression that her husband was an innocent man. She believed all that was told to her. She had never questioned her husband, never argued and believed everything told to her by her husband because '.... it was easier.., simpler to be on his side, most comfortable not to argue.' (82/1) Gradually, She learnt the truth. She reveals in this story that she could not change things in her life. She could not stop her husband ravishing unwilling women. In fact, she tells the queen of Nahusha that she had no courage to tell the truth about her husband. She did worst. She admits that she became a mirror by remaining silent.

I became the mirror that showed Indra what he wanted to see, I showed him the image of a hero, the irresistible conqueror of men and of women.

The King who could do no wrong. (82/1)

Sachi is despising herself for not revealing the truth. She feels guilty at 'having sacrificed my humanity to preserve a man's idea of me as a woman.' (81/2) She learns that humanity is more important than womanhood.

Meanwhile, during Indra's disappearance, his place was taken over by Nahusha who started to importune Sachidevi who in turn spurned his proposal. Then fearing that Nahusha might kill Indra and usurp his throne, Sachidevi with the help of Nahusha's wife planned a strategy against Nahusha according to which Sachi accepted Nahusha's proposal on the condition that he had to come to her carried by seven venerable Rishis. To their fear, Nahusha accepted her conditions. Then it

was Agastya Rishi who took the decisive step. On the way to the narrow hill paths Nahusha was thrown out of the palanquin in which he was carried by Agastya and other Rishis in the deep abyss.

It is said in the *Purana* that Nahusha's misrule was ended by Indra and Agastya Rishi. In fact it was the power, the courage given to Sachidevi by Nahusha's Queen that brought the end of Nahusha's misdeeds. But in the *Purana* these queens owe no existence. Even the court poet of Indra glorified, in his poem, Indra only. Shashi Deshpande makes a satiric comment on this aspect of mythology when Sachi tells Nahusha's Queen that-

I think I'm beginning to understand why men of learning, men who write, are given so much importance. It's not only because of their knowledge or their ideas; it's because, by putting these into words, they bring them into existence. Without words, things can be swallowed up in silence. Like you. You have no place in any of the stories that are being told about what happened...as if you never existed. (76/1)

Thus, Deshpande does not just open up a rich world of Indian traditions and mythology but she also puts blood and flesh so necessary to cover the skeleton which she picks up from it. In this story she gives identity to Sachidevi, one of those nameless queens whose identities are buried in silence.

Sachi, in this story, confesses that she disillusioned Indra by not telling him the truth but she thinks that 'It is enough for me that I know the truth.' (62) Moreover she realises that she was earlier living under the splendid shell of the Queen. In other words, she was under the disillusionment which she has been able to destroy with the help of Nahusha's Queen who gave her 'self' back to her. Now without the cover of the Queen, 'I see things

I've never seen before.' (85/1) With this vision, she is able to see Indra as a rapist. 'Yes, raped, I have to use that word now, I can no longer blind myself to what he does.' (86/1) While at the same time she feels terrible to know about her own powerlessness, 'It seems worse to be able to see things and to be unable to do anything.'(86/1) But she knows that perhaps someday the powers will come out of her knowledge about her courage, strength which she displayed once. This way, Deshpande makes Sachidevi, a woman with self-affirmation.

Shashi Deshpande has re-narrated the chapter of the Kurma Avatar from the *Bhagvata Purana in The Story*. This chapter deals with the churning of the ocean by Gods and demons, in order to get nectar out of it. But Deshpande focuses in this story on the arousing of Laxshmi out of the churning of the ocean. It is said in the Kurma Avatar that everybody desired her, gods, demons and mortals as she was so beautiful and a perfect woman too. This particular point is highlighted with a different angle in *The Story* which makes it clear that such a perfect image of woman in myth has been created by men who give them the shape according to their male fantasies, while the image of woman in reality is far removed from this image shaped by male fantasies.

In this story, a woman is shown telling the above story to her grand-daughter who has attained womanhood. She thinks it is the proper age when she should let the truth to be known to her. She begins from long back ago when men and women were partners in the great enterprise of life, when they lived together as friends and companions. But suddenly, due to the rumors of eternal life, men decided to go to search for the secret of eternal life. And for the first time, there was the division between the men and the women. At first their journey had been a disaster as they were deadly affected by some poisonous gas. But as soon as they recovered, the men set off again. This time they returned triumphant and brought bits of colored, sparkling and dazzling stone which made them greedy and possessive. In fact they were affected by these vices because the

poison had not really left men's bodies. Women too could not escape the effects of the poison. Meanwhile, they forgot the real object of their search.

The real part of the story begins when men returned with beautiful females with small waist, high breasts, smooth skins and shining hair, who pleased and attracted men who in turn enjoyed it. Women felt that they lack something which these females had. They could not understand that that was a false relationship between a man and a female. Women became jealous of the females and in order to attract the men, women too started to change themselves. Women forgot their old selves. 'They ceased, in other words, to be women.' (165/2) But this did not last long. 'Everyone longed for a change, some change which they felt would make things better, make them happier.' (165/2)

And then one day the men returned with a mysterious and enigmatic being who had everything that the women and the females had - and more. A beautiful face, a perfect body, gentleness, heavenly fragrance and there was the innocence of a child about her. '

With her coming, almost in an instant, the women they'd lived with for so long turned into dull creatures and the females they'd recently acquired became but poor substitutes for all that the being promised them' (166/2)

Each man thought she was just what he'd always dreamt of. He ignored both the women and the females. But one day the Being vanished. Nobody knew where she had gone, nobody seen her go. The grandmother ends the story here.

The message which the woman wants to convey to her grand-daughter is the theme of the story presented by Deshpande. At the end of the story, the grandmother reveals her intension behind telling the story. She says that the Being was not the real one but

.....created out of men's dreams and desires and that she returned to the fantasy world she had come from. The pity was that though she passed out of the realm of men, she stayed on in their minds with all the qualities they had seen in her. They continued to fantasise about her, they kept looking for her in every woman, in every female, and not finding her, were never satisfied with any of them.(167/2)

Here Deshpande wants to say that such myths condition our ideas so greatly that often it is difficult to disentangle the reality of what we perceive from what we learn of ourselves through them. Truly, our behaviour is often, and to a great extent, dictated to by them. In *The Story* it is said that the females and the women continued to measure themselves by the yardstick of that radiant and lost Being, the creation of male fantasies. Most of them tried to change themselves to satisfy their men's fantasies. The grandmother in this story becomes the mouthpiece of Deshpande who speaks through this character that

...the Being whom the men still carry in their dreams, the Being so many women still want to be, the Being they still try to emulate, is not real... that this Being was only a fantasy, created out of men's desires, their dreams (168/2)

The grandmother wants her grand-daughter to tell her next generation the same story so that they would be able to know the truth, so that their daughters would know that slavishness and dependence had not always been part of them, that few of them kept alive the truth of themselves, they never let themselves change, trying to become something they were

never meant to be.

In the story, *The Stone Women* the self – affirmation of the wife and her journey from the periphery to the centre, is very definite and apparent. The young honeymooning wife in the story while sight-seeing finds the paintings of

lush-bodied, high breasted woman...leaning provocatively... looking the mirror, doing the hair, playing on musical instruments, dancing (71/1)

on the wall. She ponders over the 'narcissistic existence of these women.' (72/1) For her they don't look real, a picture far removed from the picture one has of women's daily lives in this country. The sculptures of the figures of women in the panels on the wall of the temple are carved with astonishingly beautiful delicate details. Then she realizes that these women in stone are sculpted by men. They don't look real because men shaped them from their imagination. The wife in the story realizes that they are projected thus to satisfy the animal feelings of males, and women through the ages have surrendered their dignity to ingratiate themselves with the men, their masters. Here Sashi Deshpande says,

I imagine that this kind of an idea of women exists in literature everywhere, especially in stories which.. were told by men in exclusive male company. The truth, the sad truth, is that most of the literature has been the creation of men. And, for centuries, this limitation has never been understood and the picture presented by this literature has been accepted as the true and the entire picture; not only men, but women as well, have taken their

idea of women from here. (Deshpande)⁴²

The wife in the story is overcome by a sudden fear as if she is becoming one of those stone women, a woman frozen for all time into a pose she has been willed into by her creator. Suddenly she becomes aware of her 'self'. She recollects from her personal experience that she is forbidden from humming even film jingles when she is thoughtful. Her husband never catches her. ' 'you'll never win,' he says triumphantly.' (71/1) She is forced to put away 'silver bracelet' that was like a 'part of myself ' because it was 'ugly' according to the husband. Her small possessions she had been surrendering slowly but definitely and moving towards the marginal position. She wonders if she too is like the painted female figures who exist only as sex objects to satisfy man's primitive desires.

The protagonist of this story does not want to be carved according to the male fantasies. She has her own shape i.e. her identity and she is not ready to reshape it. She wants to preserve it. She returns to the hotel room, a changed woman. When her husband 'while nuzzling into her body' comments 'you're wearing something new, I don't like it. It hides you,' (75/1) she refuses to concede and replies back, ' It's comfortable, I like it' 'We go on talking but I can see a *faint shadow* on his face.' (75/1)

The wife in the story asserts herself but not at the cost of relationship. Slowly she melts into her husband's embrace indicating quite clearly that she will go through the husband-wife relationship on her own terms. Though she views her husband's displeasure, she decides to overlook it. The young wife is neither aggressive nor foolish enough to disturb the fragile peace of marital life But she is strong enough to define herself and vindicate her stand like another young wife Jayu in *It was the Nightingale*.

Thus Shashi Deshpande in three of the stories has gone back to *the Mahabharata*, one of the greatest epics of India. *The Mahabharata*, whose core story is more than 5000 years old, which is the longest poetical

work of the word's literature, tells innumerable stories. But in many of these stories, women, though very much present, have had no voice. Deshpande has lent voices in *The Inner Rooms* to Amba, and in *Hear Me, Sanjaya* to Kunti two very famous characters of the epic, and allows them finally, to explain their actions. In *The Last Enemy*, Deshpande looks into the heart of Duryodhana, the villain in *the Mahabharata*, and gives him a chance to articulate his own inner turmoil at the end of the great war.

As the writer, political journalist Nayantara Sahgal says it is very essential that our epics are re-examined by women. 'Through such re-writing... new Sitas and Savitris will arise, stripped of false sanctity and crowned with the human virtue of courage. Then at last we will know why they did what they did...' (Sahgal)⁴³

Thus, the stories *The Inner Rooms*, *The Last Enemy* and *Hear Me, Sanjaya* have echoes from the great epic, *the Mahabharata*. But they have contemporary, contextual and problematic dimensions. The writer's use of mythic material requires the reader to do his homework in order to get the most out of Deshpande's works. It is as if the writer is saying that she will present her material in all its depth and complexity and will take no short cuts. In this way she has created a familiar world anew in which authentic experiences of the interior landscape of Indian women is powerfully projected through mythological re-narration.

From the foregoing discussion of the re-narration of the stories from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, it can be said that Shashi Deshpande sees them differently, perhaps reshapes them according to its needs. In doing so, she doesn't reject the ideals, but makes it clear that we can't approximate to these pictures of ideal womanhood. She is, in fact, not rejecting the myths, but gives a meaningful and creative reinterpretation of them. As she says,

It is not the myths that are the problem; myths are both necessary and relevant to human lives, they out of the reduction of the characters in myths to

stereotypes, in making them a kind of final statement, rather than complex, questing characters. (Deshpande)⁴⁴

Deshpande explores the myths and provides flesh and blood to stereotype image of woman painted in them. Her interpretation makes the women much more real and plausible. Kunti, Sita, Amba, Sachi and Draupadi become human, persons any woman could identify with. Thus, in Shashi Deshpande, who uses myth purposively, literature acquires simultaneity with the present. One can find in these stories and analogy to some situations in one's life, some solution to the problem we are faced with, often, problems, we have not been able to frame ourselves.

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