Chapter II: THE RISING

2.1 The Dark Holds No Terrors

2.2 If I Die Today
Major Thematic Concerns in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande

2.1 The Dark Holds No Terrors
An educated economically independent, middle class woman, who is made conscious of her gender as a child and whose loveless relationship with her parents and strained relations with her husband lead to her agonizing search for herself. Because her prime intention to lead this life as a human but neither the woman. She is conscious of her feelings and emotions to her. When she finds her emotions are suppressed by someone, who is either male or female. Then she gets the energy to react in various forms. The Dark Holds No Terrors, the first literary flower of Shashi Deshpande has sarita playing the protagonist of the novel. The novel portrays the struggle of woman to achieve her identity in the patriarchal society. The theme of the novel gives the hint that Shashi Deshpande is a staunch communist. She very realistically portrays the suffering and agony of a woman under male-domination. Saru is subjected to barbaric treatment by her husband. The readers are shocked by the way Saru has to undergo traumatic experiences.

The basic question which is raised in this novel is why a woman should be relegated to a secondary position and why should she be cast aside as the most unprivileged and insignificant species on this earth. Why again males should be given priority over females. Another very surprising question that is raised in this novel is, the shabby treatment of female child by her own parents. It is against the background of these questions that the story of the novel is woven. Saru struggles from the initiation to the end and by way of taking recourse to extramarital relationship. That time she feels liberated, of course exonerated.

The Dark Holds No Terrors begins with Sarita's home-coming, knocking at the door of her Krishna's palace. At this time she remembers
the story of Krishna and Sudama. Though apparently there is no similarity between Sarita and Sudama as she says, “She herself was certainly no Sudama in rags, bare feet and humility she had none of these” (1980: 15). Yet her story is related to Sudama who came to Lord Krishna with the problem of deprivation but said not a word about it. Like Sudama she faces the crisis of life though differently. The home-coming helps her to sort out her problems. In the quite repose of her father’s company she analyses, reviews and reexamines her life. Apparently she comes home to take care of her father because her mother is dead, but in reality she wants to escape from the ‘nightmarish brutality’ of her husband. Sarita’s mother had no sympathy for her for she was unable to save her brother. Dhruva—the only male child in the family from drowning in the pond. Sarita remembers the lifeless and harsh words even after her mother’s death; “Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive and he dead” (34-35).

Saru—an ugly daughter of a beautiful mother is nothing but a constant burden to her. She wants to make Saru also a submissive woman like her and for her Dhruva—a son only matters as she says: “He’s different, he is a boy” (45). The gender difference in her mother’s treatment of Saru and Dhruva enrages her. She rebels against her. “If you’re a woman. I do not want to be one” (63). She rejects the traditional role of a woman. Her kid brother Dhruva is her primary target in her contestation with the male power. Being a son, he had the advantage of receiving more attention, care and love from parents. As Sarabjit Sandhu Observes:

The mother is very attached to her Son. Her attitude is a typical one, after all, he is a male child and, therefore, one who will progate the family lineage. In another sense, also, the male child
is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give 'agni' to his dead parents (1991: 20).

It seems at first that against the patriarchal power of domination, her relationship with Dhruva forms the battleground on which she is fighting for space of her own. However the novelist, surprisingly enough chooses the mother to represent the patriarchal power. Before the very eyes of Sarita her kid brother draws in a pit full of muddy water. Her desperate attempt to save her brother reflects her concern for her brother but she vehemently denies any knowledge about him when asked by her parents, inevitably she is confronted with her mother's hysterical accusation, "You did it. You did this. You killed him" (1980: 191).

All said and forgotten Dhruva's death should have restored Sarita to her parental love and care as she is their only child left. On the other hand this event becomes instrumental in alienating her from them by putting a guilt consciousness permanently in her psyche. Throughout the novel this guilt consciousness seems to act like a fatal flaw at times driving her to a mental state bordering on schizophrenia. This is the turning point in the novel that begins the mother daughter (matriarchal vs filial) conflict to the forefront. Every suggestion of her mother like, "Don't go out in the sun. You will get even darker" (45). Which differentiated her from her brother made her contemptuous of her feminine.

It is a male-dominated society that Shashi Deshpande portrays in her novel. In the case of Saru's parents, the father is the "master of the house" (20), and is never bothered by any of the trivials of daily routine. Like a traditional Indian woman, Saru's mother successfully effaces her personality from the room, which she shares with her husband. Consequently, the room
shared by the couple always seems only 'his.' Even after her death, the presence of Saru's mother cannot be felt in the house. On her visit to her home, Saru finds no photograph of her mother on the wall. As her father admits, "I should have put up her photograph I have been thinking of it, but somehow..." (1980: 18).

Saru's parents have lived together for a long time but the kind of understanding that should develop between the two partners in a happy married life does not exist between them. This is evident from the packet of photographs Saru comes across while cleaning her mother's cupboard in her father's home. One of these is a photograph of her parents soon after their marriage. The mother sits in the chair unsmiling and stiff, on the arm of the chair equally stiff. The two look like a pair of puppets, "a pair of strangers posing together because they had been told to do so" (57). Saru remembers that when she left the house they were equally stiff and unsmiling. Saru's parents keep a proper distance between them in the presence of their children. The father, for example, never addresses his wife by name. When the children are around and when Saru hears it from her father's mouth for the first time, it seems to her "like a caress in public, something indecent" (144).

In a traditional Indian household the will of man reigns supreme. While cleaning her mother's cupboard, Saru finds that there are a number of saris in good condition. She does not know what to do with them. She offers these to Madhav for his mother. Madhav, a student in his first year in college, he has been with them for two years. He is shocked at this offer and feebly protest, what will kaka say ?, Madhav's mother has never been able

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to afford such nice saris and he should have accepted them happily but attracting his father’s displeasure restrains him.

Another such incident is when Madhav watches Saru full of curiosity and awe using a pressure cooker for cooking the dal. He stares unbelievingly as the dal cooks into a soft yellow pulp and wishes his mother had the same facility, “My mother gets up at four in the morning to have her bath so that she can start cooking the dal. It takes nearly two hours for it to be cooked” (1980: 166). Madhav is so scared of his father that despite all his sympathy for the hard-working mother, he dares not buy a pressure cooker for her.

Saru feels sorry for Madhav who looks so dejected because of the problems his mother has burdened him with. When Saru suggests that Madhav should write a letter to his father, regarding Satish, otherwise the boy would be destroyed, Madhav says: “It’s not right that I should tell my father what he must do” (150). Saru calls him “Old fashioned” for “now it’s the young who tell the old what to do and how to do it”? (150-51). Madhav replies, “My father hasn’t heard about that, sometimes... I hate him. He sees only himself. Others don’t exit in his world” (151).

Saru fears that Manu will come to her father’s house to take her back. One night she comes out of a deep sleep and hears some voices. She experiences a sense of catastrophe and her mind panics. She is relieved to find soon after that it is not Manu but Madhav who has come back after a visit to his parents.

A woman, who tries to be different, is normally frowned upon. Mrinal, Madhav’s sister, hates the village and the kind of life she’s leading. She is fed up with the routine existence, doing the same things day after day – getting water from the well, looking after the kids, helping mother. She
does not care how but she wants to get away. A Madhav says: “She’s prepared to marry anyone who’ll take her away from there” (1980: 122). Mrinal’s father is looking out for a bridegroom for her “but he’ll never think of consulting her or asking her what she would like” (122). However, Mrinal would never marry someone living in a village, if that happens, she says she’ll drawn herself Saru takes pity on the girl but Madhav calls her “a silly girl” (123), fed on stories in magazines and books and dreams of love.

Saru, Nalu and Smita formed a close unit in the school and where nicknamed the ‘Three Musketeers.’ When they went to college, their paths diverged. Saru and Smita opted for science while Nalu took up Arts. Nevertheless they kept in touch and remained friends. Of these Smita is a wholehearted wife, mother of three children and a housekeeper while Saru combines so well a career and a family. Nalu is different from both of them. She neither married nor bore a child. Nalu accuses Smita of not meeting her although she came to the town every year. Smita defends herself by saying: “But how could I?”... I rarely stay here more than a few days and when ‘he’s’ with me... (117). Nalu vehemently opposes this abject surrender of a wife to a husband,

Ah! There it is! “He”! There is always time to do all the things ‘he’ wants to do, but never any time for doing the things you want to do. You just tag on to him and draft, a small boat towed by a larger ship... (117).

Smita is slim frail-looking girl, has put on excessive weight after marriage. She is a traditional Indian woman who subscribes to the theory that wife has to adjust every now and then in order to please her husband. When Nalu protests at Smita’s having surrendered even her name, the latter
declares with pride that her husband had chosen the name for her. Nalu strongly disapproves the attitude, "This drastic change of identity, changing both the names that identified you for so many years... how then do you know yourself, and who you are?" (1980:118).

In a similar vein, she continues: "Well I refuse to call you Anju or Geetanjali or whatever. To me you are Smita and will always be Smita" (118). Smita however, does not mind her new name, Geetanjali -- Anju for short -- because it makes her husband happy. The ideas of Nalu and Smita are like the two opposing ends of a stick.

Saru has utter contempt or Smita for basking in the glory of a dominating husband. Saru expresses her eagerness to go back home the following week, because "She" writes and says "he can't be without me any longer" (119). Smita gloats over the fact that because of the house work and the children she does not get enough time to read anything throughout the day. And if she wants to read at night, "he won't let me" (120). The implication of an insatiable husband amuses Saru. Smita's habit of nudging, pinching, giggling clutching irritates Saru. She hates being touched and therefore is quite comfortable with Baba and Madhav.

Smita, who shows off to be a happy and contented wife cheats her husband. When she borrows money from Saru without her husband's knowledge. She brashly asks Saru to lend her a hundred rupees. She had come for her nephew's thread ceremony and her husband had given her just enough to buy a small gift for the boy. She has also bought a sari for her sister-in-law but does not have enough money to pay to the shopkeeper. "He doesn't understand these things. He takes it for granted I'm welcome here, Now if I tell him I've bought sari as a gift, he'll be furious" (119). She
promises to pay back the money as soon as she can. She tells Saru that she manages to save a bit from the household expenses and spends it on such items. Triumphanty, she tells Saru, “last time I made some dresses for the girls that way and he never realized it” (1980:119). Smita is relieved to have the money and congratulates Saru for being financially independent: “You don’t know how lucky you are not to have to ask anyone for money. If you knew my problems” (119).

Saru does not accept the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a woman’s existence is to please her husband, “Everything in a girl’s life.... Was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male” (163). When she collects the butter into a vessel of water, to be stored until there was enough to make ghee, she wipes her greasy fingers on the ‘chappatis’ she has prepared. Her palms and fingers feel deliciously soft and smooth. She remembers having done this chore often as a child and being tasted by her neighbour Mai Kaki,” do this every day and your hands will be so soft and smooth, your husband will never let go of them” (146). Saru’s husband has let go her hands because Saru has failed to please him.

Therefore the women must pretend that they are smart, competent, rational or strong. They can nag, complain, henpeck, whine and moan but never show themselves as having strong personalities, “Don’t struggle, don’t swim against the tide. Go along with it; and if you drawn nevertheless, well, that’s an easier death after all” (137). Here it would be worth quoting Shobha De’s Starry Nights, who ridiculing the institution of marriage, says,

A wife is acting all the time – This is the worlds best-kept secret ... everything is decided by the bed. On the bed... No woman should be foolish enough to be honest with her husband where sex is concerned. (1991: 50).
It is expected of a woman to behave in accordance with the whims and fancies of her husband. In Indian society, woman is not expected to be independent, having her own identity. When Shakuntala was rejected by the king, Dushant, one of the escorting ascetics advised her to stay on in the king’s harem or as his slave because he was after all, her husband. The weeping, shamed, humiliated and tried Shakuntala refused to do so and was rebuked by one of the ascetics: “What, wanton girl, do you desire independence?” (1980:138).

Saru feels that her vehement advocacy of woman’s subordinate position in a traditional marriage will make the girls present at the function stand in revolt. However, when the moment or delivering the lecture comes; Saru develops cold feet and speaks on the traditional topic of medicine as a career for women. Saru struggles to achieve economic independence to fight subordination and suppression. In her childhood itself, Saru makes economic independence her goal in life. She decides to become a doctor when she meets a young woman with an air of superior detachment and learns that she is a doctor. Al so, Saru does not want “to get married, and end up doing just what you mother did” (140). This seems not only terrible but also damnable to her.

The life of a woman becomes hellish after the death of her husband. Saru refers to a woman who lived in the next street. As a child, Saru had seen her smilingly come to the doorstep to see her husband off. Saru was fascinated by this behaviour of theirs since she “had seen nothing of this man–woman relationship in her own home” (135). Once she had seen their hands touch and the moment lingered in her memory. The woman had become a widow now, with a bare forehead and drab sari. Saru is frightened.
to see her empty eyes, which are the ghastliest signs of her widowhood. She shudders at the woman’s plight, “to put all of yourself into another and then be left alone” (1980: 135).

The fate of an abandoned woman is worse than that of a widow. As a child, Saru has seen the predicament of her grandmother who was deserted by her husband a few years after marriage. She was a young woman then with two little daughters, one of whom was Saru’s mother. Her husband had disappeared without telling anybody and the family believed that he had taken ‘sanyas’ The whimsicalities of husbands are certainly ridiculed upon this novelist here, Shobha De vents similar ire against Starry Nights. In the same novel Asha Rani’s father, who deserts his family for a young and beautiful lady. Her grandmother’s father had taken the deserted woman and her daughters into his house and got the girls married. The grandmother, however, had never complained about it and accepted it as her fate, “It was written on my forehead” (1980: 70). Desertion by husband is not construed as written in fate; rather it is a kind of selfishness and cowardliness in the part of her husband. However, Saru thinks that if her grandmother had been economically independent she would not have suffered so much.

In the male-dominated society, woman has many a time to take recourse to putting an end to her life. Dark Holds No Terrors refers to a woman who drowned herself in a well because of ill-treatment meted out by her in-laws. She had continuously threatened to drown herself in the well but had been stopped many a time just on the narrow edge of the well. However, one night when she is truly desperate she silently throws herself in it. Obviously the woman was not economically independent. In the words of Veena Noble Dass:
The Indian woman caught in the flues of tradition and modernity bearing the burden of the past and the aspirations of the future is the curse of feminism in India. A search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self have become prime features of women's in literature under the sway of feminism (1995: 11).

Shashi Deshpande presents a society in which women are treated like animals. The novel refers to Sam who had been ill treated by her in-laws in a "grotesque manner" (1980: 87). She had been tied to a peg in the cattle-shed for ten years and fed on scraps like a dog. After leading such a life for ten years, she had at last died. Sam's mother gives a cruel judgment on that woman when she says, "But how do we know what she had done to be treated that way? May be, she deserved what she got! (87), and Sam detests her for doing so.

In the course of the novel, there is a reference to the woman's liberation ideologue. Sam reads Virginia Wolf's mention of a woman's right in her "room of her own" (135), and relates the phrase to her own life and thought. Sam thinks of her mother who,

had no room of her own. She treated into the kitchen to dress up, she sat in this dingy room to comb her hair and apply her 'kumkum' she slept in her bed like any overnight guest in a strange place (135-36).

In comparison, Sam has many comforts of life, which her mother lacked. But as far as possessing a room of one's own is concerned, they are similarly placed-neither has a room of her own. When Sam enters medical college, Manu, a post-graduate student, is one of the known names. He is not only a good student, but also secretary of the Literary Association, an
active member of the Dramatic society, a budding writer and a poet of promise. He has a firm chin, dark, thick straight eyebrows, full lips. Manu's mannerisms like pushing his hair back from his forehead stay in Saru's memory; "It was as if the sight of him had been so overwhelming that I could not take all of it in. Instead, bits of his face clung to my mind like barnacles" (1980: 51).

It is however, not love at the first sight. Saru meets Manu when he is directing a play on the college day. Saru goes to the rehearsal along with Smita, who managed to get a minor role. Manu gets irritated to see Saru and the latter. Saru makes herself as inconspicuous as possible. However, for Saru, "he was the only person" (53), she sees and goes home in a daze. She wants to be chosen by that "wonderful man" (53). Saru feels attracted towards Manu and thinks of entering into a marriage alliance with him. Initially the thought of marriage unnerves Saru; perhaps it is the ear of sex, the unknown. Till they get married, Manu and Saru, are quite innocent in their relationship. They have never gone beyond holding hands.

In the beginning, Saru and Manu are quite happy about their marriage. As Manu says, "when we are together, its heaven, wherever we are" (38). In fact, Saru finds it hard to believe that she could find so much in any human being. Such things happened only to girls in movies and books-not to girls like her. Manu cared for her feelings as no one had ever done. One night when she wakes up sobbing after having dreamt of Dhruva, she finds Manu hovering over her, anxious, scared, asking, "what is it, Saru? What is it?" (146). She does not tell him the truth and says, "I dreamt that you had rejected me" (146). The lie immensely pleases Manu who holds Saru close to her heart. She too gives herself up to being comforted and
loved. Marrying Manu is an act of defiance and signifies a permanent break in her relationship with her mother. Manu fears that cutting Saru off from her parents will be painful for her. Saru, on the other hand, feels quite detached from them already and explains it in a scientific manner,

Have you seen a baby being born? Do you know, Manu, how easy it is to cut the umbilical cord and separate the baby from the mother? Ligate, cut and it’s done. There’s scarcely any bleeding either. It’s as if nature knows the child must be detached from the parent. No, Manu, for me there will be no trauma, no bleeding (1980: 39).

When she accepts Manu, Saru metaphorically serves the umbilical cord. After Saru marries Manu, the mother successfully erases every trace of her in the household. Saru notices that the packer of photographs in the cupboard has none of hers with the exception of one in which she and Dhruva feature together. The mother probably did not throw away this photograph because it had Dhruva too. Saru remembers that the photograph was taken on Dhruva’s birthday. It showed a solemn looking and bewildered Dhruva with Saru painfully attempting to smile. Dhruva had protested Saru’s keeping her hand on his shoulder and pushed it away, probably. She had pinched Dhruva or squeezed his shoulder or something, which accounted for the hurt look on his face.

It is the insecurity at her parents’ home that leads Saru to look for a means of love and security in her marriage with Manu. She runs away to get married to a person of her own choice. The traditional orthodox mother puts up stiff resistance when Saru reveals her intention of marrying Manu who is no ‘Brahmin’ and is probably of a lower caste. Saru’s mother disapproves Manohar so much that she never calls him by name but always
refers to him as "that man" as if his name would have soiled her lips" (1980: 30).

Saru feels that the mother stifled her growth and that is why she defied her. Saru blames her mother of being responsible for her marriage with Manu, "If you hadn't fought me so bitterly, if you hadn't been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him," (96). She rebels against her mother and her values and seeks a new environment in which the mother cannot exercise her will.

And I would not have been here, cringing from the sight of letters, fighting with terror at the sight of his handwriting, hating him and yet pitying him too. For he is groping in the dark, as much as I am (96).

The mother had predicted the fate of Saru's love-marriage when she said, "I know all these 'love-marriages.' It's love for a few days, then quarrels all the time" (69). Saru's marriage has failed but she refuses to admit her miscalculations and accept her defeat. The mother had then warned: "Don't come crying to us then" (69). Saru had decided then never to return to her parents: "That's the one thing I won't never do" (70). When she comes back to her father's house, she acknowledges the truth of what her mother had said, which in a way signifies her defeat.

Saru expects a lot of sympathy from her father and would have behaved in a similar fashion if hers was not a love marriage, "it's my fault again. If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this?" (218). She is aware of the strength a woman can have in an arranged marriage. She reminisces about the sister of a friend who had come home as a result of a disastrous marriage.
and was surrounded with care and sympathy, as if she was "an invalid, a convalescent" (1980: 218). the girl's face carried neither despair nor shame, only a look of passive suffering: "For the failure had not been hers, but her parents'; and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl" (219). Saru's was not an arranged marriage and she could not blame her parents for anything. She herself was responsible for both her suffering as well as the guilt. As Premila Paul observes, "Saru is highly Self-willed and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over others" (2001: 53).

The love and attachment, which Saru had felt once, gradually disappear from her life. Her married life begins to crumble as the medical profession takes an upper hand and Saru is recognized as a lady doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure. It all starts with an explosion in the nearby factory. Burnt and mutilated bodies pour in and Saru attends to them.

After this incident, there is no holding back. Saru emerges as a successful and reputed doctor. Almost every morning, there is a knock at the door, the visitor demanding medical attention for one of his/her acquaintances. Saru was young and callow then, quite unused to her profession, and having real patients coming to her gives her a thrill she can scarcely hide. Manu feels totally ignored because all the nods and smiles; murmured greetings and gamester are for Saru, the doctor. In retrospect, Saru knows,

that it was there it began... this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage I know this too... that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I
was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter (1980: 42).

In a way, Saru's success highlights Manu's failure, "He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband" (42). Saru works out an interesting parallel from algebra to illustrate her point: "a + b they told us in mathematics is equal to b + a. But here a + b was not, definitely not, equal to b + a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible" (42).

Saru feels that her married life is getting upset because pursuing a career does not give her enough time for herself and her family. She feels that she is neglecting her duties towards her husband and children. Moreover, Manu cannot tolerate being ignored. Saru feels that she has to give up her pride in their professional status and then perhaps everything will be all right. She feels that if she can go back to being nothing but his wife, Manu will no longer resent her.

Saru's dream of finding happiness in marriage is soon shattered. Saru does not share a cordial relationship with her husband. Saru scorns the world love and refuses to believe that such a thing can ever exist between man and woman. She starts hating the man-woman relationship, which is based not on love but on attraction and need, "There was only a need which both fought against, futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called "love." "It's only a word," she thought. "Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away" (72). All love and attachment disappear from Saru-Manu relationship. Saru admits,
Theirs was not a case of love dying, nor even of conflicts. Instead, it was as if a kind of disease had attacked their marriage. A disease like syphilis or leprosy, something that could not be admitted to others. This very concealment made it even more gruesomely disgusting, so that she was dirty and so was he and so was their marriage (1980: 69-70).

Before her marriage with Manu, Sam had enjoyed meeting his friends who seemed "different creatures, far removed from the matter-of-fact people she met in her own profession" (153). They were a motley crowd, actually a few aspiring writers and journalists, some stage enthusiasts, one or two teachers. They all seemed charged by some excitement that made them more alive than most people. They were teeming with ideas, wild enthusiasms, fleeting effortlessly from subject to subject with great dexterity. Saru was utterly fascinated and 'dazzled' by them and the world they lived in. She felt as if she was entering an enchanting new world, very different from her own drab world of lecturers, patients, exams and results.

However these friends gave no importance to Saru's being a medical student. She was just Manu's friend and nothing more. Often she entered into arguments with them and they would mock her saying, "There speaks the doctor.... You can't see anything but dirt, disease and sick bodies everywhere, can you? (154). But gradually she started drifting and began to look on them objectively and found them slightly ridiculous they often reminded her of cocks pecking in the field of literature and the arts.

Their facility with words, which had fascinated me initially, had now begun irritating me. Words, words, words.... Sometimes they can obscure the very meaning of life.... They will spend all their lives talking, these people, and never reach anywhere (155).
All these friendships discontinue after Manu becomes busy with college, and tuitions after college hours. Manu is not a versatile personality Saru had expected in the beginning. In comparison to Manu, Saru had found other friends in the college “faceless, nameless non-entities” (1980: 53). But all romantic notions disappear after marriage. Normally Manu remains gloomy and wears a bored look on his face. Saru can remember only two occasions when he was immensely happy. The first time was the day Abhi uttered his very first word which was ‘Baba’ Manu was extremely excited, his face suffused with happiness, laughing and saying, “did you hear him, Saru? Did you? However, this enthusiasm disappeared very soon as is evident from Manu’s remark,

It's strange.... I had imagined that to have a child of your own would be one of life's greatest experiences. Now I can only think of the price of baby food and baby powders (157).

Another time when Manu came to Saru with unconcealed excitement was to give her the ‘wonderful news’ about starting a new magazine with another person whom Manu called Bhidya. However, the magazine folded up after a year. Saru had no regrets for that because she never wanted Manu to go into journalism. But after that, for a while Manu was jobless. “It had unnerved her. She knew now it was her middle-class upbringing and ideas that had made her regard an unemployed husband as a nightmare, a horrible humiliation” (152). Therefore, she was enormously relieved when he managed to get a lecturer's job in a private college. She thought they could manage well with her hospital pay and his salary. Initially Manu had protested by saying that “it's a third rate college” and “it
won't do me much good working in that place" (1980: 152). But he had reconciled later because teaching in a college was considered immensely respectable.

Living with Manu, Saru has to undergo horrors of rape. Manu asserts his manhood at night when he turns into rapist of his wife. It all starts with a friend's suggestion. Saru and Manu have planned to go for a small holiday to Ooty. It is their first holiday since earlier, they had no money and later she was too occupied with the children and her work. They go for shopping and happen to meet a colleague of Manu and his wife who had been dreaming of going to Matheran for year but could not afford it. The wife tartly remarks, "if you had married a doctor... you'd have gone to Ooty too" (111). The taunt creates bitterness in both Saru and Manu and they drive back in silence. But Manu is his usual self in the evening. Suddenly in the middle of the night, he asserts his animal power over Saru. She can feel "the hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body " (112). Initially, Saru cannot recognize the face as she is completely bewildered and paralyzed. She begins to struggle but her body, hurt and painful, can do nothing against the fearful strength, which overpowers her. Her mind fluttering throws itself despairingly on the walls of unbelief and comes back staggering, bruised and spent.

The next morning, Manu is his cheerful self and asks Saru if she had slept well. He is a glad to be in Ooty and shows his concern for Saru, "You look very tried and strained. You need to take things easy, relax. Look, I'll take the children off your hands. And no more dark circles under your eyes. Okay?" (112). Saru wonders if all this is a sham, a force, a ghastly pretence,
or is it just a dream, a terrible nightmare that left behind this terrible aftertaste of fear. But she cannot deny the reality of bruises on her body.

Manu’s wounded male pride manifests itself in the form of sexual sadism. In the daytime, he basks in her glory but at night takes vengeance on her. In the beginning, Manu’s beastly behaviour at night mystifies Saru. Each time it happens, she does not speak and puts another brick on the wall of silence between them. She fears that she will be walled alive within it and die slow, painful death. However, she is surprised that all this has no effect on Manu. He is his usual cheerful self the next morning. She finds it hard to put the two men together — the fearful stranger of the night and the rather pathetic Manu of other times. This dichotomy never ceases to frighten her. Sitting at her father’s house, Saru tries to analyze dispassionately the hidden causes behind her husband’s behaviour.

What he does to me, but he does it not so much because he hates me, but because he hates himself. And I... I hate myself more for letting him do it to me than I hate him for doing it to me (1980: 98).

During the daytime, everything seems all right — Manu a normal familiar human being. But at night, everything changes. Saru waits for the terror to strike; she becomes just a terrified animal. She can do nothing against his maniac strength. Her panic makes her incapable of resisting. The children in the next room pinion her to a terrified silence. And when it is over, she resolves; “I can’t, won’t endure this any more. I’d rather die. I can’t go on” (99). But Manu’s behaviour in the morning makes her doubt herself: “Was it possible for a man to dissemble so much? The violent...
stranger of the night... and now, this. Am I crazy or is he? Can a man be so divided in himself?” (1980: 99).

The two facets of her husband's personality remind Saru of her visit to the Devi temple along with her mother and meeting a middle-aged woman plump, large-hipped, with seven-pearl earnings in her ears and black beads round her neck. One moment this woman was like other worshippers of Devi, holding her tray of offerings in one hand, the other stretched out to apply 'kumkum' to the large brassy forehead of the Devi's image. The next moment there was a loud clatter as her tray fell out of her hands. When Saru looked at the woman's face, she felt that the woman had gone away leaving a dreadful changeling in her place - a creature with a frightening mask-like face and popping eyes that stared fixedly at the Devi. A little later, the woman began to gyrate, turning round in a slow, peculiar motion-then faster and faster, both body and breathe, the face a grotesque travesty of what it had been before. Saru feels scared and moves closer to the mother. Clutching the end of her mother's sari tightly in her fist. Meanwhile the woman goes on, feet thumping, sari coming loose, hair flying round that awful ace with those frightful eyes. And the open mouth out of which the breath comes loud and rasping - a grunt and a pant. It was horrifying and obscene. The other women present there apply 'kumkum' to the rotating woman's forehead because it is presumed that Devi had entered into that woman. Sometimes later, Saru sees the woman again - learning against a pillar, her legs stretched out in front of her, face relaxed and empty, the 'kumkum' on her forehead wiped way except for the usual mark between the brows. The woman smiles when she sees Saru and gives her lump of rock sugar to eat. The woman's behaviour perplexes Saru,
I didn’t understand how a woman who could smile and look so pleasant, could also fling herself about with an ugly wild abandon like that. I just could not put the two women together. Perhaps, I thought, they were to women after all, not just one. Only then it made sense. That a person could be so divided in herself, into two entirely different beings, was something unknown to me then (1980: 103).

Saru’s experience with Manu – a normal loving husband during the day and a monster at night – throws new light on the mysterious incident of her childhood and she is able to understand the dichotomy in the personality of that woman. Towards the end of the novel, Saru tells her father of the sadistic behaviour of her husband. When Saru’s father tells her that Manu has written to him, she reacts violently. And then panic flows, she stares at him dumbly, her mouth working, her face utterly open and defenceless, a child caught red-handed in a wrong doing. However, this is a false alarm. Manu has not written about their relationship. He has just accused her of not writing any letter to him, and not talking of her return in her letters to the children. Her father has always avoided the truth, the fact of confrontation.

Saru realizes that she had come to her parental home not to see her father’s face but to have him declare that he is no her side, like he had done earlier in the cease of her admission to the medical college. Saru had the words ready in her mind and had thought of reciting them as if she were reading out a clinical history of an anonymous patient but at the crucial moment she blurts out baldly and crudely. "My husband is a sadist" (199). Her father does not understand the vocabulary of the new generation, sadism or love of cruelty. Before explaining to her father the problem she
faces, she tells him that she is not speaking as a daughter but as a woman to a man,

I know you’re my father and I’m your daughter and there’s nearly thirty years between us, but still... you’re a man and I’m a woman. Can we talk of such things? (1980: 199).

Saru accuses her father by saying, “My first child should have been your responsibility. May be if I’d been here, I wouldn’t have had that nightmare” (202). In her nightmare, Saru used to see a man in a brown scarf trying to strangle her. However she woke up before she was killed. She considered her experience with her husband like a nightmare only. But there was a big difference. The midnight experience always left bruises on her body. It happened repeatedly, yet she could not tell anything to Manu because at all other times he would be so normal, “What could I say? Each time I tried to speak, to open my mouth, my heart failed me. What if he said... are you crazy?” (203). She also has a feeling that as long as she did not talk about it, the thing that happened between them remained unreal, that by speaking she would be making it real. She also suspects that Manu “doesn’t know it himself what he does to me at night, that’s why he never speaks of it” (203). He may be having “blackouts about certain actions.” She remembers the day when she was dressing up and Manu said, “God Saru! Have you hurt yourself? Look at that!” (203). Saru can swear that his concern at that time was genuine. She feels that since Manu does not know about his action, there’s no use of talking to him about it.

Saru expects some help from her father and frantically requests him: “You’ve got to help me, you’ve got to. You did it once. And because you did...”
I went to Bombay, met him and married him” (1980: 204). The father would like to help her now also but does not know how he can do it. He had helped her earlier because at that time she had made up her mind and knew what she wanted to do. In her relationship with Manu, she does not know what she wants and therefore the father can be of no help. Saru has the feeling of standing against a wall, blindfolded, waiting for the shot that would end it all.

As her father leaves her to her fate, Saru can understand the predicament of her brother Dhruva, who feeling scared of the dark, came to her for protection. She used to tell Dhruva that there was nothing to be scared of and put on the light to convince him. But Dhruva told her, “When the light comes on, it goes away” (205). At that time she had not been able to understand Dhruva’s problem. Similarly her father is not able to understand her problem now.

The disillusionment in marital life makes Saru look for other avenues. Her affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao are temporary substitutes for unfulfilled marital life. In Indian society, a man can do as he pleases but it is a taboo for a woman to have extra-marital relationship. Coming from the pen of a traditional writer, neither of Saru’s two affairs leads to sexual fulfilment.

Saru does not take long to realize that Manu’s literary talents and ambitions have reached a dead-end. He is great poet, no Shelley, Manu’s salary barely covers their expenses and Saru has to miss out on all the activities of student life – the parties, the eating out, the movies, and the casual trips. The shabby way of their living begins to hurt – a frayed sari she could not replace, a movie she could not see, an outing she could not join in.
She realizes that without money life becomes petty and dreary. The thought of going on in this way becomes unbearable. She is not prepared to live in a dingy two-room flat in a far-off drab suburb all her life. She wishes to have a house of her own where she can fulfill her dreams. This makes Saru use Boozie as a prop to enhance her career.

Saru takes a long time to realize that Boozie's interest. In her is not that of a teacher in a student but of a man in a woman. Boozie's interest in her remains a mystery to her. A married woman, she considers herself out of bounds for all males. She thinks that no male would be interested in a married woman. Confronted by Boozie's urbane sophistication, Saru feels crude, graceless, terribly young and unformed. She considers herself to be the raw material, which Boozie is to shape, mould, chisel into something more polished, nearer perfection. He teaches her to dress with elegance and simplicity, to speak good English and to enjoy good food.

Boozie acts as the fairy godfather who with a wave of his magic wand makes things miraculously easier for her. He gives her work in a research scheme which brings in some badly deeded extra money every month. A year later she becomes his Registrar and in less than two years she passes her M.D. Four year later she is an Assistant Honorary at a suburban hospital. She also receives money from Boozie to have a consulting room of her own.

Manu does not object to Boozie's helping Saru in her rapid climb and overlooks the liberties Boozie takes with Saru. At the party, Boozie puts his hands on Saru's shoulders and shakes them gently. This gesture attracts the stares of everyone else except Manu. Saru feels attracted by this ravishingly masculine man. Manu does not grill Saru on Boozie's behaviour. Rather he...
becomes a silent spectator to the silences, which grow between the husband and the wife like jack's beanstalk.

Later Saru thinks of seeking Boozie's help in divorcing her husband but is disappointed. She goes to his house and is warmly welcomed. "I think of you everyday. Every single day come in, come in" (1980: 97). Boozie pulls her and gives her a hug. His masculinity overwhelms her. However, she does not reveal to him the purpose of her visit because she feels that "behind the façade of aggressive, virile masculinity there was nothing at all (94). In Boozie.

Saru's attempt to find an escape route in Padmakar Rao, her partner in the college, also ends in disillusionment. She meets him at Akbarally's one day and the relationship grows. Popularly known as Padma in College. Rao never felt comfortable with this name because the feminine touch in the word, Padma, deprived him of his maleness, "I say, don't call me Padma. Call me Rao" (125). Rao was quite tactless in his remarks on girl's clothes; their walk, their way of talking and this made him the most unpopular student in the batch. His first remarks to Saru were also of this nature, uttered with a disarming grin,

I... was hoping for a glamorous creature... somebody like Marilyn Monroe maybe... as a partner. Instead I had you, in that ridiculous skirt and blouse, those two tight plaits and a stiff expression on your face, as if you were disapproving of everyone, specially me (126-27).

Later however they become good friends. Rao lacked a will to complete and succeed and Saru thought he would go in for research and become an academic. She is therefore surprised to know that Rao has a
practice in the heart of one of Bombay’s worst slums. He tells Saru that one can earn more there than in any posh place. Also, since one does not have to put up a show there, one can keep expenses down to minimum. The poor people cannot afford to be sick and lose on their income. Therefore they are also mentally prepared to pay the doctors their fees.

Saru and Padmakar Rao meet frequently. On one such occasion, Saru sees Padmakar anxiously waiting for her near her car. Seeing her, he says, "I've been waiting for you for ages" (1980: 129). He commands her as if he is her husband, "You've got to lunch with me today" (129). He is very curious to share some good news with Saru, which in normal circumstances he should have done with his wife. Bubbling with excitement, Rao tells Saru that he has come across a number of cases of diarrhoea which have refused to respond to the usual line of treatment. With the help of an old friend he has been able to isolate a cholera-like vibrato, which is responsible for the illness.

Padmakar is disheartened when Saru refuses to accompany him for lunch and says, "You've got to come. I mean, I've been waiting here for so long. I never imagined you'd say no. You can't refuse" (130). Saru does not submit even after he insists and in his rage, he leaves her alone. Saru realizes her mistake,

It was my fault. I had listened to him as perhaps, no one ever had. I had talked to him, smiled at him, given him that which was most precious to me... my time. What had I done it for? She realizes that she had let him become a habit, more difficult to get rid of (130).
Inside her sophisticated exterior, Sam still has that little-girl-scared-of-men-and-rape. She is scared of Padmakar's undue interest in her and wants to refuse even a cup of coffee that he offers. Later however she gives in when he says, "It's a week since I saw you" (1980: 131). He seeks pardon for his behaviour the last time they had met.

Finally, Sam gathers guts to tell Padmakar, "There's no point in our meeting this way. Neither of us has the time, really" (131). Rao is unhappy to learn this and retorts. "What do you mean? Sarita? No point? I enjoy meeting you, talking to you Don't you?.... It gives me pleasure, Sarita. It's an innocent happiness after all, isn't it?" (131-32). He angrily says that he has no one else to talk to and what is the harm if they meet and talk. When Sam asks him about his wife, Rao says,

My wife! She can't talk about anything but servants and the children. And prices. I earn enough, but she's perpetually trying to economize. She never has her food until I go home and have mine. She cooks just what I like, and she never calls me by my name (132).

Rao is not happy with his wife and family life. While doing graduation he had been pressurized into marriage by his parents because his father needed the dowry his wife had brought them for marrying his daughter. The girls' father had also promised to maintain the couple till Rao completed his post-graduation. Hearing this, he had given up the idea of an M.D. and gone into general practice.

Saru tells Rao that his wife has been "a good wife and mother" (132). He should be content with her. Saru asks him what he expects from her. "What can I give you that she can't?" (132). Saru herself has gone on with
Rao when she has met him smiled at him, listened to him. She realizes that she has done it deliberately, coolly, with calculation, perhaps she thought it to be an escape route for herself, "something that would lead me out of my loveless trap wasn't it always the solution for a woman who found no happiness with one man to try and find it with another?" (1980: 132). Sarita realizes that all her calculations were wrong because Rao, like an adamant child, was thinking of himself only, refusing to think of the consequences when the desired thing was denied to him. He wasn't thinking of Saru at all who regrets,

What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex, fulfillment and happiness came, not through love alone but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word (133).

She feels totally frustrated and disillusioned, "Suddenly I felt cold as I was left alone in the middle of nowhere, one more hideout discovered, one more illusion destroyed" (133). Her affair with Padmakar Rao fails to fulfill her inner desire for love and communication. No men could provide Saru with what she desired for. At her father's place too Saru lives as an isolated, lonely individual. She wishes to talk to her father but "the unchanging bleakness of their relationship saddened her" (105). She thinks that they are fated "to be strangers" (105). She wants to tell her father, "Baba, I'm unhappy. Help me, Baba I'm in trouble. Tell me what to do " (44). But finds it impossible. She also has the fear that by speaking she would be unlocking the door of a dark room in which someone had been murdered,
That by opening that door, she would be revealing to the world the pathetic, lifeless body of the victim, grotesque in an enforced death. And, her greatest fear was that they would all know the dead body to be his, her husband's. They would know too what she herself did... that it was she who was the murderer (1980: 44).

Saru's visit to her father is a kind of escape from her loveless married life. She finds some solace in the routine life there. Her father and Madhav make no demands on her. It is comforting to have the day dictated to by no one's needs but her desires. She reminisces about the kind of living she had seen as a child. Seen through the haze of the years, it seems an oasis, a haven of peace, comfort and security “The man went out to work, the children to school, the women stayed at home and cooked and cleaned, scrubbed and swept ” (161). There is a kind of harmony in this that pleased her. It was immensely soothing and comforting to hear the sounds of women at their usual tasks.

After doing all the cooking, Saru churns the cream for butter. Butter-making seemed a long and laborious process to Saru when as a child, she watched her mother do it. But the same activity seems most rewarding to her now. She is happy living the routine life of a woman, who stayed at home, did some chores, talked and when the day was over, slept.

The kind of contentment she discovers in routine life makes Saru feel that she is a totally changed person and nothing of the old Saru is left. She remembers the glass bowl one of the girls in the hostel had bought and claimed it was unbreakable. When dropped to the ground, it shattered completely, turning into fine dust. Similarly, she feels that she is a new person and there is not even a trace of the old Saru in her--the two-in-one woman.
When she began menstruating, Sam was told. “You’re a woman now” (1980: 123). Initially, she did not feel that it had made her any different; Menstruation seemed to be like a burden of the curse added on to her like an appendage each month which she wanted to shed as soon as it was over and forgotten. But the pride of being a woman comes when she first feels a male look at her to which an unwilling response comes from within her. At her father’s place, Sam again loses awareness of her femininity. She ceases to think herself as a woman. “a woman, that is, with the attributes of attracting a man” (123). She stops using make-up or applying lipstick. Since childhood, she had followed the fashions, all the meaningless, revivals and rejections, to please anyone else—at first everyone, then a generally males, then a nebulous ‘right-man’ who would some day miraculously fall in love with her, thinking her beautiful. She had done everything to find real happiness through Manu but failed:

She had lost forever... the eternal female dream of finding happiness through a man. It would never come alive for her again. Too soon, I lost it too soon, she thought. And it was like a silent mourning wail inside her (124).

Saru feels that doctor in her is more important than the wife or mother in her. When she is at her father’s house, Saru is sought after as a doctor only, she finds herself being visited by her neighbours and old friends. It becomes a routine for her to hear voices asking “Is Saru in?”(106). The women visiting Saru often tell her of the problems they are suffering from. They keep everything a secret because they do not know to tell anyone about these. “Their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them” (107). They do not tell any one of the myriad complaints they have...
backache, headache, leucorrhoea, menorrhagea, dysmenorrheal, loss of appetite, burning feet, an itch ‘there.’ Saru calls them “stupid, silly martyrs... idiotic heroines. Going on with their tasks, and destroying themselves in the bargain, for nothing but a meaningless modesty” (1980: 107). Their unconscious, unmeaning heroism born out of the myth of the self-sacrificing martyred woman made Saru angry: “Why didn’t you do something about it earlier?” (107). But the women who had schooled themselves to silence, mostly did not respond. Betty Friedan says, “For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment-autonomy, self realization, independence, individuality self-actualization is as important is the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted” (1971: 282).

Saru uses her medical skills to hear the women who come to seek her advice. With the enthusiasm of a fresh graduate, Saru advises, suggests and prescribes medicines for these women. Sometimes she wishes she could come and settle down there as a ‘do-gooder’ but then realizes the impossibility of it all. She remembers having read about Betty Friedan, a pioneer of the women’s lib movement saying, “It was easier for her to start the women’s lib movement than to change her own personal life” (1980: 107).

The attitude of the women who come to Saru for medical consultation is that of deference and admiration. To receive such respect from people who have known her as a child in unbuttoned frocks and bare feet is immensely satisfying to Saru. The women who visit her talk of her children but carefully avoid mentioning her husband.

When Madhav suffers from high fever, Saru takes his temperature and gives him medicine. She puts a wet compress on his forehead and sits by
him the whole night. Reminded of Dhruva and the day of his death, she
prays for Madhav's speedy recovery. That day it had been raining as it was
now. She is relieved to find Madhav in a better state, his flush gone, and
hopes "things will be all right now" (1980: 211).

Saru remembers how her father had come to her one night after
Dhruva's death when she had woken out of her sleep with a cry. But once
he was by her side he was uncertain of what to do next. With hesitation, he
had put his hand on her forehead as if he suspected she had fever. At that
time she had simulated sleep and laid stiff and rigid, rejecting him and his
sympathy.

At her father's place, Saru grapples with the ghost of her
responsibility in the drawing of Dhruva. She ponders over the even and
comes to understand the accidental nature of the incident. Saru's voice is
raised on a triumphant note when she tells her at her that she has totally
forgotten Dhruva: "completely, I don't ever think of him" (180). She can see
from her father's reaction that he does not believe her and this enrages her.
There is the same infuriating feeling of helplessness that she had as a child.
In an apologetic tone, the father tells her.

Sometimes I used to think you took your mother seriously and
blamed yourself for Dhruva's death. You know she was not
herself for Dhruva's death. You know she was not herself when
she said that. She was... hysterical. But I thought you began to
believe it yourself (181).

Saru contradicts him, "why should I blame myself? What did I have
to do with is dying? He was a silly idiot who didn't know better than to get
himself drowned in a small puddle" (181). but her unnatural laugh gives her
away and the air of deliberate composure falls away from her. The father
tells her to forget it but she frantically asks her, "No, Baba. Tell me why you
think I should blame myself. You felt that way too, didn't you?" (1980:181).
She further says,

I know you defended me against her. But you felt the same way
too, didn't you? And you've held it against me all these years.
It's not because of my marriage that you cast me off. It's this.
You think I killed him (181).

Saru explains the circumstances, "No, I never took him out
anywhere. It was he who pestered me, followed me. He fell in himself... He
followed me. I didn't want him to come. And I didn't know he was dead. I
knew it only when they brought him here" (182-83). Her only regret is that
the parents never asked her of the details: "both of you found me guilty
without really knowing what had happened Did you ask me once, just once"
(182). She swears to her at her: "I didn't take him out with me that day."
(182). "...Knew nothing" (183). Saru cries a lot but it is not just weeping. It
was an explosion, something that hurt with the sheer force and violence.
"Tears, and once again an indifferent stranger opposite her... would it
always be this way... a stranger watching her torment?" (183), her protest
ends in a plaintive murmur, all the passion having ebbed away. I didn't do it
(183). She herself is not sure whether she really tried to save Dhruva.

Saru's remorse takes the form of regret. She feels guilty for having
gone to that desolate deserted place herself. Perhaps if she had not gone
there, the whole incident would not have happened. The place had a vague
reputation and children warned each other in whispers of the risk of being
kidnapped. Some years earlier it had been the busy hub of a brick-making
industry. But operations had ceased after some kind of an accident in which a few workers had died. Saru had discovered the place accidentally while returning from Smita's place where she had got late and had taken a short cut within a short cut while hurrying back to her place. She liked the place with the fragrance of the mango blossoms wafting to her on the breeze. The enchanting air of secrecy about the place enraptures her until she realized that it was the notorious place. A chill runs up her spine and she flees ignominiously.

It was the day when Saru had wanted to go for a movie with Smita but was refused permission to do so. She knew that her parents would not let her go and she wanted to punish them for it. When her mother closed her self into her room for her afternoon nap, Dhruva being patted to sleep like a baby, Saru decided to go to the place she had discovered and not come back till late. The parents would be worried and search for her. She wants her mother to feel sorry for refusing her the permission to go for a movie: "Serves her right, I thought viciously, imagining her distress, her tears, her remorse, savouring my fantasy to the full" (1980: 186).

Dhruva wanted to accompany her sister Saru who tried her best to shake him off but all in vain. The stubborn, pampered child could bear no opposition. Saru feared his flopping on the ground, drumming his feet and indulging in a full-fledged tantrum. She therefore allowed him to come with her, after taking a promise that he would not tell anybody about it. Saru ran eagerly, with Dhruva invariably falling behind, calling out "Sarutai wait for me, I'm coming" (187).

At last they reached Saru's secret place. They walked down to the hollow and the ground was slippery, tufts of grass treacherously giving way,
wet mud squelching between their toes because they were walking barefoot. All the enchantment seems to disappear when Dhruva says, “There's nothing here” (1980: 187). Duruva changes his tone and says, “I like it. It's nice... Look at all the water” (187). Near the place is a hollow which the rains have turned into a sort of lake. There is stagnant muddy water in it which has an unpleasant odour. Dhruva and Saru play umpteen games there. They make faces at their own reflections, they play ducks and darker, they sail twings and dried leaves in the water and with joy Dhruva proposes making a foray in the wet mud and then wash again the river. Saru forbids his doing so and moves away from the place with determination knowing that Dhruva would not stay alone and follow her soon. Saru finds climbing up quite tough and she turns to call. She sees him falling into the water. She thinks Dhruva would easily come out and follow her but when she calls for him; there is no sign of Dhruva. Saru wonders if Dhruva is hiding somewhere, playing the fool or trying to scare her. Then suddenly she sees him in the water for a moment and then only bubbles. Saru wants to shout but a monstrous grip round her chest and throat does not let her voice emerge. Desperately, she comes down, slithering, slipping, clutching. She wades into the water to look for Dhruva but cannot reach out to him. At one lace, her foot gives way. Her heart lurches and then recovers her balance, she stands there, panting and gasping. The water is deep there and she sees that Dhruva is in it. She kneels down time and again hoping each time that she will be able to rescue Dhruva but that is not to be.

It seems totally incredible to Saru that Dhruva could have disappeared so totally in so short a time. She feels that it is not real – it is only a nightmare of which she would eventually wake up to have Dhruva
calling out. "Sarutai, wait for me. I'm coming" (1980: 190). She sits in the deserted mango grove, without sheltering herself from the pouring rain.

Finally, Saru gets up to go home, knowing quite well that everybody must be searching for them. She wishes that Dhruva is waiting at home to tease her when she reaches home late — that Dhruva is sleeping in his room since the time she came out. With her dripping frock clinging uncomfortably to her, Saru walks home slowly. Saru accepts that she is the guilty sister accepted by all. This is the agony of woman, who is serving her entire life selflessly to others. But unfortunately no one is willing to listen her inner voice rather than taking interest to suppress her body and soul. Therefore she thinks that a life in death and a death in life. She is moving between these two worlds.
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2.2 If I Die Today
Now-a-days, husband-wife relationship is melting down against the backdrop of globalization, privatization and marketization. Both should globalize and shower their love to each other instead of hating each other. Because they are the wheels of the same vehicle. But sometimes they have to face such circumstances they are on the opposite shores. Of course, that is not the expectation of the society and the family particular in Indian culture. The central character of the novel is Manju, who is narrated this story. She struggles to create her identify in the world of men. Manju being a traditional Indian wife. She is subjected to a secondary position where her self remains suppressed. Her husband Vijay does not care much to what and how his wife says to him. He is non-caring type of man and it is the callousness on her part which that wrecks and troubles her.

Shashi Deshpande’s primary focus of attention is the world of women. The struggle of women in the context of modern Indian society unable to fully defy traditional, patriarchal norms of society, these women characters attempt to realise and presence their identity not only as women but also as human beings. Being trapped in this woman’s world of experience, Deshpande hopes to emerge as a kind of female Tolstoy who can create real, rounded characters and not merely women characters created for men. As Sarla Palkar says,

For a long time, woman has existed as a gap, as an absence in literature created … This is not only true of the fiction, created by men, but also by women, who have mostly confined themselves to writing love stories or dealing with the experiences of women in a superficial manners (which) represses the truth about the majority of their sisters and their lives (1989: 163).
Deshpande hopes to kill this vacancy. The heightened sensibility of her protagonists helps them in their attempts to carve out a niche however small for themselves. Loneliness, one of the concerns of existentialists is not merely an incorrigible disease but a symptom of modern man's predicament and the awareness of this have made him search for the true meaning of life. Ironically, the search itself has become a disease and meaningless and man has been eternally condemned to be free in the vicious circle of struggles. For long, woman in Indian and other societies has been seeking an ideality and trying to declare that she is just a being and can live in the world where men also live. In trying to carve out a place for herself, she has become more and more self assertive and confident of her position and her predicaments in the society are the same as those of man's and her efforts and pursuits to extricate herself from her wretched and sordid position and confusion and carve out a place for herself in the men dominated society have further worsened her state. As a result, she suffers from loneliness more than her compeers in the past. Her constant search for self autonomy and freedom has proved. Otherwise self-deceptive, horrendous and meaningless.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are mainly concerned with the self assertion and loneliness of woman. Her chief concern is the human relations not the rationalised but felt perceived and real, not the traditional but redefined human relations especially the relationship between man and woman in all these the central figure is woman. For her writing the novel is like. She says,

ultimately fiction is like imagination. Imagination superimposing upon life, reshaping it. Tidying it, creating some
kind of an order out of the chaos. But you start with life. Imagination comes later. Life is the springboard (Dhawan, 1989: 134).

Apart from this affirmation she has not spelt out her goal or purpose overtly anywhere. Woman is the central object of her fiction. Her women characters are born out of a typically Indian situation. They represent middle class society. Her theory is not the theory of Western feminism. In fact, she has no theories; she rejects them and she gives her own assessment of the predicament of Indian women caught between tradition and modernity between family and profession, between culture and nature, between assertion and confrontation, between freedom and loneliness, between self-aggrandisement and self-realisation. The problems and conflicts faced by women in her novels are existential in nature. They occur for any woman in the society. Their self-assertion is self-alienation. The more they search for freedom and independence and the meaning of life. The more it results in alienation and loneliness. This is the typical of an existential problem every man encounters, and every modern woman, according to Deshpande is facing. Deshpande, however takes pity in her woman characters for the predicament created by themselves through self-delusions and hallucinations; and towards the end she provides a touch of feminism mixed with love. The Indian critics have therefore referred to level her as a mediating feminist.

Deshpande is more in favor of compromise than conflict. She is unlike Shobha De whose women protagonists are pitted against men in a most defined, and rebellious dispassion. The difference between approaches of the two novels owes to the fact that Deshpande believes in the sanctity of the traditional culture and social ethos whereas De ridicules the tradition.
and finds it empty and hallow. But Deshpande ridicules the system of traditional marriage which renders women servile to her husband and drives away all kind of freedom and sense of personal identity of women. In, If I Die Today, Manju detests the idea of being a wife, the role which requires women to be a loving mother also. Manju records,

If I had had any ideas of being the devoted wife, mother and housekeeper by staying at home. I was soon disillusioned. I realized in chagrin that I was almost a redundancy at home (1982: 14).

Manju finds herself reduced to nothingness in her own house. Her husband does not prefer to disclose his secrets to her which she expected as her right to share them with her husband. "Strange how Vijay made me feel invisible. No, not that. As if I didn't exist at all" (21). Traditionally, it is understood that a wife is other half of her husband and morally it becomes the duty of the husband to share everything with his wife. But the fact is that a wife is treated not as more than a servant in the house. Deshpande ridicules such patriarchal system of the society, which amounts to subjugate and enslave a wife. The novelist scoffs at the institution of marriage through Manju,

Marriage you start of expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dead leaves, the expectations of fall off. But this two... people who have shut themselves off in two separate glass jars? Who can see each other but can't communicate? Is this a marriage? (24).

Manju is discarded by her husband. Vijay does never answer her queries satisfactorily. Manju wants to know why guru has been brought by Ashoka to his house and what kind of man Guru is and also why Guru is to
be operated upon? Even she wants to know from her husband what kind of relationship is there between Synthia and Tony. Once, when Vijay was about to leave, Manju desired to know the reasons for his departure, Vijay felt reluctant to disclose to her the reasons. Thus, these exists a kind of communication gap between husband and wife, which is followed by a lack of mutual understanding and warmth of feeling between them. Manju reflects that she had done well by not telling him about her associations with a man called Rajiv. Vijay questions Manju,

Leaving? Who told you?” “Vidya” “Oh !” He rinsed out his mouth energetically.” Quite possible. I said something in a discouraged moment. You know how well we all talk sometimes. Means nothing. “I did not probe any further. As I have said it was that kind of marriage. But I wondered … if I hadn’t told him about Rajiv would we have had a better chance? I remembered what Vijay had said to me once. “You make a fetish of the truth don’t you? You won’t tell a lie even to save someone from being hurt, will you?” “Would you?” I had asked in return. “Of course,” he had said without any hesitation. And that, I had thought later was the cruellest thing he could have said to me. Letting me in for a kind of long drawn out torture, for, the thought was always in me after that … is this a lie? Or this? Or this? Better, I always thought myself, to have things in the open. Which was why; I had blurted out the truth about Rajiv and me one day. I had told Vijay everything, not sparing even myself. For it was Rajiv, after all, who had backed out (1982: 31).

In fact, Manju has to surrender her ego in order to live amicably with her husband. Marriage demands enormous sacrifice from woman and in that sacrifice; she can not express herself to be totally free and independent. In reality, a fresh bondage begins Prima-facie. Deshpande appears to be supporting the cause and concerns of her woman protagonist but the critics
have raised objections to the attains to categories, Deshpande and other novelist as feminist.

Although the women characters urge for self assertion is made to be felt it is never properly articulated in these novels. It is expressed only symbolically through neurosis. The novelists themselves do not seem to be making and enthusiastic effort to espouse the cause of the woman. They stop at the point of authenticating the human predicament. Feminism usually takes off from these. Bringing a feminist perspective to these writers is therefore very likely to lead one into a blind alley. On the contrary these novelists have created very convincing male personages who are caught in the same kind of problems as and sometimes because of their women. Kamala Markandaya, Walmiki (possession) fights a psychological battle to extricate himself from the soul-killing bondage to Lady Caroline; Her Ravi (A Handful Rice) puts up a life long fight with his wily mother-in-law. Ruth Prawer Jhabwala (Esmond in India) and Prem (The householder) find themselves in a unenviable situation mainly as a result of the stupidity of their stupidity of their wives. “Yet they do not invoke their traditional male authority. They suffer everything silently” (Rajeshwar M, 1999:110).

Indu in Roots and Shadows finds that in her married life, she is stifled and thwarted. In her married life, Indu wants to be more assertive and autonomous. She becomes possessive and always wants her husband Jayant to be with her. She observes,

When, I look in the mirror I think of Jayant, when I dress think of Jayant, when I undress think of Jayant. Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him. And I can’t blame him. It is not he who has me into this. It is the way I
want it to be... Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own (1983: 49).

In this way, she expresses her love for Jayant which has no limits, and she realizes that she is in no way different from others. Indu thinks that marriage has given her freedom, but ironically enough soon she realizes the futility of her decision. She says, "I wish, I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I can’t fantasize" (13). She speaks about her own incompleteness thus, "This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it... that was somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remembered incomplete. Then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone" (31). She realizes, "I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see... I hide my responses as if they were bits of garbage" (38). The paradox is she is not happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot live without him. She thinks she has achieved independence and completeness, but soon she realizes that her independence is not complete and total. She is not content, she wants something more.

Indu, like Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors experiences disillusionment in sex and falls a victim of 'sexual paralysis.' This silent sexual humiliation leads Indu to have extramarital relationship with Naren. This is the second step to express her self-autonomy. Both Indu and Saru seek freedom not only intellectually but sexually too. What is significant is that both Indu and Saru suffer from no guilt and they begin to revolve a new code of sexual ethics that suits their fantasies. Both the heroines undergo a new experience. Both give a new expression through extramarital sexual relationship. Both give a new interpretation of 'love'. Saru in
The Dark Holds No Terrors reveals, "Love... there was no such thing between man and woman... only a need which both fought against futilely, the very futility owing into the thing called love" (1980: 72). Equally, Indu laughs at the idea of "love". I love a book, a word, or a sari, a curry, a dog, a child, a man" (1983: 88). When Naren asks her what the truth is, she answers,

> The sexual instinct.... That is true. The maternal instinct.... That is true too, self instinct, self love ....They are the basic truths, you remember Devdas ? I saw it with some friends. They sobbed when he died for love, but I could have bucked. A grown man moaning and crying for love. God ! how disgusting ! (158).

Indu thought the marriage would bring her freedom but to her great shock and surprise, she found that Jayant had not only expected her to submit but had taken her submission for granted and she also, without being aware of it, submitted herself to him step by step in the name of love. She found it was not love but an adjustment as she never wanted conflict in her married life. As it was a love-marriage she did not want to give an impression to her parents that she had committed to mistake. She otherwise wanted to prove her success. She says pathetically,

> The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this... that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure, I had to show them that my marriage that I was a success... and so I went on lying, even to myself (159).

In If I Die Today, Manju's ailing heart finds comfort in her relationship with Guru. Deshpande's leading protagonists usually enter into
extra-marital relationship. In That Long Silence, Jaya is fascinated towards Kamat. Guru comes closer to Manju, Guru tries to assuage her hurt-feelings. There is a conversation between Guru and Manju, which reveals how Guru has sort of extended his protective wings to Manju. What's that smile for? Guru asked me.

I was just wondering how many secrets a face can hide. "Multitudes, I expect we all wear masks, don't we? Though we shouldn't. I've only just realised that. To waste this one life you have in pretences in fake emotions... it's a crime. If only I had known it earlier!" His voice trailed off into a plaintive murmur. For the first time I heard regret in his voice. "At one time I was dead scared of revealing myself to anyone. I couldn't bear the thought of opening myself out to another person. That's what kept me off marriage, perhaps. It scared me ... the intimacy of a marriage. Now it seems wonderful to me ... a relationship in which one dispenses with masks. That's what a good marriage means, doesn't it? Are you asking me a question?" I said harshly. "Well, yes I am. You should know." I thought of my own marriage and the silences and barriers that existed between Vijay and me. And suddenly shamefully, I burst into tears. I couldn't control myself. I heard the scrape of a chair, and could feel Guru's comforting hand on my back. It made no difference. I shook and sobbed as if I would never stop. Finally, Guru held me close and comforted me as if I was a child. At last I felt myself calming down. And at that moment, Vijay entered (1982: 40-41).

It may be the amours of Manju, which perhaps antagonize Vijay. Manju feels for herself, "It was after this that things started really going wrong" (41). No where in her novels Deshpande shows husbands meddling in the love relations of his wife.

None of Deshpande's protagonists are presented in the traditional pativrata mould. Closely related to their attitude to marriage is their
capacity to analyse their relationship with their husband as well as their extra-marital relationships since, these relationships do not seriously affect their marriage or stretch over a long period of time, they are dealt with in a very matter of fact fashion by the protagonists.

I had done it deliberately coolly, with calculation because, foolishly perhaps I had imagined it would give me an escape route, something that would lead me out of a loveless trap (Terrors, 1980: 132).

She dismisses love and romance as being meaningless words and is convinced that “fulfillment and happiness come not through love alone but sex” (133). Jaya considers love to be a myth. There, had however, been a time she said,

faithfully followed all the edicts laid down by the women's magazines. They had been my Bible and I had pored over the wisdom contained in them. Don't let yourself go. How to keep your husband in love with you? Keep romance alive in a marriage (That Long Silence, 1988: 96).

Manju doesn't have any illicit relationship with Guru as she herself has confessed to be so. But Guru appears to have a soft corner for Manju. He is close to her as he provides her comfort whenever she is in trouble and solace whenever distressed. “And for the first time I realised that everyone didn’t see Guru as I did. That he wasn't the same person to others as he was to me” (1982: 43).

Vijay views the relationship between Manju and Guru in the negative way but Manju continues to have relations with Guru. The male characters in the novels of Deshpande are seen only so far as they affect the life of the
protagonists. Vijay affects the life of Manju and thus his character is through the eyes of Manju. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita is the narrator and so is Jaya in *That Long Silence*. Sarita's father has no voice during her childhood as the mother is the dominant figure. Jaya is the darling of her father and blames him for dying before she realized her ambitions. Indu's father is an enigmatic personality in the traditional joint family where Indu grew up. Manohar, Sarita's husband, is first "a man who was to take the literary world by storms the man on the brink of doing so" (*Terrors*, 1980: 65). Later, we see him as a sadist by night and a failure by day. Mohan is a social climber – one who aspires to reach the topmost rung of the economic ladder by using right or wrong means. Jayant is hardly seen throughout the novel except in Indu's recapitulation of his reactions to events. Yet, the first person narrator is always honest in apportioning the blame and taking on her share too. Premula Paul writes, "While offering sufficient sympathy of the protagonist, the novelist never takes sides. This is the remarkable achievement for a novelist who belongs to the suppressed class" (1981: 81).

The protagonist, Manju is presented as subaltern character. She is not happy either as a wife or as a mother. As a mother her voice remains suppressed. Manju's daughter, Sonu doesn't listen much to what the mother says. "The child had since my illness moved away from me" (1982: 43). Manju, the mother, father regrets that Sonu "had stopped coming to me with her little affairs" (43). Manju feels neglected and tries to establish her authority in the family, particularly, so for exercising control over the child is concerned. But Vijay intervenes. Manju's attempt to central the child results in antagonizing her.
Nothing worked ... neither threats, persuasions nor bribes." She clenched her teeth, set her soft baby lips in a determined line and shook her head to everything. Her resistance infuriated me and I felt I had to break it down. My desperate attempts to control my temper usually gave way and ended in tears on my part, and tantrums on hers. "Leave her alone", Vijay said. "Stop fussing over her and she'll eat." "She won't. She'll starve." "Let her." "How long?" "Don't be silly. No child will ever starve." I'm a failure. I often thought I can't manage my own child. Perhaps this time ...? But I couldn't fool myself it would be different this time. I would go on making the same mistakes. We can rarely help being what we are (1982: 44).

Manju had to swallow humiliation because being a typical woman protagonist of Deshpande, she has to compromise with a tradition. In Roots and Shadows Mini also has to act as according to the tradition. Women like Mini who is always involved in the fetishes of traditions and household work, have no other option but to remain satisfied with the things provided women are also toned or conditioned to merge their aspirations and desires with those of their family. Mini too absorbs the trend established by the elder women of her family. She has been prepared for looking after the house and Akka's desire to educate her was not because of giving her an independent stand but because she feels that educated girls get a good match.

Mini perceives her husband's house as her final abode and her husband and as an oracle. The Indian women have been accepting their husbands with their flows and trying to live up to their desires and demands by transforming and molding themselves. Their predecessors act as archetypes for them. They absorb the trends set by them which dictate the feminine qualities to be performed by women. Although these feminine
qualities are imposed on them yet they find it difficult to free themselves
from its bondage.

Deshpande has always scoffed at the idea of being called a feminist. She wonders why male writers are never accused of writing male
propaganda "why is it said only about women writes?" (Literary Criterion,
1985: 34). She justifiably asks. Her aim is to write about human beings and
not merely about women. None of her novels, to date, has male
propagandist but she does not create female endives either. She is able to
transcend limited feminist issue and constraints. Her women protagonists
do not revel in the otherness of women but instead view themselves as a part of
the societal whole. Their strength lies in not trying to bend others even as
they themselves do not bend. The experiences of women in these novels
transcend categorization. "As if women's experiences are of interest only to
women" (Long Silence, 1988: 147). Says Jaya voicing the novelist's own
opinion. That women's issues should not become an all encompassing
obsession for any woman is Indu's opinion too, "Women, women, women I
got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. As if we
had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the key" (Roots & Shadows,
1983: 78). However these protagonists appear well-read in feminist
literature and are able to quote Virginia Woolf and Betty Friedman. Each
one of them is intent on carving out an identity of her own in this society.
The process by which each one achieves this gives each novel its basic
thrust.

Feminism by definition is a movement to gain equal rights for
women with men in social, political and economic fields. Feminisms are
multiple, but they share certain common ideas and beliefs about the basic
goals to which the movement is committed. Black feminists are the women of African origin who feel terribly oppressed as blacks in a white society as women in a patriarchy and as workers under capitalism.

Eco-feminism is about reconciliation of the under privileged section of the society. Eco-feminists feel that heterosexism is imposed upon society as the correct norm and society assumes that heterosexuality is the only natural form of expression. Marxists feminist view history in a different way. They analyse literary texts in a Marxists manner replacing the working class with women in their discourse. They feel that these two classes have recognizably similar features particularly as they have both been oppressed by capitalists and males respectively. Psycho feminists examine literary texts for unconscious articulation of feminine desire. Semi-feminists study the signifying practices by means of which females are coded and classified as women in order to be assigned their social rotes socio-feminists are interested in the rotes assigned to women in a patriarchal society.

The advent of literature written by the females promised to picture life from a woman's point of view. One comes across a profound sense of injustice that is prevalent in society in such literatures. The writers revolt against traditions those are defined by what is essentially a patriarchal society. But even feminist fiction displays to some extent traces of a dual tradition. Showalter believed that women writers cannot totally be free from the efforts of the dominant culture. Women authors, who are professed feminists, have been able to completely discard the peculiarities of the dominant culture that they have internalized.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are mostly concerned with the female protagonist's quest for identity. There is an effort to understand the inner
dimensions of the female characters and to study their place in a society overridden by andocentric norms. Personally, Deshpande is not very enthusiastic about the label feminist, but her heroines speak of Virginia Woolf and Betty Freidan who are acknowledged feminists. The novelist has displayed an ambivalent attitude towards feminist. Her female protagonists are preoccupied with struggle between their feminine self and their feminist self the novels end on an ambiguous note.

Manju struggles between her feminine self and feminist self. She strives to establish her identity in the family. She wants parity with her husband. She desires that her husband should share all the secrets with her. She hopes further that by way of becoming a mother of a child, the gulf that has been created between herself and her husband would be bridged but she feels frustrated. Manju records her feelings in this way,

I'd heard of a pregnancy bringing a husband and wife together with Vijay and me, it seemed to have the opposite effect. We had drifted even further apart. This child, I had made my own, the fight to bring it to life, my own struggle. I don't know if Vijay had sensed this feeling of mine: but he kept himself aloof. He looked after me but it was the detached kindness of a stranger. We had even, I realised one day, stopped quarreling as if we had not even any areas of disagreement between us (1982: 43).

Thus, all hopes of Manju to achieve freedom and develop an amicable relationship with her husband proved to be a sort of crying in wilderness. And finally, she has to compromise and go home,

Yes where else could I go? But was I going home because there was no other place? And yet, what could I do? There was Sonu,
And this child to come. For a moment, I resent them bitterly. Motherhood, I thought. It's a trap keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom: until you forget what the word “freedom” means (1982: 47).

Such type of circumstances and picture we find in Small Remedies. Where the thinks that freedom does not exist in her husband's house. She observes,

Freedom is always elsewhere. Did Bai after leaving homes, long for the life she had left behind? Did she suffer because she had sacrificed her reputation and status? Or did she enjoy the freedom she had gained, did she feel good to be able to do what she wanted? (2000: 222).

Bai elopes with her Muslim lover, which is another anti-traditional decision. She takes her daughter, Munni, with her. So Bai, her daughter and lover, Gulam Saab live together. But it is very difficult to live in a small village like Neemgaon with her muslim lover. About freedom J. Macquarrie remarks,

This distinction between the freedom that is prior to action and the freedom that is subsequent to it can hardly fail to remind us of the very similar distinction that we met in keerkegaard and some other thinkers between the primordial anxiety that comes before the exercise of freedom and the subsequent anxiety or care that accompanies man throughout his life (Ira Pande. Seminar, 1991: 37).

In our society women are not as free as men. Being weak women need the protection of men on whom they depend. Commenting on women's freedom the narrator in small Remedies says,
Women can never be free: Is that it? No, knowing Leela and now Bai, I can’t go along with this idea. Both these women got for themselves, the measure of freedom they needed, they worked for it. And they both knew the price they had to pay for it (2000: 224).

Freedom brings responsibilities, which, when, thwarted may result in boredom and loneliness. Bai wants a Guru like Pandit Kashinath Buwa who is residing on Bombay. She goes to him to be his disciple but Gurjee, an orthodox Brahmin discourages her to do so because Gurujee thought that music is not the proper field for ladies. But when the Gurujee decides to live permanently in home-town Bhawanipur, then Bai approaches him and impresses him to teach her.

It is an acknowledged fact that the Indian woman has no identity of her own. The complexity of gender construction in India is influenced by power of structures like caste, class and religion. Jaya like a typical woman has to imbibe traits of her father’s personality and later those of her husband’s from early girlhood, she is enveloped by society, parents, teachers, priests — and also in many buyers of conditioning. She is given an idol to worship and an ideology to imbibe.

In Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors, Sarita a doctor earens much more than her husband, Manohar. Unlike Jaya in That Long Silence, Sarita is financially independent and on the contrary it is her husband, Manohar who is dependent on her luxuries in life. But even though her marriage is a cruel person Sarita doesn’t opt for divorce. She, too like Jaya is forced out of the daily routine an order to attain true perception of her identity.
In If I Die Today, there are different types of women who are coupled with their husbands in different roles of domination and subordination. Manju, the narrator is a lecturer in Bombay. She is like other women protagonists does not enjoy much privilege in her family and as a result there of she has to live a life of suppression and humiliation. She is the type of traditional woman who dread to be away from their husband. A woman without husband in a traditional Indian society is not accorded a proper place. Manju is constantly worried about her husband's mood. Once, Manju goes out without intimating her husband and when she comes back, Vijay reacts "Where were you? He asked me angrily" (1982: 47). It appears husband has been given privilege to control his wife whereas a wife is not at all enjoined upon to question the absence of her husband. This is known as double-standard that the society is practicing for long and perhaps Deshpande wants to raise her voice against this kind of discriminatory treatment to women. But at the same time, she seems to suggest that there is no way out other way out than to compromise with the situation for women. Manju records the callousness of her husband towards her in the following way,

Vijay was lying in bed reading. He didn't raise his eyes from his book as I entered. I brushed my teeth, washed my face, changed folded and put away my clothes. Then I drank some water and got into bed. Vijay was still reading seemingly unaware of my presence. My heart felt as cold and heavy as my body. The bulge of my body, which no blanked could hide, disgusted me. For a minute I hated myself and the child I was carrying. I felt it move as if protesting against this emotion. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep (48).
Shashi Deshpande’s primary focus of attention is the world of women – the struggle of women in the context of modern Indian society unable to Rully defy traditional patriarchal attempt to realize and preserve their identity not only as women but also as human beings. Being trapped in this woman’s worlds of experience, Deshpande hopes to emerge as a kind of female Tolstoy who can create real rounded characters and not merely women characters created for men. As Sarla Palkar says,

For a long time woman has existed as a gap, as an absence in literature... this is not only true of fiction created by men, but also by women, who have mostly concined themselves to writing love. Stories or dealing with the experiences of women in a super ficial manner... which represses the truth about the majority of their sisters and their lives (1989: 163).

Deshpande uses the first person narrative in all her novels. As the protagonists present the world as they see it, the readers' sympathies are directly channelised towards them even when the protagonists are able to distance themselves and write ironically. There is no linear progression as the story moves in a circular motion the past and present merge to provide a total picture. These characters are not the prototypes that we come across the earlier writing by women novelists. These characters do not even have any earth-shaking goals. It is only the need to realise themselves and their potential that is an essential, throbbing even felt need for them. The closed spaces or enclosures into which life seems to imprison them in insufficient for their potential. These women are neither more nor less heroic than men. Viewed from the protagonist's angle, other characters recede into the background since all her novels revolve around the experiences of the female protagonists.
In the present novel, Manju's experiences as a wife and mother are brought to fore. The novel includes other women protagonists also like Rani, Cynthia, Shanta etc. Rani is the wife of Dr. Agrwal who is the Dean. Rani enjoys much privilege in the family as wife. She often hosts parties and prefers to show herself off. Cynthia is the wife of Tony. Cynthia is a pediatrician and her husband Tony happens to be a games master at the local college. Before marriage attraction grew between them and crossing all the limits, they indulged in physical relationship, resulting in Cynthia conceiving a child which had to be terminated for fear of stigmas. As a result of this termination of pregnancy Cynthia could not mother a child after marriage. Cynthia says,

I had already sinned once. Before marriage. Oh, I was crazy about Tony then. There was still a year to go for my finals and we were to get married only after that. Since we were to be married, I thought ... what is wrong? I should have known. A wrong is wrong. You can't escape the consequences. When I realised, what had happened? I panicked. I took the wrong way out again. For a medical student, it wasn't very difficult one to get done. It didn't seem a sin then, either. Just something that had to be done. After all, we thought, we can have kids after we're married. They never came. It was a punishment for what we did. I know it now. Tony could never see it my way (1982: 94-95).

But after marriage the love between the couple dwindles and Cynthia begins to scorn her husband as “the silly old fool” (94). Shashi Deshpande has given us the glimpse of the rigid system of the marriage in India which is decided not on the basis of compatibility but on caste religion and dowry. Indu, in Roots and Shadows speaks against the traditional mode of setting marriages when she sees, Mini being pushed into an incompatible marriage.
by their elders. She accuses. “You are leaving out that great incalculable... human emotions” (Roots & Shadows, 1983: 99). In her marital life Indu could not free herself from “The shadow of submission” (158). Shashi Deshpande specifies in the essay mentioned above,

“... love leads to the certainly of marriage. But marriage invariably takes you back to the world of women of trying to please, of the fear of not pleasing, of surrender, of self abnegation” (35).

In her march towards emancipation and selfhood, the contemporary Indian woman has to struggle against the insensitive fatality of options and the indoctrination of centuries which silently yet persistently endeavours to fashion her into mould of “womanhood” (131), as he defined and defiled by the society. “The true woman” (131), Simone De Beauvoir remarks, is an artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made. He presumed instincts for coquetry, docility are indoctrinated as is phallic pride in man” (131). Indu moulds herself to satiate Jayant and prevents herself from retaliating as it will certify her marriages as a failure. Indu foresees it and decides to hide the frictions of her marital life from her family. She analysis herself,

The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this... that I had, clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage, that I was a success shows whom? The world, the family, of course and so I went on lying even to myself comprising, shedding bits of myself along the way. Which meant that I, who had despised Davdas for being a coward, was the same thing myself? I had killed myself as surely as he had done” (158-159).
Indu concludes that as life partner, they always expected from each other to overlook their vices and appreciate their virtues. Indu accepts that she throttled her desires not because of Jayant’s pressure but because it was her own decision with which she had given up her identity and individuality. Soon she realizes,

And one day I had thought... isn’t there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid with no shape, no form of my own? At that moment a savage truth had stared me in the face... without wants there is no T (1983: 49)

Shashi Deshpande in her talk on 'The Indian Woman – Stereotypes, Images and realities states- “The good woman – whether she’s the wife, mother, sister or daughter-in-law doesn’t matter – is always so selfless that she negates herself to the point of extinction” (Images and Realities, 30 Oct. 1997).

Manju, the protagonist, too, sacrifices her own self and identity for the welfare of her family. Her husband, Vijay does not care much about his wife whereas Manju is so caring. Once when Vijay was late for his home, Manju began to worry. “Suddenly, I realised how late Vijay was. Why was he so late? What could have happened? Each minute, as it ticked by, brought fresh horrors into my mind” (1982: 97).

Similarly, Meera, another female character in the novel seems to be much more worried about her husband Ashok whereas Ashok is caught red-handed by Manju when he was making love with another lady. Manju thought about Ashok “How could a man be so stupid?” (80). Ashok, after being caught began to make excuses in order to prove his innocence. The girl Leena with whom Ashok was making love was married. The
conversation that fellow between Ashok and Manju is so realistic and revealing.

   Really, Ashok I can't understand you.” I said despairingly. “How could you?” “Don't preach, will you?” he said irritably. “I don’t owe you any explanations, do I? God knows why I’m trying to explain. Just forget about what you saw.” He gave me a pleading look. What could I say? And there was Meera. “And what about her? This Leena, I mean can’t you see she’s dead serious about you? Can’t you see she’s suffering?” “Oh she!” he said airily. “She'll forget me fast enough. She's married you know. She has a husband in Gulf countries. She gave me the usual flap about his not understanding her. That's how I... I was just being friendly and sympathetic. She misunderstood me (1982: 80).

Apart from dealing with the theme of women’s questions, If I Die Today appears to be a detective novel. Deshpande has been a pioneer in the field & detective fiction. If I Die Today and Come Up and Be Dead are both detective novels. The influence of Agatha Christie appears very strong here, though the atmosphere is again totally Indian. But the method of bringing together a number of suspects on a particular occasion directing the readers suspicions purposely in the wrong direction, the contrast between the everyday domestic setting and the most in human crime – murder – all speak of the Cheristle influence.

Philip Stevick in his Theory of the Novel states that the novel records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience. The protagonist of the novel follows a pattern of disillusionment – from potential fulfillment to actual accomplishment, from a hopeful nature to a resigned wisdom. Thus, it is distinguished from romance, which is essentially escapist literature. The novel leads us back to reality. If we consider the themes of Shashi Deshpande's novels, we realise that a similar
progress in the protagonist's life is portrayed in them. All her protagonists Indu, Saru, Jaya Khshama, and Manju are shown to be in a state of confusion at the beginning. Slowly as the novel unfolds, they go through a process of introspection, self analysis and self realisation. At the end, they emerge as more confident more in control of themselves and significantly more hopeful. As Jaya in That Long Silence concludes... there is always hope.

Manju appears to be in a state of confusion in the beginning of the novel, the mystery of murder of two leading males – Guru and Tony and also of Prabhakar Tambe is not unfolded till the middle of the novel. It is only at the end of the novel. When Vijay is attacked by an unknown person in the darkness? Manju comes to know that Murderer is Vidya, the sister of the Dean. But the reason why Vidya turned out to be a murder is not known to either Vijay or Manju.

I had asked Vijay the same question next day. "Why did she do it, Vijay?" Vijay had shrugged "she won't ever tell us about it. That's certain now. We have to guess. Guru... yes, I think, I can imagine why she had to kill him. Remember the relationship between her and her brother. The Dean was four years older. He must have been a tremendous influence on her, right from their childhood days. From what little I know of their family, they were two of a kind, friends and allies in a large family. Later, it was he who educated her and gave her a chance to become what she did. She must have admired him and looked up to him. Let's just say that and not get too Freudian." He had given me a rueful grin. "That may be one of the reasons why she never married (1982: 135)."

As in other novels of Deshpande the women protagonists in If I Die Today belong to middle class educated women of India who are "well
educated, hard working people in secure jobs. Cushioned by insurance and provident funds with two healthy, well-fed children going to good schools" (Long Silence 1988: 05).

Indian women in general are passive patient and self sacrificing. They tend to sacrifice individual happiness for the collective good of the family. But, of late, western education as well as change of attitudes, has brought of perceptible metamorphosis in modern Indian women. Manohar Malgaonkar, too ridicules the hypocrisy and pompousness of the Indians who pretend to be so under the influence of the Westernisation this is not to say that Westernisation progress is abhorred by him, but what, in fact, he disdains disowns one's basic cultural roots. Deshpande also subscribes to the idea of adhering to one's tradition and culture on the part of women in the interest of the family and society. But some of the critics have charged her of prescribing to the Western feminism.

However, within the larger literary academic contest, Deshpande's reliance on early western feminist traditions and their subsequent slow death and burial at the hands of more titillating and fashionable critical practices in the academia have in many ways diminished Deshpande's claim to originality and limited her writing to being seen as of only gender specific interest visualized as a woman writing for women alone Deshpande's best work, written largely in the eighties, has failed to a degree to close in on reader interest in the manner of later and more celebrated counterparts (Anjana Sharma, 2004: 98).

It is a fact that feminism being a global concern. 'Emancipation of women' has become a watchword of this century. Devaki Jain feels that it is "an ugly phrase, reminiscent of serfs and slaves" (Indian Women, 1976: 5). Woman commands a place of respect in Indian culture. But it does not
mean that Indian woman’s place and position are safe and secure. Devki Jain says,

The role status and position of woman has been far from static, ranges from what is thought to have in a position of considerable authority and freedom to one of equally considerable sun-service (1976: 07).

Various factors, historical, sociological and psychological – have their say in deciding woman’s place and fate. Modern women find no sense in being an acquiescent, suffering and sacrificing lot. As they feel the need for self-expression and individual fulfillment, they have began to question the conventions and defy traditions. This craving for individual freedom naturally results in the breaking up of family and relationships. If suffering and unhappiness are involved in sacrificing individual happiness, struggling for self-fulfillment at the cost of family and security too is not devoid of bitter consequences. This kind of individualization that results in clash of personalities inevitably results in the breakage of age-old institution of marriage. Divorce, far from being a panacea, is accompanied by sociological psychological and economic problems.

Right from the beginning India has been facing a traditional and cultural upheaval. This process is initiated by under the Western influence. Devaki Jain observes that a look at the modern girls serves as a warring against careless transformation, “They reflect again the urban phenomenon – breakdown of traditions without a substitute ideology” (Indian Women, 21). But it should be remembered that India is a country that has its roots in its ancient culture and can absorb the changes that occur with the passage of time at the same time retaining its identity and Deshpande strongly
endorses this view. Woman's life is unfortunately shaped by man rather than woman. Therefore she has to face the life of golden caged bird, who is leading the life in a golden cage. But it has no open air to fly in the company of nature. The same is treated with the woman by man. Therefore suppression and exploitation became the watchwords in her entire life.
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