CHAPTER -III
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The bold Heroines are self-reliant and economically independent. They are not meek and submissive are ready to face the challenges of times boldly. They are breaking the Shackles of traditions, slavery, domestic exploitation, dominance of male and, to the great extent, are trying to keep a balance between their home and career. Shashi Deshpande is a master artist of such human relationships prevailing is the life of woman in homes and career. Bold heroines are mostly 'new woman' as well as 'career woman'.

Urmila in Binding Vine is also a bold heroine.

Shashi Deshpande's female character are not only meek and submissive half world of humanity but they also fight for the cause of woman as an individual human being and as bold heroines. India is a male-dominated society, in which a woman can only pretend to be satisfied and happy. This idea is (expressed in one of Kamala Das's poems entitled "suicide".)
But
I must pose
I must pretend
I must act the role
of a happy woman,
Happy wife.¹

Such pretence leads to frustration and suffocation. Consequently, the boredom and frustration becomes the fate of female characters like kate, character of Jane Wagner's feminist play, complain.

I am sick of being the victim of trends I reflect but don't even understand?

Kate pretends to be happy but she faces the fate of being a victim and, finally, a woman searches her own identity-'a room of her own' as Virginia woolf accentuates.

In recent Indian-English novel, we find that the characters are quite sure of themselves, of their rights and their places in society. They are aware of their existence and are no longer submissive and silent. There is a marked difference in their attitude as compared to that of
the female characters of earlier novel. Writing has been, till recent years, considered as a male domain. As Jane Austen observes in *Persuasion*: "Men had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree the pen has been in their hands." But seeing the recent emergence of woman writers, who are telling their own story, we know that the pen is no longer in the hands of men only. These days more and more women are becoming conscious of their rights. They have risen in revolt and are raising their voice against their exploitation. Some important women novelists who have portrayed strong, determined and assertive heroines, are Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Geetha Hariharan and Veena Paintal.

Kamala Das's *My Story* is an expression of her dislike for the conventional and traditional role of woman. In fact *My story* is Kamala Das's deeply personal protest against the marginalisation of women. It is her autobiography. It is her self assertion and self-realisation, no more living in obscurity in some dark corner of the four walls of the so-called house. Kamala Das Shares her miseries and
triumphs with the readers. She has always been disturbed and annoyed by the imbalance of rights and role of men and women. She writes in My Story:

"You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her in the long summer of your love so that she would forget not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless pathways of the sky"4 Thus when her marriage was fixed by her parents, she could not prevent it her only way to revolt and show her displeasure was to behave in an untraditional manner. She was not the Shy, Coy, quite, demure bride but behaved more like a tomboy. Instead of wearing a good saree and traditional Jewellery, she wore a simple white sari on her marriage day. In the midst of everyone's joy and revelry, she was feeling uneasy and uncomfortable. She was pained to see that "The bridge was unimportant and her happiness a minor issue". (p.23) After marriage she wanted an emotional and intellectual companion but not a sex-companion. Her position in her husband's home was the same as that of most other women. She was supposed to forget her identity and serve
lord and master. She expresses these duties in the following words:

"You called me wife, I was taught to break sacharine into your tea and to offer at the right moment the vitamins. Cowering beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic leaf and became dwarf. I lost my will and reasons to all your questions, I mumbled incoherent replies" (p.192). Although she kept herself busy with the household chores, her spirit "protested and cried out, get out of this trap, escape" (p. 103) She did, however, manage finally to escape not by breaking the bonds of marriage, because in an orthodox society seeking a divorce was not easy for a woman- but by taking to creative writing, this activity gave her an opportunity to express her desires and hopes, to assert herself. Writing gave her the opportunity of establishing an identity of her own. It enabled her to speak as well as be heard.

While Kamala Das protests against male-domination by establishing her identity through literary writing, Veena Paintal's heroine, Charishma, walks out of her unhappy marriage and finds a dignified place for herself in society.
Charishma is the heroine of Veena Paintal’s novel entitled *An Autumn leaf*. Charishma, too; wishes to have a husband who would treat her with equal respect and love. She desires a companion in the true sense—not a dictator, lord or master. She did not believe in arranged marriages, where women are usually tied down like slaves, and have little chance of survival. She agrees to marry Amit, a colonel in the army. He is the brother of her friends Neeru. Since her parents would not have consented to this marriage, she takes a bold step by running away from her home and starts living with Amit. She is not legally married to him. Later when she hears of Amit’s infidelity, she does not tolerate his faithlessness and breaks away from Amit. She does not bother about how society will react. She leaves Amit and lives in her own way and establishes a new relationship with Rohit. But it also fails and comes to the conclusion that on equal relationship cannot be achieved in marriage. But her own identity, she has to break the fetters of conventions and traditions in a male-dominated society where a woman has to struggle against heavy odds, and she can have a room of her own. Charishma finds happiness in playing with her children.
and devoting her time to them, "She had discovered a flair for writing and was kept busy. Penning articles for the press". An Autumn Leaf is the story of a strong, assertive woman who knows how to fulfil her dreams. Charishma says': I have my own personality and my dreams. I refuse to be tied down like a slave to some rich man I don't even know and be treated like a piece of furniture" (pp 20-21)

Similarly, Shashi Deshpande's heroine, Saru, in The Dark Holds No Terrors, escapes from the trap that marriage is; after a lot of struggle and unhappiness she succeeds in having a room of her own. Isn't it ironical that a woman who looks after the whole family and household doesn't even have a peace of mind a moment of freedom becomes room of her own. She feels the sense of meaningless and her existence becomes immaterial, and unimportant. It is a known fact that a woman's life during childhood, youth and old age is spent in her parent's home and then in her husband's and son's home respectively. During all the three stages of her life, she is dependent on man for her survival. She is made to live at the margin but never
becomes the subject and her contribution goes unrecognised.

But Shashi Deshpande's heroines are courageous enough to revolt against the attempt of men to marginalise them.

Saru, the heroine of *The Dark Holas No Terrors*, is finally able to live a life which is really happy in the true sense with no pretensions and no marks. Her childhood was not happy and her mother makes her feel guilty of her brother's death as she had seen her brother Dhruva, drowning in the water that she could not save him. The harsh words of her mother-

"Why are you still alive?" "You killed your brother," "Why didn't you die?" - keep ringing in her ears even when she was grown up. She hates her mother and rebels against her by going to Bombay to study medicine. Here she falls in love with Manohar and marries him against the wishes of her mother. Saru hopes that her marriage would close the painful chapter of her childhood days. But she did not know that she had only moved from one prison to another even the worse one. When she receives the news
of her mother's death, she takes this opportunity to escape the violent world of her husband's house and returns to her parental home ostensibly in order to take care of her father. She here realises that merely shifting between her father's and husband's homes will not provide her satisfaction and freedom that she desires. Finally, she realises that she has to walk out of these homes in order to lead her life of her own dreams and desires.

When we first see saru in her husband's house in Bombay, lives as unhappy woman and feels "there is this strange new fear of disintegration." A terrible consciousness of not existing,

"No worse, of being just like a ventriloquist's dummy, that smiles, laughs and talks only because of the ventriloquist. The fear that without the ventriloquist, I will regress, go back to being a lifeless puppet, a smirk pasted on to its face"6

Her needs are simple and she wants to live. As a result she has to get away from this house which is symbolic of savagery and submission" (28)
When Sara reaches her father's house, she recollects the events of her life. Hers had been a love marriage but her husband, Manu, turns vicious when his career fails as a poet and Sara becomes successful as a doctor. Earlier she was known as the bride of the poet Manu, but, later on she became popular as a lady doctor and Manu was known as husband of lady doctor. Sara remembers painfully, "a+b they told us in maths is equal to b+a. But here a+b was definitely not equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible (p.41) The element of love had disappeared from their relationship. She realises that Manu is a sadist and this marks the beginning of their marital discord. When her father asks her if something was wrong with her husband, she reacts in a strange manner: "My husband?" She asked, blankly as if she didn't know what the word meant" (p.198) Later she tells her father. "He attacked me like an animal at night, I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this man......this man hurting me with his hands, his teeth, his whole body,"(p.200) Now love and romance proved only illusions to her and the code word of
the present age is only sex. "Fulfilment and happiness came not through love alone but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word" (p.133)

In her home town, one day she sees a woman as a widow, during her childhood in her happier days when she lovingly sent her husband off to office. But now the same woman is a shade less tree, which makes her desperate. She compares herself and feels that "I'm not that either........I'm just nothing" (p. 135).

The tragedy of Saru is endless and she does not know how to come out of the trap. In her husband's home, she was like a terrified and trapped animal. And even in her parents home she did not find the desired freedom. The change comes when she gradually realises that there is life is beyond relying and depending on an unsuccessful marriage, parents, home, and other such social institutions. Finally, she decides to lead her life as an independent individual. She decides to walk out of the traditional bonds of marriage and home and moves into the wider world.
Although she hates her mother does not share with her- "neither she nor I have that thing 'a room of our own" (p. 136). She feels the sense of the hollowness, emptiness, nothingness and finds her as a lonely figure.

This feeling of having a room of her own is also accentuated when the brother of Madhava is lost and his parents are after him to find his brother. (Madhava is a young boy who stays with Saru's father). He gets frustrated and irritated by their constant messages and cries out: "I can't spoil my life because of that boy. It's my life after all" (p. 208) It has the magical effect upon Saru's life with a new meaning which is always haunting her, "And Yet, they would not leave her alone. She went back to bed, the words going on and on in her mind" (p. 208).

Towards the end of the novel, she receives a letter from her son, Abhi, informing her that Manu would be reaching her father's home. On learning this, she decides to go away but where to go. Her predicament is to search a home for herself. She couldn't neither call her husband's home in Bombay nor her father's home as a home to her. She is standing at the cross-roads, feeling "How odd to live
for so long and discover that you have no home at all"
(p.215) Abhi's letter leaves her in a state of desperation
and once again, she feels trapped and helplessness like
any animal, finally, becomes the victim of his pursuer.
She is tired of her life and tells her father that she just
cannot prolong in such way. She has lived as a guilty
sister, undutiful daughter, unloving wife. But she only
knows that, if she was all of them, they were not at all of
her. She was all these and so much more. At last she finds
herself like a puppet standing "futilely on the stage for a
brief. While between areas of darkness" (p.220) She gains
self-confidence and becomes assertive and finds her as
woman now.

Earlier she had asked her father not to open the door
for her husband. But now with regained courage and
confidence she tells her father: "And oh yes, Baba, if Manu
comes, tell him to wait." (p. 221) with these words, she
goes to attend a child who was suffering from fits. She
once emerges as a doctor as well as woman "and now
there were no more thoughts in her, except those of the
child she was going to help" (p.222).
Another powerful novel by Shashi Deshpande is That Long Silence. In this novel, too, the heroine, jaya, succeeds in realising and discovering herself. The need to establish herself as an individual comes to her after seventeen years of marriage. Jaya's husband, Mohan, is facing charges of corruption and may possibly lose his job. In order to avoid further complications, his partner Agrawal suggests that she should remain away from office for the time being. Mohan moves along with Jaya to her maternal uncle's flat in Dadar. Jaya remains confined there for few nights and it is during this brief but critical period that she remembers the past events of her life. The memories of the past make her feel uncomfortable and unhappy. She analyses her life and relationship with her husband and children and finds that she has miserably failed at all fronts. Her silence and uneasiness remind us of the epigraph of this novel. In the beginning of the novel, Shashi Deshpande has quoted a thought-provoking statement by Elizabeth Robins, "If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy- the weight of that long (p. 23) Silence of one-half of the world"
"The weight of the long silence maintained by Jaya becomes unbearable. She begins to realise one futility of her existence. She pours forth her frustrations in the form of the novel- That Long Silence. In the midst of playing the roles of wife, daughter-in-law and mother, she had forgotten that she was a talented writer. Although she had won the first prize for a story she had once written for a magazine, the response she had received at home was far from encouraging, to say the least. But by the end of the novel, a great change has taken place in Jaya's personality. She has decided that she shall no longer be the subservient, silent wife. She has decided to break her long silence. She has only tolerated throughout the year. She has decided to emerge from the margins and occupy a place in the centre. She is conscious of her own individual personality and says, "I'm not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I'm Mohan's wife, I had thought and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible."

In recent Indian English fiction, the accent is on the freedom of women. The new trend in fiction, no doubt,
reflects a desirable change in the contemporary society. Literature is indeed, a mirror of society. The same pattern of discontent and retaliation, the desire and demand for freedom is evident in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Indira Manhindra's *The End play*. The situations, characters and stories are different but the demand for freedom is the unmistakable the same. It is relevant to mention here the experiments conducted by Satish Kumar Kalra and Rashmi Raina of the Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow, in order to study the reflections of an average Indian Woman. Although women have entered the erstwhile male domains, yet they feel trapped in uncomfortable situations. In order to find a solution to their plight, the two authors conducted a study and published the results in the *Indian Journal of Training and development*. In one item the respondent was asked to imagine herself /himself as any other living being other than humans and also mention the reason for the particular choice. The result shows that 71.4% women wanted to become birds of "Freedom". "I want to be free from the Shackles of prescriptive roles, systems, structures and relationships which the society has to offer," which is
observed by Rashmi Raina and S.K. Kalra while describing the reflections of an average educated Indian woman (this report was published in the newspaper. The Pioneer, Lucknow, on 3 June 1994).

We can witness that the female characters of novels of Shashi Deshpande appear as bold heroines who have broken the chains of society, family, and traditions and emerged as an individual even after facing the great hardless, predicaments, problems and challenges of time. Jaya in That Long Silence and Saru in the Dark Holds No Terrors can be treated as great fighters of womankind.
REFERENCES

1. This poem is taken from Kamala Das's poems entitled "Suicide".


3. This passage is found in Jane Austen's works Persuasion.


8. From the Dhammapada, quoted at the beginning of the novel. The Dark Holds No Terrors.