CHAPTER TWO
TRANSCENDING THE BOUNDARIES OF FEMINITY

The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it.

Roseanne Barr

For ages, women lived under the protection of either parents or husband or her children. This pattern of living, though it made her life safe, and smooth, in reality, drove her into an unappealing state of slavery, and dependence. The new education has awakened her to real self. As a result of this, she starts longing for independent, and self-reliant status in life. And in order to achieve this, she begins to shed her shyness, and shun miserable surrender to the protective cover provided by man.

The modern, educated young woman questions the man’s wilful unconcern for woman’s wishes, her likes, and dislikes. Until the sixties, and seventies man alone was looked upon as bread-winner, and woman was confined to the household. In the modern era, woman too makes money independently. She not only earns money but also attends to her household tasks. Undoubtedly, the modern, educated young woman’s struggle against the age-old slavery, suffering, and suppression is a welcome development. But, this striving of the modern woman to be free, and self-reliant is often harmed by her timidity, and hesitancy. In course of this crusade, she suffers from certain weaknesses, and complexes which have been very honestly highlighted by the Indian women novelists. Their heroines are all eager to retain their individuality in the clutches of disintegrating, and troublesome forces that threaten their identity.

One of the major concerns of the contemporary literature all over the world has been to highlight the plight of women, their increasing problems, their physical,
financial, and emotional exploitation, and their mental anguish in the male dominated society in every sphere of life. Feminist issues transcend all limits of nationality, race, creed, etc. Women writers have been echoing the feeling of marginality, and expressing their revolt against the purely masculine world. The Indian women writers stressed their need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position. The new woman voices a note of resentment as they fell stifled under the oppressive restrictions. She has her notions of life as portrayed by women writers.

It is believed, accepted, and inexorably asserted that the presence of women in the speculative field either from the domestic perspective or from the professional strata is undeniable, and irrevocable. Today, women have achieved her status, her suppressed voice no more remained so. The dignity of women is affirmed. The woman has a greater sense of social responsibility, and a greater readiness to author her own authority. A woman writer, being a woman, can write more explicitly about a woman, and her sufferings in the midst of male-chauvinistic society.

Not all literature written by women is feminist or even about women. Neither is the scope of women’s writing restricted to allegories of gender oppression. Women’s experiences were used as a resource for critical discussion, making it possible for women to share their dimensions of lives they had earlier kept secret or felt too insecure to confront or even recognize. The women writers encouraged women to focus on, and articulate anger, and dissatisfaction, and evolved through discussion new interpretations of their experience. Through their writings they spread the message of what basically feminism stands for, which actually is very broad. They proclaimed that feminism means putting an end to all sufferings of women in silence.
Feminism stands a socio-economic movement, demanding legal, and political rights for women. The term denotes the movement for women’s equality, legal rights, and about women living on equal terms with man, and not pushed down, by law or culture into a subservient role. It is an anti-musculine movement of the women, by the women, and for the women. The history of the modern western feminist movement is generally broken down into three waves dealing with different aspects of feminist issues. The first wave movement comprises the one from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century dealing mainly with suffrage, working conditions, and educational rights for women. The second wave belonged to the 1960s, and the 1980s, and dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as culture inequalities, and the role of women in society. The third wave of feminism belonged to the late 1980s to the first decade of the twenty first century, and is seen as both the continuation of the second wave of celebrating, and asserting womanhood, and feminine experience, thus emphasizing the difference as against the stereotype of main stream literature. The feminist reading has targeted certain features of social reality as intolerable, and need to be rejected. The themes explored include patriarchy, sexual objectification, and oppression. In literary theory, it challenges the patriarchal canons, and the ‘third world feminism’ is explored.

The feminist prospects, and the feminist movements in the West have had some influence on the women’s movements in developing countries like India. Unlike the western feminist movements, India’s movement was initiated by men, and later joined by women. The efforts of these men included abolishing Sati, which was a widow’s death by burning on her husband’s funeral pyres, abolishing the disfiguring of widows, banning the marriage of upper caste Hindu widows, the custom of child marriage, promoting women’s education, obtaining legal rights for women to own
properties. They also took pains to regulate the law to acknowledge women’s status by granting their basic rights in matters such as adoption, religious law, and expectations or ‘personal laws’ enumerated by specific religion, often in conflict with the Indian Constitution, eliminating rights, and powers women legally should have.

However, the Indian women’s struggle for emancipation could not mimic its western counterpart for obvious reasons. Due to historical, and cultural specificities of the region, the feminist movement in India had to think in terms of its own agendas, and strategies. The problems, and predicaments peculiar to the Indian Women found artistic expression in the Indian Literature in English since the 1970s.

Shashi Deshpande is one among the most important, and versatile Indian English woman writers. Her novels, and short stories explore the psyche of middle class Indian woman. The reasons for Shashi Deshpande preferring the middle class woman may be her own middle class background, her pre-occupation with the social forms at work in society, the middle class woman becoming a representative of a large part of contemporary Indian society.

With rare sensitivity, and depth, she portrays the dilemma of the Indian woman trapped between her own aspirations as an individual, and the forces of patriarchy which confines her. Shashi Deshpande’s novels concentrate on the domestic situation, and the man-woman relationship within marriage. The total in-depth experience of woman in all her roles, their inner assets, achievements, problems, frustrations, and their intrinsic impact on the future generations cannot be summed up, introspected, and documented completely.

Shashi Deshpande’s characters occupy a pivotal position in her novels. Her characters are modern ones. They are written in a psycho analytical way. They have
strength of their own, and inspite of challenges, and hostilities remain uncrushed. The characters are sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant, and creative. They revolt against the traditional parental family, and run away from the suffocated atmosphere of the narrow minded society.

We can trace three distinct phases of women writing in India which in a way follows the three waves in feminism. The first phase is woman’s entry into male domain. The women writings have influenced from the past portraying the character of the women as being triggered to the mechanism of male chauvinistic society. The women have forayed into the male territory, asserting their identity into a new dimensional capacity, and triggered to occupy the space led by the male institutions.

The second phase is resistance, and questioning the patriarchs. Socialism, and feminism emphasizes the ways in which discrimination against women is manifested, and how this can be resisted. The women attempted to integrate themselves into a public sphere, a male tradition, and many felt a conflict of ‘obedience, and resistance’. Women questioned, challenged the male institutions, and this appeared that they violated certain social standard, and ethics of the prevalent traditional society that embittered a vague sense of guilt. They challenged the male authority, voiced up, and protested, and consequently suffered inevitably for which they ended up their life tragically, and yet victoriously.

The third phase is celebrating the ‘self’. At the third phase, the contemporary feminist writing glorifies the status, a woman has achieved. We see the woman celebrating herself, and creating the new feminist aesthetics by asserting the freedom as her birthright. She proclaims the feminine sensibility where she is praised
for her aesthetic values, and explicit ideas that deserve the worthy of thought, and praise.

It is possible to trace the chief concern of the three stages mentioned above in the works of Shashi Deshpande’s novels. Shashi Deshpande’s contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle class woman. In an interview with Vanamala Viswanatha published in Literature Alive, she says: “I realize that I write what I write because I have to. Because it is within me. It’s one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that I think is my contribution to Indian writing” (4).

Further in the same interview Shashi Deshpande makes it clear by saying, “It all starts with people. For example, The Dark Holds No Terrors came to me when I saw a couple” (8). The novel The Dark Holds No Terrors, rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a wife’s existence is to please her husband. It portrays the protagonist’s fight to survive in a world that offers no easy outs. The story line is mainly on the waking up of acquisitive knowledge that there is more to life than dependency on husband or parents. The woman has established herself as an autonomous being. She is free from the restrictions imposed by the society, culture, and also from her own fears, and guilt. The novel also transcends feminine constraints, and raises issues, which the human beings in general encounter in their lives.

Saritha the protagonist of The Dark Holds No Terrors is born in an orthodox Brahmin family. Her parents are highly orthodox, and they live according to their traditional beliefs. As a child, Saritha is not given the proper maternal attention, and
care. Even at a very young age Saritha realizes that her mother considered her inferior to her brother.

In one of the recapitulations, Saritha records her conversation with her mother:

“Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get darker”.

“Who cares?”

“We have to care if you don’t, we have to get you married”.

“I don’t want to get married”.

“Will you live with us all your life?”

“Why not?”

“You can’t”.

“And Dhruva?”

“He’s different. He is a boy”. (45)

Saritha craves for love, understanding, affection, and recognition from her parents. Saritha’s mother imposes restrictions on Saritha at all possible times. Even for the family photograph she prefers Dhruva to Saritha:

...the day came back to her with an astonishing clarity. And they had gone to the studio to be photographed. But in the photograph of the two of them, he looked solemn, something lost and bewildered in the eyes. And she skinny, smiling in a painful attempt to please the photographer showing gaps in her teeth, one hand on Dhruva’s shoulder. (58)

Shashi Deshpande presents us with more complex relationships between the women in her novels – mothers, and daughters.
Sarla Palkar a critic points out in *The Post modern Indian English Novel Interrogating the 1980s and 1990s*:

Deshpande presents us with different facets of the mother daughter relationship, which is a bitter-sweet experience, riddled with tensions and conflicts, love and cruelty, joy and pain. The conflict between the mother and the daughter can be, in most cases, just a conflict between tradition and modernity, or a clash between the claims of selfhood and the need for love in relation-ships. A number of mothers or mother-figures have the patriarchal ideology so ingrained in them that they treat the daughters as second class citizens and this often leads to bitterness and estrangement between the mother and the daughter.

(171)

The childhood experience of watching her brother sink into water, and his death gives Saritha a sense of guilt that she is responsible for the death of her brother. It is enhanced by her mother’s words. Saritha’s mother becomes very upset when her son Dhruva dies. She is angry with Saritha for she has witnessed his drowning. She even shouts at Saritha:

“You killed your brother. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?”

Saritha replies, “I didn’t. It was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn’t and I ran away. Yes, I ran away, I admit that. But I didn’t kill him. . . . And I could do nothing with the sorrow but bear it. It was mine and mine alone. I could share it with no one.” (146)
Shashi Deshpande has assertively exhibited the plight of the girl-child who has to endure the trauma of gender-discrimination, and social conditioning, and is made to feel inferior to the progeny since her childhood. Marriage is set as an ultimate goal for girls. Saru’s confrontation with her mother reaches its peak when she decides to marry Manu. Her mother rejected her marrying Manu as he is from a lower caste.

What caste is he?
I don’t know.
A Brahmin?
Of course not.
Then, cruelly . . . his father keeps a cycle shop.
Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they? (96)

Against her mother’s wish Saritha marries Manu. Her married life with Manu does not run smoothly for a long time, and it makes her think that even pleasure is unreal, and like an illusion whereas grief seems more real having weight, and substance. Saritha is more hurt when she hears her mother saying, “Let her know more sorrow that she has given me” (101). At one point she even thinks that she is really unhappy, and destroyed in her marital life as her mother had cursed her.

The real fact is that Saritha being a lady doctor is always given more importance. People come to her, surround her, ask for, and respect her, and it is something which her husband cannot digest. This proves how the women have triggered into male institutions which were predominantly meant for men.

Deshpande writes about human relationships – the relationship between husband and wife, mother and daughter, and brother and sister. The struggles of these characters are those of ordinary women fighting to prove their identity, and to make
the society accept them not as stereotypes but as themselves. According to Deshpande a feminine self should be a fusion of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity, fantasy and reality, rebellion and reconciliation. Deshpande’s protagonists are concerned with a woman’s external quest for an authentic selfhood, and an understanding of the existential problems of life, and is excited to retain her individuality in the teeth of disintegrating, and divisive forces that threaten her identity as a woman.

Saritha, by marrying Manu, has an everlasting break in the relationship with her mother. At a point, Manu, fears that cutting Saritha off from her parents will be throbbing for her. But Saritha, on the other hand, feels quite separated from her parents. She explains this in a more logical manner:

Have you seen a baby being born? Do you know, Manu, how easy it is to cut the umbilical cord and separate the baby from the mother? Ligate, cut and its done. There’s scarcely any bleeding either. It’s as if nature knows the child must be detached from the parent. No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding. (39)

In Saritha’s role as a career woman, she is no longer happy in their untidy apartment, and she prefers to move into something more civilized, and beautiful. She feels that the flat in which she, and Manu have been living all these years is constricted, and also Manu’s earnings now make her feel that it scarcely covers her needs. Her works keep Saritha away from Manu for longer hours, and she reaches home late at night for which he sulks. His ego is hurt by her success. He feels inferior, and this sense of inferiority makes him cruel in his behaviour. Though he is normal by day, he turns an unfaithful rapist at night, and tries to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults upon Saritha. Her dream of finding happiness in marriage is
soon devastated. Now Saritha does not share good, and cordial relationship with her
husband. She scorns the word ‘love’, and refuses to consider that such a thing can
never exist between man, and woman.

Gradually Saritha changes her attitude towards Manu, and her marital life.
The world around her, and her place in her life becomes so immaterial that Manu’s
position, and place in her life becomes moderately unimportant. Saritha views sex as
a dirty word. With her work pressure, she recoils from Manu’s love-making, and he
takes her denial of sex as a rejection of himself. Saritha however, is unhappy over the
circumstances. She is so distressed that to save her marriage, she is prepared to
sacrifice her productive profession. Saritha gathers up all her valour, and tells Manu,
“I want to stop working. I want to give it all up.... my practice, the hospital,
everything” (79). Further she likes: “A mother in an ad, in a movie, dressed in a
crisply starched, ironed sari. Wife and mother, loving and beloved. A picture of
grace, harmony and happiness. Could I not achieve that?” (80).

Saritha just wants to be his wife so that he does not dislike her any longer.
Though in the beginning, his beastly behaviour, and sexual aggression confused her,
now she has reached a stage when she is unable to allow it any longer. In an Indian
society, after marriage women have to mould, and transform themselves to suit the
interests of their male counterparts, and in this process suppress their self-identity.

Saritha cannot stand his husband’s brutal behaviour, and she is prepared to
surrender everything as long as he leaves her alone. But Manu disapproves Saritha’s
idea of parting her job. When he asks her to go on with her responsibilities, Saritha
feels that it is absolute necessity that holds them together.
She thinks deeply, and finds that she has every reason to break away from her marriage:

She knew she could not go on, either. If only she had belonged to another time, where a woman had no choice but to go on! Human nature may not change, but isn’t there such a thing as a frame of mind, a way of thinking, which is shaped by the age you live in? It was easier for women in those days to accept, not to struggle, because they believed, they knew, there was nothing else for them. And they called that Fate. (70)

She also says to herself: “I have to orient myself, I have to be more sure, more certain” (69). Saritha establishes herself as a career-oriented woman, and her job satisfies her self-esteem.

Saritha’s dilemma is contrary to the assertion of many feminists that financial independence brings security to women. Saritha thinks that it is easier for the women in the past to admit such way of life for they did not have to struggle, and therefore has no other choice. There was nothing else for them except to quit themselves to their fate. But in Saritha’s case, her way of thinking is accustomed by the age she lives in. What really irritates Saritha is Manu’s supposition that marriage gives him a lifelong right for affection, love, and respect. Saritha has established herself as a successful doctor, and earns bread, and butter for the family. This state of affair sets the ball of disunity in their relationship continuing, which gradually acquires drive beyond anyone’s control.
Saritha has primarily been a display model to Manu, but later, Manu becomes an outright cruel person, and starts wounding Saritha in a way called Monstrous onslaught on her person, and personality:

He attacked me like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this . . . this man hunting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body. I could do nothing against him. I couldn’t fight back. I couldn’t shout or cry. I was so afraid the children in the next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure. (201)

The husband whom she submits her entire self to, tortures her because he is the victim of inferiority complex. Her husband vents his frustration on Saritha in the form of sexual sadism. She does not provoke to oppose excessiveness of her husband. Rather she bears it silently, and feels bad inside. The novelist admitting the existing vulnerable, and pathetic conditions of Indian women tells in an interview with Prasanna Sree: “The women had no choice but to submit to accept, and I had often wondered… have they been born without wills of life-time of disuse?” (6). Siddhartha Sharma passing the remarks on the novels of Shashi Deshpande writes:

She has constructed motifs of patriarchy and oppression by employing the methods of negation and affirmation. Her protagonists are victims of Indian patriarchy and her initial submission resists the oppressive situation, thereby reflecting the author’s view that a woman must assert herself within marriage to preserve her individuality. (111)

Manu is a typical traditional husband who always prefers to beat the centre, and his wife on the side-line. Saritha hates Manu’s showy attitude. Her understanding is that Manu needs a woman who is submissive, and obedient.
Silently Saritha bears Manu’s cruelty as though a wall of stillness has risen between them. She fears that a stage may be reached when she may be immured alive so that she may die a slow, and agonizing death. She realizes that her feelings have had no effect on Manu who is positive during the day time, and behaves like a beast during night times. She is unable to put the two men together, and regrettably this dichotomy never ceases. After an alert effort in evaluating the relative merits of a love marriage, and an arranged marriage, she certainly compromises with her fate for having opted for a love marriage, and for which she has herself to change.

On hearing about her mother’s death Saritha feels like seeing her father. This desire is annoyed by Manu’s behaviour, and hence she goes to him after a gap of fifteen years. It is from this parental care, and protection she had walked out once with a vow never to come back. However she returns to seek refuge, unable to bear the barbarism of her husband.

Saritha is caught in a conflict between familial security, and individual freedom, and she is constantly in quest of refuge. She needs to find someone who can give them refuge. Thus Saritha presented in this novel is an incomplete self, a partial being. She is in need of someone to shelter her, and give her refuge. The futility of her search becomes obvious to her when she hears from her father what her mother had commented on listening to the end of the war in *Mahabharata*:

> It was the episode of Duryodhana in the Mahabharata, Duryodhana at the very end of the battle. When the Kauravas are defeated and Duryodhana finds he is almost the only one of them left, he leaves the battlefield and goes into a lake. He waits there for the Pandavas to come and kill him that’s what all of us have to face at the end. That we are alone. We have to be alone. (194)
Saritha expects a lot of compassion from her father after having become a hapless victim of her absurd choice of a love marriage. Saritha yearns for refuge, and emotional attachment. She wants her father to support her, and her feelings raised against Manu’s viciousness. She even rehearses these thoughts, and recites them as if she was reading out a medical history of an unknown patient. But when the real moment comes, she blurts loudly, and offensively, “My husband is a sadist” (199).

On listening to Saritha her father simply leaves her, and goes away. In her parent’s house, Saritha lives a lonesome, and lonely life. She wants her father to listen to her but her father’s unchanging attitude saddens her. She thinks that they are like people that “are fated to be strangers” (105). Many times she wants to tell her father, “Baba, I’m unhappy. Help me. Baba, I’m in trouble. Tell me what to do” (44). But her approach remains inside her. At times she doubts for having come to her parents house, as she is reminded of her children, her practice, and her patients. In all these memories her husband does not figure at all. Her visit to her father’s house is a kind of escape from the sadist husband, and her loveless marriage. It is a kind of comfort from her hectic daily routine too. Staying with her father who makes no demands on her, and on her position is a relief to Saritha. The whole day in her parents’ house is completely committed to her own desires, and comforts. She also memoirs the kind of life she has lived as a child.

To Saritha, the idea of men going to work, children going to school, and women staying at home to work, clean, scrub, and sweep is appealing as she finds a kind of harmony in these responsibilities performed by women who stay at home. This kind of pleasure as Saritha discovers in her new routine life makes her feel that
she has a totally new life, and now as Saritha calls herself a totally distorted person, and nothing of the old Saritha is left.

At her father’s place, slowly Saritha loses the knowledge of her femininity. She stops conviction about herself as a woman. The doctor in her is more often seen that the wife or mother in her.

At the end, Saritha’s father urges her to confront reality. He tells her: “But where will you go, Saru? . . . Are you scared of him? . . . You can’t run away this way. . . . Don’t turn your back on things again. Turn round, and look at them. Meet him. You can’t run away this way” (216). He advises her to face the situation:

Give him a chance, Saritha. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what’s wrong. Tell him all that you told me... Don’t turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him. (216)

Saritha’s father is very sure about how Saritha should behave. He appeals to her not to go away without meeting her husband. Though Saritha thinks that Manu is responsible for devastating her dream of happiness in marriage, and though she wants to be free from her horrifying loveless trap, she feels guilty of her share in the breaking off of their marriage. She puts off the moment of argument, not only with her parents but also with herself. It is Madhav who stays with her father, makes her realize the reality when he says, “I can’t spoil my life because of that boy. It’s my life, after all” (208). Though Saritha considers these words to be meaningless, soon she realizes that if a young boy like Madhav can think of his life, why can’t she who is a successful doctor, think of herself, and her life.
Saritha now feels that she has to face the situation daringly, and it is she who has to decide about herself:

Besides, one cannot go back in life, one has to continue on the path of one’s own choice where ever it leads.... . . . We come into this world alone and go out of it alone. The period in between is short. And all those ties we cherish as eternal and long lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop. (208)

Further Saritha realizes: “There is no need to escape from the darkness or curse the darkness. The dark holds no terrors. The terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them with us, and like traitors, they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch, and maul” (85). Darkness makes one unable to see things clearly, and objectively. Darkness is also a source of constant fear when viewed from outside. It hampers the outlook of the inside, but it holds no terror in itself. The darkness of mind ceases to be terrible the moment one is prepared to face the situation. Saritha has begun to understand things as she finds that the dark is not terrible, as awareness draws upon her, she becomes aware that neither private life nor the wall of silence shall be of any help to her. She decides to speak of her being, the individual ruins will not be taken away by anyone, for now she hates to be touched.

To Saritha, there is awareness that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. By gaining the identity as a woman, a new Saritha is identified to whom the past was always withdrawing, and there was no future. Saritha now learns to see actuality clearly. “No, I’m a realist. We are realists. We deal with the ultimate reality.......the human body. We come into this world alone, and go out of it alone” (208). Saritha is in the process of gaining her identity as an individual.
Saritha is brave enough to recognize that:

Walking along a road, going on and on knowing, with a sinking feeling that something, somebody awful and frightening, was waiting for her at the end of it. But it was important to go on just the same, not to stop, even though there was doom waiting for her. (210)

Saritha understands that it is she, who is self-assertive. Finally, she realizes that if all is alone what else is there to fear. By following her father’s suggestion she has already broken from her past. Stimulated by the roots of Indian culture, Saritha realizes now that she is no longer a “guilty sister, undutiful daughter, the unloving wife” (220). In spite of all such awareness, and her father’s request of “don’t do it again” (216) she packs up to her husband’s place. Thus Saritha emerges as a new woman by transcending the boundaries of feminity who can control herself, and shed her meekness: “My life is my own. . . . It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing puppet, standing . . . between areas of darkness. If I have been a puppet it is because I made myself one” (220). Describing emancipated women, Maria Mies in the work *Indian Women and Patriarchy* says:

The non-conforming conduct of the women is the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman, but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives. (32)

This is exactly true of Saritha who is the diplomat of middle-class working women in modern India.
Sigmund Freud when speaking about psychoanalytic theory in *A Life Of Our Time* argued:

The mind consists of the conscious mind, which contains the thoughts and beliefs of which we are aware. The unconscious mind, by contrast, is a repository for repressed memories and unexpressed desires, and problems with the unconscious mind can lead to problems with behaviour and emotional regulation. (77)

In the following paragraphs the researcher analyses the character of the protagonist, Saritha in the light of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic tool ‘defense mechanism’ to study the inner struggles of Saritha. Sigmund Freud’s defense mechanisms were further developed, and codified by his daughter Anna Freud. When speaking about the concept of defense mechanism in *Personality Theories*, Anna Freud quotes:

Freud's defense mechanisms - which are still a part of contemporary psychology - are tools of the unconscious mind that are designed to alter reality in order to avoid pain and suffering. Repression, for example, is the tendency to forget troubling events, while projection is the tendency to project one's own traits onto someone else. (23)

Saritha adopts the defense mechanism ‘isolation’. She rebels against traditions, but ultimately tries to negotiate with the exiting reality. This is because, Saritha lives in transitional society. Saritha passes from illusion to reality, from frustration to submission, and as the wheel finally comes round, she makes an ultimate attempt to settle herself. All through her life, Saritha avoids to face the moment of confrontation. There has been no room for open discussion but she has
waited for the solution to take its own turn. By making use of the defense mechanism ‘isolation’ Saritha gains insight into her own skewed reactions, and realize what transformations need to occur with respect to her intrapersonal relations. Saritha at the end, is ready to have a life outside the family, and face the tough realities of life thereby transcending the boundaries of femininity.

Saritha desires to liberate herself from the chains of tradition, and exercise her right to reveal her individual capabilities, and realise her feminine self through identity-declaration, and self-assertion. S. P. Swain in Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors: Saru’s Feminine Sensibility said: “Saru’s (Saritha) journey is a journey from self-alienation to self-identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self” (39).

Saritha’s ‘isolation’ results in emerging of an emancipated woman. Shashi Deshpande’s feminism is certainly not pessimistic or nihilistic. She analyses the universal significance of the woman’s problem, thereby transcending the feminist perception. She is quite down to earth in her feminist approach to the woman’s problem. For though she is aware of the significance of the Indian woman’s predicament, and the generation - old struggles behind it, she also believes that a positive change in women’s social status cannot materialize without bringing about a change in woman’s mindset first. The woman’s increasing involvement rather than aloofness in her predicament as expressed in Deshpande’s novels reveals the positive, humanistic side of her feminism. Hence, Shashi Deshpande rightly considers her role as an Indian feminist as one of a ‘humanist feminists’.

The next novel taken for study is Roots and Shadows. The new education which the modern woman has received gradually made her conscious of futility of the
various long-preserved notions, and taboos about the woman, and she has started opposing, and breaking them. This new woman is Indu, the woman protagonist of this selected novel, *Roots and Shadows*. Indu, an educated young woman, is highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent, and complete in herself. She brushes aside all the age-old beliefs, and superstitions widespread in the society.

*Roots and Shadows* is an account of a woman’s journey for fetching out answers to some questions that are almost universal in nature. The novel deals with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality, and to realize her freedom. At this point it is important to determine the nature, and background of the questions, and issues Shashi Deshpande raises in the novel, primarily by means of the introspective examination through which the main protagonist, Indu, passes. The relationship, family structure, and the social background of the novel provide a fitting, and very credible stage upon which the action unfolds. Indu, the protagonist, is caught up in a conflict between her family, and her professional role, between individual aspiration, and social demands, and also between self-expression, and social disgrace.

In this novel we come to learn how Indu is able to free herself from the suffocating traditional constraints, and achieve her individuality. For Indu it is difficult to move towards emotional growth, peace, and fulfilment; she must necessarily seek within, and without herself not only to look for answers but also as a first step to identify the source of her disappointment, and mental chaos. Only then she can hope to be at peace with herself, and with her world. She states, “Now I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges off myself” (6). And similarly her belief that even if the house is demolished, the feelings, the emotions, the passions which the house has sheltered would not cease to exist. These aspects of the family would keep on holding her in spite of all assaults coming from different directions.
We do get from this novel a strong sense of the ambivalence that Indu feels towards both her family, and the house which has protected her. This brings us to the other main issues confronting her. When she was young, she left the house full of bitterness, and rebellion, determined to prove for herself, and the family that this was not her home. It is a rejection of the family in the most emphatic terms possible. This particular phase of her life gives her enough experience to know the world which exists outside the four walls.

However, in the course of introspection, and self-analysis Indu comes to realize that there is indeed a comfort in living as part of the family, whatever its level or quality, and that the house she ran away from is still the one she thinks of everyday for the first few moments. It takes her no efforts to fall into the rhythm of life at her family’s house despite the number of years she has been away from it. She does also realize that her efforts at making a family, a home consisting of just Jayant, and herself, are not really following. Her endeavour to draw a magic circle around the two of them is meaningless because she can neither keep the world away nor can she find the happiness, and satisfaction in just this one relationship. She discovers that a nuclear family misses out on a number of different relationships which a large family such as the one she grew up in provides. She thinks that maybe her home has always been with her family. Indu’s search for a home is symbolic of a deeper dissatisfaction with her marriage. She loves Jayant, and to her this love means surrendering herself body, and soul to him. However, she feels that Jayant is not dedicated to this relationship to the same degree as she is, and, understandably enough, she finds Jayant’s indifference the main source of her anxiety, and distress.

In her yester-years as a motherless child, Indu was tended by the members of the joint family who never denied her any amount of care, and affection. Old uncle,
Kaka, Atya, and other family members always cushioned her position in the family. But now she finds the dominant Akka, and even the family to be a barrier in achieving her goal of attaining independence, and completeness. Indu, from a very tender age, has always hated Akka for her bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.

Indu rebels against the suffocating authority of Akka, and the repressive atmosphere of the family where women have no choice but to submit, and accept their lot. Right from the childhood, it is dinned into Indu’s mind by the women members of the family that she as a female, and that she has to be traditional to the pattern of behaviour expected of females, but Indu resents this:

As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. (158)

Indu rebels against the narrow conventions, and more particularly the autocratic authority of Akka on matters of education, love, and marriage. In her conversation with Geetha Gangadharan published as Denying the Otherness, Shashi Deshpande opines, “We are shaped by our childhood and our parents” (229).

Indu’s husband, Jayant, symbolizes the burden of the unconscious expectations that a society places upon a woman, especially when she is married. Deshpande shows her appreciation of the fact that in respect of expectations it is a woman who is solely blamed, though nothing substantial or adverse is said against a man in spite of all his indifference, and detachment. However, Indu does realize that despite his visible detachment, Jayant is not strong enough to endure with equanimity
her complete withdrawal from him. Nevertheless, in spite of Indu’s rebellious, and questioning nature throughout her childhood, her introspection shows her that she is trying to conform to the image of the ideal wife. Her reasons might be different, but then again they might not be so. This is a disquieting realization to her, and she does not want to turn into a woman who submerges her own self in her husband’s. Her idea of being complete vanishes after her marriage. After this dishonesty, and disillusionment, she went back into the conservative ways of life. She behaves like the traditional Indian wife. She says:

Marriage makes me so dependent. When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant, when I undress, I think of him always what he wants, what he would like. What would please him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be ... Have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own.(2)

As far as Indu’s expectations from Jayant go, the central expectation remains a wish that he would learn to give as much as Indu does. She, however, realizes that, maybe, her husband is just incapable of giving that much, and that he does love her in his own strange way. There have been other incidents that lead to a hiatus in their relationship, at least in so far as Indu is concerned.

One of the most important aspects is his seeming betrayal at the time of her professional crisis. She offers to resign from her magazine when she finds she is not doing anything meaningful; instead, she is only perpetuating the self-serving lies of various influential people. This is at the core of her dissatisfaction with her career as well. The fact that she is not really doing anything meaningful has begun to rankle in her subconsciously. However, Jayant does not understand the delicacy of her situation, and to the contrary, advises her to continue with her job. Besides, there is
also the crucial issue of nurturing a family with children. Jayant is not interested in having children, and in the course of every discussion on this topic postpones it by saying that they do not have enough resources to look after a child properly.

It is true that Indu herself is ambivalent about this particular issue, for she often feels scared of the responsibility that would revolve upon her in that contingency, and still she, even if vaguely, resents this attitude of not having any child at all. Nevertheless, the very strain of maintaining a façade before Jayant on this problem in the course of their life together is emotionally exhausting. It is not at all palatable for her honest, forthright nature to continue with this pretence or any other kind of pretence for a certain measure of time. This naturally leads to another layer of resentment, and anger in her.

Yet another theme that frequently recurs in this novel is that of freedom, independence, and detachment. Since her childhood Indu has rebelled against the rigid dictates of the family matriarch, Akka. She gets a taste of what society expects from a woman through the way the various people in the family try to mould her to the well established cast of traditional household. She is made to feel like a criminal for being inquisitive, and intelligent, for being wilful, passionate about things, and a non-conformist. Her only support is her old uncle, Kaka, and her aunt, Atya. However, she is too young to value their advice at that time, and so yearns for freedom.

In an effort to counter the pain of disillusionment, Indu tries to take the path of independence, and detachment. However, these paths do not provide her with happiness either. She eventually realizes that what old uncle has been trying to tell her all these years is the only solution. To find happiness in little things, finding a
measure of freedom within the obligations of duty, and finding that there is no shame in being dependent on people, these are the only possible solutions to this eternal cycle. Indu says:

But twice in my life I had thought that I was free. Once, when I left home as a young girl. And the second time, when, once again I left the family after Naren’s death and returned to Jayant. Both times I found out how wrong I was. New bonds replace the old, that is all. (24)

Old Uncle tries to clear the confusion in Indu’s mind. According to him, it is unavoidable, and inevitable because the whole world is made up of inter-dependent parts. He says: “If all the bacteria in the world were to die, the rest of the life would be unable to exist” (2). He adds: “There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity, and grace. We can always find measures of freedom within these rules” (24).

Indu is fully attached to her ancestral house, and also to her husband, Jayant. On the one hand that house, and the members of the house have become a part, and parcel of her life; and on the other hand she cannot live without Jayant. Sandhu quotes in The Novels of Shashi Deshpande: “All these bitter facts of losing her identity into her husband’s frighten, and scare her. The paradox of the situation is that she is not happy with Jayant but at the same time, she cannot live without him” (4).

Defying the traditional role Indu is expected to play, she seeks fulfilment in education, and profession. Since education, and modernity are slowly creeping into the life of Indu, tradition is hatred to her. Kaka tells Indu, “... elders were to be feared, respected, obeyed. We used to sit up when they entered the room, and touch
their feet when we went out . . . You youngsters now . . . you’re a different breed altogether” (46).

Indu knows how women in the patriarchal social set-up are subjected to ill-treatment, and mortification, and how the situation becomes even worse when unfortunately a woman loses her husband. The burden of widowhood is forcibly thrust, and destruction of the set rules condemns the woman’s life to the position of outcasts. Widowed women should get their heads tonsured; otherwise, their status is reduced, and traditional widows would not eat food cooked by them.

Indu’s decision to cut off all family ties in an alert choice to break out of the confining cage of inferior womanhood. She is cognizant of the fact that her female relations have succumbed to the dictates of male authority, and she says: “. . . years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so that 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” (125).

Young modern women like Indu are sandwiched between tradition, and modernity. According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one’s own ethics, and be true to one self in speech as well as in action. Indu realises her position in her ancestral house, the responsibilities, fears, and frustrations do not touch her. The commotion, and aversion that had filled her slowly begin to seep out of her. She thus transcends the boundary of her conventional feminity. She is viewed as a confident woman with an emerging new self.

In the end, Indu comes to a piece of sorts. She realizes that her home, her destination, her point of final arrival is Jayant, and Jayant alone. She needs to shed off her complexes, and not let her love for him become a restrictive bond. She also needs
to do away with a large part of the façade she has built up around Jayant, and to inject
honesty, and authenticity into their relationship. She comes away with a better
understanding of her family, and of what is really important for a meaningful
domestic life. She is in a way to forgive or at least to understand what has actually
driven Akka to be the kind of woman she has been. Indu understands herself better
during this period of introspection, and self-analysis. She has recognized that her
morals would not suffer on the altar of her profession, and that she would devote
herself to the kind of writing she has always dreamed of doing. Looking from a
broader perspective, in the end the realization comes that freedom lies in having the
courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do, and the determination, and the
tenacity to adhere to it, which alone can bring harmony in life.

Indu suddenly realises what she lacks, “I knew in that instant what it was that
my life had lacked. It was the quality of courage” (150). S. P. Swain appropriately
sums up Indu’s growth in his work *Roots and Shadows – A Feminist study*, as:

> The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as
> a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her
> job, thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s
> masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the
> feminine self’s struggle for harmony and sanity . . . She is able to
> discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and
> a commercial writer. (95)

Being smothered in an oppressive male-dominated, and tradition bound
society, Indu attempts to explore her individuality. Indu a rebel, often wished to be
free, and unrestrained. Thus she is presented as model against women belonging to
the older generation. The author has beautifully voiced out how a woman overcomes
the domination by men, she can voice up the frustration, and disappointment, and challenging the grave concepts of male chauvinistic society.

The Indian Women Writing has tremendously explored how a woman celebrates the ‘self’ independence. In *Roots and Shadows*, the predicament of Indu represents the larger predicament of woman in contemporary Indian society where the new concept of western education, economic independence, and globalization have completely shaken the roots of old Indian culture, and social values. Indu opposes certain long preserved notions, and taboos about the woman. Indu is highly sensitive, aspires to be independent, and battles against her womanhood. She hates the utter ‘feminity’, develops a vague sense of guilt, and strongly upholds the view that her womanhood, in fact closes many doors of her illuminating bright future. She finds a sense of fulfilment, and inherent satisfaction in education, and career.

When anxiety becomes too overwhelming for Indu, unconsciously she employs defense mechanisms to protect her from the feelings of anxiety. When speaking about defense mechanism, Allen says in *Personality Theories*:

“In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanisms are psychological strategies brought into play by the unconscious mind to manipulate, deny or distort reality to defend against the feelings of anxiety, and unacceptable impulses” (66). Further in the same work Allen says:

Healthy persons normally use different defenses throughout life. The purpose of defense mechanisms is to protect the mind from anxiety and to provide a refuge from a situation with which one cannot currently cope. Defense mechanisms are unconscious coping mechanisms that reduce anxiety generated by threats from unacceptable impulses. (78)
As Saritha of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu of *Roots and Shadows* also adopts the defense mechanism, ‘isolation’. She distances herself from a situation of unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. She stays at her parental house. Her painful ideas are separated from feelings associated with her. To face the full impact of aggressive thoughts, and feelings, her ideas are kept apart. It is at her parental house she gets a chance to review her relationship with her husband. In the beginning though she views these bonds as unreasonable, gradually, she learns to be bound by them as a typical traditional Indian woman. The isolation results in the emergence of this protagonist as a bold, and challenging woman of determination. She goes against all feminine limitations, and also acquire the power to change others.

Thus Deshpande addresses the issues of women who can no longer endure the suppression, and objectified treatment of the patriarchal society. She visualised a modern Indian woman by breaking the feminine conventions, and transcending their boundaries. Raman in his *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* writes about the position of women, “The time has come when woman’s body must be heard, and woman must uncensor herself, recover her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under sea”. (150-151). Thus the novel *The Roots and Shadows* portrays the conflict between tradition, and modernity. That is how the shadows of progressive change the roots of tradition. The sufferings of traditional women in olden days have been clearly shown in this novel.

The next novel taken for study is *That Long Silence*. Jaya of *That Long Silence* is a conservative, educated, middle class, smiling, placid, motherly woman who learns to suppress her own wishes, and act according to her husband’s. The stark, and unashamed first person tone to the novel initially comes across as arrogance, later to be replaced with pity or admiration as various readers may perceive it. Jaya, a
writer, gives up everything to take up “her only profession” – being Mohan’s wife. She cannot dare to complain, and has finally unlearned her silence. She affirms with confidence, “I am not afraid any more” (191).

Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence*, lives in Saptagiri in her childhood. Her father dies when she is at the age of fifteen. Then she goes to stay in her maternal uncle’s house in Ambegaon along with her two brothers, and her mother. Once Mohan happens to meet Jaya during her visit to her uncle’s house in Saptagiri, Mohan, on seeing Jaya decides to marry her for she has good fluency over English. They got married, and settled in an old house in Dadar. Later they moved to a decent, and cosy flat in Churchgate. Mohan’s demand of an English-speaking wife makes him tie the knot with Jaya, a well-educated girl. Jaya in turn marries Mohan out of defiance, as her mother disapproves him. In spite of Mohan’s expectations, he had a strong traditional background where she had grown up seeing his mother silently submit to every demand of his father. With the roles of submissive wife, and domineering husband deeply ingrained in his mind, he enters into matrimony with Jaya. On the other hand, Jaya, the only daughter of an unconventional family, was brought up differently. The disparity in their background leads to clash of expectations.

The action of the novel, *That Long Silence* is triggered off by a crisis in this middle-class family. Mohan has been caught in some business malpractice, and an inquiry is in progress. Presently their children Rati, and Rahul have gone on an excursion with their family friends. Jaya gets out of touch with her daily schedule, and becomes an introvert. It is there in the intolerable period of waiting, and rising hysteria, that the process of self-examination, and self-criticism begins for Jaya. She
sits in deep contemplation, and recollects her childhood, her marriage with Mohan, the frustrations, and disappointments in her seventeen-year old married life.

After Jaya’s marriage, she has been renamed as Suhasini by her husband. She identifies herself with the sparrow in the story of ‘The Crow and the Sparrow’. There was a foolish crow who built his house of dung, and a wise sparrow who built hers of wax. And when it rained, the house of wax stood firm, while the crow’s house was washed away. And the poor crow, shivering went to the sparrow’s house, and knocked on the door, calling “Let me in, sister, let me in” (16). After a while the crow knocked again. And the sparrow said “Wait, I’m feeding the baby” (16). And so the story goes on, the foolish crow begging to be let in, while sister sparrow spins out her excuses....till finally she says “come in, you’re all wet” (16). And she points to the pan on which she has just made the chapattis, “Warm yourself” (16), she says. And the silly crow hops on to it, and is burnt to death. Jaya has her first, and the only outburst with Mohan soon after her marriage. Mohan has not spoken to her until she made the first move.

In the early years of her marriage Jaya wants to become a writer. Mohan encourages her, and introduces her to editors of various papers, and magazines. She writes a prize-winning story that frankly talks of a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body. He fears that people may assume that he is the man portrayed in the story. But Jaya knows that there is no truth in this accusation. Yet, she stops writing as she does not want to risk her marital life. The lovelessness in the married life makes Jaya turn towards Kamat. He is a lonely man who lives above the apartment of Jaya at Dadar, Bombay. Jaya’s attachment to him cannot be termed platonic though it falls short of a fullfledged affair. She gets from Kamat the best of her father’s concern, and the best of attention that she expected to have from Mohan.
Jaya responds to his gentle look, voice, and touch. But she rejects this urge because she thinks that it would affect her marital bliss. That’s why she behaves callously on the death of Kamat.

_That Long Silence_ highlights the patriarchal power structure in several man-woman relationships. Jaya narrates an incident relating to Mohan’s father. His father would not eat his children’s disgusting leavings, and he always wants his rice fresh, and hot. One particular night he has before him steaming hot rice. As he is not served with fresh chutney, he deliberately throws the plateful of rice at the wall, and goes out. The woman cleans the floor, and wall, and starts her third round of dinner. Other living examples of the oppressed Indian women in this novel are Jeeja - Jaya’s maid, Kusum - Jaya’s cousin, Nayana, and Mohan’s sister, Vimala.

Sometimes, Jaya appears to be not very different from other women – Nayana, who despises her drunkard husband but craves for a son, Mukta, the widow who fasts, Mohan’s mother, who suffers her husband’s humiliations silently, and Jeeja, who thinks that a woman without her kumkum on the forehead is nothing. When the choice of selection between her husband, and family, unhesitantly Jaya chooses to be with her husband. She is a stereotyped housewife who is “nervous, incompetent, needing male help, and support” (76). Superficially she is a satisfied housewife married to an actually caring man, with a comfortable home, with no deficiency of material comfort. But on analysis, it is revealed that to achieve this stage of fulfilment as a wife, Jaya has systematically covered up every aspect of her personality that refuses to fit in with her image as a wife, and mother besides that as an unsuccessful writer.
Ruminating on the past, Jaya sees how her marriage has condensed her to a mere automation. She realizes how she washed away the most valuable time of her life in arranging, and re-arranging things, dusting, polishing, washing, ironing, cleaning the fridge, and changing the sheets. She is bewildered to find in her diaries that she had spent her life engrossed in such as what she bought, how much she paid for it, the dates the children’s schools had begun, the servant’s absence, the advance they had taken, etc.

*That Long Silence* has three distinct phases of feminism. In the first phase it is seen as the imitation of role models where the heroine has crossed the limits. This kind of imitation leads to anger, and protest of all kinds. The major concern, and thrust of the novel is the second phase of feminism in Jaya’s life – when she looks back in her life: it is a scene of no sense of nostalgia or yearning, but it is merely a feeling of suppressed anger, resentment. Her suffering initiates the process of self-discovery in her, leading in the final analysis to accept the fresh perception of life. In a way her suffering has a beneficial effect on her personality. It further strengthens her to emerge with certain willingness to compromise with life, and its problems. Thus, in order to achieve a state of complete family, as a woman, Jaya is forced to suppress every aspect of her wants, needs, and desire that simply refused to fit into her role-model of a wife, and a mother. The novel shows the darker side of the society where a woman is compelled to keep her mouth shut. *That Long Silence* traces the passage of woman from a silent sufferer to a revolting one. She uses the motif of silence to show the subjugation of a married woman.

The third, last phase of feminism in *That Long Silence* is Jaya’s life – her articulation, and assertion is hinted at the end of the novel to be the future possibility for Jaya. The whole exercise in the novel is for the articulation, which will break her
long silence. Strong hints are cited in the novel, that Jaya is going to transcend, and break her passivity, and she asserts in these words, “I will have to erase the silence between us” (192).

By implication, the character of Jaya represents modern woman’s ambivalent attitude to married life. It is only by neglecting her own personality that a woman, who is powerless in the patriarchal order, can survive. Jaya in order to maintain her marriage as a happy one, slowly transcends the boundary of her feminity to this ideal of womanhood, where she learns to repress her anger. Jaya always works up to please her husband. Jaya even transforms her appearance to suit his idea of a modern woman, cuts her hair, and wears dark glasses. She ultimately gets so completely absorbed into the family fold that from a fiercely independent woman, she is transformed into the stereotype of a woman.

*That Long Silence* ends on a positive note of affirmation with Jaya looking forward with new hope to a new beginning with Mohan, and declaring: “I will have to speak, to listen. I will have to erase the silence between us” (192). When Jaya breaks the silence, and decides to be angry, her anger is met with complete bewilderment, incomprehension, and distaste from Mohan. As Jaya puts it, “He had looked at me as if my emotions had made me ugly, as if I’d got bloated with them. Later, when I knew him better, I realised that to him anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’ . . . ” (83). Thus a patriarchal world order does not admit of either speech or anger as a ‘womanly’ woman’s attributes. For Mohan, Jaya’s anger is sacrilege because he can neither remember nor envisage his mother ever having raised her voice against his father however badly he may have behaved towards her. So Jaya learns to suppress her anger.
As Jaya points out, the very concept of ‘an angry young woman’ is alien to the Indian psyche. To quote Jaya:

A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There’s no room for anger in my life, no room for despair, either. There’s only order and routine—today, I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms; the day after, clean the fridge.

... (147-48).

Through these words, Jaya is able to capture the only image of woman that Indian society is willing to countenance. Using Jaya as her mouthpiece, Shashi Deshpande is able to bring a woman’s understanding, and sympathy in interrogating stereotypical images of women that a patriarchal society insists on thrusting upon an unsuspecting populace.

Ideal images of women as projected by the mythological figures of Seeta, Savitri, Draupadi, and Gandhari are held up as epitomes of perfection to be emulated by the mass of woman kind. Significantly, all these images of women suffer silently, but do not speak. Thus silence becomes a commendable virtue, and speech a crime. Deshpande’s most significant achievement has been her ability to capture, and convey a middle-class sensibility with a strong regional rootedness of India. She portrays the insignificant day-to-day happenings in the life of women. She is also passionate about challenging the stereotype of the ideal woman portrayed in myth – one who is self-sacrificing, chaste, patient, and submissive. According to her, these ideals are difficult to aspire to, because in contemporary life, they prevent woman from giving expression to various other facets of her personality. Therefore, she does not compare her characters to stereotypical, and mythical images. She herself has said that she
wanted to reach a stage where she can write about human beings, and not about men or women.

Jaya’s journey from silence to speech enables her to rebel against the clamping control of the straitjacket imposed by mythological images of women. Shashi Deshpande also attempts to refigure, and reinterpret some major strands in mythology. *The Epics*, and *The Vedas* have been written by men, and as a result the feelings, and emotions of the women present in them are depicted from men’s point of view. But only a woman can understand the feelings of a woman in such a situation. Shashi Deshpande has made this attempt, and has questioned many paradigms present in mythology, and has also shown the psychological turmoil of the mythological women through her stories. The central message which runs as an undercurrent in most of the stories seeks to question the paradigms of patriarchy both in the myths, and actual life.

Jaya resurfaces, and insists on introspection, and self-analysis, on speech, and articulation, and on bold confrontation with the phantoms of the past, and with the challenges of the future. It is with a new maturity that Jaya returns to her writing to rediscover the child within her “a child, wearing a dress with pockets for the first time . . . heady with the excitement of finding unexpected resources within herself” (187). Shashi Deshpande believes that today’s woman suffers because she has been caught between custom, and modernity. On the one hand her Sita-Pativrata tradition urges her to suffer silently, and not rebel against things which she cannot except. On the other hand, her femininity exhorts her to stress her individuality.

Thus the entire novel brings out the stale married life in a middle class home. As a typical Deshpandean heroine, Jaya does not decide to walk away from marriage
or think about a divorce. Instead she has decided to tackle her marital problems in her own way, and make her husband realize that she has to be treated on an equal footing, without destroying the statuesque of her family life. In the process of analyzing herself, she discovers her true identity. She realizes that her ‘self’ had been a divided self – one for the world, and another for herself. But in a middle class society it is a must for a woman to fulfil the roles of wifehood, and motherhood before their own identity. Finally Jaya breaks out of her conventional roles, and attitudes, and seek an identity of her own.

Dissatisfaction in the women’s sex is cited as one of the important factors affecting the marital relations of Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists. The three novels discussed in this chapter represent three types of sexual abnormality. In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saritha explains her sexual relations with Manu, her husband, thus:

I woke up to darkness and an awareness of fear. Panic. Then pain. There it was . . . just a nightmare. The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body . . . then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength which overwhelmed me. . . becoming the familiar known one of my husband’s. (111-112)

Further Saritha adds: “Panic and sensation came back simultaneously. I turned my head slightly, fearfully, and saw him beside me, snoring softly. No more a stranger, but my husband” (12).

Neither the woman nor the man in Shashi Deshpande’s novels try to do something about their marital monotony. The women specially tend to ignore the sexual roots of their marital discord. Their assumed roles do not give total
nourishment, as their sexual dissatisfaction raises its ugly head at times, and disrupts the harmony of their attractive living. Hence they seek sexual fulfilment by resorting to extramarital relationships. Saritha tries to justify her affairs with Boozie, her boss, and Padmakar Rao, her college classmate as the substitutes she had found for her unfulfilled marriage. Yet, such affairs do not give her total satisfaction. In the case of Indu’s affair with Naren, her cousin, Indu suffers like woman-in-guilt. Like Indu, and Saritha, Jaya in *That Long Silence* feels guilty of her aborted affair with Kamat, her neighbour.

Shashi Deshpande writes not for publicity, but to mirror the society as she observes it. She is least bothered about name, and fame. Being very much fascinated by her women characters, she lays more emphasis on women only. She deals very minutely, and delicately with the problems of middle class educated women. Infact, initially, she always had in her mind people from real life in India to write about, but as she proceeded, spontaneously, and involuntarily, woman became the focus of her writings. The stark reality around, and the fictional representation of women necessitates that they remain their identity despite constraints. Mercifully, women have reached a part of their destination, and only some more distance remains to be covered. So in this transitional phase, they have to be alert, and capitalize on their own merits, and strengths to pave way for a better future.

Thus through the novels *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande clearly portrays the plight of middle class Indian women, who are oscillating between traditional, and modern roles. In all these novels the protagonists go through the thought process. At the end of the thought process they see themselves differently. They do not either break off their marriage or run away from the house, and family. A revolution comes out by transcending their
boundaries of feminity. They start facing the situation with a different idea of what they are. They are all very intelligent women capable of self-analysis. They do not go back to the same point. They are moving. The end is not specific. It is always open.

In an interview with Prasanna Sree, published as *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, Shashi Deshpande comments that:

> I don’t consider that the revolution comes out of escaping the situation, but facing the situation with a different idea of “What I am” . . . this is to me the biggest revolution. I know what I am now, I am going to live my life knowing what I am. There is no greater revolution than that.

(146)

In the changing scenario of post-colonial Indian society that observed crosscurrents of traditional ideals, and newly imported ones, Shashi Deshpande made the task of giving these women characters the specific roles that would fit in the socio-cultural modes, and values of the changed society.

A new generation of women emerged, taking up the changed values according to which women have a voice of their own, a voice that had been censored for centuries. As Sandra Lee Bartky points out in his *Body Politics – A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*:

> The situation of woman is such that she, a free and autonomous being, finds herself in a world where she is compelled by man to assume the status of an inferior to whatever man imagines him to be. Women are bound to their oppression, by male control of the dominant institutions and the dominant ideology. (85)
Hence, in order to gain both equality, and to realize their human potential, women must transcend their distinctive femaleness to lead the kind of life men do, in other words, they must be autonomous. By transcending their boundaries women become equal, and balancing with men not on terms of domination, and subordination but a better world for themselves without being frightened, dependent, trapped, and frustrated.

The term ‘defense mechanism’ got its start in Psychoanalytic Theory, but it has slowly worked its way into everyday language. All defense mechanisms can be adaptive, and allow us to function normally. In the First Annual Psychoanalytic Conference 2013, held at Delhi, Sudhir Kakar, the Neo Freudian says:

In psychoanalytic therapy, the goal may be to help the individual uncover the unconscious and find better, more healthy ways of coping with anxiety and distress. Defense mechanisms are a part of our everyday life. Even if we're not a Freudian by philosophy or training, we've got to admit that there's something to be said for the idea that all of us engages in some form of self-deception at least some of the time. But we cannot detect the form of deception that we our friends, colleagues, and family are using at any given moment. (13)

It is possible to see that the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande unconsciously make use of the Freudian Psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanism to defend against their feelings to safeguard the mind against the thoughts that were too difficult for their conscious mind to cope with. Jeya of That Long Silence adopts the defense mechanism, ‘displacement’. Her feelings, and thoughts directed towards one person or object are directed towards another person or object. She uses writing as a means of self-expression, and liberation.
The unexpressed aggression, and hostility of Jaya are trapped within the psychic apparatus with corrosive effects on mind, and body. The bottled up aggression is turned against the self by a weak, and undeveloped ego that is not capable of handling the stress of hateful feelings. The techniques of modern psychoanalysis are aimed at allowing the ego to direct aggression outward in productive ways.

Many of the new women characters created by Shashi Deshpande are engaged in writing which is in fact a creative way of self-expression. This transformation of women into acclaimed writers can be seen in the case of Indu, Madhu, Sumi, and Jaya. They find writing as a powerful means of communication, and more than that an escape from the dull domestic chores, and the limitations of femininity. As Mary Eagleton says in Feminist Literary Criticism: A Reader: “Escape from the pangs of heart, and bodily weakness – when you throw off yourself – what you feel to be yourself – into another atmosphere, and into relations where your life may spread its wings out new” (348).

While traditionally trained women experience a feeling of emptiness, meaningfulness, and frustration in their daily lives, these new women characters in spite of their struggles for existence, experience the thrill, and joy of self-discovery, and self-actualisation. They are women who raise above the usual routine of their gender assignments, and operate beyond the existing conventions, and customs of bravery, and gladly getting involved in many a useful project whenever, and wherever possible. Thus the protagonists unconsciously make use of defense mechanism tool to defend themselves from situations that were too difficult to cope with.
The next chapter **Emerging Identity of Women** gives a vivid study of women’s fervent desire to survive, and succeed like men in their own social contexts is emphatically expressed in the literary works of Shashi Deshpande. The novels selected for this study are *Small Remedies, A Matter of Time, and The Binding Vine*