CHAPTER 2

Tales and Tellings : Narratives of Marriage

To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself.

Hayden White

The oscillations and struggles of the women protagonists between tradition and modernity and between illusion and reality have become a recurrent motif in many novels by Indian women writers, especially within the institution of marriage. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande show this by presenting multiple and often contesting narratives of marriage, in their novels. The master plot of marriage has been repeatedly narrativized by the concerned novelists because they engage conflicts that seem to be permanently present in the lives of the majority of human beings. The women protagonists in the novels of Desai and Deshpande struggle against a powerful narrative of marriage which pre-exists in society and dominates their mind-set, their behaviour and actions. They struggle to carve out a space for themselves, where they can be free to express their own needs, desires and aspirations. These struggles take the form of their individual narratives which often clash with the grand narrative, though at times they seem to be conforming to it. All the novels that are taken up for the present study are based on the conflict erupting from expectations and questions. Expectations from a pre-existing social order within the institution of marriage wield power over the psyche and imagination of the characters of the novels and contesting narratives evolve in the form of questions and clash against the pre-existing narratives.
I refer to the narrative of marriage in two senses – one as the socially and collectively held traditional narrative of marriage, finding expression in the rituals and beliefs as well as in the mythical stereotypes used for reference as the ideal marriage; two, as the narratives subscribed to the individual women protagonists who attempt to break free from its constraints by articulating an alternative conception of marriage. The heroines are seen caught in a web of variations from the traditional views held by the husband, in-laws and women of the older generation, parents and peers that are often interrogated by the heroines themselves. This chapter studies the multiple narratives of marriage as existing in society and the heroines’ reactions to these narratives – which lead to the emergence of their own individual narratives. It also probes how the heroines who are an integral part of the matrimonial arrangement are situated within the prevailing narratives of marriage and how they attempt to certify their own narrative versions of marriage against the competing versions.

The study of narrative, like the study of other significant human creation, has taken a quantum leap in the modern era. ‘Narrative’ is defined as “the recounting of one or more real or fictitious events, communicated by one, two or several narrators to one, two or several narratees” (Prince 58). In order to distinguish narrative from mere event description narratologists like Labov, Prince and Rimmon Kenan have defined narrative as “the recounting of at least two real or fictive events or one situation and one event, neither of which logically pre-supposes or entails the other” (Ibid 58). It has a subject, which is complete in itself and exhibits a complicating action. Narrative must have two parts – story and discourse. The same given story can be told differently in narratives and conversely different stories can be told in terms of the same discourse. Likewise,
people respond differently to the same narrative. Narrative is not only a product, but also a process, not merely an object but also an act, which occurs in a certain situation because of certain factors and with a view to fulfilling certain functions. More specifically narrative is a context bound exchange between two parties, an exchange resulting from the desire of at least one of these parties. The ‘same’ story can have a different worth in different situations, for example the husband understands marriage in one way and the wife in another. Narrators attempt to establish their own narratives or their point of view. For instance, the wives seek to establish their identity through their narratives in a marital situation which impinges on their freedom.

By definition, narrative always recounts one or more events dealing with a particular subject. It is not simply a relating of events it also explores and devises what can happen. “Narratives thus shed light on individual fate or group destiny, the unity of a self or the nature of a collectivity” (Prince 60). Individual narratives provide its own brand of order and coherence to a possible reality. It also furnishes examples for its transformation or redefinition and effects mediation between the law of what is and the desire for what may be.

Hayden White has pointed out that the word ‘narrative’ goes back to the ancient Sanskrit ‘gna’ a root term that means to ‘know’ and that it comes down to us through Latin words for both ‘knowing’ (gnarus) and telling (narro). This etymology catches the two sides of narrative. “It is a universal tool for knowing as well as telling, for absorbing knowledge as well as expressing it” (qtd. in Abbot 11). This knowledge moreover, is not necessarily static. Narrative can be and often is an instrument that provokes active thinking and helps us to work through problems, even as we tell about
them or hear them being told. The idea of narrative has graduated from its archaic sense of 'gnarus' – not simply the relating of events but it has become the very mode by which people live their lives. The purpose of my thesis is to highlight the problems of the protagonists as projected through their narratives and study the nature of their struggles against competing narratives in order to seek solutions for their predicaments.

Narratives have therefore taken the form of solutions to the problem of translating 'knowing' into 'telling'. For any given narrative there are always multiple narratives that can be constructed in response or as resistance to it. Characters are understood only when they are narrated or offer their own discourses. Every discourse is a result of a conflict and it is conflict which structures narratives and gives life and energy to a narrative. Various social, cultural, psychological and moral conflicts are at play in a narrative. As W.J. T. Mitchell proclaims, one of the essentials of narrative is “Conflict and not mere sequence, connexity or a central subject.... Narrative dramatizes the most fundamental debates about the value and the nature of narrative as a means by which human beings represent and structure the world” (Mitchell viii). Without differences and without comparisons there can be no meanings and therefore no truth. The existence of doubt and disagreement with oneself, as well as disagreement with others, is a necessary condition for the occurrence of scientific change and for the establishment of truth. The narratives of the various characters are determined by their individual motives, interests, strength, weakness, trustworthiness, capacity to love, hate, adore, deplore etc. They try to certify their narrative version of events against competing versions. When people respond differently to the same narrative there is the persistent assumption that narrative appeals through its representation of some kind of conflict.
When there is no conflict there is nothing to narrativize and therefore no necessity for characters to be represented. When friends quarrel, neighbours complain, family members rebuke each other, lovers recriminate or spouses harbour expectations it is a case of people trying to certify their narrative version of situations and events against competing versions. "Disagreement can lead to novelty, rather than to merely futile controversy only if there is a basic open-mindedness lack of dogmatism, element of ignorance, uncertainty and genuine doubt at the frontier of science. The existence of doubt (disagreement with oneself) as well as disagreement with others is a necessary condition for its occurrence of scientific change" (Beller 12). The value of narrativity is a mode of making sense of reality – whether the factual reality of actual events or the moral and symbolic reality of fictions. Narrativity takes the form of a revolt against the authority of the social system. Conflicts in narratives are necessary because it is possible that the strange might be true and the familiar false. Sometimes people emerge wiser from their conflicts and attain remedies for their predicaments, sometimes they fail to do so. The purpose of my thesis is precisely to find out whether the heroines emerge wiser or are vanquished through the conflicts of narratives.

Narrative therefore is an instrument of power and the rhetoric of narrative is its power. However, this power is at stake, because of the conflict which is inevitably present in every narrative, though the conflict does not necessarily take the form of a clear opposition between a dominant character and a suppressed character. Besides, the conflicts are not solely about particular characters or entities. There are conflicts regarding values, ideas, feelings and ways of seeing the world. In fact there can be no culture without such conflicts.
Truths, meanings and solution are arrived at through the differences and conflicts between different individuals. An absence of narrative indicates an absence of meaning itself. Discourses strive to unfold the truth and to reach the heart of identity. The purpose of narrative therefore, is to give new insight into the nature of real events and also dispel blindness regarding assumed and accepted reality. Therefore narratives need to juxtapose itself with other narratives. It is necessary for narratives “to define its difference, its irreducibility, and even perhaps its heterogeneity” (Foucault 45).

In the narrative discourses presented by the character of the wife, in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, conflicts and differences emerge which contradict the pre-existing narratives of marriage, in order to establish a truth and seek solutions for an incarcerated life. The narrative of the wife vies with the narrative of the husband, in-laws, older women, peers, parents and of the patriarchal society at large. The narrative discourses are made explicit to other forms of discourse and thereby to social behaviour generally. The form and features of a narrative version is determined by particular motives and interests. The narrative of marriage of the wife therefore, represents a particular set of purposes or interests which range from fulfilling her own needs, desires and aspirations to creating a separate space for herself and endorsing her individuality rather than functioning as an automaton of the patriarchal society. As Foucault says:

We must reconstitute another discourse, rediscover the silent murmuring, the inexhaustible speech that animates from within the voice that one hears, re-establish the tiny, invisible text that runs between and sometimes collides with them. (Foucault 27).
Narratives therefore serve important cultural purposes and attempt to resolve conflicts that cripple and scar society and make living difficult for the marginalized people. It seeks to provide a way for people to live with a conflict that is irreconcilable, for example, the conflict between the desire to live and the knowledge that we have to die. A narrative can have immense power and serves major functions in the negotiations of cultural and social conflicts, which might persist over several centuries, through several generations. The narrative discourses serve to reflect reality or supplement it. They either reinforce ruling ideologies or sometimes subvert it. The reality which lends itself to narrative representations is the conflict between desire on the one hand and the law of the social order on the other. When there is no rule of law there can be neither a subject nor the kind of events which lend itself to narrative representations. The law which determines the various narrative representations taken up for study in my thesis is the Hindu marriage law, which I have dealt with in the previous chapter.

Narratives themselves need to be evaluated in a matrix of social practices which are carried out through various human relationships. The sociological system is built up of myriad human relationships which are governed by law. In any representations of social reality, we are accustomed to find various kinds of conflicts, struggles, tensions which are presented to us as a history. Such representations are directly related to a legal system which functions as a subject of concern and which points towards a moral order. Sociologists have claimed that social order rests on strong conservative elements. In the Vedic period, the social order was codified by the stringent laws of Manu, the influential and powerful law-maker of the Vedic society. In his *Manusmriti*, specific regimes of duties for the married couple are clearly chalked out.
According to Hayden White social orders are meant to “define the normal and justify the disciplining” (qtd. in Sturrock 107). In the Manusmriti, the discourse of power operates under the guise of a simple service to truth. As Hayden White has further observed:

Modern legal systems and penal systems represent a social authority which masks itself behind professions and humanistic concerns for the citizen, humanitarian principles of social organizations and altruistic ideals of service and enlightenment. But this authority seeks to make society into an extended prison, in which discipline becomes an end in itself and conformity to a norm which governs every aspect of life, especially desire becomes the only principle both of law and morality (Ibid 107).

This concept is an element in the never-ending conflict between power and desire. Thus, laws and master narratives control society under the guise of altruistic ideals and morality with the objectives of maintaining order and discipline in society. Such laws of morality and discipline tend to threaten and jeopardize the individuality and freedom of a section of humanity, under its rigid norms, expectations and surveillance.

In the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, the heroines are controlled by a master narrative of marriage, as held by the patriarchal society, which objectifies women. Women’s lives are defined not by their own will, but by waiting for others to take the initiative. Patriarchal religion has enforced the view that female initiative and will are evil. In the Bible, this is indicated by the juxtaposition of Eve and Virgin Mary. Eve caused the fall of mankind by asserting her will against the command of God, while Mary began the New Age with her response to God’s initiative. Expectations from the
social order impinge on the psyche of the heroines and seek to mould them accordingly. The consequences of such control are the emergence of varied narratives of the various heroines of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande in the concerned novels. A common element of complaint runs through the narratives of all the heroines. Few of them put up a fight against the master narrative since they have been conditioned by the belief systems and values of the society, culture, religion and family. They are powerless to free themselves and ultimately seek escape through suicide. Whereas, the other heroines oscillate between obedience and rebellion; they combat the expectations of the master narrative through questions and protests. Ultimately the only tool they achieve to empower themselves against the hostile circumstances is self-assertion.

The *Manusmriti* is the master narrative, against which various other narratives of marriage are measured. It is only through contests and comparisons that truth is evolved and justice maintained. Differences lead to identity and knowledge, through the comparison of the narratives of the different characters. The identity of a character is established by measuring his/ her narrative with a master narrative, or by assessing their position in an order. The heroines in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are paradigms of Indian womanhood who wage a silent passive protest against the patriarchal order. Their narrative of complaint is also a silent narrative. The views on marriage held by men and women are different. The two sexes are different from each other, though one has the necessity of the other.

This necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them; women have never constituted a caste making exchanges and contracts with the male caste upon a footing of equality (Beauvoir 446).
The basic component of the narrative of the wives is that women are equal partners in the matrimonial set-up and in the creative process and they are human beings with their own set of needs, desires and aspirations and are not mere instruments to execute male dictates. Their narratives bring to light hidden aspects of their situations and events which call for thinking and action.

When narratives are those of a silent and passive women, as in the case of some of the heroines of Anita Desai, the conflict is weakened and the solutions become remote and elusive. Besides, such weak narratives can be over-powered by the master narrative. The heroines of the concerned novelists are not hard-core rebels, even in their oppressed states within their marriages. They have difficulty in breaking free from the familiar zone of male support and protection. The influence of the controlling narrative also becomes too strong to be avoided. The heroines therefore adhere to what they are directed to. They succumb to the belief that though they are enslaved, they have the satisfaction of doing what is believed to be proper. They are like the humans which Victor Turner has described:

> We mime and dance with one another — we have webs of interpretive non-verbal symbols. And we play one another — beginning as children — and continue through life to learn new roles and the subcultures of higher statuses to which we aspire, partly seriously, partly ironically (Turner 143).

Individual narratives are not a set of surface discourses but are verbal acts of particular narrators performed in response to and shaped and constrained by sets of multiple interacting conditions. They are in fact the effects, which follow causes. Just as in the Newtonian universe in which we grew up — the basic premise is that effects
always follow causes — similarly, individual narratives are the consequences of causes. These causes would consist of the particular context and material setting (cultural, social and physical) in which the discourses are related. The values and goals which motivate human conduct are embedded in the master narrative which is in the very centre of the social drama and which constitute the cause of individual narratives. Social life is a series of movements in space and time, a series of changes of activity and a series of transitions in status of individuals. It is these changes and transitions which lead to the emergence of multiple narratives to either conform or clash against the master narrative. The master narrative tends to support orthodox and potentially conservative social conditions, whereas, individual narratives like the narratives of the wives in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are a revolt against the authority of the social system. Revolts or conflicts can also be against the social or physical environment or against one another or even against themselves. For instance, the heroines revolt against the patriarchal order, their husbands, their parents, their relatives and also against the orthodox values ingrained in their own psyche, since their childhood. The values of the master narrative either as a mode of imposing order on reality, or as a way of unleashing a healthy disorder are debatable. The answer for this is arrived at through a study of the various narrative discourses, their ways of viewing, presenting and evaluating.

The question arises as to what kind of insight does narrative give into the nature of real events and what kind of prejudices and misconceptions does it dispel. Each narrative version reacts in a different way to the grand narrative and each of them sustains, removes, connects or separates different features or sets of features in
accordance with the particular occasion and purposes of the narrative. The difference between the master narrative and the multiple narratives related to it are determined by the social, cultural and psychological conditions which influence the different narratives over the centuries. Narratives are not only structures but also acts, the features of which are the functions of the various social, cultural psychological conditions in response to which they are performed.

Narratives can be considered to be a part of a social transaction – since it encourage us to notice and explore certain aspects of reality that tend to remain obscure or elusive, when we conceive of it primarily as a kind of structure, or text or any other form of detached and decontextualized entity. Every rendering of narrative is produced or experienced under certain social conditions or constraints and it is the circumstantial contexts and the structure of motivation that sustain the narrative transactions between the different entities. Different narratives are bound by a psychosocial dependence for the sake of individual human growth and significant social change.

Narrative voice can be through someone’s eyes or perception, through someone’s ideology, conceptual system etc. or from someone’s general interest, profit, welfare, well-being etc. There is a crucial difference between ‘point of view’ and ‘narrative voice’. ‘Point of view’ refers to the ideological situation or practical life-orientation, to which narrative events stand in relation. ‘Narrative voice’ on the contrary, refers to the speech or other overt means through which events and existents are communicated to others. ‘Point of view’ does not mean expression; it only means the perspective in terms of which the expression is made. Narrative voice can be related to the full speech which Lacan describes as the “speech which aims at, which forms, the
truth such as it becomes established in the recognition of one person by another. Full speech is speech which performs” (qtd. in Freud, Anna 107). Because “Each time a man speaks to another, in an authentic and full manner, there is in the true sense, transference, symbolic transference – something takes place, which changes the nature of the two beings present” (Ibid 109).

Through narratives, an individual becomes both self-expressive and relational to other narratives, thereby making its reality symptomatically external in so far as it is entrusted to the gaze or the point of view of others. Women’s narratives legitimate for themselves, a definition which is outside the gaze of the other, or rather outside the standards of the gaze of man. Their narratives claim to be their own specifically, but in reality conform largely to masculine desires and needs. There is therefore, the risk of deviating from their original desires. The narratives of the heroines sometimes are not entirely their own – they are determined by the expectations of the patriarchal society. This has led to a dichotomy of their selves. This dichotomy will be analyzed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

In the typical feminine impulse to self-narration there is a desire to express oneself, in the double sense of actively expressing one’s own self and finding the words that translate that exposition into narrative form. Women are inflicted by an anxiety that the partially unexposed is partially non-existent. Therefore, they are tormented by their desire for their narrative. The desire for their identity seems only to be rendered tangible by their words and actions which become the vehicles of their desire. There is an innate desire in the heroines to understand who they are and the narrative of identity is rooted in this very desire.
Although women live in the world as beings, complementary to men, with important functions entrusted to them; this is an existence that the patriarchal tradition tends to synthesize within the catalogue of feminine qualities that reduce the ‘who’ to the ‘what’ – a wife, a mother, a daughter-in-law. From the viewpoints of the phallocentric representative order, women exist only in the empirical sense. The narratives that emerge therefore do not have at its centre a compact and coherent identity but only an unstable and insubstantial identity longed for by a desire for selfhood. Both the exhibitive acting self and the narrated self are utterly given over to others. In this submission, therefore, there is no identity that reserves for itself protected spaces or private rooms or certain impenetrable refuge for self-contemplation. As Foucault suggests:

The play of individuals’ thought, in a given period and disciplinary context, takes place in a space with a structure defined by a system of rules more fundamental than the assertions of the individuals thinking in the space.

(Gutting 9, 10).

Individual relations are determined by domination, control and manipulation. In such relations the self custodian nature of the modern society is reflected where all social institutions like schools, barracks, hospitals, factories including the institution of marriage, resemble a prison. (Foucault 228). The heroines of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande feel suffocated within their marriage and some of them escape to seek spaces of their own to search their true selves. It is only from their escapades do they attain self-realisation and learn to be assertive. According to Foucault “Power is a
matter of the subtle and meticulous control of bodies rather than the influence of ethical and judicial ideas and institutions” (qtd. in Gutting 20).

Relations of domination and control have positive traits because every exercise of power is accompanied by or gives rise to resistance and conflicts. It is necessary to create space for resistance, through descriptions, analyses and criticisms of existing power relations and also to develop oppositional strategies and new forms of experiences. Conflict situations arise when individual needs, desires and aspirations are not recognized. Family and family relationships, especially the relationship between husband and wife are the most significant areas where such conflicts take place, as the family represents a power structure which works through power relationships. Within a marriage there is power even in the subjugated wife because of her domestic authority and her reproductive powers.

Conflicts lead to continuous change and disagreement with others is a necessary condition for the occurrence for scientific change. Conflicts are an essential step towards truths, meanings as well as freedom and identity. Identity is built up as a composite of images and effects i.e. mental representations, taken in from the outside world from the start of life, which are developed in relation to the desire for recognition and adjusting to social requirements by submission to an arbitrary law. When women do not seek their own identity, beyond the roles entrusted to them they will settle for the world as men have made it. It would mean establishing themselves in the world negatively.

Narrative techniques are not ends in themselves but a means of achieving certain effects – like value, meaning, truth and identity. A narrative cannot be perceived except
in relation to other narratives and while the purposes of the different characters, writers and readers vary — they are inseparable from the question of value and meaning. A narrative remains undefined until someone construes it in relation to a personal identity theme. People’s ideas of goodness, justice, fairness, honesty, hypocrisy, courage, cowardice are all part of their social being. The modalities of response to the traditional values range from acceptance to skepticism and irony. Such varied responses serve as an index of historical and social change, which move from one socio-economic approach to the next. Social, cultural and literary changes combine to produce new kinds of narratives and new methods of interpretations. Multiple narratives thus evolve, depending on how the characters question social norms and practices; fill in meanings or try to find positive alternatives to the inadequate or unjustified views held by society. Meanings and values derived from narratives are passed down from one generation to the next. It is only through narratives that characters understand themselves as active entities that operate through time. Master narratives have traditionally provided an affirmation of social values. Tradition is:

An aspect of contemporary social and cultural organization, in the interest of the dominance of a specific class. It is a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present. What it offers in practice is a sense of predisposed continuity (Williams 116).

The narratives of marriage as held by society are a means of establishing order, discipline, values and meaning to the institution of marriage. Sociologists have observed that social order exists when fundamental human relationships are bound by law and moral sanctity. Marriages are important in society because it provides
emotional and physical security to man and woman – entities of society who are complementary to each other and make an organic whole.

Procreation and preservation of the human race are two essential functions of the institution of marriage and man and woman are partners in the creative process. As Manu said:

Where women are honoured, there gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rites yield rewards ...where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy, ever prospers.... The houses on which female relations not being duly honoured, pronounce a curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic.

(Manu III 56—58).

Manu here advocates respect and honour for the object entrusted with the functions of procreation, preservation and carnal gratification. The partnership ideal between man and woman is part of the narrative of marriage as held by society. The ancient Hindu scriptures like the Manusmriti, hold that besides procreation, the wife’s prime duties are to preserve her husband’s identity and honour by begetting sons to carry on his line; to assist her husband in attaining spiritual glory and to serve her husband and fulfill all his needs, desires and expectations. This is considered to be the core component of the Indian society. This ideal of servitude, expected the wife to be always dependent on her husband or other male members of her family and live a circumscribed life of subjugation and sacrifices. The wife is expected to be firm in her loyalty and fidelity towards her husband. Besides, she should never attempt to be a separate entity from her husband but oblige to remain in his shadows always, to serve
him. Such narratives of marriage, as held by society therefore discourage the selfhood principle of woman.

Besides religious and domestic duties (Dharma) and progeny (Praja), conjugal love (Rati) is also an essential objective of marriage. According to Hindu ideology women are expected to be endowed with purity, gracefulness, gentleness, physical maturity, beauty and fertility. This ideal of conjugal love, as held by society turns women into an object of carnal gratification, meant to cater to man’s sexual needs. The Hindu scriptures proclaim that woman is an incarnation of the Divine Being, entrusted with the task of creativeness. Therefore the girl-child is gazed upon as an object of procreation since her childhood and is moulded and schooled to fulfill her functions in the social order. Ancient law-makers regarded it sinful to marry off girls after they attained puberty. Child marriages which were grossly prevalent in ancient India were a means of imposing rigidity and control over women’s needs and desires because according to Manu “Women are able to lead astray in this world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and to make him a slave of desire and anger” (Manu II 214).

Similar kind of control and subjugation have percolated through the generations, as is seen in the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, taken up for the present study, as in the case of Indu (R&S) and Madhu (SR). That women should have desires only to complement the desires of her husband and that female sexuality is to be determined on the basis of patriarchal parameters are again a part of the narratives of marriage held by society. Though matrimonial ideals have gone through massive changes since the ancient times, the outlook of society regarding the status and roles of the wife remain more or less the same because the question concerning women’s
identity threatens the patriarchal powers of men, which had been their lot for centuries. Even in the present times, educated men expect their wives to follow their ideals, serve them and their families and fulfill all their desires and needs. Most husbands, barring exceptions, expect their wives to be obedient and subservient and never attempt to out stride them as in the case of Saru (DHNT).

Women have been extolled since the ancient times for her roles in the social order. Epithets like Duhita, Shakti, Mother Goddess, Annapurna, Lakshmi, Sati have been attached to woman, both as a form of reverence and as a reminder of her responsibilities. Goddesses symbolizing the qualities of female power of fertility, graces and prosperity are worshipped both by men and women alike and women are in turn expected to follow the iconic examples and are expected to become the embodiments of endurances, love, selflessness, sympathy and passivity. The goddesses as mother, sister or spouse function to rescue and establish male kingly power, rather than to uplift the power of women. All the major religions of the world advocate spirituality, morality, order, discipline and harmony in society. However, religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism have always promoted systems of religious law and symbolism that marginalize women. In the texts, rituals and oral traditions, the pagan religions also appear to be essentially androcentric.

The goddess symbol for woman is the affirmation of the female body and the life cycle expressed in it. Because of women's unique position as menstruants, birthgivers and those who have traditionally cared for the young and the dying, women's connection to the body, nature and this world has been obvious. Women were denigrated because they seemed carnal: fleshy and earthy than the culture creating males. (Christ 278).
Whether woman is feared as a seductress, sought as a sex object, or idealized as a mother, her primary value is supposed to reside in her physical being, her body.

In return for the services and sacrifices of women they are protected and provided with physical, material and emotional security by their husbands. The responsibilities of protecting and providing, thus, is allotted to a powerful authority which expects obedience, tolerance and sacrifices from the women which leads to a suppression of woman's needs, desires and aspirations. Similarly the social authority which claims to maintain discipline, order and morality in society, turns itself into an extended prison, with its rigid legal and penal systems. Rigid laws, norms and surveillance are camouflaged by humanistic concerns for the citizens of society and to attain a certain level of civilization. Norms of order and morality make people, especially women, live a circumscribed life. Paradoxically enough, society fails to reach the desired level of civilization, when objectification of woman replaces humanitarian concerns.

The term 'Patriarchy' implies the power of men over women and the effects of this power. Patriarchy implies:

defined notions of masculine and feminine. It is held in place by sexual and property arrangements that privilege man’s choices, desires and interests over and above those of the women in their lives and is sustained by social relationships and cultural practices which celebrate heterosexuality, female fertility and motherhood on the one hand and valorize female subordination to masculine authority and virility on the other (Geetha 8).
Society is a world steeped in gender – every habit, gesture, attitude and activity is generalized and categorized as male and female, masculine or feminine. Men’s attitude towards women is the consequence of social conditioning just as women have been victims of social conditioning. As Moira Gatens has observed – “The mind of either sex, is a neutral passive entity, a blank slate, on which is inscribed various social ‘lessons’. The body, in their account, is the passive mediator of these inscriptions” (Gatens 139). The onset of the temperamental differences between the sexes begins with the process of conditioning since early childhood.

There is a universal tendency to attach gender identity to a person, based on his/her biological sex, for instance, masculinity in the case of the male sex and femininity in the case of the female sex.

Masculinity at the beginning of the 21st century can be recognized in much the same way as femininity was by Freud, at the 20th century’s beginning as a dynamic between embodiment, identification, social privilege, racial and class formation and desire, rather than the result of having a particular body (Halberstam 355).

However a person’s gender identity is primarily a result of post-natal psychological influences. These psychological influences nourish and formulate the gender identity of a person. At birth the body is neutral and passive with regard to the formation of consciousness, “Masculine and feminine behaviours are arbitrary forms of behaviour, socially inscribed on an indifferent consciousness that is joined to an indifferent body” (Gatens 140).
Psychoanalysts however undermine the concept of social conditioning and advocate the view that it is not gender but sexual difference which valorizes patriarchy. The body can and does intervene to confirm or deny various social significances which are inevitable to patriarchal social relations. That the male body and the female body have quite different social values and significance cannot help but have a marked effect on male and female consciousness.

Freud describes femininity and masculinity as end results of a developed chain. Women are castrated therefore passive, yielding, warm, serving, sensitive, sacrificing, compassionate etc. While men are phallic, therefore active, strong, dominant, independent, forceful, assertive etc. just as the ovum is passive and the sperm active (Gatens 142). Woman takes over the object and man ‘combines’ the values of the subject. According to Freud, the psychology of masculinity and femininity mirrors this biology.

Thus the phallus and testosterone hormones together with the social conditioning have led men to believe in the myth of their unquestionable superiority. For Foucault however, the body is not ‘sexed’ in any significant sense, prior to its determination within a discourse. It is only through discourse, it becomes invested with an idea of natural or essential sex. The body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations. To be sexed, for Foucault, is to be subjected to a set of social regulations. Law directs those regulations and acts as the formative principle of one’s sex, gender, pleasures, desires and also as principle of self-interpretation. Social and symbolic process of gendering sexed bodies however maintain unequal and asymmetrical relations of power.
The roles prescribed for women have always been for the benefit of men with gross refusal or inability to see women as total separate human being. Rather, men have chosen to define women only in terms of how they benefited their lives. Patriarchy assumes women to be the property of men – her body, her services, her children. For Simone De Beauvoir, sexual difference is at once produced by anatomical and biological factors and by the intervention of other people, who have unconsciously become the bearers of specific social values. Simone de Beauvoir adopts existentialism in understanding woman, who is the 'prey of the species' (Beauvoir 97). She further states:

It is regardless of sex, that the existent seeks self-justification through transcendence – the very submission of women is proof of that statement. What they demand today is to be recognized as existents to life, the human being to its animality (Beauvoir 97).

Yet women are placed on a pedestal and considered powerful for their functions of procreation – for giving birth – which is a symbol for all the creative life giving powers of the universe. Even women who are not biological mothers can give birth to objects of art, literature, science or nurture other children, men and women. The creative powers of women are recognized and revered by society. But reverence is directed solely towards the symbolic representation of motherhood or creativity because it is seen that women as members of society are objectified for their roles of procreation, just as goddesses are worshipped for their creative, life-giving aspects. Besides, the powers of womanhood are meant to complement the powers of men and to establish male supremacy.
Rosemary Redford Ruether tries to seek the reason for this male supremacy—

Could it be that male marginalized from direct participation in the great mysteries of gestation and birth, asserted his superior physical strength to monopolize leisure and culture and that he did so by ritual expressions that duplicated female gestation and birthing roles, so as to transfer power of these primary mysteries to the male?

(Ruether 277).

Men depend on women to reflect their masculine powers and recognition of their autonomy. Therefore, women are essential to the construction of that autonomy and become the basis of a radical dependency that effectively undercuts the function it serves. Men need women to reflect and guarantee an apparent masculine position. Simone De Beauvoir had said that it "incites man to be universally irresistible and it incites man to a capricious imperialism" (Beauvoir 183). Among human beings the temptation to dominate is irresistible and the traditional marriage provides this opportunity to men. In the novels of Desai and Deshpande it is observed that the basic male psyche has not undergone any fundamental change. They share almost the same mind-set as their forefathers and most of the men still join the campaign to eliminate women who step out of the social norms prescribed for them. The notion which the husbands express about their wives, their services, professions, needs, desires, aspirations, freedom and spaces reveal the insensitivity and cruelty of the traditional male ethos, which stifles and smothers the individuality of their wives in a gradual and definite way. The husbands deny true independence of thought and action to woman and respond with cruel uncomprehending cynicism when coercive methods cannot be directly applied. In the novels of Desai and Deshpande one detects a repetition of the
typical masculine response to woman's preference to lead a life of their choice, which leads to clashes and conflicts, separations and suicides.

In the novels taken up for study in this thesis, the character of the husband is presented as 'thin and typed', sans any progressive outlook. The incarcerated situation and the psychic trauma of the wives are the result of the rigid norms, codes and attitude of patriarchy inherited by the husbands. In Shashi Deshpande's *Dark holds No Terror*, Manohar a college lecturer has no qualms about treating his wife as an equal and as a person. But when her success as a doctor begins to highlight his failure, he degenerates towards brutality. An interviewer's casual query "How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most part of the bread as well?" (182) Manohar's male pride is severely wounded. When Saru, his wife, becomes more powerful than him in income and social status, Manu overpowers her through his brute male strength – through sadistic sexual assaults. As Foucault has put forward that the discourse on sexuality is a play of power. It "lends access to the human body and through the body to the control of the group, the species and finally life itself."(qtd. in Sturrock 109). The age-old narratives of marriage held by society that a wife should always be dependent on her husband; follow his footsteps and never attempt to overpower him, inflicts injury on his psyche and identity and plunges him into the depths of an inferiority syndrome. Manohar's sadistic acts are carried out without his conscious knowledge, because he develops the psychiatric condition of a split personality from his feelings of worthlessness. Saru (DHNT) observes ironically, "My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood." (198). When a woman is dominated she can submit to the superior authority because she is conditioned by society to do so. But, Saru analyses
“There is something in the male ...that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination” (198).

In That Long Silence, Mohan, Jaya’s husband grew up with the notion that the husband’s authority is the supreme authority in a family. He expects Jaya to obey all his wishes and directions as well as share all his sins and sorrows. Jaya executes all his wishes and tries to imitate the devoted pious women of Hindu mythology. As a young boy, Mohan was a witness to his mother’s oppression by his father, yet he never condemns his father. Instead he eulogizes his mother as a virtuous woman – “She was tough. Women in those days were tough.” (36). Mohan sees his wife, his mother and all women as a species of humans, existing for the service and benefit of men, in return for which the husband will provide the material, physical and emotional security. The silence of his wife, which camouflages her needs, desires and aspirations, is mistaken for the silence of contentment. Centuries of conditioning of the male psyche has left its mark on Mohan.

Jayant (R&S), too share the same authoritarian attitude as Mohan and is similarly victimized by social conditioning. He desires that his wife Indu, should take up the profession not of her choice but of his choice. Besides, he is impervious and indifferent to her emotional urges and gets shocked to see sexual passion in her. Indu relates “It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I am like that, he turns away from me. I’ve learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I’m passive. And unresponsive. I’m still and dead” (83).

In Small Remedies Madhu and Som share a companionable conjugal life with no demands or allegations on either side. But after seventeen years, the rigid norms of
patriarchy surface in Som’s mind and create havoc in their marital lives. Madhu’s confession of a sexual encounter with her father’s friend, prior to her marriage, shocks and shatters Som. His male pride is injured with the knowledge that Madhu was a willing partner in the act. Som rigidly adheres to the belief that the physical needs and desires of a woman are to be suppressed and that she should always be faithful towards her husband. Though educated and compromising, Som fails to recognize the needs and desires of a woman’s body, because he has been socially conditioned to do so.

In Anita Desai’s *Cry, the Peacock*, Gautama is presented as the reserved, rigid and resigned husband of Maya, engrossed in his own world, refusing to see or fulfill the needs and desires of his wife. He expects her to be contented with the protection, comforts, status and space he has provided her with. He fears Maya’s extreme emotional dependence on him, because he himself wishes to be independent. His self-interest makes him turn an indifferent eye on her and he resorts to sarcasm and detachment. Male supremacy therefore refuses to acknowledge the interests of the wife, who is treated as an object left to fend for herself.

Nanda, in *Fire on the Mountain* too is a victim of negligence. Her husband who is Vice Chancellor, educated and respected in society, believes that a wife’s prime duty is to offer unswerving devotion towards her husband and his family and to silently cater to all his wishes and needs. He turns a blind eye to her emotional needs and sentiments and is unfaithful to her. He allows no separate space for her, to grow as an entity, but expects her to simply exist for the service of his family, to rear his children, attend to his mother and his innumerable guests and see to the smooth functioning of his house.
In *Voices in the City*, Jiban, Monisha’s husband too shares similar expectations from his wife. He does not notice her yearnings for freedom; how tortured she feels to be confined to the domestic drudgery or how pained she is to be subjected to ridicule for her child-less state. Besides, the notion of equal partnership of a husband and wife is remote from his mind, because he expects her to seek his permission before she spends any money.

Raman, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is the dutiful husband of Sita, providing her with protection, care, material comforts and making no undue demands. But Raman fails to fulfill her emotional needs or understand her abhorrence for the mechanical materialistic life which he lives with its “vegetarian complacence, the stolidity of the well-fed” (49). For Raman, life’s meaning is to earn enough money, live comfortably, have a large family and educate the children. Confused and perturbed by Sita’s demand for ‘divine love’ and attention he asks her “Bored? How? Why? With What?” (50) He expects her to be complacent like the other women of his family who are forever “chopping, slicing the incredible quantities of vegetables they daily devoured” (48).

The character of Raman brings to light, that women too attach undue expectations on their husbands. Towards the end of the novel, Sita observes with remorse that her husband looked tired and worn-out and that he had suffered from anxiety and uncertainty during the weeks she had been away. “There was courage, she admitted to herself in shame, in getting on with such matters from which she herself squirmed away, dodged and ran” (139). Raman is practical and unemotional in his approach to life and is courageous and calm with life’s adversities, but his wife’s
behaviour baffles him and upsets his equilibrium. The emotional and biological natures and needs of women, their glandular secretions and hormonal imbalances which cause havoc in a woman’s body, mind and moods are unknown to men. Anita Desai’s Raman and Gautama belong to such a category of husbands, who feel oppressed within their marriage. The emotional dependence and demands of their wives impinge into their independence.

In *Dark Holds No Terror*, Shashi Deshpande’s Saru who is a victim of sadistic assaults wonders “Who is the victim and who is the predator?” (144). She feels her husband is a victim too because she has vanquished his male authority by becoming more successful than him. Just as wives are expected to serve men and follow their ideals, men too are expected to be embodiments of valour, virility, intelligence and competence. Men are also expected to be rational and unemotional and are assessed according to their ability to protect, command, regulate and control people and resources, as well as by the affirmation of fatherhood, especially by begetting sons to continue his lineage. Besides, cowardice in a man is severely condemned. It chips away the very base of the pedestal of his manhood.

Society assumes men to be providers for women – from the sperm to protection and economic sustenance. In return they are conditioned by society to wield authority and control over women and are not expected to recognize the feelings, sensibilities, needs, desires and aspirations of women. The character of the husband in Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande’s novels, thus are much a victim of social conditioning as they are its perpetrators.
The moral ideology propagated for women are accepted not by men alone but by women as well. “Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs” (Cixous 349). The perpetrators of the power structures within the family circle are most often women and it is the relationship of one woman to another woman mediated through a man that reinscribes the power of a woman over another woman. These are the women who have internalized patriarchy. Women especially elderly women have the agential capacity within the so-called ‘traditional’ societies and wield certain powers within patriarchal arrangements. Marriage, which so often gives rise to exploitation, is sought after with obsession because it offers the possibility of exerting power over another woman even while being the subject of subjugation herself.

The proverbial mother-in-law, grandmothers, mothers, aunts and elderly females guardians are the agents of patriarchy who strictly conform to the pati-parameshwar code and act as the agents of patriarchy. They hold fast to the belief that woman is born to serve man and live as his shadow. These characters never endeavour for self-definition, but believe that a woman can be identified only by her service and devotion towards her husband and her family. Religion and moral codes have tied down women and blinded them from hopes of liberation within the patriarchal set-up, giving way to passive expectation of a reward from the Divine for serving their men.

The elderly women are the custodians of value contrasting against the ‘new woman’ who are wanton with sexuality and replete with self interest. For the elderly women defying of social norms would mean letting in the gross social guilt of sacrilege. They therefore willingly fall prey to patriarchy, submit to a culture that oppresses them ,
uses them as objects and makes of them a medium of exchange with very little or no profit. The only benefits they receive are masochistic pleasures of the domestic labour force and of motherhood. The authority which they wield over younger women is the reflected power of their masters – ‘the power of slaves’ (Irigary 368). The emphasis upon passive virtues of women has not challenged exploitation but has supported it. Moreover, the virtues they propagate and practice do not follow from their own reason, but are simply an implementation of patriarchal rules.

Simone De Beauvoir states that the woman is the other not only to man but also to herself. She is perceived by man and at the same time also perceives herself as an object. Centuries of such objectification has blinded the vision of the tradition bound woman, leaving her in the familiar state of dependency upon man, not knowing what she wants, she simply seeks fulfillment in marriage. Elderly women therefore are forever seeking suitable husbands for their daughters, grand-daughters and nieces.

Social anxiety grips the tradition bound woman, when they refuse to do what patriarchy demands. The guilt continues to haunt them, long after it has been recognized as false. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande suffer from this guilt, being placed at the crossroad of tradition and modernity, desiring emancipation on the one hand and on the other, feel guilty to break free from past traditions.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows* are crowded with the elderly women, who are the torch-bearers of tradition, keeping a strict vigil on the upbringing and behaviour of the younger generation of women. Akka, the great-aunt of Indu (R&S) represents the authoritative male power. Akka herself had an unhappy and traumatic marriage. She was a victim of marital rape as a thirteen year old bride and later of betrayal by her husband. Yet the concept of marriage is strictly in
conformity with the narrative of marriage held by the patriarchal society. As laid down in the Manusmriti, “Though destitute of virtue or seeking pleasure elsewhere or devoid of good qualities, a husband must constantly be worshipped as a god by a faithful wife” (Manu II 154). Akka conforms to the pati parameshwar code and nurses her husband with care and loyalty when he becomes a paralytic. She adheres to the qualities of devotion, self-sacrifice and endurance as encoded in the Scriptures and holds fast to the belief that woman is born to serve man and live as his shadow. Though she was victimized she believes that a woman’s identity lies in her service towards her husband. She considers it her duty to pass on this concept to the younger generation of women.

Similarly in That Long Silence, Jaya’s upbringing had moulded her to be a devoted wife and to suppress her own needs and desires. In Dark holds No Terror, Saru’s mother was always partial towards her brother and considered her to be a burden. She was against Saru’s pursuit of higher education and later disowned her for her rebellious act of marrying a person from a different caste. Indu’s (R&S) numerous aunts looked askance at her rebellious traits and for being without a child. In Desai’s Voices in the City, Monisha is under the constant surveillance of her mother-in-law – while she is carrying out her domestic duties and also while her siblings visit her. Besides, Monisha also has to suffer the butt of ridicule from the other women in her husband’s family for her sterility. The elderly woman’s sheer dependence on men for their physical sustenance, their obsession with religious and ritualistic principles, their lack of education and social consciousness have made them pawns of patriarchy. Their roles in promoting patriarchy have established women in the world negatively.

For the lesser women characters in these novels, like the heroines’ aunts, friends and the maids, the fear of society and the expectations of this society dominate their
lives. There appears to be no way out of the oppressive society except death – like the *chakravyuha* of the *Mahabharata*, the strategic positioning used in battles. However, unlike Saru, Indu and Jaya who cling to their marriage for fear of social disapproval, two women characters in Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies*, Leela and Savitribai Indorekar are rebels of their time, who dared to break free from societal barriers to seek freedom and achieve their goals. Savitribai left her husband and her little daughter and eloped with her tabla master, Gulam Saab, to pursue her passion for music. Leela, the heroine’s aunt was a widow who defied prevalent religious customs and married a Christian man. She worked devotedly for the Trade Union, among the factory workers and later become the victim of gender politics. She could never reach the hierarchal top because she was a woman. Savitribai on the other hand, achieved fame as a vocalist, but her failed role of a mother haunted her throughout her life. Both these women achieved for themselves the measure of freedom they needed and they both had to pay a heavy price for it.

When women do not define themselves beyond the roles of sufferers there can be no growth for them, nor can society be truly civilized. The patriarchal powers can change only when bonds between woman to woman are developed. The female self is allowed to grow only when female friendship develops to negate their victimization and work in unity for self-responsibility and self-definition. This is possible only when the woman’s narratives are articulated and translated into a strong defiance of the patriarchal codes, which smothers their individuality.
Works Cited


