CHAPTER 4
Conflict and Conformity: Dichotomy in the Heroines

Texts may be sacred, but to me the human intelligence, the ability to think for oneself, the power to reason logically, the urge to discover the truth ... these are far more sacred. Shashi Deshpande

The heroines in the novels I have taken up for study, owe considerably to the influences of the traditional Indian values as well as Western ideas imbibed through the spread of education. The heroines of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande represent women who are disgruntled with the inhibiting cultural and sexual roles assigned to them. They represent the New Women who have awakened to the truth that physical and psychological abuse should not be tolerated and neither should their sex continue in destructive relationships. But strangely enough they fail to reject their social and cultural background or free themselves from the attachments, opinions and expectations of the society which have moulded their psyche. They stand at a cross-road caught between tradition and modernity and bear the burden of the past and the aspirations of the future. They have dissociated personalities and are plagued by a dichotomy within themselves – of a tug-of-war between social norms and moral codes on the one hand and at the same time rebelling against its rigidity in order to endorse their individuality. Placed in such a paradoxical situation they live an ambivalent life because the traditional values of society imperceptibly and subconsciously influence the heroines and regulate their behaviour. Yet, a part of their psychic apparatus refuses to submit to repression. The consciousness of a changed time on the one hand and the socio-cultural
modes pertaining to a grand narrative of marriage on the other hand, has led to a fragmentation of the very personalities of the heroines. Like their creators, they are torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. This dichotomy of narratives within them, conflicts with their own desires and aspirations. The portrayal of the heroines is therefore laced with feelings of frustrations and alienation. The present chapter studies this particular dilemma of the heroines, of their need to conform to the traditional values of marriage and at the same time rebelling against them. It attempts to analyze the peculiar situation of the heroines who look backwards in time and visualize the future as well. It probes the reasons which lead to this dichotomy; the effects it has on the heroines and also finds out whether it deters the heroines from their mission for selfhood.

Social psychologists emphasize the role of social and cultural forces in shaping man’s response to his surroundings. Eric Fromm affirms that even the most beautiful and the most ugly inclinations of man are not a part of his biologically fixed nature, “but a result from the social process which creates man” (Fromm 12). Man therefore acts and lives as a response to his surroundings. The character of man is moulded by external pressures together with his ingrained desire to feel whole as an individual. He therefore develops a unifying philosophy of life and wants to live for something, for an objective that signifies life’s meanings. Similarly in the modern educated heroines of Desai and Deshpande, there is a struggle to establish contact with their real selves rather than living out their lives catering to other’s expectations and needs.

The character of the wife feels an urge to define herself, her place in society and her relationship with her husband and his family. She has become conscious of her
situation and awakens to the urgency to liberate herself from the clutches of unjust taboos and customs forced upon her. Thus, feeling shackled, she refuses to languish on the borders of patriarchy and wishes to live a meaningful life by endorsing her individuality. A sense of alienation grips her which makes her life a meaningless void. She therefore wishes to be liberated and seeks spaces of her own through professions, through reading and also through extra-marital relationships. This struggle however is not be found in the older generations of women who serve as agents of patriarchy and faithfully carry on the legacy of male beliefs. The heroines of Desai and Deshpande struggle for equality, liberty, compatibility and self-preservation. Their crusade however does not assume the proportions of the militant feminists since they are passing through the twilight period of transition with their struggles still in its nascent stage, lacking support and acceptance. While they fight against the established patriarchal system, there are occasions when the women protagonists suffer from a feeling of alienation, which makes them want to turn back and seek male protection. The heroines thereby conform to the grand narrative of marriage which advocates their complete dependence on men. They are propelled by the urge to satiate their innermost need to be loved and to cater to the male gaze; thereby making the most difficult compromises and trading their selfhood meekly, merely for approbation.

Childhood moulding, upbringing and experiences have intensified and reinforced woman’s psyche and made them dependent on men. The social order has followed Manu’s proclamation that women must never be independent. “Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the male” (Manu IX 3). Old habits compel her to seek male protection, be dependent on them and to be treated as a child, while the
realization of her new identity compels her to liberate herself from the age-old guardian-child complex. The agony and rage of Indu (R&S) finds expression in her query—

“When Naren declares about his going, why did I feel at once like a deserted abandoned child? Why did it always have to be someone else for me? I felt foolishly ridiculously angry, like a pampered child suddenly left on its own, finding out that grown-ups have other more engrossing interests after all” (161).

Maya (CTP) too, resents being treated like a child by Gautama, her husband. She complains, “And you think me a tiresome child” (113).

The heroines of Desai and Deshpande are disgruntled and self-contemptuous of their dependence on men and they struggle to be free and self-reliant. However, their ingrained timidity and diffidence— the effects of centuries of subjugation and protected life pattern, pose a major hurdle. Though they are well aware of the sufferings and suppressions of their lot and new ideas of reform influence their psyche, they feel powerless to walk off from their oppressive marriages or raise their voices in protest against taboos and suppression. The reason for this is that, the heroines are shackled with certain weaknesses and complexes. Fear being one of them. Women think and act as they are programmed to. The opinions of the patriarchal society deeply influence their psyche. Believing what others have led them to believe is however detrimental to their well-being and development and inimical to the expansion of their individuality. Indu (R&S) realizes that what she needs is “to live without fear …fear of being unloved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing, without the fear of failure” (191). All the other heroines too feel that fear has weakened them. Yet, paradoxically enough,
another fear grips them – the fear of losing their own identity. As Indu reflects anxiously “Am I on to becoming an ideal woman? A woman who sheds her ‘I’, who loses her identity in her husband’s?” (54).

Indelible marks are carved on the psyche of the heroines by conventions and norms established by the society which restricts them from exhibiting their true selves. The mode and style of their development inculcates in them – submissiveness, silence and passivity. The heroines therefore suffer the oppressions of men in silence and without protest, as they were not aware of protest as an option to change their world. As Jaya (TLS), was made to believe the doctrine that “anger made a woman unwomanly” (147). She reflects ironically, “A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There’s no room for despair either. There is only order and routine – today I have to change the sheets; tomorrow scrub the bathrooms; the day after clean the fridge....” (147-48).

Women have been taught since their childhood to follow the iconic examples of mythical characters like Sita, Savitri and Gandhari and to suppress their own needs, desires and aspirations. Therefore the thought of desertion by her husband terrifies Jaya and losing the approval of her husband unnerves Indu (R&S). Jaya has not been able to cast off the roles of the ideal wife as propagated by the scriptures and practiced by the mythical characters. They have been reared with the belief that the husband is the epitome of protection.

Myths are an integral part of our cultural histories as well of the human psyche. In the Indian social and cultural context myths have a powerful impact and its legacy has been carried on through the ages. Shashi Deshpande herself states, “Myths
conditions our ideas so greatly that often it is difficult to disentangle the reality of what we perceive, from what we learn of ourselves through them: our behaviour is often, and to a great extent, dictated by them. (Deshpande 88). Myths have continued to be a referential point for people in their daily lives, especially for women. To be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi, as beautiful as Lakshmi, as bountiful a provider as Annapurna, as devoted as Savitri, as strong as Durga – these have become the ultimate role models for women (Ibid 88). Similarly the heroines of Desai and Deshpande are expected to follow the iconic examples. The image of women is rated in accordance with these mythical characters which have been created by men, to fulfill their various needs. They are expected to be the devoted wife; the chaste partner, to guarantee exclusive rights of the man over her body; the temptress to provide sexual gratification; to beget sons to carry on the husband’s name and to be the self-sacrificing mother. Women’s very own feelings, needs and aspirations do not figure in this agenda. They attempt to seek these but finally fall into the trap of convention. The dichotomy which plagues the heroines is due to their inability to break free from this powerful tradition of the past because women have been “led into self-dismay by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentricis” (Cixous 348).

Deshpande’s Indu and Jaya and Desai’s Monisha, Nanda and Sita suppress their own needs and aspirations to seek societal approval at large and emotional and material support from their respective husbands in particular. The heroines struggle to adjust themselves in their marital lives in the best possible way, by trying to preserve their identity as human beings; to create secluded spaces for themselves rather than free themselves from the traditional world, because they have been reared and groomed in a
tradition bound society. In other words, their narratives conform to the master narrative. The pull of the past traditions is too strong to be shaken off easily therefore, the heroines suffer from an existential angst, which ultimately hampers their growth. They display signs of maturity when they make adjustments in their marital lives and compromise with their own wishes and desires – but every compromise shatters their individuality into pieces. Being victims of self-denial they are at conflict with their inner selves, because their urges and aspirations are denied. Conformity to traditional norms leads to a conflict within their minds, because the selfhood struggles for expression. “The denial does not mean that the feelings cease to exist, they will still influence his (/her) behaviour in various ways even though they are not conscious. A conflict will then exist between the spurious conscious values and the genuine unconscious ones” (Hall and Lindzay 289). The urge to express the self continues to exist even if it is denied. In the case of the heroines, though they willingly adhere to the rigid norms and codes of marriage, a part of them abhors it. The heroines therefore, suffer a dichotomy of their two selves – one adheres to traditional values on the one hand and on the other, seeks to endorse their selfhood, which are their true selves and the former being their pseudo-selves. According to Karen Horney, the making of a self image or a pseudo-self and investing it with fantastic powers; idealizing it and then living it, tantamount to the Faustian ‘devil’s pact’. The pride is to be paid in the form of neurotic troubles that arise and “pave the way to an inner hell of self-contempt and self-torment. By taking this road the individual is in fact losing his soul – his real self.” (Horney 39). Deshpande’s Indu and Jaya and Desai’s Monisha and Nanda are self-contemptuous of their pseudo-selves. These heroines depict the devastating effects of
prolonged suppression on the personality of the individual which sometimes leads to neurosis.

"Neurosis is caused by bottled up feelings, because when people repress their feelings they repress their memories and traumatic experiences" (Moller 22). Desai’s Monisha, Maya, Nanda and Sita become victims of neurosis for repressing their feelings, needs and urges. While Deshpande’s Saru, Indu, Jaya and Madhu are examples of women with shattered self-hood, flaunting traits of devotion, duty, sacrifice and fortitude, to earn societal approval. They are like the ‘artificial product’ which Simone de Beauvoir describes: “The true woman is an artificial product that civilization makes.... Her presumed instincts for coquetry, docility are indoctrinated as is phallic pride in man” (Beauvoir 428).

Man’s essential inner nature is both weak and strong. It is weak in the sense that it can be easily suppressed and it is strong as it cannot be fully destroyed. Whether weak or strong it strives to endorse their self-hood. However attempts of the heroines to break free from traditional bondage are overpowered by their inherent respect for the same traditional values. The heroines like Sita, Saru, Indu, Jaya and Madhu compromise within the shackles of their marriages, initially through self-denial and later on, after a phase of intense self-introspect, Desai’s Maya, Monisha and Nanda succumb to tragic deaths during the phase of oppressive self-denial. In repeating tradition and following the iconic examples of mythical figures and the dictates of patriarchy, the heroines deny their self-assertion and hence languish as an object, meant to exist for the benefit of others. Self-assertion is an essential ingredient of a person’s individuality and is the root system of growth. When the heroines are unassertive they lose touch with their inner
reality and stagnate as objects; when they are in their suppressed states they deny themselves their own growth. It is only after intense soul-searching and self-introspection do they empower themselves and cease to negate their own needs, desires and aspirations. They finally become self-assertive and proceed to live meaningful lives as significant individuals. Thus self-realisation empowers them and helps them to bridge the gap between traditional values and emancipation. The dichotomy is finally dissolved through self-assertion.

In Shashi Deshpande’s *Dark holds No Terror*, Saru achieves economic independence through a successful career, but her emotional needs, desires and aspirations remain unfulfilled within her marriage. Saru who has been subjected to partiality, injustice, neglect and humiliation by her mother, turns rebellious and walks out of her parental house to become a doctor and marries outside her caste. But these rebellious traits remain dormant when she is abused sexually by her husband, Manohar, who turns into a sadist at night to overpower his wife, who has earned a superior position in society than him. Saru who has been deprived of love before her marriage, desires to be accepted, cherished and loved by a superior male. This desire in her adheres to the social order which states that a woman must always be inferior to her husband. Though she has become a successful doctor and has attained economic independence, she does not wish to walk off from her marriage. Saru thereby conforms to the partnership ideal of marriage, which advocates that man and woman are complementary to each other and make an organic whole.

There is an innate inability in Saru to raise her voice or fight against the brutal onslaught on her body. Fear of patriarchy has rendered her powerless. Though she seeks
to achieve her individuality through her profession, she finds that it is her profession that comes in the way of marital harmony. This is because her husband belongs to the conventional patriarchal order who believes that his wife should be a few steps behind him. Sara therefore, contemplates giving up her career to pacify the male ego of her husband. But her husband deters her from doing so because he has got used to the comfortable lifestyle she offered him. Centuries of conditioning of the female psyche has silenced Saru’s own needs and aspirations. She therefore surrenders herself to be victimized. Even after being abused physically by her husband she does not question him or raise any form of protests because she has been moulded to believe that it is his right to treat his ‘possessions’ as he wishes. Sara is tormented by a split in her – one part of her wishes to be economically independent while the other part prevents her from raising any protests. It is only when her physical torture and humiliation gets persistent and intolerable she seeks refuge in her father’s house. Eventually after a period of intense soul-searching and retrospection, she goes back to her husband.

Traditional values imbibed since childhood, makes Sara believe in the sanctity of marriage and in the superiority of the husband. She admits with guilt that his image has been diminished because she is a successful doctor. She observes, “My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (217). Before Manohar comes to her father’s house to take her back Saru’s initial reaction was to, pack her belongings and run off because she feels she cannot face him. When her father questions her “Are you scared of him?” She answers “Scared of him? O god, Yes. But not the way you think. It’s not what he has done to me, but what I have done to him” (216). Ultimately, she goes back to her husband to share her life with him, but she resolves that it would be on her terms.
The part of her which yearns to seek selfhood, finally makes her strong and assertive. She decides to make her relationship with Manohar a companionable and meaningful one, instead of the destructive one between the tyrant and the oppressed. Saru therefore wishes to be independent and fulfill her own dreams and aspirations but at the same time she cannot relinquish the belief that a husband must be superior to the wife. Her going back to her husband after a prolonged phase of intense soul-searching is not an act of submission or resignation, but it is to start a more healthy relationship based on understanding, respect and trust.

A similar dichotomy torments Indu in *Roots and Shadows*. She walks out of her ancestral home as an act of defiance against its conservative and authoritarian mode and seeks happiness and fulfillment in her marriage to Jayant. As she fits herself into the role of the devoted wife and engages herself in catering to every wish and desire of her husband, she realizes her own wishes and desires remain unfulfilled. Like Saru (DHNT), the rebel in her is suppressed and she becomes powerless to free herself from the directions and dictates of her husband. Indu thereby conforms to the narrative of marriage as held by the social order and at the same time becomes a prisoner of her own device because her own needs and aspirations get suppressed. Jayant has not pressurized her into the role she adopts. It is the way she wishes to be. These dual conflicting narratives in her mind lead to turmoil because she cannot find fulfillment either way. The confusion together with self-loathing makes her escape to her ancestral house and seek solutions to her tormented life.

On the threshold of a changing social order, like Saru, Indu is also in an intricate and inexplicable way bound up with her past. She realizes “We can flatter ourselves that
we have escaped the compulsions of the past, but we are still pinioned to it by little things" (34). The challenge for Indu is to interrogate both the options — the traditional values which have percolated through the generations and the liberated deviant beliefs in the Western mould. Like the other heroines of Deshpande, Indu interrogates the norms and practices which define an Indian woman. She has urges in her to be a crusader for woman’s rights and attempts to be so through her writings and she also tries to be assertive about the needs and desires of her own body. Paradoxically enough, like and obedient docile wife she gives up her writing when Jayant wishes her to do so and even underplays the desires of her body, because Jayant gets shocked to see sexual passion in a woman.

The dichotomy in Indu is the consequence of her adaptations to other’s expectations and not what she was meant to be. The baggage of advice which she has heard since her childhood, that a woman should neither demand, nor assert, nor proclaim — continue to influence her thoughts and actions in her marital life. She reflects, “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” (158). But the rebellious part of Indu had laughed at them and sworn that she would never pretend to be what she was not. But after marrying Jayant, she realizes that he too expected her to be meek and submissive and she surrendered to him without any protest. The narrative of resistance is overpowered by her narrative of dependence. It is this trait of dependency in women which leads to the dichotomy in them; “19th century women, …share a dream of dependency. Gratified, it may give them the opportunity of control; or it may lead to the recognition that it involves some fundamental denial of the
self. The woman's dependency may bring mastery or misery; her human need for relationship can become for her a source of torment” (Spacks 77).

Indu has clung tenaciously to Jayant and to her marriage not for love alone but because she is afraid of failure. There is a strong urge in her to show to her family and to the world, that her marriage is a success; she has to justify her rebellious actions and prove herself right to her family. Therefore, she went on deceiving herself by compromising with her marriage and shedding her selfhood in the process. In spite of her education, career and progressive outlook, Indu feels helpless without a male supporter for her emotional needs. She laments, “This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself” (34). A part of her psyche wishes to resist the demands of her husband while another part refuses to do so for fear of displeasing him and losing his affections. In her ancestral home with its strict conventions and rituals Indu had felt like an incomplete being, restlessly seeking a wholeness of personality. After she marries Jayant, strangely she feels a sense of wholeness and completeness in the initial stage. Indu reflects “I had felt incomplete, not as a woman but as a person. And in Jayant I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self” (51)

However this initial sense of euphoric completeness turns out to be deceptive. She begins to feel alienated from Jayant, when she has to suppress her own needs and aspirations and cater to every wish of her husband. To Ann Foreman, Women experience themselves as fulfillment of other people’s needs: “Men seek relief from their alienation through their relation with women; for women there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structures of her oppression” (Foreman 102). Women have always been gazed upon as objects necessary
for man’s needs and women have been led to believe this. It is this belief, which had been ingrained in Indu’s psyche, which surfaces and conflicts with her modern ideas of women’s emancipation. Thereby, Indu like millions of women continue to be oppressed. Indu plays the role of an ideal housewife in order to survive emotionally but in the bargain she has to live a meaningless and futile life. Like Saru (DHNT), Indu too blames herself for her marital discords. She holds herself responsible for having regarded her marriage as a trap and not as a bond. After the phase of intense self-introspection in her ancestral home, Indu realizes that she has created her own torment: “Had I not created my own torment? Perhaps it was true...There was only one thing I wanted now and that was to go home... the one I lived with Jayant. That was my only home” (187). Indu resolves to start her life anew with Jayant but on her own terms – being assertive is an important step towards a healthy harmonious relationship, to make her marriage a bond of love, understanding and of positive growth and not a trap.

Jaya in That Long Silence experiences similar conflicts of narratives. The traditional ideals of wife which had been imprinted in her psyche since her childhood prevent her from breaking free from a marriage, which stifles her selfhood. After she marries Mohan, Jaya moulds herself into the role of an ideal wife as propagated by Sita, Savitri and Gandhari in Hindu mythology and upheld by the social order. She was made to believe that without a husband “You are dangerously uprooted and vulnerable” (32) and in return, the wife has to fulfill all his wishes and desires. Initially, timidity and meekness cripple Jaya to voice her resentment and frustrations or to assert her own needs, desires and aspirations. Her narrative of complaint takes the form of silence. Her self-abnegation and silence assume self-destructive proportions, yet she is incapable of
breaking free from the roles assigned to her by the social order. Solution to her predicaments is finally achieved through the breaking of silence, after a prolonged period of subjugation. Yet being passive and static is not the true nature of Jaya. Her father who was a freedom fighter, a playwright and a Sanskrit scholar had encouraged her to be confident, resilient and courageous. He had christened her 'Jaya' with the hope that she would always be victorious. The ambiguous lessons she had received since childhood splits her – one part urges her to be courageous and resist all that is wrong while the other part directs her to cling to traditional values, which implies submissiveness.

The period of 'exile' in her Dadar flat, where she and her husband had to shift to, in order to escape a scandal, provides her the occasion for an intense soul-searching. A number of queries rose in her mind which made it essential for her to seek her individuality. The solution she hits upon was that she has to break her silence and assert her needs and aspirations. A healthy and meaningful relationship between husband and wife will then prevail rather than a relationship which is mechanical, silent and full of resentment. The fighter in Jaya finally emerges when she refuses to hand over the keys of her Dadar flat to Mohan, her husband. She realizes, “It was not he who has relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him” (9).

Like Indu (R&S), Jaya too is emotionally dependent on her husband. She feels bereft of support when her husband leaves her even for a short duration. She never confesses about such ‘frenetic emotions’ (97) to Mohan, yet they plague her and make her ashamed of herself. The strength of her feelings for her husband had both shamed and terrified her “It had seemed like a disease, a disability I had to hide from everyone.
Often to get out of all that emotional extravagance, I had rationalized: we are all frightened of the dark, frightened of being alone and so we cling to one another” (97).

Jaya thus experiences herself as a partial being in need of a male protector, thereby adhering to the partnership ideal. Jaya seeks emotional security outside her marriage as well, in an extra-marital relationship with Kamat. This is a form of protest against the restrictive norms of marriage which subjugates her individuality. Though Jaya had been married to Mohan for seventeen years there had been only emptiness between them. It is this emptiness that draws Jaya towards Kamat, who is warm, friendly and understanding. With him, Jaya forgets her womanhood and is simply a person called ‘Jaya’. It is Kamat who encourages her to write and not to restrain her anger in her writings.

Jaya’s submissiveness intensifies and her conflicting narratives frustrate her. She finally decides to break her silence and become assertive. A number of queries arise in her mind which makes it essential for her to seek her individuality. She believes this was possible only by breaking her silence and asserts her own needs and aspirations. A healthy meaningful relationship between husband and wife will then replace the relationship which is mechanical, silent and full of resentment. The fighter in Jaya finally emerges when she refuses to hand over the keys of her Dadar flat to Mohan, her husband. She realizes, “It was not he who has relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer conceded any authority on him.” (9).

Solution is arrived at when she breaks her silence and begins to assert her rights. She starts her life anew with Mohan, based on self-assertion and understanding. The
chasm between emancipation and traditional values is bridged when Jaya finally resolves to make adjustments in her marital life.

Madhu the heroine of *Small Remedies*, also suffers from a similar tug-of-war between rebelliousness and acceptance. She rebels when her husband refuses to acknowledge her needs and desires but ultimately she goes back to him seeking emotional support. She feels devastated and desolate when her husband rejects her with accusations of infidelity when she discloses to him about a pre-marital sexual encounter, with her father’s friend. What flabbergasts her husband, Som, is the fact that she was a willing partner in the act. Som cannot accept Madhu’s explanation that it was a cathartic release of her grief at her father’s death and not the result of love or lust. The needs and desires of a woman’s body, her yearnings for comforting human contact have never been recognized by the patriarchal society. The *Manusmriti* has laid down that a woman must be ‘self-controlled and chaste’ (*Manu* IX 30).

In all human beings passion is natural and necessary, but, Rousseau outlines his theory of sexual asymmetry in his *Emile* (1762), by saying that passion in woman is not controlled by reason and women must be subject all their lives, to the most constant and severe restraint, which is that of decorum …and that women should be taught above all things to lay a due restraint on themselves (qtd. in Greene 155). To this Mary Wollstonecraft argues that:

Female desire is a contagion caught from the projection of male lust, an ensnaring and enslaving infection that made women into dependent and degenerate creatures, who nevertheless had the illusion that they act independently (qtd. in Greene 155-56).
Through the ages, patriarchy has always attempted to control female sexuality, based on the concept that female sexuality is dangerous and powerful and therefore male supremacy needs to exercise strict control over it. In Small Remedies, Som gets shocked to realize that he had no control or knowledge about his wife’s sexuality. Madhu is agonized with the realization that woman is deprived of the right of self-possession. Her need to be physically comforted is considered to be a violation of moral codes by her husband. The narrative of patriarchy conflicts with the narrative of the wife.

Men have been socially conditioned to accept the urges and responses of their body as natural. Som belongs to the patriarchal order which clings on to conservative conceptions about women’s purity and chastity. Like Ramchandra of the Ramayana, Som too questions and puts the fidelity of his wife on trial. He adamantly refuses to understand her or to accept the fact that her body is her own. This makes Madhu rebellious and she leaves her marital abode. She questions the policies of control of the patriarchal society and the socio-cultural determinants of chastity for women. She withdraws from the male domain which she had faithfully resigned herself to, to seek completeness and happiness and engages herself in her writing career. A phase of self-introspection follows which makes her realise that the fault lies with herself. Madhu falls into the trap of conventions. Her narrative of independence conflicts with the narrative of dependence within her. She realises ironically, that she had given undue importance to the body’s responses. Such responses are to be controlled if a woman has to bargain for peace, harmony and emotional and physical support from the male world.
The common element of dichotomy, present in the other heroines of Shashi Deshpande, is also present in Madhu. On the one hand she behaves like a sexually self-assured woman who speaks for her own rights and on the other hand she puts the blame on herself and turns back to her husband and idolizes him as a comforting father figure. The rebel in her surrenders to the fact that she has to accept people and laws as they are. Therefore when Som writes to her, asking her to come home, she does so, resolving to share her life with him with dignity and self-assertion. Her going back to her husband is not an act of submission but it is to accept a relationship based on mutual respect and understanding.

Among the heroines of Anita Desai – viz. Maya, Monisha, Sita and Nanda – it is Sita of Where Shall We Go This Summer? alone who has affinities with the heroines of Shashi Deshpande, in the sense that the same dichotomy can be detected in her. Sita's mental, moral and emotional issues oscillate between the two polarities of rebellion and acceptance. Initially she rebels and then she proceeds towards acceptance of her marital situation. She attempts to escape the mundane reality of her existence but finally compromises with life as it is.

Sita rebels against the dull tedium of a meaningless existence within her marriage, yet she finds herself incapable of breaking free from the ties of tradition. She openly defies all social and family norms in order to achieve a sense of triumph. The insane obstinacy of her wish to hold back her unborn child together with her overwhelming despair, put her in the category of the earlier Desai characters that move towards neurosis or sudden drastic death.
In Sita, the narrative of rebellion conflicts with the narrative of reconciliation. The inner contradictions in Sita, make her fail to see herself as a complete entity; she therefore experiences herself in fragments — for instance on the one hand, she cherishes herself as a helpless, emotionally dependent woman, seeking almost divine love from her husband and on the other hand she is a rebel who smokes and shuns domestic duties. Her rebellious withdrawal at social and psychological levels breeds conflicts within her, which she overcomes when she relates herself to the realities of life. After much struggle Sita realizes that there are no values outside life and that an autonomous self can evolve only when the self flows out to the world in an act of participation. She learns to reconcile with life and its problems, which eventually saves her from the psychic disasters of earlier heroines of Desai like Maya, Monisha and Nanda.

The reconciliation however, does not indicate inner liberation. Conflicts and dilemmas plague her and after a prolonged struggle Sita realizes that her solution lies in accepting her marital situation and in facing her problems through a strong assertive attitude. Her changed perspective is a clear shift from impulsive rebellion to a healthy and satisfactory existence. When her husband comes to fetch her in Manori, the island where she had escaped to, Sita resolves to go back to her home and family, with a spirit of love:

If one is alive in this world one cannot survive without compromise — drawing the line means certain death, and in the end, Sita opts for life — with compromise — consoling herself with the thought that she is compelled to make this tragic choice because she is a part of the earth, of life and can no more reject it than the slumberous egg can or the heifer or the grain (Ram 382).
Sita derives the strength not to succumb to her conflicts and be vanquished. Instead she emerges a courageous being, ready to face life. The quiet note with which the novel ends, speaks of the maturity of attitudes achieved by both Sita and her creator. Sita adheres to the philosophy that if one opts for life one must compromise with it. She learns to be part of the earth and of life.

Desai's heroines in the earlier novels like Maya (CTP), Monisha (VITC), Nanda (FOTM), can be clubbed together into one category. Unlike the heroines of Deshpande or like Desai's Sita (WSWGTS), they fail to come to terms with their oppressive situation, nor do they put up an active struggle to break free from their bondage and are finally vanquished in death. The dichotomy which is common in all the heroines of Deshpande and in Desai's Sita, is not to be found in Maya, Monisha or Nanda. They could not accept their marital situation in which they find themselves in. They are disgruntled, frustrated, suppressed and neglected. They yearn for love and freedom and being unable to find that, they withdraw into themselves, thus fleeing from their inner turmoil.

Submissively they carry out their roles as dictated by patriarchy and remain confined within their marked space. Maya is confined to her comfortable quarters and the beautiful garden and is expected not to complain about her loneliness; Monisha is confined to the crowded house with barred windows and is expected to execute her household chores and bear children and Nanda is confined to her status as a Vice Chancellor's wife and is expected to be a skillful homemaker, mother, daughter-in-law and hostess. Having no choice they hold on to the traditional values attached to matrimony; they are powerless to break free and ultimately they succumb to their
sufferings. In the end, Maya and Monisha commit suicide and Nanda dies of shock and guilt.

There is no intense soul-searching in Maya, Monisha and Nanda, neither is there any attempt to face life and its problems. They do not struggle to free themselves from their predicaments or assert their rights. Moreover, the three characters remain static, they do not grow like Sita, who learns to accept the problems of life and then proceeds to seek solutions. Erroneously, they cling on to their withdrawal strategy, suppressing their wishes and aspirations and become non-participants in the act of living. The only way they try to save their individuality is by alienating themselves from oppressive relationships. They seek solutions by resigning to their fate, become passive sufferers and settle for less. Withdrawal becomes their only form of rebellion. As Monisha observes “My silence I find, has power over others” (130). However in rebelling thus, they become failures – since resignation and withdrawal are unhealthy and lead to disintegration. The quest for selfhood bears fruit only when one is able to establish a communication with the outer world. In the case of Deshpande’s heroines and Desai’s Sita, rebellion is followed by self-realisation and ultimately an acceptance of their marital situation. Maya, Monisha and Nanda fail to realize that acceptance of existence will lead to fulfillment, through an assertive approach and not through destructive self-abnegation. This dichotomy between rebellion and acceptance, which plague the other heroines is not present in Maya, Monisha and Nanda.

Freedom implies cessation of all conflicts and liberation from all fears. Thus, all the heroines, except Maya, Monisha and Nanda seek their freedom through the torturous journey of sufferings, protests, withdrawals and ultimately through
acceptance. The heroines do not grow when they are reduced to silent and subordinate objects by the cultural conditioning. Towards the end of all the novels they all go back to their husbands after a phase of rebellion and intense soul-searching. They however refuse to suffer the indifference or phallic uprightness of their husbands. But they evolve into self-assertive, strong and upright individuals. They do not seek their freedom by breaking free from their oppressive marriages; rather they resolve their conflicts by endorsing their individualities and continue in the same marital relationship. This is possible because none of the heroines could break away from the past. As J. Krishnamurthy says, “We are the past and there is no freedom in the past. That is our life, a constant battle, the past, modified by the present, moving into the future – which is still the movement of the past though modified” (Krishnamurthy 97).

The heroines cling to the sanctity of marriage as laid down in the Scriptures, in order to achieve a sense of security from the familiar world in which they grew up. Though the heroines were disgruntled and imprisoned in their marital lives, they were not powerful or courageous enough to rebel. It is part of the human condition to fear to rebel against a powerful and prohibiting system. Rather they meekly execute the dictates of patriarchy. As Jaya says, “That way lay – well, if not happiness, at least the consciousness of doing right, freedom from guilt” (167). Besides, during their withdrawal phases, when Jaya, Saru, Indu, Madhu and Sita leave their marital abodes, they are inflicted with spells of self-accusations and loneliness. Being bereft of emotional support they eventually turn back to their husbands. None of the heroines are emotionally independent characters. They all harbour a wish to be accepted and supported by a stronger personality. A feeling of inadequacy lingers over their
subconscious state which makes them seek male partnership. They obtain a feeling of completeness only through their husbands. It is this feeling of inadequacy which leads to the dichotomy in their personalities. This inherent dependence on man results in the loss of their will and self-hood. The heroines behave on the one level, like self-assured women with an urgent need to fight for their own rights and on another level, they put the blame on themselves and go back to their husbands, wishing to maintain the sanctity of marriage and seek emotional refuge.

Within a cultural context, psychoanalysis aims to understand individuals by uncovering desires hidden deep within their minds and revealing their connections with the conscious surface. Minds are intrinsically split, fragmented and self-alienated. Likewise, it is seen that though the heroines of Deshpande and Desai are disgruntled and unhappy within their marriage and some of them walk off to seek a respite, ultimately the hearth and husband pull them back. This can be traced to the inherent traits of dependence and devotion which are essential to woman's nature and are unchangeable.

The dependence of women on men is based on biological theories which is natural, and not on social and historical concerns. According to Freud, individuals harbour an unconscious mind that operates by rules more primitive than those of consciousness. He construed the dependence of woman as her reaction to her castration, or the lack of the phallus. Women therefore turn to her father as a child and later to other men as love objects. They therefore have weak egos and are passive (Freud 588).

Early social interactions in the family, rather than biology alone, shape psychological structures. Social differences begin at birth from parents' labeling and the
child's cognitive schematizing, which in later life include abandonment, deprivation, loss and narcissistic injury. Mary Wollstonecraft saw the traits of sentiments and sensuality to have led women to chose a subordinate social and subjective place in culture (Greene 158). For this reason when the heroines desire separation from their husbands and seek independence and autonomous individual identities, they have difficulty in breaking from their marriages.

An authoritarian patriarchal upbringing in the case of each heroine creates situations in which they feel compelled to comply with the expectations of marriage, for the sake of harmony and peace. They feel that in order to be liked and accepted they must behave as others expect them to, thereby sacrificing their own will. Their own wishes, feelings, likes, dislikes and grievances are not asserted. Eventually, they lose their own values and become dependent on the opinion of others on which rests their self-esteem. The heroines are ironically dependent on the patriarchal order because they are accustomed to seeing themselves being seen; to cater to the male gaze and to value themselves according to others' evaluations of their behaviour and functions.

The dichotomy is present in the heroines because women are also basically masochistic. “Masochism is the elemental power in feminine mental life and child-birth represents the climax of masochistic gratification” (Deutsch 8). Masochistic phenomenon represents the attempt to gain safety and satisfaction in life through inconspicuousness and dependency. The heroines have an inclination to conform to patriarchal ideology because of their dependency. Cultural factors too foster masochistic attitudes in women—for instance, the ideology that women must always be dependent on men and that her life is given content and meaning only through servitude and sacrifice. The heroines
adhere to this principle because they have been psychically programmed to believe this since their childhood. Besides, the fear of losing love is a specific masochistic feature. Though the heroines strive for emancipation none of them wish to sever their relationship with their husbands. They conform to the partnership ideal and seek happiness through their husbands. Past history of mythical prototypes has shown that women can be happy, contented and efficient under these conditions.

The dichotomy or the tug-of-war between tradition and modernity; between obligations and emancipation and between rebellion and reconciliation finally ushers in a solution. The heroines are able to create a habitable world for themselves in the margins of patriarchy. All the heroines except Desai’s Maya, Monisha and Nanda reconcile with their husbands not as losers or under compulsion but as strong, assertive women resolving to continue their struggles for emancipation. They decide to maintain a balance between their obligation towards the sanctity of marriage and their own needs, desires and aspirations. All the heroines except three, viz., Maya (CTP), Monisha (VITC) and Nanda (FOTM), end with a positive note with the heroines promising to resist the oppressive codes of marriage, no longer as silent, passive and meek women but as women, with a strong will to assert. The conflicts between the narratives of the wife and the narrative of the husband will therefore continue, but the dichotomy which had confused and tormented them, ceases.
Works Cited


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