CHAPTER 3

Suppression and Silence: The Narratives of the Wife

It is the confrontation of the inner and outer (worlds) that interest me as a novelist. The clash between the two is capable of shattering the inner worlds, unless the individual finds the strength and the courage and the imagination to protect it.

Anita Desai

Characters are understood only when they are narrated. The character of the wife in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande offer their own narratives by drawing upon the pre-existing narratives, as held by society as well as by the various characters in the novels like the husband, older women, parents and peers. The wife in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande tries to certify her narrative versions of events against competing versions and thereby embark on a course of self-discovery.

This chapter studies the social predicaments of the married women whose positions alternately clash with and conform to other narratives in society. The narratives of the wife vie with the narratives of the husband and with the older generation of women, which conform to the grand narratives of marriage prevailing in the society. The identity of the wife is established by measuring her narratives with a master narrative, because without differences and without comparisons there can be no meanings and therefore no truths. My intention in this chapter is to investigate how pre-existing social orders as embodied in the master narrative of marriage affect the wives; the predicaments they face; the oppressions they suffer and their reactions to these predicaments. This chapter endeavours to find out what is at stake in the embattled
practices of self and society as the heroines wage a war between their own narratives and those of the society, in order to endorse their individuality and attain self-fulfillment. This chapter makes an analysis of the conflicts that crop up in the marital lives of the heroines in the concerned novels and traces the course which the narratives of the wife take in their mission for selfhood.

The Shastras consider woman as partner in the creative process; marriage therefore provides woman with a sense of being complete and whole as a person. Perfect humanity manifests itself when man and woman who are complementary to each other are bonded through marriage. The character of the wife in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande too conforms to this partnership ideal prevailing in the society. They also seek anchorage in marriage for their emotional, physical and material security. All the heroines of Desai and Deshpande, in the novels taken up for study, are a disillusioned lot. The apparent comfort and security of the conjugal house camouflages a harsh reality. For the heroines, marriage turns out to be a trap where they are expected to follow tradition as a virtue and cling to age-old beliefs, while their selfhood and desires get erased into oblivion. They become prisoners of their own choice. By conforming to the partnership ideal, they fall into the trap of convention. They therefore struggle to make a habitable world on the margins of patriarchy, a secluded space of their own and endorse their selfhood, so that they remain meaningful to themselves, as significant individuals.

The character of the wife in Anita Desai’s novels can be classified into two distinctive groups: 1. Those that are oppressed and denied emotional security and fail to compromise with societal expectations and are ultimately vanquished. 2. Those that are
oppressed; become rebellious but finally compromise with the expectations of the patriarchal society. Maya (CTP), Monisha (VITC), Nanda (FOTM) and Sita (WSWGTS) though apparently well settled in marriage are disturbed psychologically by forces beyond their comprehension. They feel insecure and apprehensive and brood over the agony of existence and a metaphysical void within their marriage. There is a striving in them to progress towards an authentic way of life than the one which is available to them.

_Cry, the Peacock_, is a narrative of dependence, which strongly adheres to the partnership ideal of marriage. Maya is presented as a young, beautiful, intelligent and a very sensitive and sensuous woman who fails to grow out of childhood and is incapable of leading an independent existence. She cannot seek her happiness and emotional fulfillment as a separate entity but only in relation to her husband thereby conforming to the ideal that man and woman are complementary to each other and make an organic whole. Marriage for Maya implies fulfillment of love and the need to be accepted. She builds around herself a bower of Bougainvillea and Jasmine buds, “palpitating with living breath, open, white, virginal” (106). Maya’s views on marriage are limited to the fantastical, fairy-tale world of aesthetics and sensibilities, where she seeks adoration from her husband, for her femininity. She has an intense longing for love that borders on morbidity which proves to be the root cause of her catastrophe.

Maya’s husband Gautama is an industrious lawyer who is several years older than her and is incapable of recognizing or understanding her needs and emotions. Maya is a woman of fine sensibilities who is at home in a world of flowers, pet dogs and romance. According to her, anyone who is devoid of aesthetic sensibilities is a
lesser mortal. She gets desperate when Gautama cannot distinguish the fragrance between Petunias and Lime Blossoms. Her agonized reflections on her husband are “How little he knew of my misery or how to comfort me. Giving me an opal ring on my finger he did not notice the translucent skin beneath” (14). Being morbidly dependent she makes neurotic claims on her husband for his attention and company, when her pet dog dies. The lack of response from him is interpreted as rejection. Deprived of emotional support Maya becomes neurotic, which later induces her to kill her husband and also end her own life.

Marriage for Maya implies attention, recognition and romance, which she has developed into a narrative to live by. Her aspiration as a wife is to seek fulfillment in sensuous and romantic love, which will provide her emotional security and a sense of belonging. Gautama’s failure to fit into this narrative drives her towards frustration, which later assumes neurotic proportions. Love as she sees it does not give a sense of sharing or oneness, rather it produces a feeling of dependence. She languishes like a starved and lonely soul while her husband is engrossed in his professional pursuits.

Maya’s morbid dependence on her husband can be traced to her childhood dependence on her father. Having lost her mother early in life and her father’s excessive protection dealt out to her with unconcealed partiality does not allow her any independence to think and grow as an entity. He focuses all his attention on her and instead of freedom to grow as an individual he offers her a life of protection and comforts which make her dependent and submissive. Maya is apprehensive of losing her father’s affection because on it rests her security and sense of belonging. This dependence on her father is shifted towards her husband, after marriage, to seek
protection from a hostile world. Maya’s involvement with her father is highlighted in her relationship with her husband. She constantly misses her father’s support and unconsciously searches for him in her husband.

Manu lays down in his Manusmriti that a wife should be dependent on her husband “Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males. Her father protects her in childhood; her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age. A woman is never fit for independence” (Manu IX 3). Likewise, Maya thinks of Gautama as a protector and a guardian. She would have been happy to be in his shadow and be the object of his individual attention, but a feeling of oppression sets in when her physical and psychological demands are not fulfilled. Her complaint is that of an agonized woman whose desires remain unfulfilled. She moans “He did not give another thought to me, to either the soft willing body or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed” (9). The title of the novel, together with the powerful symbols of the peacock’s voluptuous dance and the mating calls of the pigeons highlights the sexual desires and frustrations of Maya.

Maya’s defence strategy for her lonely life is seeking adoration from her husband, which results in her being morbidly dependent and self-effacing. Her obsession for emotional security makes her lose her selfhood, which ultimately results in her losing her senses as well as her young life. There is no attempt in Maya to search for her individuality; unlike Sita (WSWGTS) or like the heroines of Shashi Deshpande’s novels, yet she is desperate to feel wanted and emotionally secured. Within her marriage, Maya is gripped by a sense of inferiority. The members of her husband’s family treat her like a delicate doll, which loves to play with the babies of the
household. There is a strong desire in Maya to raise herself above others, by achieving a sense of being wanted. As Karen Horney says, of people afflicted with inferiority complex:

If he had a sense of belonging, his feeling inferior to others would not be so serious a handicap. But living in a competitive society and feeling at bottom — as it were-isolated and hostile, he can develop an urgent need to lift him above others (Horney 21).

When Maya fails to achieve the emotional security she yearns for, loneliness, frustration and fear take their toll on her. She crosses the borderline into insanity and in a final drastic attempt at self-preservation, she kills Gautama in a vindictive rage. Though Maya presents an instance of absorption into the conventional narrative of dependence, there are yearnings in her for recognition and acceptance, as an individual. Her desire to be noticed and loved as an individual clashes with the loneliness and indifference she is subjected to in her marriage.

A narrative of silence, subjugation and withdrawal is detected in Monisha Voices in the City. Monisha is powerless to fight against the meaningless social myths governing the male psyche in a tradition bound society. Her innate silence and aloofness are interpreted as morbidity by her parents and they force her into a marriage with Jiban, a prosaically dull person, unsuitable to her taste and temperament. Her life is reduced to cooking and washing, which hurts her pride — “To sort the husk from the rice, to wash and iron and talk and sleep, when this is not what one believes in”. What Monisha wants is to “Live the clean, husked, irreducible life” (121).
After her marriage, Monisha is unable to relate herself to the people in her new home. She weaves a glorified picture of herself as a superior being, much above her in-laws. She shuts herself in her room and reads books and at night she creeps to the terrace to calm her inner turmoil. She cherishes her loneliness and her stoic-like life, very much different from the mass of women she sees around her, who are forever chopping vegetables and boasting of the number of sarees they possess. She reflects sarcastically on the women “Waiting on men, self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, and waiting for death and dying misunderstood” (120). She is pinned down to her role of a wife, in the crowded house with numerous expectations from her husband’s family invading upon her selfhood. Marriage stifles her self-expression and life drains her emotionally.

A suggestive imagery in the novel is that of the criss-cross bars in the windows which symbolizes Monisha’s incarcerated condition. In a house full of crying children and waiting women, she is expected to willingly enslave herself to the ideas believed and practiced by Jiban’s family. Her duty is to conform and not to create. The elderly women in the house display not only the traditional mind-set of the males, but also the ugly and disastrous impact of social conditioning on the female psyche. The denial of any personal space gradually erodes her dignity. She becomes withdrawn and ceases to participate in the act of living and relinquishes all efforts, aspirations and the will for attachment. Though she reads the Gita, she misses the vital essence of non-attachment, therein. It does not advocate the running away from the field of action or from conflicts. Monisha fails to assert her individuality in front of her husband or her in-laws. She neither asserts, nor conforms. Her narrative is that of silence and passive suffering and
her strategy of resistance is to withdraw into a world of her own. Her withdrawal can be interpreted as an attempt to save her individuality by clinging to the illusion that she is unique and stoical – very different from the mundane women she sees around her – women “who follow few paces behind their men” spending their lives “waiting for nothing” (220). Such beliefs are an attempt to keep herself intact and to preserve her selfhood. Monisha feels elevated in her silence because Jiban’s family abhors it. But since such withdrawals are unhealthy, it leads to disintegration. She fails to realize that an individual “cannot grow in a vacuum, without closeness to and friction with other human beings” (Horney 276).

Monisha’s suffering is also due to her childless state. She is the butt of rebuke by the other women of the family, who repeatedly discuss her blocked fallopian tubes. Monisha’s incapability of becoming a mother, further victimizes her, as traditionally, maternity is enough to crown a woman’s life. The Shastras say that the primary functions of a woman in the social order are those of preservation and procreation. Monisha’s failure to conceive a child clashes with the narrative of marriage as held by society. Her oppressions assume wider proportions when she is accused of theft. She gets a brutal shock when she realizes that she is not considered as a member of the family. As a wife, Monisha like Maya, nurtured a crying need to belong. Her husband’s words “Why didn’t you tell me before you took it? (The money)” (138) cut her even deeper. She is looked upon as an outsider, not as a wife, who can exercise any authority in money matters. Monisha’s self esteem receives a cruel jolt and her individuality is threatened when she is considered so low by men and women who are themselves so low. One day, as she watches the street dancers representing Kali, the goddess of
destruction and totality, she is propelled towards self-destruction and in a final attempt to have a control over her life, she kills herself. Monisha prefers death to a meaningless existence. Her suicide denotes an unconscious impulse “to frustrate, outwit or defeat others in personal relations” (Horney 27). It is an attempt at victory over her in-laws, a form of resistance to patriarchal oppression.

Monisha’s marriage to Jiban is a battleground of warring expectations. Jiban and his family expect servitude, devotion and procreation from her, while Monisha expects recognition as an individual, a little freedom and some space of her own, within her marriage. The conflicts in Monisha arise from her inability to transcend the social conditioning as per pre-defined patriarchal concepts of behaviour while she searches for her selfhood. When she refuses to yield and compromise, she has to make a choice between a meaningless life and non-existence and she chooses the latter.

The narrative of Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, is that of silent suffering and suppression. Nanda Kaul is presented as a lady, advanced in years, recuperating alone in the hills of Kasauli, among the cicadas, seeking retirement from her earlier roles of a wife, mother and hostess. She is placed in a similar situation as Monisha (VITC), performing the roles of a wife, as expected by a preconceived social order. She is a passive performer, whose services are unrecognized and unacknowledged and whose needs, desires and aspirations are unasserted and unfulfilled.

The Hindu marriage regarded service to the husband and obedience to him to be the highest duty of a wife. The *Manusmriti* has confirmed submission to the will of the husband and classified personal service to the husband, as service to the religious sphere. It advocated the ideology of *pati-parameshwar* or accepting the husband as
devta or deity. The sole function of the wife in the matrimonial arrangement is service to the husband and the family. This is part of the narrative of marriage as held by the social order. The choices, wishes, desires and selfhood of the wife are to be suppressed at all costs. Nanda Kaul conforms to this ideology. She is turned into an object of servitude and devotion with her own needs and desires suppressed. The human element in her, yearning for love and recognition is however strong enough to create tumultuous conflicts in her. The conflicts within her find no expression. Therefore, she loses her self-esteem and is filled with self-contempt.

Nanda’s marital life has been a claustrophobic one, catering to the needs of her Vice Chancellor husband and his innumerable guests and in bringing up her brood of children. Nanda’s individuality is eroded, as she becomes an epitome of devotion, duty and sacrifice. Her life pattern amply illustrates it:

Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husband’s study, to her mother-in-law’s bedroom, to the verandah that was the gathering place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after (29).

Nanda Kaul’s entire life has been one of ‘giving’ which made her lose her own identity and her space, leaving her with a foreboding sense of insecurity. Nanda has been a meticulous householder and a dutiful wife and mother to the core, harbouring expectations of receiving love in return. But marital life strikes a cruel blow on her. Her husband’s infidelity and his utter disregard of her, together with the callous attitude of her children made her recoil in silent suffering. Nanda realizes she is not the queen of
her husband's house, but simply a necessary element in his life – mother of his children and a social symbol of his respectability.

Under these circumstances the choice of Nanda is limited. She either has to fight it or bear it. Meekly she chooses the latter; thereby becoming unassertive and self-effacing. Like Monisha, her resistance to the patriarchal narrative is a silent and passive one. She engages herself in the discharge of her family duties and adopts the self-glorifying virtues of selflessness and submissiveness. In attempting to be the virtuous wife, Nanda adopts a survival strategy. She believes she will be glorified for her sacrifices. Later she realizes it had only crippled her individuality and she is filled with self-contempt for her failed life.

Her ultimate survival strategy is to move to ‘Carignano’ in the hills to live an ascetic life. She feels an intense need to withdraw, in order to preserve her wholeness and sanity after executing her marital roles. Her constant effort to “merge with the pines and be mistaken for one” expresses her desire for solace and freedom. Such detachment however is not akin to the solitude and renouncement of the Hindu concept, which is sought for enlightenment. It is simply a form of escape. The objective of this withdrawal is not to seek self-knowledge like the heroines of Shashi Deshpande. Nanda simply adopts her detached and resigned attitude out of her frustrations in her marital life because the expectations of her husband and her family clash with her expectations of love and recognition.

In Nanda Kaul, one fails to find any sense of contentment at having performed her duties. The self-sacrificing spirit of a wife and a mother is often accompanied by a sense of pride and achievement. But in Nanda there is only the sense of remorse, not the
joy of creativity. Her self-effacement has smothered her urge for creativity. She derives a weird sense of happiness, of a release from bondage when her responsibilities are over. But chaos continues to haunt her life because it is simply a freedom from responsibilities, not the liberation of the self.

Nanda cannot find peace in her withdrawn and detached state, because that is not her true self. Her oppressive marriage made her adopt a false image of a cold and aloof woman, which becomes equally torturous for her. With the arrival of her granddaughter, Raka, she finds herself getting attached to her, and taking an interest in life, and later on we find Nanda repenting for not providing refuge to her poor friend, Ila. The need to reclaim Raka’s love indicates Nanda’s subconscious longing for love and recognition. Raka’s interest in the stories she tells gratifies her desire for love and attention from others of which she was starved of as a wife. She is finally able to sleep better at night. In actuality, the attention she directs to her grand-daughter is “A compressed mask for a repressed longing for love” (Storr 85), which drives her towards neurotic compulsions – like making up false stories of her past life for Raka’s entertainment.

At the news of her friend Ila’s death, Nanda is swept by a gulf of self-reproach, guilt and low self-esteem. Her old friend Ila who has been reduced to penury had approached her and had sought shelter and help. Nanda who has resolved not to take further responsibilities in life, after fulfilling the patriarchal expectations of servitude and devotion, tactfully evades helping Ila. The news of Ila’s rape and murder devastates her. She considers herself responsible for her friend’s tragic death. The incident causes a psychic death in Nanda, followed by a sudden physical demise. Nanda too is
vanquished like Anita Desai's other heroines – Maya and Monisha, because of the discord and trauma arising from the clash of narratives between the wife and the patriarchal expectations.

The narrative of Sita, in Where Shall We go this Summer? is a narrative of complaint. Sita has affinities with Maya in her paranoiac rages, enigmatic demands and querulous behaviour. Raman marries her when she was lonely and helpless and acts like her messiah giving her the required social and psychological security – a comfortable and secured life, “of the ordinary, the everyday, the empty and the meaningless” (100). For Sita, the relationship with her husband is based on a ‘deal’. She will be the good and obliging wife and Raman will honour her for her good and lovable qualities. The marital relationship of Sita and Raman therefore conforms to the narratives of marriage as held by the social order, which lays down that the husband will be the provider and protector and the wife will fulfill all his needs and desires and provide him with sons to carry on his line. Sita however fails to find happiness from a relationship, which is based on such a mercenary ‘deal’. She aspires for a relationship based on love, which transcends the limits of the self and human finitude. In other words she yearns to be recognized as an individual and not as a necessary element in the marital set-up. Like Maya (CTP), Sita cries for attention and tenderness from her husband, which will endorse her individuality and sense of belonging. She aspires for the partnership ideal where she will not simply be shoved into the shadows of her marital life, to serve her husband but to share love and respect on an equal footing with him. Sita seeks her happiness beyond the protection and the material comforts. She desires her selfhood to be respected and fails to find contentment in the comfortable secured life offered to her.
to, a salary earned, a salary spent" (138-39), are to be fulfilled. He along with her children belongs to a world hungry for power and materialism; the glamour and glitter of the metropolis, where they are unmindful of their true selves. She observes cynically of Raman’s business associates – “They are nothing – nothing but appetite and sex and money matters. Animals” (47). Sita however, feels stifled and claustrophobic within her marriage, when she sees tenderness, emotions and values crumbling around her. Her husband loves her, protects her and offers her all her material comforts but fails to fulfill her emotional needs. But Sita yearns for recognition beyond the protection and the material comfort.

When Raman fails to recognize her wants she protests by turning rebellious and vindictive. She rebels against the ‘vegetable existence’ lived by the women of Raman’s family and in a show of disregard for their way of life, she takes recourse to smoking. Sita also attempts to hurt the male ego of her husband by referring to her attractions for a hitch-hiker she had met. At this, Raman’s perfectionist moral standards receive a jolt. “He regarded her admiration for and interest in, the hitch-hiker practically as an act of infidelity” (53). Such attitude on Sita’s part gives her not only a vindictive triumph but also restores her self-esteem. Unlike Monisha, Sita rebels when her needs are unfulfilled. Quite unawares, Sita experiences herself in fragments. On the one hand she cherishes her image of a helpless, suffering woman seeking an almost mystic love from Raman, on the other hand, she is a rebel feeling kinship with an aimless wanderer. Her frustrations and rebellious attitude plunge her into a neurotic withdrawal – whereby she loses interest in her marital life. She presents a gloomy picture to her children and a quizzical one to her husband as she sits on the balcony, smoking endlessly and staring at
the sea. Her strange desire to keep her unborn child within her arms and escaping to Manori, the island where she grew up, signifies her desire to protect her child from the callous world.

Sita’s concept of freedom however is not healthy since it is an attempt at freedom from conflicts. Spontaneity and involvement, which are the preconditions of positive freedom, help in the affirmation of life. But in her state of withdrawal Sita, does not attain liberation. It is only when she struggles with her inner conflicts and resolves to make adjustments in her marriage does she learn to be contented. She finally conforms to the narrative of marriage as held by her husband and by the society at large. She finally reconciles with her lot and learns to be contented. Later, after Raman comes to the island to fetch her, she willingly accepts life and its problems. Sita thereby conforms to the narratives of marriage as held by her husband and by the society. She seeks solutions to her problems through a compromise which helps her in self-direction. The conflicts and struggles make her wiser unlike the vanquished plight of other heroines of Desai like Maya, Monisha and Nanda. Sita’s “personal problems transcend into existential ones and her neurotic despair and anguish give way to a more philosophic perception of the absurdity of human condition” (Bande 119). Thus Sita’s narrative of complaint turns into a narrative of compromise.

In her novels, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemmas along with her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as a human being in a tradition bound Indian society. The heroines of Deshpande always find it difficult to relate to the world without the husband. Women are presented in Despande’s novels as a partial being who is in need of someone to shelter her – be it her
father, brother or husband. Bogged down by existential insecurity and uncertainty, the women protagonists in her novels are engaged in search for refuge. At the same time however, they are not passive or static or cling to their husbands parasitically. They struggle to endorse their individuality within their marriage. They are well aware of the peculiar situation they are in where their selfhood gets erased into oblivion, after they tie the knot. Marriage is no longer a sacrament, but a social contract. It is an arrangement always to the disadvantage of the women. These women have no choices before them. Their marriages are made in heaven and their decisions are made in their husbands’ minds. The women’s lives revolve around the needs and desires of their husbands. Significantly, the women characters of Deshpande learn in due course how to arrive at a compromise and find a sense of balance in life as they try to conform to their roles. All the novels of Deshpande end with an optimistic note with the possibility of some positive action in future. There is an attempt on Deshpande’s part to connect the old traditional beliefs with new ideas of women’s empowerment.

Deshpande’s heroines too suffer from ego-inflation and self-glorification like Desai’s heroines, which appear to be the root causes for their discontentment. Being educated and being influenced by the liberal outlook of the West, they refuse to comply submissively with the norms of marriage, as laid down by patriarchy. Anger, protest or resentment is the most natural symptom of ego-inflation. Saru (DHNT) suffers from ego-inflation, resulting in her rebellion against her mother’s partiality towards her brother during her childhood which later surfaces again in her relationship with her husband. Indu’s reactions against her husband’s concept of love, marriage and sex are acts of resentment and anger. Similarly Madhu (SR) resents her husband’s refusal to
understand her. Whereas, Jaya’s (TLS) ego-inflation, leads to discords in her marital life. She feels like a prisoner within her marriage. Yet all the heroines of Shashi Deshpande clutch tightly to the sanctity of marriage and womanhood though they suffer, question and look for answers for their problems. They decide to sort out their problems instead of brooding over them. Solutions come to them with the breaking of silence. When husband and wife begin to speak and express their needs and aspirations, they usher in a new kind of life based on understanding and harmony. The tug of war between their existential dilemma and their desire to cling to their marriage finally ushers in a workable solution. Through negotiations and adjustments, they make a habitable world for themselves. They attain self-realisation and make themselves better individuals. Self-realisation or self-actualization is arrived at when there is a deficit state in a person. All the heroines of Deshpande suffer from the need to be understood and the need to express themselves. “This replenishment or fulfillment of a need is what is meant by self-actualization or self-realisation”(Hall and Lindzey 250).

In Shashi Deshpande’s *Dark Holds No Terror* a narrative of oppression is dominant. The novel explores the myth of man’s unquestionable superiority and that of woman being the paragon of all virtues. The protagonist, Saru is presented in the novel as a successful doctor, married to Manohar, a charismatic young poet, who turns vicious when he realizes that his career as a college teacher ranks nowhere near his wife’s in popularity, fame or income. When an interviewer asks Manohar the question “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but the bread as well?” (200), a psychological reaction takes place within him, making him turn into a sadist at night, when his male strength in all its brutality surfaces to overpower his wife in a sexual
onslaught. During the day however, he behaves like a normal caring husband, unaware of his split personality or his attacks on his wife. Sara, the oppressed wife opts to give up her profession because she realizes she has fallen into the trap of social orthodoxy to which her husband is bound. Sara realizes with bitterness that her economic independence and successful career pose a threat to her married life. Yet a respectable career was important for Sara because she believed “To get married and end up doing just what your mother did seemed to me not only terrible but damnable” (140).

The Manusmriti has confirmed that women are always to be subjugated by men and be dependent on them. Their sole function in the matrimonial arrangement is service to the husband and the family. Sara goes beyond such limited functions prescribed to her – she takes up a doctor’s profession and serves humanity. Thereby her narrative clashes against a dominant patriarchal narrative. Her husband refuses to be inferior to his wife and therefore oppresses her. She realises with bitterness that, a wife must always be a few steps behind her husband. Her ironical advice to a group of college girls is:

Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage should be on equal partnership. That’s nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it is unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you (124).

Marriage for Sara requires of her to be subordinate to her husband. Centuries of diabolic conditioning have left their mark on Sara’s psyche. She realizes with bitterness that she has to carry her ambitions, intellect and achievements like the dead albatross. Sara is an unhappy yet vivacious woman who defies her parents, walks out to seek a medical degree and marries outside her caste. The injustice, neglect and humiliation
meted out to her by her mother, that had darkened her childhood and adolescence, had made her strong, determined and rebellious. “I had to work hard, to be a success, to show them ...her (her mother) ...something. What? I didn’t know. But I had to make myself such so that no one would say to me again....Why are you alive? Why was I alive?” (50). Yet, beneath the façade of her wanton defiance, lies a lonely, trembling and insecure girl who wants to be loved, accepted and cherished by someone. She wants to be self-reliant but at the same time she dreams of a superior conquering male who will give her the meaning of life. Here Saru conforms to the partnership ideal of marriage. Saru seeks emotional security by marrying Manohar. But as she scales her career ladder and becomes socially and economically successful, the old sense of insecurity begins to haunt her again because her husband cannot accept her superior position. Saru’s needs and aspirations clash against preconceived patriarchal attitude of her husband.

The injustice meted out to Saru in childhood, because of her mother’s partiality towards her brother, made her rebellious and defiant. Her need to be economically independent is actually a demand of her inflated ego. The ego-inflation of her childhood later mars her relationship with her husband. She resents the role of the subservient wife. Once her identity as a doctor is established, she gives in to self-glorification. She admits:

The esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps the same thing that made me inches taller made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband. (42).
Saru’s marriage therefore, turned out to be a “monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible” (37). Similar inequality was also present in the shared life of her parents – an inequality that was marked by silence; sanctioned by tradition and was accepted as culture. In Saru’s marital life, however, such silence becomes oppressive. She represents the dilemma of a modern woman who strongly resents the onslaught on her individuality.

For Saru, success in marriage means manipulating and manoeuvring her relationship with her husband according to the socially accepted norms. Though Saru was a rebellious child, her childhood experiences with her mother maimed her psyche to accept injustice and self-negation, in silence. Saru therefore is unable to voice her protests against her husband’s sadism and escapes to her father’s place. Her parental house provides her a retreat from her oppressive marriage and an opportunity for intense self-introspection. Saru realizes finally “silence had been a habit for us” (199). Saru finally goes back to her husband, thereby conforming to the ideals of marriage that are psychically imprinted and socially upheld. She resolves to start life anew by refusing to live on her husband’s terms and by finding a solution through self-assertion. She decides not to allow herself to be the object for man to take his frustrations on. She graduates from a fragmented self to a unified whole. The open-ended conclusion of the novel conveys that a wife should believe in her strength and seek refuge in her own strength.

The title Deshpande’s third novel, That Long Silence itself is indicative of a narrative of oppressed silence. Jaya, the protagonist of the novel is a modern woman rooted in tradition married to Mohan who is a traditionist rooted in age-old beliefs.
They fail to understand each other because of this marked difference. Their relationship is more of a compromise where a long silence binds husband and wife. Jaya resents her husband's callous attitude and becomes a victim of circumstances.

After her marriage to Mohan, Jaya fits herself into the clear definite roles of a wife, mother and homemaker thereby accepting the narratives of devotion and servitude as laid down by the social order. She moulds herself to live according to the expectations of her husband, imitating the life patterns of orthodox families, for she believes it will provide her the freedom from guilt, if not happiness. The constraints in her life began in her childhood when she was nurtured to mould herself according to patriarchal expectations. The belief that "A husband is like a sheltering tree" (167) which had been ingrained in her, conform to the narrative of marriage as held by society. Jaya shapes herself "so resolutely to his desires" that in the end she is left with no identity of her own, "just emptiness and silence" (144). Jaya and Mohan were just a man and a wife married for seventeen years, with no bridges of understanding and love between them. She observes lamentably "We lived together but there had been only emptiness between us" (185) and they were like "two bullocks yoked together" (8), both having to go the same way without questions or retorts. Jaya's innate sensitivity however revolts against her attempts to mould herself into the conventional wife, which only brought her loneliness, vulnerability, boredom and monotony, starving her of intellectual fulfillment and of autonomy as a woman. Societal pressures clash with her ardent need to find a purpose in her life and it culminates in a long silent suffering, through obedience, surrender and subordination. In other word, hers is a narrative of complaint against the narratives of the patriarchal society.
Jaya is a talented writer but it is her husband who chalks out what she should write and avoid writing. Thus, the writer in her was strangulated because of her husband. “To Mohan I had been no writer, only an exhibitionist.” (44). He gets enraged with the story she had written about a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body. He believes her readers would interpret the man to be him. Mohan however, encourages her to write the light humorous ‘middles’ about a middle-class housewife, which had gained popularity and which he considers harmless to his ego. Thus, Jaya the budding writer dwindles into the conventional Indian housewife. Her frustrated cries are “Scared of writing. Scared of failing. Oh god! I had thought, I can’t take any more. Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into. I had mine – as Mohan’s wife, as Rahul’s and Rati’s mother” (148)

Feeling thus stifled, she seeks escape in an extra marital relationship with Kamat, who notices her predicament and encourages her to write – “Spew your anger in your writing, Woman, spew it out.” (147). This advice echoes what Cixous said to women writers “Write your self. Your must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth” (Cixous 350-51). Jaya’s differences with her husband; her frustration and her claustrophobic experiences all surface during the period of exile, when she along with her husband had to withdraw to the suburbs of the city in order to escape from her husband’s defamation threat. There she tries to erase her silent suffering through self-retrospection, by articulating her predicaments and by asserting her needs. She learns to challenge the destructive social norms of marriage and seek self-hood by transcending silence, negation and self-alienation.
Jaya was brought up since childhood to follow the iconic examples of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari. She therefore seeks support from the sanctity of marriage and the thought of desertion by her husband unnerves her. The traditional ideals of a wife which have been imprinted in her, renders her incapable of walking out from a mechanical existence. She is imprisoned by tradition at the same time she rejects the virtuous examples of mythical heroines. She states, “What have I to do with such mythical women? I can’t fool myself” (11). Jaya therefore represents an ambivalent attitude to married life. She is plagued by a tug of war between tradition, which prescribes devotion to husband and family and a search for individuality, whereby she can fulfill the needs of the writer and the woman in her.

During the period of self-introspection, in their hideout, Jaya realizes that her marriage had been a mechanical existence, with the only involvement being sex and child rearing. Jaya’s marriage adheres to the objectives of procreation and preservation as laid down in the Scriptures. She however, refuses to live such a limited life – of functioning simply as a body. Her narratives therefore clash with the narratives of marriage as laid down by the social order. She adopts silence as a survival strategy as well as a form of revolt. The mounting pressure of revolt, assumes self-destructive proportions. There is no expression of anger as seen in Saru and Indu. Her first and only outburst with Mohan, soon after her marriage, results in days of Mohan’s silence. She schools herself to suppress her anger because Mohan thought anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’. Since then she adopts the silence stratagem and turns the direction of her anger on herself, which becomes self-destructive.
In the case of displaced anger or reaction, the person, "directs his hostile feelings towards some object or person other than the one actually causing his frustration" (Ruch 464). But sometimes the expression of anger might not find any scapegoats and "may turn his hostility inwards and blame himself for his failure" (Ibid 464). Jaya belongs to this category. She directs her resentment towards herself instead of directing it towards the real objects — her patriarchal upbringing, her conformist husband and conventional concepts of marriage and sex. But her upbringing, which schooled her to follow the traditional role model archetypes of Sita, Savitri and Gandhari, force her to cling to her husband. Her incapability to break free plunges her into the depths of resentment and silence. Her silence is symptomatic of alienation and apprehension, rooted in every woman's soul in different forms — a silence that is often misunderstood by man as a symbol of woman's contentment.

Later, through self-introspection, Jaya realizes that she herself has contributed towards her own victimization. She overcomes her unnatural silence after a bitter struggle and realizes that negation of one's emotional needs never leads a woman towards selfhood. She learns that articulating one's predicaments is the first step towards removing them and that life can always be made possible. The courage she exhibits is similar to the other heroines of Shashi Deshpande — like Saru, Indu, Madhu and like Anita Desai's Sita. She decides to transcend the marginality condemned to women and to be an active participant of life rather than exist mechanically. Jaya finally arrives at a compromise and achieves a sense of balance in life. Solution thereby comes with the breaking of silence and by asserting her needs, desires and aspirations. The author Shashi Deshpande stated in an interview with Lakshmi Holstrom — "There is a
conclusion in that Jaya has changed. That is what matters, Not whether she is going back to Mohan or not. It is what has happened inside her that is going to shape her life now” (Deshpande 247). The narrative of silence therefore transfers into a narrative of self-assertion.

A narrative of disillusionment pervades Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*. Indu is presented as a determined and rebellious protagonist, who arrives at her ancestral home after ten years, in answer to her great aunt Akka’s summons. All family ties had been severed after she had married Jayant, who belongs to a different caste and community from hers. The home coming of the prodigal daughter provides an occasion for intense soul searching. Indu has escaped from the ancestral home, which represents an authoritative male voice, to seek education, a career and marriage. Ironically however, Indu discovers that her hard won independence is threatened by the patriarchal expectations of her husband. Indu is tormented by self-loathing and retrospective self-questioning, for having allowed herself to be in the ‘shadows’ of her husband. She questions whether she can ever be her own self in her role of a wife. She wonders if she has to live with the tragedy of never being free or being complete.

Like millions of women, Indu is bogged down by existential insecurity and uncertainty. She walks out of her ancestral house, to escape from its conservative and authoritative enslavement and seeks physical and emotional security in her marriage with Jayant. Thereby Indu conforms to the partnership ideal, which is part of the narrative held by the Hindu scriptures. She sees herself as a partial being, in need of a male protector and is filled with self-loathing for it.
Indu married Jayant with the hope of feeling complete and whole as a person. It was a symbolic act of asserting her identity as an individual because by marrying a person who did not belong to her caste and community she actually protested against her authoritarian conservative upbringing. In severing her relationship with her family, she sought her independence through marriage. But her expectations remained unfulfilled as she became a prey to conventions and to the patriarchal attitude of her husband. Her expectations, desires and aspirations, clash with the expectations and desires of her husband.

Indu’s marriage to Jayant ostensibly for love was disillusionment. She comments with consternation, “And I was so proud of my logical and rational thinking. But there was my trap waiting for me after all” (84). She fell into a trap which was of her own making. She finds herself conforming to the narratives of marriage held by the social order, as represented by her husband. Her hopes of independence are shattered, as she has to relinquish her identity by surrendering before Jayant’s masculinity — by becoming his wife. Willingly she yields herself to the demands of marriage and moulds herself according to the dictates and expectations of her husband.

Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him. And I can’t blame. 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. (40).

In relating herself to her husband, Indu is separated from her own sense of identity. Her identity exists “largely as being for others needing to please — and deriving security from her intimacy with others rather than living for itself” (Waugh 46-47). Indu finds herself following the norms of devotion and servitude towards her husband — the
ideology of *pati parameshwar* or accepting the husband as *devta* or deity, as encoded in the Hindu scriptures. She learns to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wants to hear. Her marriage had taught her an “immense capacity for deception” (38). Thus she deceives not only Jayant but also herself. Like the other heroines of Deshpande and Desai, Indu is situated in the familiar state of dependency on man. She is in need of male support, thereby conforming to the ideal of marriage as held by Manu — that woman must always be dependent on man. By fulfilling every wish of Jayant, Indu craves emotional support. She wishes to be desired, loved and feel complete as a person because man and woman together make an organic whole. Yet she perceives she cannot be complete if her needs desires and aspirations as a woman remain unfulfilled. Though she is conscious that her existence is that of a shadow, and is also sensitive of her subjugated self, her need for emotional security, together with her traditional upbringing prevent her from asserting her selfhood, in the initial stage. Her identity is confined to pleasing others, wherefrom she derives a sense of security. Her wishes and desires are to fulfill the wishes and desires of her husband. Indu’s behaviour and actions are meant to cater to the desires of Jayant — to gain his approval and to satiate her innermost need, which is to be loved. However, paradoxically enough, she feels alienated from Jayant — for having to suppress her feelings and aspirations. Her freedom of thought, expression and literary pursuits are curtailed by her marriage.

Indu also has to underplay the desires of her body because Jayant gets shocked to see passion in his wife. Within her marriage, Indu therefore has to live a dishonest life of pretence and hypocrisy and masquerade the norms of femininity. According to Helene Cixous, “It is sexual modesty that weakens and victimizes a woman” (Cixous
The sexual modesty in Indu enables Jayant to wield control over her and affirm the primacy of the phallus.

Indu’s adulterous one-night stand with Naren, a distant relative, is an act of defiance, against the prescribed norms of marriage existing in the society. Indu resists the ideal of loyalty and fidelity and deviates from following the iconic examples of Sita and Savitri. By being different from the ideals of virtuous women, Indu strives to establish her own identity. Through her tryst with Naren, which is not the outcome of love or lust, she attempts to subvert the phallocentric image of man. She believes that there are other dishonesties potentially more harmful than an incidental physical contact.

Indu shares the same dichotomy present in the other heroines of Shashi Deshpande. She is plagued by the wish to follow her husband’s wishes and at the same time she is filled with self-loathing for sacrificing her individuality. Tradition bound, she seeks her happiness in her husband’s happiness—but is frustrated. Her selfhood, which was nurtured by education and social consciousness makes her restless and disgruntled.

The Shastras laid down that one’s role in the social order is of preservation and procreation and therefore marriages are necessary. Indu however, looks for wider meanings in a woman’s life. She refuses to be shackled in motherhood and looks askance at her aunts who perennially have babies in their arms. Indu struggles to assert her selfhood, to fulfill her desires and aspirations. But her marriage prevents her from achieving this selfhood since she has entered into a life of pretences.
Indu’s visit to her ancestral home, away from her husband provides her the opportunity for intense soul-searching, which culminates in her accepting her marital situation. Indu resolves not to allow her needs and aspirations to be smothered by the dictates of her husband. She decides to be assertive, resist dominance and live life on her own terms. Indu thereby conforms to the sanctity of marriage. This act however, is not a submission to a superior authority, because her struggle for her individuality would continue. The open-ended closure of the novel indicates Indu’s skepticism of her solutions. She says, “Maybe Jayant would understand. Maybe, he wouldn’t. But even so….” (187).

In Deshpande’s Small Remedies the narrative of frustration struggles against the moral codes and rigid norms of patriarchy. The novel follows the familiar trend of the protagonist finding herself entangled in the problems arising out of marriage – questioning it, fighting it and then proceeding towards acceptance and reconciliation. Crisis crops up in Madhu’s marital life after she visits a painting exhibition. When she sees a particular painting with the familiar name of the artist imprinted on it, an incident which was deeply buried in the recesses of her memory awakens and haunts her. She reveals the truth to her husband that as a young girl of eighteen, she had had a sexual encounter with the artist of the painting, who was also her father’s friend and who eventually committed suicide, being overpowered by guilt and self-loathing. The single act of copulation was propelled by the engulfing loneliness, which made her yearn for physical human contact. It was rather a cathartic release of her grief, at her father’s death and not an act, prompted by lust or love. After years of being happily married, this revelation flabbergasts Som and his attitude towards his wife changes. He wants to
believe that Madhu was not a willing partner in the act. But Madhu stands by the truth, refusing to surrender to his condescending attitude, his angry outbursts and allegations of infidelity. Their son, Adit, aged sixteen, leaves their home in disgust and confusion hearing his parents’ noisy quarrels, only to die in a bomb blast in Mumbai. Madhu suffers from her husband’s rejection and his refusal to understand or to forgive her. Madhu values the partnership ideal of marriage and seeks love and understanding from her husband. When he rejects her with accusations of infidelity, she feels devastated and desolate. After her revelation Madhu and Som become strangers to each other. As she says, “We are like two travellers embarked on a terrible journey rocketing at a dangerous speed, unable to help ourselves” (258). The death of her son for which she blames Som, leaves Madhu shattered and agonized. She questions the policies of patriarchal control and the socio-cultural determinants of purity and chastity for women.

Som puts Madhu on trial, like Ramchandra does to Sita in the epic, because she is a woman. From the days of the Ramayana, the male dominated society has asked for proof of woman’s chastity. Madhu reflects with awe, “Purity, chastity …these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter” (262). The rights and freedom of the female body have been constrained right from the ancient times to the modern. Madhu’s marriage is rendered null and void by her husband when he discovers that Madhu’s sexual act before her marriage was desired and consensual. Som adheres to the narratives of marriage as laid down in the Manusmriti. A woman must be “patient of hardships, self-controlled and chaste” (Manu IX 30) and Madhu is punished with rejection for violating this rule.
Madhu realizes like Saru (DHNT), that a woman's life is not her own. Madhu too has been deprived of the freedom of her body, of the need to fulfill the body's needs and desires. Both Saru and Madhu believe that the fault lies with them. Madhu reflects, "The problem lies with me"(307). She understands that she gives undue importance to her body's desires. Ironically she reflects:

I know I should put this response away, where it belongs, among all other spurts of desire for anonymous male bodies. Men do this better, they are better at dealing with the needs of their bodies, they accept it as natural, as part of our human identity (307).

Men accept the body and bodily response as natural, because they have been socially conditioned and sanctioned to do so. The question that torments Madhu is – are women's bodies and bodily response any less natural, any less part of their human identity? Woman is deprived of the right to its own truth – the right of self-possession and self-containment. The questions, which arise in Madhu's mind, therefore clash with the preconditions of marriage, as laid by the social order.

After marrying Som, Madhu enjoys a general freedom in which the self is allowed the space and the stimulation to develop and grow. Before marriage, when Madhu moves to her aunt's place, after her father's death, she observes, "There's something magical about everything here – the food, the smells, the conversation, the laughter"(88). The same euphoria continues even after she marries Som. A narrative break follows that creates a lacuna and demarcates with startling clarity, the moment of change. "Two years after our marriage Adit is born" (146). The child is a wonderful joy and a terrible burden and Madhu's world rather than opening out into a full flower
becomes restricted and curled in upon itself. Motherhood, the essential ingredient of marriage, reduces her to an obsessive mother. Madhu herself, ultimately, comes to see her obsession with motherhood as a delusion – “A small center, a vast exclusion” (144). Madhu’s life is lived for and through her child to the exclusion and refusal of all other possible selves. A room of her own is given up for the shared room of a child. Unlike the other heroines of Shashi Deshpande, Madhu measures the success of a woman’s life against the ideal of motherhood, just as it is encoded in the Scriptures that the chief function of a woman is procreation.

After Madhu’s son dies in a bomb blast in Mumbai, to seek solace for her loss, she engages herself in writing the biography of the vocalist Savitribai Indorekar. In sharp contrast to Madhu’s life, the story of Savitribai indicates a life lived for the self and for creative fulfillment. The joys of motherhood so much cherished by Madhu, have been shunned by Savitribai. She abandons her little daughter, Munni, and elopes with a Muslim tabla player, breaking all barriers of caste and marriage codes. Savitribai is an epitome of strength and rebellion, who challenges the narratives of marriage upheld by the Indian society. After a long struggle, she has created her own space, her own individual identity amidst the male dominated society. Fulfilling her artistic urges formed the prime agenda of her life, whereas marriage and motherhood were of little importance to her. Madhu admires the woman in Savitribai for her courage and strength. “I see the artist, the woman in search of her genius, of her destiny. But the artist was born of the woman. First there was the woman and then there was the artist” (133). Madhu does not fail to detect the pain and suffering in Savitribai’s life. Though she defies conventions and lives on her own terms by sacrificing everything for the
cause of her art, Savitribai has to pay the price of her success with loneliness and rejection by her own daughter. The narrative of motherhood as presented by the two women in *Small Remedies*, clash against each other.

Madhu’s attempts to write the biography of the vocalist, Savitribai Indorekar gives her an opportunity to study her own marital life, which proves to be an internal voyage for Madhu herself, resulting in her self-realisation and self development and ultimately her glorious surrender before the force of truth. She realizes that for an individual, growth is possible when one learns to accept a situation, instead of withdrawing from it. When she receives Som’s letter asking her “come home, we need to be together at this time” (323). Madhu decides to go back to her husband; offer emotional support to each other at the loss of their son and continue their life together. She gets rid of her anger, guilt and loneliness and accepts Som’s ideas of marriage. She seeks transcendence from the chaos of life by seeking permanent values like the sanctity of marriage. Madhu therefore conforms to the narratives of marriage as held by the social order. Madhu adheres to the Buddhistic philosophy which proclaims that unhappiness results from “wanting to change that which cannot be changed, or from wanting to keep the same that which cannot be kept the same” (Bahm 101). Madhu seeks selfhood by dissolving her prejudices about people’s flaws; by accepting them as they are and by inculcating the strength to survive with dignity and self-assertion. She goes back to her husband with the hope that he would understand and share the truth of her life. The narrative of frustration thereby dissolves with the attempt towards reconciliation and harmony.
It is discovered that the norms of marriage as held by the master narrative, oppresses, subjugates, frustrates and imprisons the heroines. They all experience a crying need to express themselves and be their true selves, rather than perform the roles of wives, as prescribed by patriarchy within a set of parameters drawn around feminine virtues and iconic examples from mythology. The heroines share a similar fate as that of their sisters through the ages – of being objectified by the patriarchal society. “When one is an object, not a subject, all of one’s psychical and sexual impulses and interests are presumed not to exist independently” (Miller 63). Since the heroines are objectified they are denied their own space. Yet they struggle to crawl out of the imprisoning parameters and seek respite. The wives in the concerned novels are thus abused through psychological incarceration within an allotted space from which they struggle to free themselves.

The heroines in the concerned novels are anchored to a space which is circumscribed by social norms and moral codes. Though such a space serves as a mere locale or passive prop it has a powerful impact on the psyche as well as on social processes. Space is not just a form that may be linked up with social structures but is the essential ingredient of which social life is made. Space enters into the very constitution of society, individual identities, human relationships and position. Space also determines the power or the lack of it. In the case of the heroines it is the latter. It is the master narrative of marriage which determines the specifications of space and generate culturally determined rules for drawing boundaries which structures given modes of perceptions and social interactions. Space or spatial considerations figure in the
institution of marriage – as a set of norms, ideas and ideals that anchors and directs lives of the married women.

The character of the wife in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, is allotted a limited confined space – for her to perform her role and execute her prescribed duties as laid down by the social order. When the wife steps into her marital life, she steps into this space of limitations and confinement. The partnership ideal of marriage propels the wife to step into this space, along with a horde of expectations of her own and hopes of attaining happiness and fulfillment. However, disillusionment crops in and she feels stifled, incarcerated, oppressed and experiences a disintegration of her individuality. The space which she was believed to be a sanctuary turns out to be a prison. She therefore seeks escape from her stifling roles and seeks solace in a space of her own, where she can be her own self.

Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, withdraws to the garden to be among the flowers and birds to soothe her agonized mind. But the pleasure basking in the garden, converts into a frustrating wait, as Maya eventually feels lonely in the beautiful garden and yearns for her husband’s company. The space she creates for herself offers her only momentary solace.

Monisha in *Voices in the City*, seeks her space in the deserted terrace of the crowded house. Stealthily she walks up to the terrace at night when the entire household sleeps, seeking peace from the surrounding darkness and tries to restore balance into her chaotic life. During the daytime she is under the constant vigil of her in-laws. She is under surveillance even when her sister visits her. The criss-cross bars in the windows accentuate the feeling of imprisonment and the rhythmic repetitions of lessons by a
child in the house add to the monotony of her life. The secret nocturnal retreats of Monisha offer only temporary relief. She is pulled back to the call of duty – to fulfill others' needs and expectations.

Nanda in *Fire on the Mountain*, seeks her space after executing all her duties of a wife and a mother. She resolves to shut herself off from all human obligations and live solely for herself. The space she created for herself in ‘Carignano’, the lonely house in Kasauli, however fails to offer her peace and happiness because she has been living a life of pretences. In her attempts to endorse her selfhood by living an ascetic life, she has been suppressing her natural urge for love and compassion towards others.

Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* escapes to Manori, the island where she grew up, when she saw human sensibilities crumbling around her, in a world of artificiality and hedonism. For a short duration in Manori, Sita communes with the pristine beauty of the island seeking a soothing respite from the mechanical existence of her marital life. The island provides her with a congenial space to carry out an intense self-retrospection. It helps Sita to emerge as a stronger person, to face the bitter truths of life and prepare herself to make adjustments in her marital life. The retreat to a space of her own rejuvenates her and she shuns her earlier indifferent and rebellious attitude and learns to accept her marital situation.

In *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru goes to her parental house, seeking escape from her husband’s nocturnal tortures. Saru could find no security or happiness in the space she created for herself – a successful career, a husband of her own choice, a son and a daughter. Her hopes of euphoria were shattered by the preconceived beliefs of her husband. Saru therefore seeks security and comfort in her father’s company. Her
parental house provides her with a space for intense soul-searching and makes her discover the truth about herself. She feels empowered to assert her rights. She therefore goes back to her husband a stronger person.

Like Saru, Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, too moves to her ancestral house, which she had relinquished once, to seek her own space in a marital relationship. Catering to the needs of her husband and living a life of pretences by suppressing her own needs made Indu's life a shackled one. Her ancestral house provides her the space for deep introspection and she emerges a stronger and an emotionally independent person who could assert her own needs and aspirations.

Jaya in *That Long Silence*, who is another victim of bondage in matrimony, seeks her own space in an extra-marital relationship with Kamat. Jaya's husband strangulates her writing urges and she is allowed to write only what he wishes her to write. Kamat on the other hand, encourages her to vent out all her allegations and anger through her writing. Extra marital relationships find a prominent place in Shashi Deshpande's novels. Through such relationships the incarcerated heroines seek respite from their marital roles, which strangulate their own needs and desires. Saru (DHNT), has an intimate relationship with her doctor colleague, Boozie and Indu (R&S) with her distant cousin Naren. The attractions of these heroines to other men can also be interpreted as a form of protest against the rigorous patriarchal ideology.

Jaya seeks her own space in her flat too in the suburbs of the city, where she along with her husband retires for refuge, from a scandal. As they approach the door of the flat, Jaya refuses to hand over its keys to her husband — which is suggestive of an assertive and empowered attitude in her. Finding her own space in her flat, away from
the demanding roles of a wife and a mother, Jaya undergoes an intense self-introspection, which makes her realize she had to break her oppressive silence and voice her own needs and aspirations.

Madhu in *Small Remedies*, finds happiness in her marital space only for a short duration. The disastrous truth of her past begins to haunt her relationship with her husband and she gets separated from him. Freeing herself from her oppressive marriage, Madhu seeks her own space. She engages herself in her new assignment of writing the biography of the vocalist, Savitri Bai Indorekar, which gives her an opportunity to assess her own marital life. The self-introspection in her own private space leads her towards self-realisation and self-development. She learns that life has to continue and she has to accept that which cannot be changed.

The heroines like Desai’s Maya, Monisha and Nanda look for spaces of their own and seek a momentary respite yet they fail to achieve liberation in their private spaces. They are all bogged down by existential insecurity and uncertainty. Moreover, the patriarchal expectations of society continue to haunt them, even in their escapades. Whereas, Shashi Deshpande’s heroines like Saru, Indu, Jaya, Madhu and Anita Desai’s later heroine Sita, emerge stronger from their self-introspection in their private spaces. They resolve to be assertive and proceed to fulfill their needs and aspirations within their marriage. All the heroines seek love, understanding and recognition as individuals. Since they are in the quest of emotional refuge and are in need of a male to shelter and support them – the space or ‘room’ of their own cannot provide them liberation or happiness. Therefore, their marital lives end in discontentment. It is both physically and
spiritually dissatisfying. It creates confusion in them whether to take up the path of rejection or submission because both end in discontentment.

The heroines of both Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande thus suffer discontentment, frustration and helplessness. The predicaments of Desai’s heroines make them hysterical, neurotic and ultimately escapists. Maya and Monisha embrace death to escape from their sufferings, while for Nanda a life of denial and deprivation culminates in a psychic death followed by a sudden physical demise. Sita however has affinities with Shashi Deshpande’s heroines. She emerges stronger from her sufferings just as the other heroines are able to assert themselves from their introspection. Like Saru, Jaya, Indu and Madhu in Deshpande’s novels, Sita too graduates from self-abnegation to self-realisation and learns to accept and compromise without letting her individuality disintegrate. Through introspection they learn in due course how to arrive at a compromise and find a sense of balance in life. They try their best to conform to their roles and the novels end in an optimistic note with the possibility of some positive action in future. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande refuse to bear their sufferings like the torture of Sisyphus. Neither do they walk off like Ibsen’s Nora or Nayantara Sahgal’s heroines, nor do they seek solutions through death like Anita Desai’s heroines. Rather her heroine is like a “revisionist questioning the adequacy of accepted conceptual structure” (Showalter 333).

Thus it is seen that the various narratives of the beleaguered wives emerge from the subordination they are subjected to by the male order. Their narratives possess the power to reflect reality and establish their identities. In fact, “Women are said to be the Phallus in the sense that they maintain the power to reflect or represent the ‘reality’ of
the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position” (Butler 45) The heroines of Desai and Deshpande’s novels struggle to achieve this ‘reality’ by oscillating between resistance and conformities to the master narrative of marriage, as held by the society. Some of the heroines like Maya, Monisha, Nanda adopt their own strategies for survival in their oppressive lives and finally seeks escape by choosing death. On the other hand, Sita, Saru, Indu, Jaya and Madhu conform to the sanctity of marriage, by complementing their narratives with those of their husbands. They accept the belief that when circumstances do not change, they have to make changes in their attitudes by becoming strong and assertive. There is found an innate powerlessness in the heroines to break free from the societal values, ingrained in their psyche and at the same time the desire to endorse their individuality makes them restless. This dichotomy, which worsens their predicaments and acts as a stumbling block in achieving their selfhood is analyzed in the following chapter.
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