Chapter III

Feminism and Feminist Perspective

in Shashi Deshpande’s Fiction
Since the dawn of civilization, there has been a struggle to release women from male domination. Feminism is an expression of resentment towards the unjust behaviour meted out to woman. In literature, it means to any method that reviews a text with prime concern for the nature of woman’s experience. The discrimination against which the feminist have raised their voice of protest—legal, economic and social restriction on the basic rights of woman—have existed all through the history across the world in all the civilizations. Naturally, the principle of feminism was articulated much earlier and its roots can be traced in the history of human civilization. There has been plentiful evidence to say firmly that women have been writing in India since times immemorial, as early as 1000 B.C. on holy subjects mainly in the form of poetry. Later we have “Bhakti Women Poets” like Jana Bai and Meera in various parts of the country. It has been existing for hundreds of years, probably with some breaks off and on. Therefore, it is not something new that has happened of late.

The literary world of the Indian English fiction has encouraged woman writers. Therefore, more and more woman authors are articulating anxieties and concerns focusing on woman’s issues and creating a literature of their own. Feminist issues transcend all limits of nationality, race, creed etc. Woman writers have been echoing the sentiments of marginality and expressing their resentment against the patriarchal world. The major concerns of the modern literature all over the world has been to bring to light the plight of women, their increasing problems, their physical, financial and emotional exploitation, and their mental anguish in the male dominated society in every sphere of life.

In almost all the countries, in the academic field, in woman forum, the main focus is to bring into light the oppression faced by women in various forms. The enforcement of the feminist movement, the establishment of various woman study centers and the formation of various
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welfare organizations are the indication of the fact that the voice of women is being heard. In order to reach the stage of being listened to, the woman writers had to struggle much and through their writing, they have been projecting their points, pleading and fighting for a change in the attitude of society towards woman.

Virginia Woolf calls ‘Shakespeare a masculine mind’ and regrets the fact that Lady Winchilsea who could be equally great a poetic talent was not allowed to grow because of gender - bias of the Elizabethan period. Woolf traces out the history of English literature and maintains that women were deprived of education, economic independence and domestic space. ‘A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write a fiction’. (Virginia Woolf) She cites an example of Jane Austen who wrote. Stealthy, hid her manuscripts from male intruders, got a time for writing in the sitting room only when the family members were out. Above all, while she suffered all kinds of causal interruptions, she tried to conceal her identity as a writer for fear of being mocked at. Historically speaking woman is what man has made of her, a weaker sex.

In literary theory ‘Feminism’ means challenging the patriarchal canons, deconstructing the phallocentric creative and critical discourse, decoding gender as an organizing principle of experience and relative forms of feminine articulation to changing external circumstances and associations. In this study our basic concern is to theorize a woman’s discourse as a concept of basic reality of woman’s life situation which is grown out of the anxieties of woman’s life. The strong wave of feminism in 1960s and 1970s is a result of dealing with the issues related to women being raised in range of forums and woman’s ‘groups which emerged all over the country. Feminists in the cities and feminist scholars have dealt with family violence, the law, the household, health care, education, curricula, the media, and woman’s work and working conditions. The very basis of feminism is reformist. A famous historian Linda Gordon
Feminism is an analysis of woman’s subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to analyse it.” (Gupta 12)

Mary Wollstonecraft, an English feminist critic in her article *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, fully explains the reasons of woman’s subordination. To her, it is the fact that woman exists in a stale of ignorance because she lacks right education. Being influenced by Locke and Hartley, she regrets that women are seldom pleased by reason than emotions. They foolishly nourish the false notion of beauty and delicacy, excite emotion in men and try to win pleasure and power through their sexual character. They are seldom found obedient to reason in shaping the identity of their individual characters, and cultivating agreeable talents of their own. Men are prone to see beauty, good humour and docility in women and women look for manner, gentleness, and smart appearances in man.

Elaine Showalter, an American feminist critic, who laid the foundation of the feminist movement, pleaded for one structural frame work of the-woman writers. The credit goes to Showalter for giving uniformity to the feminist genre of literature. She told the women writers to rely on their personal experience, rewrite and re-examine their cultural and literary history, understand the social and psychic mechanism that construct and perpetuate gender differences, sharpen their creative faculty and develop their linguistic caliber. Showalter further exhorted the women writers to create new aesthetics and encourage the psychodynamics of female creative literature. The nucleus point to the whole argument is what Pouline de la Barre once pointed out: “All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuits.” (Barre 389) Jane Austen in Persecution also remarked: “Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree: the pen has been in their hands.” (Austen 153)
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Feminist theory studies a structural inequality of women caused by systematic social injustice. It also goes against various structures and interrelationships of power — the state, the church law and the academy which patronise patriarchal. Feminist Literary Theory sees a fundamental continuity between text and world interpreted within social and cultural construction. Reality is foreground as ‘textualised’, the world itself is a text. Shoshama Felman points out:

Man alone has thus the privilege of proper meaning of literal identity; feminity as a signifier, cannot signify itself, it is but a metaphor, a figurative substitute; it can but refer to man, to the phallus, as its proper meaning, as its signified. The rhetorical hierarch station of every opposition between the sexes is then such that woman’s difference is suppressed, being totally subsumed by the reference of the feminine; to masculine identity. (Felman 47)

The origin of woman in various scriptures of the world also denotes her subordinate position. In the Devee Bhagvata, Narayan creates Urvashi from his thigh, in the Book of Genesis, God creates woman from Adam’s rib to alleviate man’s loneliness in Ovid’s Metamorphoses. Pygmalion breathed life into a dead but beautiful statue of woman sculpted by him. Both Nature and Culture rated woman inferior to man. The Roman Law limiting the right of woman cited: “the imbecility, the instability of sex.” (Beauvoir 11) No where her ‘legal status’ was the same: she was considered ‘equal but separate’. Simone de Beauvoir maintains that woman is to man ‘a sexual being’, ‘a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities’, ‘a natural defectiveness’, an incidental being’ and above all, she is ‘the other’, she is woman in virtue of her anatomy and physiology. In short, woman lacked respect in history and masculine consideration as well.
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What to be noticed is that the feminist belonging to different countries, regions, languages, cultures, religious and social milieus have handled these subjects because feminine sensibility is more or less the same every-where universally. The basic reality of woman’s life situation, its interrupted nature, perhaps, is the reason for a close affinity between women and fiction writing. The feminists have been drawn more to fiction writing than to other genres of poetry and drama. Handling women writers in all kinds of genre will be unwieldy and is too ambitions a task. It is not out of place to reiterate that only a few novelists have been dealt for giving a serious consideration to the basic issue of feminism and reviewing the cosmic vision of feminism and its application in Indian and Western fiction.

Today, in reality, the feminist movement is still going quite strong all over the world with the prospects of attaining stronger in near future. As Liz Stanley and Sue Wise remarks:

The essence of feminism for us, is its ideas about the personal, its insistence on the validity of women’s experience, and its argument that an understanding of women’s expression can be gained only through understanding and analyzing everyday life, where oppression as well as everything else is grounded. (Liz and Wise 135)

The last quarters of the 19th century was landmark in the history of Indian novels in English on account of the emergency of a host women novelists, who gave a new direction in the writing of fiction in English.

The first Indian women novelist who made a pioneering effort in writing novels of profound psychological significance was Toru Dutt. Although she is pre-eminently renowned as a poet for the versification of a substantial number of poetical works yet she is recognized as a novelist for her fictional work like Le journal de Made moiselle d’Arvers written in French,
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Blanca or The Young Spanish Maiden written in English. These two novels are self projection of her own agony and anguish of life. The Marguerite in French novel and Bianca in English novel are self portrayals of Toru’s own personality attended with tragedy. Toru’s typical attitude, feelings and sentiments, which are characteristically Indian in all respects manifest in the character of her heroines. The portrayal of the woman characters leads us to infer that Toru remained invariably an Indian woman in her temper, temperament and outlook.

Anita Desai recognized as the pioneer of psychological novel in modern Indian English literature. Her novels present an explanation to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche. In the novel Cry, the Peacock Anita Desai explores the turbulent emotional world of neurotic protagonist Maya who is constantly haunted by a pre sentiment of her husband’s death on account of her belief in astrological prediction. None realizes her exuberance of sentiment, emotion and tension. Even her husband Gautama an insensible and unsentimental youth hardly shares in her psychological suffering. On the contrary he treats her as a spoilt child. Cry, the Peacock begins with Maya’s reaction to the death of her pet dog and husband’s total indifference to her. Anita Desai in Voices in the City psychoanalyses the inner mind of three characters Nirod Rao and his sisters Monisha and Amla. In Where Shall We Go This Summer? Anita follows the track of Bronte sisters, who chose to study the heart and mind of women from women’s point of view. Their novels provide glimpses into the tortured souls of their heroines. In like manner, Anita too portrays the tragic intensity of her women characters with a feminist perspective. Thus Anita Desai heralded a new era of psychological exploration of inner mind in the novels.

Geeta Hariharan is a novelist who uses her novel as a vehicle of her protest against male dominance over women. In her novel The Thousand Faces of Night she denounces the subservience of Indian women and advocates their emancipation from the bondage of male
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domination. She depicts the tragedy of women, who in their inner mind react to this kind of subjection and persecution. This novel presents a vivid picture of patriarchal dominance in social life. It also strikes a note of feminist approach in the theme of women’s psychology.

The other feminist novelist who won the booker prize for literary achievement is Arundhati Roy. A study of her novels can convince the readers as to how they assume feminist significance by reason of her concentration on the portrayal of women characters. Another woman novelist, who projects a new vision of Indian women in her fictions is -Manju Kapoor. In her novel Difficult Daughters she portrays her women characters as women of new modern outlook.

As a novelist Nayantara Sahgal’s development carries testimony to the fact that she has been walking toward a certain feminist state, is that the female’s feeling do not merely provide data but are actually organized in such a way that become a practice in pullulating consciousness and a critique of society with its unequal gender roles and the power distribution involved in them. The Day in Shadow and Rich Like us analyse the woman’s position through feminine perspectives. These novels raise the voice of its protagonists against the oppression of male chauvinism and hegemony in the familiar level through feminine perspectives.

Shobha De is also one of those popular novelists, who have raised her voice against patriarchal hegemony, oppression and sexploitation of the women. Her novels evoke hostile reviews. She once said: “I write with a great deal of empathy towards women. Without waving the feminist flag, I feel very strongly about the woman situation.”( THTM 3) Her novels Socialite Evenings, Starry Nights, Sisters and Strange Obsession, Sultry Days and Snapshots throw light on the plight of them. De does not consider marriage as a necessity of life. In Sultry Days De writes: “who knows about marriage - sharriage .... I am happy as I am”. (Sukla 120) The anecdotes in all her novels have the same feminine perspectives.
Veena Paintal’s novels deal with many questions about women. Paintal’s heroine in *An Autumn Leaf* rejects the traditional customs of marriage. The novel *An Autumn Leaf* is a novel of the plight of feminine sense. Sorabji was an advocate by profession but she championed the causes of Indian Women and exposed in her stories the deep mental agony of the married and unmarried women. *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *Sun Babies* (1904) and *Between the Lights* (1908) are the stories that focus realistically on the inner mind of the suppressed women living behind purdah. Each story seeks to evoke pity and sympathy for the socially and sexually tortured women who dare not raise their voice for deliverance from persecution. Really Sorabji was a feminist and a social reformer.

Another revolutionary women novelist is Kamala Das. She projects in her poetry and novels her own inner mind without inhibition and hesitation. She revolts against the male dominated Indian Society and revels her feeling in a confessional mood. Her novels *Alphabet of Lust* and *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* are the ironic expression of the various physical and psychological harassments meted out to married women. Her *My Story* is also an autobiographical novel in which she reveals her reaction in support of women and against male as a class or people. By her portrayal of women’s predicament, Kamala Das has given a new direction and dimension to Indian novels in English.

Similarly Shashi Deshpande too reveals with a feminist perspective the revolutionary sentiment of an unusual woman character Sarita. The girl revolts against the age-old traditions of orthodoxy and conservatism in order to assert her independence and identity. Her novels also tend to suggest a conflict between traditional and modernity. Her *The Binding Vine* is a novel of feminist significance. It presents woman as a spineless wooden creature subjected to male dominance. In the novel *The Long Silence* Shashi voices her feeling in favour of emancipation of women from the grip of conventional male control. In all her novels she
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concentrates on the portrayal of pathetic and heart-rending condition of Indian women in the male dominated Society.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most dominant voices among the contemporary Indian writers writing in English. Being a woman herself, she chooses women as the central characters of her novels. Her novels have been categorized by some critics as ‘feminist’ novels, but, Deshpande is not happy with the classification of her texts. In her defence she claims that she is a woman herself and so, she is able to describe a woman’s psyche, woman’s predicament more convincingly than a male writer. She feels comfortable in writing about women and so, her characters “happen to be women”. But, she provides her male characters an equal space along with her female characters. According to her, if any feminist ideology has been traced in her writing that is not been incorporated by her intentionally, but, the readers, critics and scholars have found these things out. In that case, the author has to do nothing.

The focal point of Deshpande’s novels is women and their struggles for existence in the rigid Indian society. She is conscious about ‘feminism’, but, her idea of feminism is unique. Her concept is totally different from what we know about the western concept of feminism. She thinks that the western thought of feminism is not applicable to the women of our country, especially to the women from the middle class society. In a broader aspect the word “feminism” somehow delivers the idea that it is “a Western concept; rejecting the family and home, hating men and waging a war against them” (ToI) Shashi Deshpande emphasizes that feminism does not at all indulge in any of these actions — neither any of these actions possible in India where women are supposed to be the home-maker. She even does not portray her male and female characters on the basis of master and servant relationship. In this matter her view is clear:
My idea of feminism is simple. It means that I see men and women as two halves of a whole. In every way, we have been created to complement each other, and together we can fulfill our roles in life; But the main thing is that we are both human. (Ranjana 28)

She rather views “feminism” as an approach to make the world a better locale for both men and women where both can communicate with each other with a more cordial and mutually respectful approach. She opines:

. . . how can feminism be anti-men when it is really working for a better, a more meaningful and companionable relationship between men and women instead of the uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed? (Deshpande 84)

Margaret Atwood shows her concern with the imaginative depiction of socio-realistic themes with woman as central character. The most important factor of life is survival. She deals with women fighting against the female norms of life - sexuality, dichotomy between career and the claims of the family. She wants her protagonist not to be solitary weepers, but to make decisions, perform actions, be ready to face the consequences, whatever they be, and to be ambitious. The Edible Women is a “Protofeminist” novel. The question raised in this novel is the most unnerving one - are we really liberated? Is economic independence the only ingredient in the quest for freedom? To Atwood, the economic independence might help, but it certainly has not helped them to lead a complete life. A woman’s normal destiny is still marriage, which practically means total subordination to man in the existing context of things.

Jane Austen was the first one who deals with the theme of psychological insight and feminist objective. The other women novelists who reflect on woman’s mind in their fictions are Mrs.
Gaskell, Bronte sister, Richardson and Virginia Woolf etc. Bronte sisters presented in their novels a sketch of women characters in their deep anguish. They portray these characters of women from women’s viewpoint. Another women novelist who is preoccupied with the psychological exploration of the mind of women is Virginia Woolf. Her novels are overtly psychoanalytic study of the hidden motives and reaction of women. In order to unveil their veiled mind, Woolf exploits with subtlety the new technique of interior monologue and stream of consciousness. She depicts woman characters with a profound feminist perspective. She is primarily concerned with the relation of women with women and women with men. Virginia Woolf in her significant essay *Men and Women* has analyzed the men-women relationship in a historical and literary context.

Sylvia Plath’s novel *The Bell Jar* is a feminine study as well as a bildungsroman. In German literary criticism ‘Bildungsroman’ means *Formation Novel*. Women writers have successfully developed “a female Bildungsroman as a long-over due and necessary counter weight to the long tradition of portraits of the Artists as a Young Male.” (Miles 102) *The Bell Jar* is a bildungsroman - a novel depicting the early emotional development of the protagonist, as well as a revenge play where the oppressed heroine rises from fear to fury and assumes the mantle of a Vengeful Diana or Kali.” (Anderson 3) The heroine of the novel is a pullulating artist facing the social impediments around her.

The contemporary Afro—American literature presents the conflict by the female protagonists with their father, brother, husband, sister, society and conventional custom. There are many Afro-American writers viz., Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Paul Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Nikki Giovanni, Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lucille Clifton, Mari Evans, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez and many others. This study deals with the emergence of the most acclaimed writers such as Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison.
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and Paule Marshall, all winners of Awards. These novelists chose the same themes and motifs. In the novels of the novelists the black protagonists try to find their meaningful identity and long to survive with respect in the society due to their “triple oppressions: as blacks in white supremacist society, as women in a patriarchy, and as workers under capitalism” (Gupta 43) Black women in America have undergone the racial obstacles for years. As Maya Angelou remarks: “The Black female... is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and lack of power.” (Chafe 52)

Almost all feminine writers in African literature have exposed the real status of women before the public eyes. Among them the most remarkable writers are Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head, Rebecca Njau and Mariama Ba but “Of all the woman writers in contemporary African literature, Buchi Emecheta of Nigeria has been the most sustained and vigorous voice of direct, feminist protest.” (Brown 35) In her notable novels- In the Ditch, Second Class Citizen, The Bride Price, The Slave Girl and The joys of Motherhood Buchi presents a forceful attack on male-chauvinism. She is considered as a significant writer of feminism in the world. O. Osa rightly remarks:

Emecheta’s solution to the woman’s problem is avant-garde and in itself brutal. The rejection of marriage and all it stands for runs through all her novels. She defines matrimony as slavery . . . hers is a crusade to debunk the myths of superiority of man over woman and the sacredness of the marriage institution. (Oso 42)

Judith Fryer is of the view that “the awakening of the female writers to a sense of their own identity begins at the turn of the century” (Fryer 26) depicting woman as a free, self-actualized being, they still remain “the reflections of the prevailing images of woman in the nineteenth century, and alike the predominantly male creators of the Utopian scheme” (Fryer, 23). It is
truly with the female protagonists in the novels of Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, Willa Cather and Margaret Mitchell that “a special female awareness emerges through them.” (Showalter 173) Being a feminist Ellen Glasgow has thought for the emancipation of woman but the way different. Her Barren Ground is a victory over defeat in some very personal ways. Kate Chopin neither joins any of the feminist movement nor supports them but the advocacy of women’s rights rises all through the period of her active writing.

Judith Wright, an Australian poetess, is applauded ‘for the treatment of feminine sensibility. “Her wide humanity, her exploration of the feminine sensibility, and her superb control of diction, form and image, make her stand apart from many poets of the English language.”’ (Syed 101) Judith has been a feminist in her writing but she has not thought it essential to rise in revolt against males in general. She does lay stress on the protest against what man has made of woman. Love, sex and marriage being the basic themes of human beings female authors often discuss on these themes. She has articulated her thoughts and feelings in her poetic voice permeated with a feminine-cum-feminist sensibility. She is of the view that a female is not only a thing of sexual convenience as many male think of her; she is rather a fertile land of love leading to the expansion of humanity. In all her poems mainly Woman to Man, Woman’s Song, Woman to Child, The World and the Child, The Unborn etc Judith Wright is quite aware of the actual purpose of sexual act with the life-partner or propagation of the human existence.

In 20th century the woman writers in France start their writing on feminine subject. Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex is the outcome of that effort. In the novel a woman trusts that dependence on parents, husbands and sons, is her sheer potentiality, rather than a free will, commits a moral defect. The existentialist theory in Sartre’s Being and Nothingness maintains
that human being is a being between being and nothingness that it definitely reaches beyond its present structure into an open future. This very aspect is emphasized in Beauvoir’s mind and hence she raises her voice against the oppression of women in male-chauvimstic society:-

Pay no attention to a woman’s murmurs, her cries, her pains; nature has made her for our use and for bearing every—thing; children, sorrows, blows and pains inflicted by man. Do not accuse yourself of hardness. In all the codes of so-called civilized nations, man has written the laws that ranged woman’s destiny under this bloody epigraph: “Vae—Victis” woe to the weak.

(Beauvoir, 285)

Beauvoir realized the need for the defence of women folk. The Discussion has already been made earlier in the beginning of this study.

Women, be they Hindu or Muslim, have the same fate. In Mistaken Identity, Nayantara Sahgal uses history to highlight the position of women. Both Hinduism and Islam restrict women’s freedom. Bhushan’s mother who confined her major part of life behind the walls of the zenana is having a similar position that of a Muslim woman dressed in burakha. But difference in identity persists. Sahagal’s symbolic use of clothing defines gender tagged with cultural mores.

Today, many versions of feminism as liberal, radical, socialist, post-colonial have cropped up, making a body of literature worthy Of research and enquiry. A feminist ideology stems from ‘individualism’, which stormed the west, but in India its impact was silent but steady. Sahgal point out: “Feminism in India is making a tremendous impact with less noise and drama than in the West.” (Quest 3) To begin with the literature of ‘imitation’ the Indian women novelists have entered various complex problems of modern life to deal with in their novels. They are
in a position to look to their batter—placed counterparts in the West ‘Feminism’ is polythematic and polysynthetic. It requires an indigenous way of decoding gender (roles, relations and identities) probing into the very structure of the text and foregrounding the feminine. It is an onion like creation, the more we peel off, the better in leads us to understand the matrix and meaning of it.

An overview of the above discussion of the feminist writers belonging to different regions in India and aboard has thus been projected. After taking a comparative analysis, we learn that women have caught up with the changing trends and challenges in the society and begun to articulate their feelings. Their main revolt is against male-chauvinism, patriarchy and their hue and cry is for identity, equality and democratic way of life where they are treated like human beings on par with men.
Depiction of Gender Discrimination and Suffering of Women in Her Novels

Our society is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Here a female is considered a peripheral member of the family, both in her parent’s house as well as husbands. Throughout her lifetime, she is unable to decide her roots and this leads to her insecurity. As the daughter is closest to the mother, this insecurity is rubbed on to her also. In almost all societies, a woman is culturally assigned norms of behaviour in which standards of conduct and decorum set the boundaries for her as external signs of what it means to be seemingly proper and respectable within the differentiated hierarchy called gender. Any form of deviation from prescribed norms or any display of transgressive potential in violation to the ideal image of womanhood makes her an unruly woman to be ostracized by society. As Bartky points out, the situation of woman is such that she, a free and autonomous being, finds herself in a world where she is compelled by man to assume the status of an inferior to whatever man imagines himself to be. Women are bound to their oppression, “by male control of the dominant institutions and the dominant ideology...” (Bartky 85) Hence, in order both to gain equality and to realize their human potential, women must transcend their distinctive femaleness to lead the kind of life men do, in other words, they must be autonomous. Beauvoir exhorts women to achieve autonomy, to discover and nurture their authentic self through lived experience for self-realization. This argument may apply in case of Manjari, as she negotiates many opposed discourses and moves forward in a quest to know who and what she is.

In the context of the changing world we live in, it has become imperative to do away with separate domains for woman and man and to redefine man-woman relationship as equal and complementary and not on terms of domination and subordination. For Deshpande, “A world
The Dark Holds No Terrors, the mother-daughter relationship is based on gender-bias and lovelessness. Saru is the daughter of the family, deprived of parental care and affection. Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists reject rituals that are the vestiges of the past. In their rejection of their mother, they also discard the meaningless rituals like circumambulating the tulsi plant. Saru refuse to undertake such rituals that are meant to increase the life span of their husbands. The rejection is an indication of their autonomy and their capacity to see their lives independent of their mother/past. These heroines shudder at some of the natural biological functions of the female and they have developed, from their childhood, apathy towards their body. Shashi Deshpande heroine is confronted with the problem of what the mother stands for and the only way out for her is to seek a new environment where the mother cannot exercise her will.

The woman in order to achieve her freedom seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. She resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that her new role will help her in winning their freedom. Well placed among her contemporary writers in English Shashi Deshpande is perhaps the only Indian author to have made bold attempts at giving a voice to the endurance and tolerance, the disappoints and frustration, the agony and suffocation, the anguish and conflicts, the fear and panic, the sorrows and sufferings experienced by Indian-middle-class women. Caught between tradition and modernity on the one hand, and self-expression, individuality and independency on the other hand, women feel themselves lost and confused. A continuous inner conflict goes on in women’s mind whether to rebel against the social setup or to submit to the traditional morality, whether to listen to her intellect or to her emotions.
Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a telling example of the gender discrimination by parents towards their children. Saru, the protagonist of the novel, has a series of tolerance. Right from her childhood she has to tolerate the atrocities of her mother. She is always ignored in favour of her brother, Dhruva. No parental love is showered upon her and she is not given any importance. Her brother’s birthdays are celebrated with much fanfare and performance of religious rites, whereas her birthdays are not even acknowledged. Her brother’s naming ceremony is celebrated with joyous excitement. Her mother’s adoration of son is deeply engraved in her mind that she began to hate her own existence as a girl or women.

The preference for boys over girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian middle-class families, and is inextricably linked to the Indian psyche. The Indian society steeped in tradition and superstitions considers the birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage. In another sense also, the male child is considered more important than a girl child because he is qualified to give Agni to his dead parents. It is considered that the soul of the dead parents would wander otherwise in ferment. Besides these, dowry could be one reason for the preference of a male child. This sort of blatant discrimination made by her mother between Saru and her brother, Dhruva leads Saru to a sense of insecurity, loneliness, disappointments, and frustration amid the family.

The turning point in Saru’s life is the accidental death of her brother by drowning. Her mother held Saru responsible for it and accuses her intentionally: “You did it, you did this, you killed him” (*TDHNT* 191) She not only accuses Saru but also snatches every opportunity from Saru as she has lost interest in life after her son’s death even she takes no interest in Saru’s education, career or future.
Saru’s mother’s discriminatory behaviour makes her feel unloved and unwanted leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. She is in the grip of insecurity. Irrespective of geographical or chronological space, any Indian girl is a victim of gender discrimination in the Indian social setup. Her feeling of being unwanted is so acute that she says scornfully: “If you are a woman, I don’t want to be.” (TDHNT 62)

Devoid of love and security Saru rebels mother, her traditional practices, her rigid values and marries Manu, a classmate in medical college. She gets married against her parents’ wishes only to find solace from long turn endurance and tolerance. She marries to secure the lost love in her parental home and her identity as an individual. As, S.P. Swain writes: “Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility”. (Sharma 31) She would probably not have married against her parents and brought herself to such a miserable condition if her mother had not been so rude to her. Indeed the circumstances that lead to her taking such a step are the making of her own parents.

Soon Saru’s blissful marital life turns into curse and she realizes that happiness is just illusory. Manu is uncomfortable and feels humiliated and embarrassed with Saru’s steady rise in status, as he feels ignored when people greet and pay attention to Saru. Besides she is unable to spare time enough for Manu and Children. Earlier she was happy and contented to live on Manu’s salary but in her new role as a career woman she becomes discontented. Manu does not love her as he used to earlier. Saru begins to hate this man-woman relationship, which is based on need and attraction and not on love. She scorns the word “love” now. While her social and financial status rises gradually, there is an inverse decline in her conjugal relationship. She does not achieve fulfillment in life. Betty Friedan asserts: “For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment- autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as
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serious consequences, when it is thwarted”. (Sharma 33) It is really true that men can never tolerate playing a second-fiddle role in marriage because according to them it hurts their manhood when their wives gain a superior status in society.

Certain incidents aggravate the already strained relation between the two to the extent that in the privacy of their room at night he does not behave like a husband but a rapist. Although Saru has achieved economic independence, her plight is miserable. Besides practicing medicine she has to fulfill the assigned job of a housewife. However she expresses her desire to leave her medical practice but Manu dissuades her from doing so, as their standard of living wouldn’t be possible on Manu’s Salary. Gradually the circumstances seem all the more intolerable to Saru as Manu behaves beastly at night and leaves the place finally. What Shashi Deshpande wants to show through this novel is the gender discrimination by parents towards their children, and the compulsion to perpetuate male dominance if the marriage is to be kept going on.

Through the endurance and tolerance of Jaya, the protagonist of That Long Silence (1988), Deshpande has tried to explore the endurance and tolerance of women in general. Jaya is caught in the midst of a domestic storm. Her husband is accused of corrupt practices at office and due to the offence the couple has to leave their posh flat at Bombay’s Church Gate to an old Dadar flat of theirs. The children go out for a holiday. That gives space to Jaya for self-interrogation. Traditionally, a woman has an identity only as husband’s wife or father’s daughter or son’s mother. The real picture never emerges. Ten different mirrors show ten different faces. A woman is always defined with reference to man and not he with reference to her is true of the Indian women. Shashi Deshpande is aware of many constraints present in the Indian society and she defines freedom for Indian women from the point of view of the Indian socio-cultural milieu.
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The novelist takes the help of small details to imprint in the reader’s mind the endurance and tolerance of women in the Indian household. In Jaya’s house it was ordained that the girls, not boys clear up after the meals. Mohan, Jaya’s husband is aghast when his wife hints that he should cook food during her confinement. Jaya cannot find her name in the family tree drawn up by her uncle. Later she learns that a married woman belongs to the family of her in-laws.

Even the very conduct of a girl is conditioned by the family from her early childhood. Jaya is chided by her grandmother for exhibiting curiosity. Jaya often hears, “a husband is like a sheltering tree and the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you”. (TLS 32) The winning of a husband, his longevity and the propagation of his lineage through a male child are the goals of the women.

Jaya tolerate a lot in order to keep Mohan happy. She silently wills to her husband’s will and endures everything, tolerates all kinds of masculine oppression silently. She does not protest when Mohan had renamed her ‘Suhasini’ after marriage. Jaya has to adjust even all her lifestyle to suit Mohan’s tastes. She cuts her hair short and follows the modern trend of dressing. Her original style of writing has given place to fashionable and frivolous writing. Jaya’s talent, according to Mohan, is not her personal trait, but an asset to raise his social status. Due to long endurance, it becomes difficult for Jaya to tolerate any more. And she sees herself and Mohan as a pair of bullock yoked together, living together because there was nothing better to do, despite creating the illusion of happiness as most couples do.

There are other instances of the endurance and tolerance of married women. Jiya, maid-servant of Jaya is another living example of tolerance of women. She tolerates all the cruel beatings of her drunkard husband without any hint of complaint. She has to support herself
and her husband. She has to earn for the liquor consumed by her husband. The woman continued to tolerate all the cruelty in her pathetic silence.

Shashi Deshpande allows one of her women characters to exercise her reproductive right by aborting unwanted foetus. Vimala, Mohan’s sister speaks of her mother’s unwanted pregnancies. She says: “Almost all my childhood, I remember her as being pregnant”. (TLS 37) Because of the lack of information about safe methods of sex and facilities for safe abortion, Vimala’s mother, like other women in India, continues to tolerate in silence a series of unwanted pregnancies. She already has six living children and has lost four or five babies. Unsafe conditions of abortion carried out by untrained quacks unleash a whole range of problems to the women.

In The Country of Deceit, she shows how patriarchy still works on the psyche of the common people. After Rani left her first husband, she never married again. The man is having fun out of his revelries because of his gender. But, a woman is never supposed to have such kind of life. Ashoke, Devayani’s lover admits that he has had many relationships with various women, that is Why, he can continue with his relation with Devayani too, without marrying her. But Devayani is not supposed to be in that liaison. These are the drawbacks of Patriarchy which Deshpande brings to the fore.

Thus, to give voice to the suffocated psyche and suppressed desire of woman and lay bare ambitions and frustrations and soothe the aches and pains has been primary focus in Deshpande’s writing. Her works show that compromise is what characterizes the life of the common run of the middle-class women in India. Unable to defy social conventions or traditional morality, she finds herself enmeshed by desires and despairs, fears and hopes, love and hate, withdrawal and alienation, suppression and oppression and marital discord and male
chauvinism. Simultaneously, Deshpande reveals the fact that compromise and adjustment are no doubt the signs of maturity but every compromise shatters her individuality into pieces.

Shashi Deshpande shows that a person is neither a victim nor a predator; everyone suffers due to some circumstances. Every human being has different shades in his character, so they must not be judged by any speculation. She is never biased in his approach towards life. In this aspect she stands unique in her position and asserts herself not as a gender biased critic of patriarchy but as a rational and liberal humanist.
Quest for Identity

The earlier novels by Indian women novelists project the traditional image of women. But as times changed, the portrayal became realistic with a thrust on her sense of frustration and alienation. The characters created by them like their creators, were torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Their crises of value adaptation and attachment with the family and home pulled them asunder. The plight of the working women was still worse, aggravated by her problems of marital adjustment and quest for and assertion of her identity. In a country like India where on the one hand, a woman is equated with man through the concept of Ardhangini, on the other hand there are daily reports of bride burning, dowry harassment and rape. Therefore a favourite theme, with women writers has been an analysis of women’s position. A sensitive and woman conscious writer Shashi Deshpande seems to grapple with the identity crises of the contemporary woman. She deals with the middle class Indian women who represent the overwhelming majority of Indian women and is struggling to emerge out of the cocoon of self-pity, to spread her wings of self confidence. Deshpande illustrate how in the tradition bound male dominated Indian Society, the Indian women has struggled to understand herself and preserved her identity as wife, mother and above all a human being.

Violence against women whether physical, mental or emotional is an issue that crosses all borders and all classes of women. The Indian women, for years, have been a silent sufferer. While she played different roles - as a wife, mother, sister and daughter, she has never been able to claim her own individuality. The words which we always associate with what we consider to be the concept of an ideal woman are self-denial, sacrifice, patience, devotion and silent suffering. A woman was and is expected to subordinate every wish and every
desire to someone else - apparent, a husband or a child. But Deshpande’s protagonists are desirous to revolt against the stereotyped roles assigned to them by society. Initially victims of self-denial they are at conflict with their inner selves because they deny their real feelings. Deshpande’s heroines move from self abnegation to self realization. Their experiences compel them to struggle for their self emancipation. Swine observes:

The tragic predicament of Despande’s protagonists is the outcome of male-domination in a patriarchal culture. Their silent suffering is socio-psyche in nature. In her quest for identity, the Despande’s protagonists move from despair to hope, from self negation to self assertion. Her struggle throughout is to attain wholeness, completeness and authentic self-hood. (Swain 125)

Sarita in ‘The Dark Holds No Terror’ depicts the journey of modern women towards financial independence, emotional balance and social recognition. She is a modern perfectionist who: “Defies her own mother to become a doctor, defies her caste to marry outside, defies social conventions by using Boozie to advance her career.” (Iyengar 785) She is confident, competent and amazingly conscious of her own career and place in society. She refuses to succumb to the pressure of a male dominated culture and paves her own way after a long struggle. Sarita is a successful doctor during the day time, at night a terrified and trapped animal in the hands of her husband, Manohar who is an English teacher in a small college.

The novel begins with Saru (Sarita) returning after fifteen years to her father’s house. She once proclaimed that she would never come back to her father’s place - a place she had once sworn never to return to. Unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband she returns to his home. The rest of the novel is what Saru remembers and a brief confession to her father with whom she had hardly communicated before. The narrative meanders between the past and the present. Her stay in her father’s house gives Sarita a chance to review her relationship with
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her father, husband and dead mother; though she remains unchanged till the end she has a better understanding of herself and others. This gives her the courage to confront reality.

Sarita is highly self willed and her problems ensue because of her outsized ego and innate love for power over others. She defies traditional code at the slightest threat to her importance as that is what she missed and craved for in her mother’s house. Even in childhood Saru had realised that economic independence alone could be an insurance against subordination on suppression. From then on every move in life is towards the realisation of that goal of economic independence. It is not service mindedness that impels Saru on to progress. “The dingy two roomed flat” is not her conception of life and she will not bring up any child to a “life of deprivation.” She is interested in the economic and social status the profession offers. The financial ascendance of Sarita renders Manohar less significant and impotent. He thinks that the only way he can retain his potency and masculinity is by turning into a rapist at night. This action at night terrifies and humiliates Saru.

And each time it happens and I don’t speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. May be one day I will be walled alive within it and die slow, painful death. Perhaps the process has already begun and what I am is a creature only half alive. And it seems I can do nothing to save myself.

(TDHNT 96)

The burden of a working housewife always ends up with the burden of double duties and conjugal relations. If the balance is not maintained, the feeling of imbalance and disenchantment leading to separation becomes a possible way out for mutual happiness. When Saru’s life becomes a problematic one she goes back to her parent’s house. She becomes an emotionless human being. She expects sympathy but to no avail. Absolute
confusion prevails upon her. She feels that she has done injustice to her mother, husband and her children.

If only same one would tell her what to do, she would do it at once without a second thought. It is strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life, she now had this great desire to let go. To put herself in another’s hands. (*TDHNT* 97)

Lack of emotions and spiritual oneness between the husband and wife has to be overcome by mutual surrender of ego, and then only understanding and happiness will follow. Saru’s trauma is her aspirations and paucity of its fulfilment. A tradition bound woman may sacrifice anything for the sake of her family’s welfare and she may not jealously guard her individuality. In the case of educated women it becomes more often than not the family life and happiness is minimum because of divided self between husband and children and then between work and herself. Feminine sensibilities crumble and natural love disappears:

> Love how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against futilely. (*TDHNT* 72)

Sarita is not able to seek support from any quarter which makes all her suffering worse. Hence she has to fend all herself - oppositions and oppressions. At times Saru sees herself as two-in-one women. At other times it is more than mere dichotomy, total disintegration, Shashi Deshpande uses effective images like women possessed by Devi and the Ventriloquists dummy to show the rift and distance between the activist in her and the actions carried out by her. One has to integrate the two halves within to maintain the harmony within and without. Escape has been her mode of resolving the tangled knots, exchanging old
horrors for new ones. But escapism is no permanent solution nor should one look to anything outside of oneself to provide the solution but seek it from within. It is ironical that the father whom Saru had always considered a negative man incapable of strong feelings and who had always avoided things, the truth, facts, life, confrontation is the one who ultimately urges her to confront facts.

My life is my own. Somehow she felt as if she had found it now, the connecting link. It means you are not just a strutting, grimacing, puppet standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness. I have been clinging to the tenuous Shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated, because I have been afraid. (TDHNT 201)

Rather than escaping from the dark or cursing the darkness all that Saru needs to do is to break the self imposed exile, light a candle and declare The Dark Holds No Terror. The dead mother, the dead brother, Manu and even Renu are externalised aspects of terrors within ‘that scratch and maul’. The mother and brother are sealed beyond confrontation or reconciliation. Saru has to deal with the living. She knows that she has been carrying the light, the solution within and has to light up the situation and let the terrors flee. She realises that the problem is as much within as outside. Earlier it was only Manu’s inadequacy that she saw. Now she sees her own inadequacy to combine roles and be a source of love as a daughter, sister, wife and a mother. With the self realisation comes the decision to confront problems. Unlike other women who bear suffering like the torture of Sisyphus, she gathers strength not to surrender, not to run away from problems or not to be behind the symbolic purdah or veil. Rather she accepts the challenge to prove herself as a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, a good doctor and a good human being not from the phallocentric point of view but from her own ‘female’ view point.
Deshpande makes it clear that a women’s life is her own, she is an individual not a dependant, but a being capable of withstanding trials in life alone. Her identity is no longer seen in terms of the identity of male counterpart. This new Saru passes through a process of transformation which signifies a change from bondage to freedom and self assertion. The Saru of the opening section of the novel who had visualised herself as the archetype of Sudama going to an all powerful male (her father) for support ends up as a self sufficient woman who goes to Manu not to seek help but to complement him.

In Small Remedies using the story of two women Leela, the trade union activist and Savitribai Indorekar, the ageing diva of the Gwalior gharana - as the background Shashi Deshpande again explores the theme of a woman set on a journey of self discovery, a journey which will bring past and present within a single pair of brackets, which will heal the wounds even if it does not provide all the answers. Madhu, who introduces these two women into our lives is not a mere passive story teller. She is very much a creator with great potential. Though her intention is to write the biography of Savitri, Madhu in coming to Bhavanipur is attempting to search herself which is linked with the search of identity of the other women. It is through their struggle for identity that Madhu comes to know her own self.

During the course of this journey, we witness various stages of Madhu’s life - as the motherless daughter of a successful doctor in Neemgaon, her friendship at that time with Munni, Savitri’s daughter, her moving to Bombay to Leela and Joes place where her father dies, the beginning of her love for literature due to Joe’s influence. Tony becoming her brother, her job as Assistant Editor of City News, her marriage to Som, the birth of their only son Adit and finally the rift between the couple and the death of Adit. Madhu is not alone on this journey. She has companions: Lata, a young and lively woman, Hari her quiet husband. Tony Hasina who is Savitri’s companion and student whose music takes Madhu a great way
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along the healing path and Som whose very absence underlines his place in her life, who leaves her in peace, allowing her time to come to terms with life in her own way and finally there are memories that keep her company, memories of all those incidents, words and gestures that have shaped her life and memories she want to get away from.

The novel opens with the sentence “This is Som’s story”. It turns out soon that it is rather Madhu’s story, Madhu who enclosed in fog of bereavement caused by the death of her only son Adit, while mulling over past incidents remembers her quoting once T.S. Eliots Words:

“In the life of one man, never the same time returns”. (SR 3) words which had silenced every one assembled, words which had shown then how ominously empty life can be. Thinking of this incident now, Madhu feels that you can neither undo nor repeat what has happened that the past is irrevocable, that time moves on relentlessly and you have to go along with it. No mantra can ward off the evil eyes. Even thinking philosophically that “To get happiness, you’ve got to accept the sorrow and pain as well”, (SR 81) is futile, such thoughts do not make it easier to bear the past, do not lessen the pain.

Having abandoned all such charms, Madhu has come to Bhavanipur to write the story of Savitribai’s life. Is this an occupational therapy for a mother devastated by the death of her son killed in a bomb blast? Would this writing of the life of the ageing Savitribai help her answer the one question that has preoccupied her since Adit’s death? How does one live with the knowledge of a child’s death. Because in writing about Bai she would be dealing with the relationship between Savitribai and her daughter Munni, her childhood friend. Munni was the daughter whose existence Bai has obliterated for the sake of her career. The girl rejected her famous mother and took the name Shailaja Joshi, who died by same strange coincidence on the same day (like Adit) victims, both of them of the same madness that gripped the country in the aftermath of Babri Masjid incident in Ayodhya.
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When Madhu accepted Chandru’s offer to write this biography, probably to divert her attention from her grief, she did not bargain for the silence Savitri exercises with respect to Munni. It was as if Munni did not exist, never existed. Madhu realises that Savitri has mapped out the story that she wants her to write. But Madhu knows that there are three books here. First there is Bai’s book, that Bai wants to be written in which she is the heroine. No dark corners anywhere, then their’s Maya’s and Yogi’s book. As publishers they are interested in a book that is controversial, Trendy, and Politically correct with a feminist slant, a book that will sell.

During the day time Madhu enjoys herself in her work and remains an indifferent observer in the life of people around her. But her grief makes her nights unbearable. In spite of her desire to remain isolated and detached Madhu slowly gets involved in the lives of people around her. Madhu’s final breakdown and her talking of Adit’s death prove to be cathartic for her. Voicing her anguish she says: “I can’t come to terms with my ignorance of those days, I am obsessed by the need to reclaim them from the darkness”. (SR 305) She finally speaks of her loss of identity and alienation when she says: “How long will I live this way? And what for, oh god, what for.” (SR 306) Talking about the loss lifts the burden and brings in the realisation of the despondency of her life. Madhu accepts the simple truth that it is not necessary to know all the answers to the questions that life throws up. “That what we call truth has nothing to do with truth that emerges through words” (SR 255)

With this understanding, the realisation dawns upon Madhu, that life has to be lived no matter what happens, even when things look so abysmal. The truth comes home to Madhu not abruptly but slowly. On being asked to give her blessings to a boy at the ‘upanayanam ceremony’ the Bhavani temple she wonders.
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What blessings can contend our mortality? Mustard seeds to protect us from evil blessings to confer long life. Nothing works. And yet we go on Simple remedies. No, they’re desperate remedies and we go on with them because in truth there is nothing else. (*SR* 319)

This realization of the inevitability of death and even destiny against which we cannot fight makes her accept Adit’s death. Hasina’s prayer on the stage of Bhawani temple where she recites “I saw a dream, a dream” makes Madhu feel “She’s speaking of my dreams too, so many of them all woven about Adit and Som’s dreams for his son. It’s all over now, there are no more dreams left for me, for either of us.” (*SR* 319) But it all so give her the strength to accept fate. She is not resigned to her fate, but accepts it with dignity and once again recovering her own sense of self she becomes aware of her needs. She realizes that she needs to share her loss with Som.

We need to be together, we need to mourn him together, and we need to face the fact of his death and our continuing life together. Only in this is healing possible, between the two of us we can recreate him, we can involve his presence and make his existence real, Som and I, we can wash away the darkness and ugliness, not only of Adits death, but of what happened before, with our own oblations of sesame seeds and water. (*SR* 323)

Madhu in the end has attained self realization and now hopes to accomplish her dream to recreate Adit’s her memory and unburden her soul. This revelation is what makes Madhu ask herself at the very end of the novel: How could I have ever longed for amnesia? As long as there is always the possibility of retrieval, as long as there is memory, loss is never total. (*SR* 324)
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This was the same Madhu who had thought at the beginning of the story of the totality of loss, its irrevocability, Madhu learns: “But for all of us there’s a self inside which we recognize as our real selves.” Deshpande makes honesty an important tool in the quest for self. Madhu accepts the facts of her life and achieve success in her quest. But what is crucial is that we are all alone our quest for self. Madhu may learn from the experiences of Bai, Munni and Leela but she alone has to find her identity by understanding her life. As Deshpande’s epigraph of ‘The Dark Holds No Terror’ from the Dhammapada states this secret to self realization,

You are your own refuge,

there is no other refuge,

this refuge is hard to achieve” – Dhammapada (TDHNT)

A Matter of Time begins with a domestic crisis that compels the female protagonist to return to the “Big House,” her childhood home. Like the sage Yajavalkya of the Upanishads and other renouncers of old, Sumi’s husband Gopal suddenly decides to abandon the role of householder, leaving Sumi with three teenage daughters to raise alone. When she and her daughters are brought back to the Big House by Sumi’s silent father, her mother cries out, “No, no, my God, not again!” For history has repeated itself: what has happened to the daughter once happened to the mother as well. The novel thus advances a double plot: the resolution of both the traumatic past of the Big House and the predicament of the abandoned Sumi and her daughters, particularly her eldest, Aru, who is angry and resentful toward her father. In contrast, Sumi, like Yajnavalkya’s wife Maitreyi, accepts her husband’s decision. Rather than blaming him or wallowing in self-pity, she focuses on how she can step out of the shadow of the past to establish a measure of independence.
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Deshpande in, *A Matter of Time*, portrays the story of Sumi, whose husband, Gopal, abruptly leaves the family with a determination to achieve salvation without giving any thought what will happen to his wife and three daughters who are passing through career making phase. Sudden and silent desertion of Gapal brings big shock to Sumi, the protagonist, who is so shocked that she laps into complete silence. However, she apparently tries hard to keep things normal for her daughters. Gopal’s abrupt desertion is a great cause of humiliation and mental trauma for her as it is not only a matter of great shame and disgrace but also a better realization of being unwanted. Anyway, Sumi must be appreciated for her hard efforts to manage the home affairs and look after children’s welfare even without her husband, Gopal.

The foregoing analysis shows that Shashi Deshpande is an Indian novelist par excellence. She has portrayed with tremendous power the struggle of her protagonists, who survive in an andocentric world which offer no easy outs to women. The overall implications of the novels point towards a poetics of liberation of women and by women. Her protagonists live to see life with the possibilities of growth and have discovered the meaning of life in their journey to individuation.
Genuine Concern for women

Deshpande’s concern and sympathy are primarily for the woman in whatever circumstances she might be placed or whatever role in the society she might be playing. While revealing the woman’s struggle to secure self-respect and self-identity for herself through her protagonists, the author subtly unravels the multiple levels of oppression, including sexual oppression experienced by women in our society thus creating a new social awareness. This stance of Deshpande makes her a potential feminist writer creating a woman’s world with loving, care and a soothing touch depicting the nuances of her consciousness while advocating her liberation from the meticulously concocted web of imposed socio-cultural orders that have existed over centuries. From this point of view, Shashi Deshpande emerges as a novelist striking a golden poise the traditional respect for the family as an institution engrossed with innumerable myths that guide and motivate a woman since her childhood and the Western idea of self-identity and expression, probably as a working philosophy for the Indian woman.

Usually we find the heroine as a narrator in Shashi Deshpande’s works. She employs a kind of stream of consciousness technique. The narrative goes back and forth in time. Since there is nothing doctrinaire about her fiction, it won’t be proper to put her in the list of feminists. She simply portrays the meaning of being a woman in modern India. The authentic recreation of India is the outstanding feature of her stories as well as novels. There is nothing sensational or exotic about her India. She doesn’t write about the grinding poverty of Indian masses. She describes emotional deprivation. The woman, who is deprived of love, understanding and compassion, is the center of her work. Shashi Deshpande discloses traditional Indian Society’s bias against women. However, she recognizes that in most cases women oppress their sisters.
The women characters of Shashi Deshpande battle to reclassify their role and identity in the light of the feminist ideology. Marxist feminism and social feminism state that capitalist development with its exclusive divisions between the general population and private circle is one noteworthy reason for women’s persecution. The need to keep women monetarily free is one of the principle goals of feminist theory. The idea and picture of women have experienced a positive change. No country can ever advance without a dynamic support of women who are a basic part of human progress in its general improvement. Shashi Deshpande is such a writer who manages human issues very effectively which are of interest to all humankind. As subjects, she has treated the regular normal and ordinary experiences through which a middle class woman is going. A middle class working lady is the heroine in each novel of hers. Deshpande’s heroines endeavour to determine their issues by a procedure of provisional withdrawal from their traditional assigned role.

*Binding Vine* is an exceptional novel as it introduces basically the women’s reality. The men come into picture only when they attempt to make women understood that they (men) are superior. Women are domineering so as to bat against shameful acts, incurred upon them by patriarchal system. They are aware of their constraints, and have misunderstanding about other women, particularly the daughters about their mothers. The title is aptly chosen in the light of the fact that mother and child are bound by *The Binding Vine* of affection, for it grows in all directions and has intricate network. In this novel, the stories of Mira, Akka, Vanna, Inni, Shakutai, Sulumavashi and Kalpana, touch Urmi profoundly and disturbs her mentality by which she gets to be ready to investigate life around and it helps her to defeat her own feeling of misfortune and gloom. It bails her to leave all shades of false impressions.

Deshpande creates women characters that battle hard against the social setup to obtain an identity and independence they could call their own. Urmi has extra marital attractions
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however she doesn’t permit herself to be confounded by any sentiment of guilt. Her heroines are strong however they don’t change conventional models set around society for women. They experience a procedure of self-examination before they achieve self-realization. Along these lines the strong heroines spare themselves getting pulverized under the heaviness of their own tragedies, and they confront life with incredible bravery and quality. The writer’s enormity lies in the way that her women characters seek and find harmony within the traditional social setup.

Jaya in That Long Silence, similar to whatever other educated middle class woman, complies with the guidelines and limitations of the society. She is not able to discover whether she lives for herself or for her family. She is underestimated by everybody in the family. That is the reason she was looking for her own identity. She is a typical Indian wife with love and fondness for children, respect and feeling of obligation for spouse and her in-laws. No one in her family comprehends her sentiments and feelings. Being husband and wife, she imparts personal relations to Mohan, yet, she is not able to relate herself with him as far as emotions are concerned. Her silence is typical of the vast majority of the women of the world who are incapable to present themselves as individual. Her contemplation and recollections are a part of every woman’s life like every other woman she is not encouraged to take up her profession. In spite of the fact that she tries her hands at writing, she is not appreciated by her spouse. Not just spouse, her children as well discourage her. Grown up, they overlook her as they stay occupied with themselves. She is not fulfilled by her life and needs strength to revolt. Besides, she loses her character when her name is changed from Suhasini to Jaya after marriage. She feels a sort of stagnation when she reviews that her life which appeared to be so busy was nothing, but a useless pursuit. She is underestimated by everybody in the family. That is the reason she has a desire to search for her identity.
Jaya in her journey came at a circumstance of Compromise. She consented to change herself and sought after a change in Mohan who had written a telegram that reported his arrival. The compromise with respect to woman, and also man makes Shashi Deshpande a liberal writer who does not focus on a written work that seek ultimate freedom for women and assigns domestic chores to men.

The writer moved ahead of the female ruled vision and depicted the female psyche. Jaya therefore rose out as a round character that created in due course of time. This novel deals with the female journey for identity in which the female heroine long for self, identity and self-reliance on the grounds that she experiences silence and absence of communication with spouse. On one hand, the novel instructs women to battle against the silence, and express themselves, and on other hand, it gives a message to the man to attempt and comprehend women in a better way. This is the only resort to cheerful and quiet presence.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent Indian feminist writers who have demonstrated their genuine concern in the portrayal of women in writing and have communicated anxiety of protagonists with the traditional condition of women. In *Roots and Shadows*, her worry with the social and cultural structure of gender, her open objection against the treatment of women as sexual object, her defiance of the stereotyped roles allotted to women, her bold attempt to show the biased behaviour of the society towards women are clear. She demonstrates a thematic and technical maturity as well as adequately conveys intensity of female sensibility. She has evidently infused another cognizance offering various interpretations of everlasting Indian values, and highlighting our cultural legacy.

The problem of Indu represents the predicament of women in contemporary Indian culture where the new ideas of Western education, financial autonomy and globalization have totally shaken the foundations of old Indian society and social values. The breaking up of the joint
family, forfeiting of moral values and so on is the prompt and noticeable effect upon the Indian society. It has negatively influenced diverse relations at distinctive levels and husband-wife relationship specifically. The writer has unpretentiously passed on the message of common understanding and co-operation between wife and husband. The Indian women need not to be defiant like the Western women nor like the legendary submissive and meek Indian wives. The Indian women must look for their freedom inside the border of marriage through mutual understanding without disturbing the Indian socio-cultural standards. The novel closures with a positive note with the hope of new dawn. The novel delineates the eternal imprint carved on the mind of woman by customs, standards and traditions of the male-commanded society which disallow them from showing their actual self. The mode and style of their advancement instills in them meekness, silence and passiveness which hold a strong impact on their mind. Indeed, even modern educated women deliberately wrap themselves with this attributes and find themselves in a fix. In this manner, Shashi Deshpande passes on the message that the modern Indian women ought to figure out how to defeat their trepidation and affirm themselves. The novel reaches an end with a note of compromise as opposed to revolt and revenge which is the fundamental quality of Indian feminism.

The *Dark Holds No Terror* is reflective of the feminist goals. The conflict and the dissatisfaction of the educated woman in a custom bound ‘Indian Society’ is the theme of the novel. There is an ultimate acknowledgment toward the end after a delayed mental dilemma and a long drawn contemplation. Women’s’ mission for self exploration is the essential subject of this novel. In an interview with Shashi Deshpande it uncovered that every one of her characters are concerned with their “selves” and they figure out how to be completely honest to themselves. The books of Shashi Deshpande speak the truth of women’s self journey and battle to free themselves from the confinements forced by society, culture and nature. It is a story of a doctor who is frustrated as a girl as the compatibility between her and
her mother is tad bit strained. She is not able to recognize herself as a darling daughter to her mother and when she grows up she is not able to be attractive enough to be an excellent young woman having rapturous power. Thus she understands that what she is as a young girl is not what that makes her. She comprehends that what she is to become is going to give her the identity that she is hunting for. She understands that getting to be productive which means making life feasible and pleasant, and comfortable for others, thus she chooses the road of medicine. She is a child with a considerable measure if interest which is reflected in her fun loving nature, going to meet friends and outside activities.

Small Remedies holds a mirror before the women of society. Madhu, Savitribai, and Leela are the three ambitious and valiant women who demonstrate their strength by yielding everything for their objective. These women don’t get to be victims of their purported female shortcoming. Rather they look for manly power and admiration. Politics, writing and music are the fields where these women aspire to build up their identity. Being women, in some cases, they are sidelined in their vocation, like politics supposed to be male bastion. Deshpande uncovers the understanding of woman mind especially educated, middle class urban women trying for self assertion and freedom.

In this manner in Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande portrays the real women characters in their subversion of their conventional roles. We have glimpses of their smashed lives yet they fight their own battles in various arena of the society. In their own specific manner, they attempted to build up their identity as opposed to getting compromised to their standards. Bai, Madhu and Leela are the victims of the gross gender discrimination yet their self-acknowledgment helps them in finding their identity. They went ahead with the burning desires towards their goals confronting the hardships which life threw upon them. They never looked back, going through the alienation, rebellion and aggression if required; they
accomplished their desire of being independent and a new woman. They have their own dreams and they figure out how to fulfill those dreams regardless of social obstructions.

In *A Matter of Time* Deshpande has minutely dissected the institution of marriage in its distinctive dimensions. She has demonstrated different types of marriages in the novel – love marriage as of Sumi’s and arranged marriage of Kalyani. The novel, *A Matter of Time*, delineates a society in transition with the depiction of the organization of marriage. An extensive overview of the Indian women from different generations, different education and economic levels develop on the expansive canvas of the novel. The story involves four generations of women of a middle class generations: Manorama, an uneducated representing the first generation; Kalyani, the grandma, who is not educated; Sumi who is educated yet has not worked outside home; Aru, Charu and Seema, who all aim for freedom and their own career. All coincide in a family that is modern however with certain old values. Every one of them has their own mindsets and values about marriage.

She has demonstrated that, a wife’s individual self is given no significance in patriarchal society and self-effacement is her normal way of life. However, in this novel, Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru develops eventually as strong women who assert and accomplish freedom. They figure out how to live concordantly in the public eye disregarding neither the family relations nor the modern aspirations for being autonomous self. In any case, Deshpande has additionally proposed the conceivable solutions with the goal that woman can escape from the engagement and capture of marriage and build up her own particular identity. The influence of education is especially stressed in this association. Both Sumi and Aru are educated and they succeed in accomplishing an autonomous stand. Meena Shirwadkar observes:
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“As women received education they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their tradition-bound surroundings, resentment of male-dominated ideas of morality and behaviour problems at home and at place of work or in society—all come up in a welter of projection. (Shirdwadker 2)

Shashi Deshpande’s novels possess large amounts of women’s journey for their self identity. Her novels are generally narrated by her female heroines who endeavour to figure out their own selves all through the novel. Her protagonists attempt to figure out their own selves through writing and they at last achieve a solution of their problems in their lives. Probably, they are disturbed by the recollections of past and feel a sort of uselessness, yet towards the end they understand their selves. This is one of the imperative needs and messages in today’s reality where, women are confronting a void and a vacuum in their lives. However, they give off an impression of being successful in their life, but they seem to lack direction and feel a feeling of vanity. Deshpande’s novels fit into such a situation and help females to understand their potential in a positive way.
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