Preface

Shashi Deshpande is a major novelist who has effectively articulated the woman situation in her novels. The earlier novels by Indian women novelists project the traditional image of women: the characters like their creators were torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Their crisis of value adaptation and attachment with family and home pulled them as-under. The plights of the working women was still worse, aggravated by their problems of marital adjustment and quest for and assertion of their identity. Shobha De and Namita Gokhale, too, have portrayed the challenges of the educated ‘socialite’ women with an urban base. But Shashi Deshpande deals with the middle class women who are struggling to adjust themselves to their predicaments rather than liberating from the traditional world.

The emergence of ‘the new woman’ is a global phenomenon. It is a curious irony of fate that in this pseudo-moral system of male dominated society a woman has been the victim of moral hypocrisy, exploitation and violence since the earliest times but she could not freely narrate or openly discuss these experiences. With the emergence of the feminist movement the woman have started discussing freely such experiences in their writings but her characters and incidents are not directly lifted from her own life. She has made creative use of her experiences and
memories in her works. For instance she has woven in Jaya's That Long Silence recapitulation of her own past life and experiences, sights and sounds, fables, sayings internalized codes about the place of woman, recollections and parallelisms with myths. Shashi Deshpande has made it absolutely clear that she has nothing to do with feminism in the narrow sense. She has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemmas, her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being in the tradition bound, male-dominated Indian society. Her 'new woman' has a strength of her own, and inspite of challenges and hostilities, she remains uncrushed. Her 'woman' is not reduced to the level of a breeding machine.

Thus, the 'new woman' is not a projection of the modern feminist movement into literary character. A woman is 'new' if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her own rights as a woman. Seen from this angle a revolutionary woman cannot be called a 'new woman' on this account only. The woman is 'new' when she analyses and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social, moral and spiritual fields and at the same time, she does not use the thorough patterns given to her by this male-made order. She endeavours to evolve her own thinking process, her own intellectual pattern in such a reflection. Deshpande very deftly contrives the desired effect through the use of metaphors which reveal moral and
spiritual urge of the 'new woman'. She explores the entire domain of her role as daughter, sister, wife, mother in a new frame of reference which she has evolved for herself. She also evolves her own 'moral code' in the light of which she evaluates the social norms set by the society. Therefore the entire gamut of the social norms of man-made social order which are the bases of evaluating the various roles imposed upon women are also covered. But this evaluation in the 'new woman' is secondary to the examination of her moral and spiritual needs. The analysis of the novels of Shashi Deshpande seeks to explore this aspect. Deshpande has probed into the suffocated psyche of woman to highlight her suppressed desires to lay bare here ambitions and frustrations, soothe her aches and travails and activize her slumberous feminine 'I'. She has thus expressed her ambivalent attitude of contemporary, educated, independent-minded Indian women who can neither reconcile themselves to a new situation with their husbands simply because 'the husband' is a 'sheltering tree' nor can they afford to live without. Deshpande's 'new woman' wished that she should be judged by an equitable standard and that man should rise above the prejudice of his sex. The need for self-discovery and self-understanding is emphasized. She is, thus, far ahead of her times in regard to the treatment of the 'new woman'.

She is not unconcerned about Indian reality in respect of the lot of women; but she is not strident and militant kind of feminist who sees the male as the sole cause of woman's problems. Her
concern is nothing less than human predicament. She has faithfully and marvelously presented the interplay between tradition and modernity and the tensions generated by this conflict are reflected in the image of the New Woman.

The thesis begins with an introduction focusing on the formative influences on Deshpande and her career as a novelist. Chapter II reveals the new woman’s vision of life and her search for survival and happiness, a quest for something to cling to in the strange world to live. Chapter III is a psychoanalysis of Deshpande’s women; their psychic process with reference to her major novels – The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows, The Binding Vine, That Long Silence and process of self discovery. Chapter IV shows the relationship between man and woman and the treatment of Love, Marriage and Sex in Deshpande’s novels. Chapter V identifies the technique and style of Deshpande’s fictional world through certain metaphors and images. Conclusion sums up the Deshpande’s success as presenting the image of the New Woman in the hierarchy of contemporary novelist.

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