India has undergone during the last four decades cultural changes more rapidly than at any other time in her previous history. The influence of the West may be seen in every walk of our life. Our studies in colleges and universities, music, dance, dress, social habits, morality, and feministic ideas reveal this. Our economic planning and political theories come from the West. We formulate our industrial policies on foreign lines. But all this not without protest by some people. There are basic differences in the ideologies of our own people, the results of which are bloodshed, murders, strikes and riots. Dacoities have ceased to be news. Our old values are cast out and Western modes of life embraced almost blindly. In short, there is a cultural crisis. And existentialism is, as has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, the basic response of sensitive minds to a cultural crisis.

At such a time when there is little external support for an individual to rely upon, the only meaningful point of reference is his own immediate consciousness. This immediate experience of self-awareness is what existentialism
emphasizes. When an individual is caught at the cross-roads, he sees that his salvation lies in a search for self-identification. This is what the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande are involved in. We shall consider in this chapter the crises the protagonists of three of her novels are faced with and the way they meet them. The process leads them to attain self-realization.

It is clear that with Sm. Deshpande self-realization or self-identification is a psychological term and not a metaphysical concept. The Upanishadic concept of moksha (salvation) is far from her thought. She has neither belief nor interest in the supernatural or divine. But the psychological self-identification and the metaphysical self-realization are considered by some to be one and the same.

Roots and Shadows

Indu is born in a joint-family which has several members belonging to four different generations, ruled over by a despot, Akka, a widowed sister of Indu’s grand-father. She has returned to her parental home after the death of a brutal husband who had viciously exploited her sexually. Akka
was such a terror that she could reduce Indu's Kaka, even after he had become a grand-father, to a red-faced stuttering school-boy by her venomous tongue. Her simple wish was command. Meaningless superstitions and outmoded conventions had an equally suffocating hold on the members of the family, although Indu's cousins were all educated. None of them had done well in school except for Naren, the grandson of a distant cousin of Akka. Indu herself went to school and breathed the air of freedom and enlightenment as against conventional modes of thought and traditional ways of living. It is to this kind of cultural crisis that she reacts by leaving home to go to college and stay in a hostel. In these days of women's emancipation when a woman is free to do anything from cooking to piloting a plane, women are free to make a choice -- one of the assumptions of existentialism. Like a true existentialist, she takes her own decision. At the end of another eight years, she takes another bold decision -- to get married to Jayant with whom she had fallen in love at first sight. And she did what is conventionally called an unwomanly act -- she proposed to him. All these decisions she takes intentionally and consciously because she does not want to go back to the old home to become a "faceless" thing. She takes these decisions of her own free
choice. She does not allow outside forces determine for her. And like an existentialist, again, she does not hold anybody else responsible for her unhappiness which is a result of her choices. In this assertion of the significance of personal responsibility lies her existentialism, and in the assertion of her right to happiness, her humanism.

Although Indu and Jayant have been married for three years, they have not been invited to the ancestral home even once, probably because she has married on her own and also because Jayant belongs to a slightly different caste. But comes the time when Akka passes away leaving a will in favour of Indu. Akka might have been extremely old-fashioned and despotic, but she must have had an intuitive insight into the character of the people around her if she could entrust all the family property to a young woman who had left the house years ago with no intention to return.

Indu comes and learns that Mini is to be married off to a man completely unworthy of her. But Mini is a stoic and she answers all of Indu’s objections with a counter-question and a single statement: "'What choice have I, Indu?’" (p.137) and "'I don’t care what kind of man he is. Once we are married, and he becomes my husband, none of his faults will matter.’" (p.139)
Indu sees that Mini will be contented, if not positively 
happy, all her life. As a contrast, she herself had been 
ecstatically happy for a short time after marriage but 
soon disillusion had followed. What was worse, she sank her 
identity into Jayant's until she was nobody. Ironically, it 
is her visit to the old house which set her on the way to a 
search for self-identity.

Indu's father had married a woman of a slightly different 
caste. Unfortunately she died in childbirth when Indu was 
barely two weeks old. The baby was brought home and she did 
not know that she had no mother until she was six and that, 
too, when Naren, as a little boy, asked her who her mother 
was. She had never missed her mother because her relatives 
had given her whatever her mother would have and, therefore, 
"there is a faint tinge of pity in me for the small families 
of today. Father, mother, child." (p.14)

She had left home when she was about sixteen for higher 
studies and also because she did not want to vegetate like a 
faceless being like the others under the suzerainty of Akka. 
After getting gold medals and awards, she had become a popular 
journalist and had married Jayant. Opposed to arranged
marriages, she had married for love and it was love which had robbed her of her individuality. She had become a shadow without substance. Even then she had been revealing to her husband no more than what she wanted to reveal. Again, Jayant had a strange notion of a woman's love. "... it shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I am like that, he turns away from me," says Indu. (pp. 91-92). The result is sexual alienation. So she had even thought of leaving Jayanat and living alone. There is no proper communication between them.

Indu's talks with Mini, with Narendra's grand-father and with Narendra himself indicate to her what is wrong with her attitude. The grand-father tells her, "'... the whole world is made up of interdependent parts. So why not you?'" (p. 117)

Sartre, the most famous and influential of existential philosophers, too, says something very similar: to understand oneself, contact with another person is a prerequisite.

Indu's love-affair with Naren is probably the result of the influence of the feminist movement discussed in an earlier chapter and the sexual alienation from Jayant. This has been criticised by P. Bhatnagar:
The way an intelligent and sensitive person like Indu, who was so very choosy in her affections, is made by the writer to resolve her doubts and uncertainties is very alarming. She had to commit adultery to come to terms with her married life. Indu’s casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of the modern Indian woman? (Italics added.)

When the critic asks the rhetorical question "Have our morals really gone so low?" (italics added), it is not clear to whom the question is addressed. Presumably it is addressed to women. He should have first addressed it to men, and if the answer was no, there would be some justification, according to the feminists, in asking it to women. If, on the other hand, the answer is 'yes', what right have men to put it to women? There cannot be one law for men and another for women. P. Ramamoorthy goes to the other extreme and defends Indu’s assertion that her affair with Naren "had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together." (p.206) "This sheds a brilliant light on Indu’s awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant."  

2 "My Life Is My Own;" in Sushila Singh (ed.) Feminism, p.124.
But this extra-marital love-affair should not be judged by conventional norms of morality. The act is a-moral. Indu is conscious of her body and the need of sexual fulfilment. The affair with Naren, who is a kindred spirit, gives her both physical and psychological fulfilment. At a time when there is little external support for her to rely upon, the only meaningful point of reference is her own consciousness. Hers are distinctive qualities of an existential-humanistic individual and not of women in general. Being honest to the core, she confesses that she had wronged Jayant "by pretending, by giving him spurious coin instead of the genuine kind. I had cheated him of my true self." (p.168) But "with Naren, I would never have to pretend." (p.98) After the accidental death of Naren by drowning, Indu recapitulates those two perfect nights, "... let me just remember those days for what they were, something complete in themselves, unrelated to other days, other places, other times." (p.196)

After this profound, soul-moving experience, she is a changed woman. Her sensibilities get more refined and perceptions sharpened. In more mundane matters, too, she acts with admirable judgment, in the best interests of everybody concerned. "Naren had made me a legacy too, giving me his
simplicity of will." (p.202) She begins to love the old dilapidated house which she associates with the champak tree in the courtyard, the golden flowers of which fill the dark rooms and the darker corners with their lovely fragrance. But she knows she cannot retain the house though her uncles and aunts who have lived there all their lives will sorely miss it. The consolation is that the money it fetches will be used for Mini's marriage. The cash and jewellery which Akka has left her are legitimately her own, but she distributes them among the various members, including Vithal who is an orphan boy who works in their house but studies late at night sitting in the moonlight to save electricity. (This is a factual error on Sm. Deshpande's part, for nobody can read by moonlight.) She gives money to Vithal against the advice of Naren who had declared that the money would taint anybody who would receive it. But she rightly feels that one's duty to the living is more important than one's word to the dead. She realises also that detachment is for the dead, not the living. If this is not humanism, what is?

Indu also comes to realise the importance of relationships, which is represented here, among other things, by the joy of the whole family coming together on the occasion of Mini's marriage. The house she had left determined never
to return to has now become a home. "I am home, I thought. This is home. I had to go away to know it. It was a moment of rare and pure happiness." (p.56) The Parable of the Prodigal Son and Robert Frost's definition of home as

"Home is the place where, when you have to go there, They have to take you in." suggest the same idea.

Home is an important symbol in Shashi Deshpande, And it is an ambivalent symbol. First it represents out-moded, traditional, reactionary values and superstitions. It is a place with life-denying atmosphere, but when the protagonist returns to the place rebuffed by the world outside and disappointed by the person she had believed in, the home is seen in a new light not noticed before. It becomes a source of a new kind of light showing them the way to self-identification. The experience of Saru and Jaya is not different from that of the protagonist of Roots. Indu realises that the house she had fled from to avoid being faceless contains the roots which sustain her volition to attain self-identity, while her marriage which she had believed would take her to self-realization had transformed her into a shadow.

Her relationship with Jayant changes, too. Earlier when she had suggested to him that she would like to give up journalism in favour of writing novels, he had said no, since journalism was bringing in money. But not only has he now agreed but promised to publish her novel, if it were not accepted by publishers. "'I'll publish it for you,' Jayant said, putting his arms comfortingly round me. And Atya brought me a cup of tea. Happiness ... I never knew it was made up of such little things." (p.15) But how is Atya at Jayant's home? She came to live with Jayant and Indu when the old house came down. She was a childless widow, and apparently nobody was interested in her. So she came to live with Indu. "Jayant, I can see gets something from her undemanding affection - something he never gets from somebody else,... Does not each relationship have something unique to offer?" (p.14) Something similar had happened to Indu, too, with her relationship at her old home. Paul West writes in another context, "Before a man can be valuable involved with others, he has to be himself, have a clear sense of himself."  

The evolution of Indu's personality is from being "faceless" in her ancestral home to being a shadow in her husband's house, to discovering the way to self-identity in the ancestral home again, to being herself with Jayant in their own home. This is more or less the theme of all the novels of Shashi Deshpande, with of course change of name, but dominant is that slight change in circumstances — the theme of "Know thyself."

The action of an existential story, novel or play does not have a climax such as we find in adventure novels. For the assertion of the self of an existential character in the face of frustration is not a heroic act. It is an ethical conflict rather than a heroic struggle. In this novel, Indu wants to live like an individual and she starts to do so meaningfully.

THE DARK HAS NO TERRORS

Of all her existential-humanistic novels, Roots and Shadows is the most feminist in that Ms. Deshpande allows her protagonist to have an extra-marital love-affair with no regrets whatsoever, but in the later novels, some of the protagonists are tempted to surrender themselves to some
friend but the author does not allow them to go beyond being individuals in search of their identity. "According to Deshpande, it is only the crisis of identity which is the root of all problems in human life."  

The principle of the novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the need for self-understanding, for without it there can be no real happiness. Self-understanding or self-identity is the responsibility of every individual and it involves a subjective interpretation of life. Saru (Sarita) evolves in accordance with her experience. When young she is not free in any sense and all her feelings are mere reactions to the way her mother treats her. But as she grows, she attains freedom through her will. She wants to give up all connection with her mother, relinquish all ties and limitations. The freedom of choice that an individual has and the acceptance of the responsibility for the consequences of that choice are important aspects of existentialism. She chooses to study medicine, selects the man she would like to marry, decides to flourish in the profession and takes the necessary steps to do so by getting a post-graduate degree and consulting rooms with the help of Dr. Boozie even at the cost of compromising her.

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5 Ibid., p.102.
reputation, and pays the price for it by being sadistically treated by her husband in bed. She then leaves the house under the excuse that she has £6 and meet her father on the occasion of her mother's death. There she has the freedom to be alone and an opportunity to understand herself. Her realization that she alone was responsible for the situation gives her the courage to face the reality of existence. The darkness has no terrors for her, since in the light of her understanding, there is darkness no more. She is her own refuge.

The traumatic story of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is of a double psychological conflict; one, between mother and daughter (Saru), and, two, between Saru and her husband. The first one is between a mother tradition-bound and custom-fettered and a daughter intelligent and strong-willed; the second one is between a husband who starts from a position of success and acclaim, but moves downhill and a wife who starts from a point where she has been rejected by her mother, but rises through grit, effort and intelligence. They move in directions opposite to each other and are hence on a collision course. Of these three persons, it is only Saru who has the intelligence and integrity to attain self-identification.
The problem is suggested by the writer in the preamble and the solution in the epigraph. The pre-amble is a scene of a rape of a wife by a husband; the epigraph is a quotation from the Dharmapada, to the effect that the only refuge a person can have is himself.

The first conflict is a tragic one between mother and daughter, between whom there should have been natural understanding and love. Instead, the mother treats her as inferior to her younger brother, Dhruva, the attitude later developing into mutual hatred. The father, for example, talks and plays with Dhruva while he rarerly speaks with Saru who has to keep company with her mother. He has a small seat fixed to the bar of his bicycle so that he can take his little son for rides; there is no reference in the novel to his taking Saru for a ride. Dhruva is given preferential treatment always except on the occasion of haldikunkum when it is Saru’s privilege to sprinkle rose water on the visitors. Every year their birthdays used to be celebrated, but when Dhruva died, they stopped celebrating her birthday, too. The death by drowning of Dhruva was a tragedy for which Saru suffered even more than her mother because she was held responsible for it. It was true he was in her company when he
got drowned in a shallow pool of rain water; she tried, but perhaps not hard enough, to save him; it was true she did not run home to inform her parents of the accident; and it was true that she repeatedly denied she was with him when he got drowned after the body was recovered. The mother firmly held her responsible for the boy's death and used to repeat it again and again. She even told Saru "'You did it, you did this. You killed him.'"6 "'You killed him. Why didn't you die? Why are you alive, when he is dead?'" (p.191) On the anniversary of Dhruva's death, the parents fast for the whole day, but Saru would like to have her meals. The mother has to cook for her only:

You will be eating, I suppose?
Of course. Why should I fast?
Yes, why should you? ...

But that was wrong. It wasn't her own self that her mother had been punishing. It was Saru she had tried to punish. She would lie in bed, stiff and immobile like a corpse, get up and cook for Saru, serve her with an exaggerated solicitude, and then go back to bed and her corpse-like posture, like a prisoner who had earned a reprieve. (p.180)

The mother considers her daughter ugly, but no girl ever believes that she is not beautiful. The mirror always tells her that she is good-looking. Every mother finds her

daughters so. But not Saru's mother. Saru recapitulates, "I was an ugly girl. At least, my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying ... 'you will never be good-looking. You are too dark for that, ... How many times must I call you? Looking at yourself in the mirror! I'll give you a certificate to say that you are beautiful. Will that satisfy you?'" (p.61) Saru knows she is not beautiful but how hurt she must have been when her mother taunts her about her not being beautiful! But like all human beings in whose breast hope springs eternally, Saru, too, hopes for a miracle.

When the mother is about to die of cancer, a neighbour suggests that she should send for Saru. The mother retorts, "'Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless.'" (p.196) When Professor Kulkarni approaches her to bring about a reconciliation, the response he gets is shocking. He recollects,

"I always imagined no mother could ever dislike her own child. But Saru's mother seems to be an exception. She shocked me. Imagine saying ... 'I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me.'" (p.197)

And an old neighbour tells Saru of her mother's unforgiving anger. "And now the small room grew full of the
smouldering anger of the dead woman. The thought of that anger was like a cloud, blotting out everything else. Even the happiness of her early married life vanished as if it had never been.” (p.109).

Action and reaction are equal and opposite in nature, says science. It is equally true in human nature. With such actions and feelings on the part of the mother towards Saru, the daughter’s feelings cannot be much different towards her mother. Saru has not always been right either. She tried to save Dhruva from drowning but unconsciously perhaps she did not try hard enough because she always wished him dead. She could have run home and informed the parents. On the contrary, when they asked her, she asserted that she had not seen him. For such feelings, her mother is primarily responsible. An elder child’s jealousy towards a younger one is a very common and well-known phenomenon, because it feels neglected with the arrival of a new-comer. Saru pulls down Dhruva from her father’s lap. On the anniversaries of Dhruva’s death, she eats her food with greater relish. About her mother she remarks, "If you’re a woman, I don’t want to be one, I thought resentfully.” (p.62)
She goes for medical studies, not for going away from her mother as some critics have suggested, but to flout her wishes. She tells her mother about her intention to marry Manu (Manohar) deliberately to hurt her:

What caste is he?
I don't know.
A Brahmin?
Of course not.
Then cruelly ... his father keeps a cycle shop.
Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they?

The word the mother had used, with the disgust, and hatred and prejudices of centuries had so enraged her that she had replied ... I hope so. (p.96)

But for her mother's contemptuous prejudice and objection, Saru might not have married Manu. But she now feels convinced that she is right in marrying Manu and wants to prove her mother wrong. "I'll show her I'll make her realise."

"But her mother had not waited for the reply. She had gone, leaving the battle unfinished, taking victory away with herself." (p.60) Her mother's anger and hatred haunt Saru even after her death, "I hate her, sapping me of happiness, of everything. She's always done it to me ... taken happiness away from me. She does it even now when she's dead." (p.109)
Saru saw Manu for the first time when she was in the first year at college and he a post-graduate student. He was a student set apart from others. He was handsome with a fair complexion, long black hair which he brushed back with his hand when they fell on his fore-head; he was a good debator, a budding poet and associated with the debating society. Saru was enamoured of him, but he had not looked at her a second time. When she entered the medical college, she saw him with a few friends of his on the campus. After sometime she introduced herself. He was surprised, for the ugly duckling had become a swan. He tells her that he could not have recognized her and she replies that he had not changed at all. But that was not true. He was no longer referred to as a Shelley and his physical decline had begun. His eyes were faintly puzzled and bewildered like the eyes of a man who had at one time been at the top and then, unaccountably, slid down. "He had been the man who was to take the literary world by storm, the man on the brink of doing so. And now, he was just another man clinging on to a job." (p.65) But they fall in love with each other and get married against the advice of her mother.
For a short time they are ecstatically happy. They live in a single-room flat, noticing none and noticed by none. One day the neighbours notice that she is a doctor and every evening somebody knocks on the door for the doctor's help. In the beginning Manu used to open the door thinking that the knock was for him. He soon realises that the visitors require his wife, not him. "And now when we walked out of our room, there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me, only for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored." (p.42) There starts his inferiority complex. The love between them becomes only a need.

"... 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. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (p.42)

This destroys their marriage. To save it, she offers to stop her medical practice and be just a housewife. But Manu does not agree since he is conscious that his salary is in no way sufficient for their daily requirements.
Saru has realised that Manu would never be a Shelley. "I soon knew what he really was. I knew he would be teaching in that college until he got out with a pension." (p.200) Once a girl from a newspaper comes to interview her. About the time the interview is to end, Manu walks in and is introduced. The girl asks him, "'How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?'" (p.200) All the three laugh. Saru and Manu know, but have not given a second thought to it before this. Manu, however, now realises that he is a parasite and people know about it.

Meanwhile Saru had got a post-graduate degree and her own consulting rooms with the help of Dr. Boozie. Her relationship with Dr. Boozie has been discussed in an earlier chapter. The remark of the newspaper correspondent who had suggested that Saru was the bread-winner of the family and Manu's mistaken impression of an affair between Saru and Dr. Boozie give him such an inferiority complex that he becomes impotent. "... he was whipping himself on, trying to arouse himself to some pitch of excitement that yet remained beyond him.... For the first time in their years together, he couldn't go on." (p.86) This impotence later makes him a sadist. But the surprise is he is a cruel, heartless sadist at night and a completely
normal being during day-time and he does not remember during
day what he does at night. "Can a man be so divided in
himself?" she wonders. (p.99) When she remembers during day
what happens at night, she feels she is "a dark, damp, smelly
hole," (p.27) and not a doctor. She is normal when a patient
comes in, but when he goes out, she starts drawing
intertwining circles or cutting a sheet of paper into little
pieces, as though the pieces are fragmented pieces of herself.
The intertwining circles are an attempt to relate herself to
something. She is afraid that one day Nirmala, her attendant,
will come in and see only the white coat and nothing inside
it. She will have lost her individuality and there will be
nothing left of her. Behind her fine clothes, polished
demeanour, and professional sophistication, she will soon be
nothing. She has become a two-in-one woman -- a woman in a
white coat during day-time and a terrified animal at night.
It is probably to forget this intolerable situation that she
has a light-hearted flirtation with Padmakar.

But she becomes aware, when Padmakar invites her for a
love - act, that it is no solution to the crisis she is
facing. Existentialism is not a state of stagnation but a
constant movement, a series of choices and decisions taken.
consciously. The choices Saru made -- medical education, marriage to Manu, her friendship with Dr. Boozie, her flirtation with Padmakar -- have only led her to a crisis in her personal life with Manu which she finds unbearable. She is faced with a meaningless universe. She is at the end of her tether. "Frequently, existential fiction strikes through all aspects of morality to get at certain basic truths about man and his behaviour." What little satisfaction she had from her external achievements tastes bitter on her lips because the driving force behind these achievements was her desire to "show her mother". But she had died already carrying victory with her, leaving her daughter completely vanquished. She has misled herself into believing that her suffering is the result of her mother's curse and has not realised that it is the result of her own voluntary choices for which she alone is responsible.

Learning of the death of her mother, she makes the occasion an excuse to leave her house and visit her father to offer her condolences, but really "to sleep peacefully the night through without apprehension. Not to think, not to dream. Just to live." (p.27) She wants to leave the hell of

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sagery and submission behind. If she carries the hell within her, then there is no hope. With just a few clothes in a suitcase, she leave for home. She thinks the conflict can be solved by physically distancing herself from the immediate vicinity of her husband. How wrong she is, she will herself find out.

The story of the novel may be divided into two main parts, the first of the story ending with her decision to seek refuge in her parental home and the second from that point to the end. The theme of the first part is implied in the preamble, of the second, in the epigraph. It is a real home-coming, because the journey home becomes a journey of self-discovery, the way to existential philosophy -- "You are your own refuge."

The idea of the growing indifference of man to man in the modern technological world is suggested in the opening scene. Sarita arrives at her father’s place in a rickshaw. She gets down, picks up her suitcase, walks up to the door and knocks, while the rickshaw driver continues to sit, completely indifferent to what she is doing. She cannot help contrasting him with former tongawallas. The tongawalla would have carried the suitcase up to the door and knocked on her behalf. A
change is to be seen in the yard also. The tulsi plant which her mother used to worship and circumambulate is gone. Even then the memory of it gives her a shock. "The memory was as violent as an assault and angrily rejected it." (p.15) The tulsi has served its purpose of making her mother die before her husband. Instead of the tulsi, which is not a pretty plant, whatever religious or medicinal values it may have, there are hollyhocks, tall and colourful.

As she waits there, she is reminded of the story of Sudama who went to Krishna to beg for succour. He is poor, ragged and barefoot. Krishna and Rukmini rush to welcome him. Like Sudama, Saru has come for succour — he for riches, she for peace of mind. The door opens after a few knocks.

The father does not recognize her immediately. She has changed since many years have passed. He has changed, too. "No, not just older. Something more profound than that. An alteration that made him not just the same man so many years older, but another man altogether." (p.16) Nothing appeared to have changed in the house, but there were alterations. Her father had started smoking; there was a stained cup with the dregs of tea standing in it, a thing which could not have happened if Saru's mother were alive. In fact, there was an
air of relief in the whole house. They had not even put up a
photo of the dead woman, as though they wanted to forget her.
When she was alive, "he was feeble. No, worse than that, that
he was a non-entity and didn't matter." (p.29) But now he is
happy. "She had imagined her parents to be symbiotic, but here
he was, almost the same as before silent, reserved and
withdrawn. And yet she knew that he was in some way content,
and that to him his life was in spite of its semblance of
emptiness, full." (p.43) He has an air of tranquillity about
him. He has become a more natural, common, average human
being. When his wife was alive, on only one occasion had he
the courage to ignore his wife's opinion, and that was when
he supported Saru in joining the medical college. "Now I
wonder whether his was a fight for me or against her." (p.139)
Neither before nor after had he the guts to say anything
against her wishes. On an earlier occasion Saru has said,
"Perhaps there is something in the male, she now thought, that
is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female
domination." (p.85) And that is what had happened with Saru's
father. When his wife died, he became his natural self. In
that sense he had become more moral, more existential. In the
beginning, welcoming Saru appeared to him a kind of disloyalty
to his dead wife, but on the other hand, he had never been on
unpleasant terms with his daughter. True, he had not visited her or written to her after her marriage, but how could he when his wife was alive? But now that she has come home he is in a way glad after the initial hesitation. "... he sat gingerly on the edge of his chair, like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest." (p.18) However, he must have soon felt that a living person deserves more consideration than a dead wife's prejudices.

For this resurrection, Madhav appears to have been fortuitously responsible. He is a boy from a poor family from a village, living with them and studying in the first year in the college. He becomes Dhruva's surrogate and it is significant that Madhav is another name for Krishna, the saviour of those in trouble. Saru's mother, who had refused to see any doctor, goes to Bombay for treatment when Madhav suggests it. That she did not recover is no fault of his. He has even a greater influence on Saru's father. That he has occupied Saru's place in her father's heart is suggested by his having been given her room in the house. He has brought about a kind of regularity, simplicity, order and naturalness in the life of Saru's father. On Saturday afternoons, her father and Madhav play carrom with the enthusiasm of little
kids, but it is a ritual the two men take with the utmost seriousness. The father is like a child when he plays, collecting the coins he has successfully put into the pockets with eagerness.

About the housework, too, there was perfect understanding. One cooked, the other washed. "It's a partnership, wordless, uncomplaining and perfect. A tacit understanding. As all good partnerships should be." (p.35) Within a few days she joins the partnership, her part of the work being cooking in the evening, serving them and removing the plates after eating. He has started taking interest in the happenings of Madhav's college and Madhav's future. Madhav's father is a priest and he wanted his son to become a priest too. Her father tells Saru that Madhav "'has his own plans.' The smile he offered Madhav carried pure affection with it." (p.30)

After lunch she shows them the photos of her two children, Renu and Abhi. Madhav exclaims that Renu looks like Saru's mother, but she refuses to accept it. In fact, she is very much upset. The father remarks, "'He looks like ...'" (p.34) and stops, because he is aware that she will not like it. While the father accepts the past without regrets, Saru
cannot. That is why he is healthy mentally, while she wants to forget and cannot, which shows that she has still not attained a healthy state of mind. Her grievances against her mother are still bitter and the mother's idea that she is responsible for the death of her brother has become a fixation.

Saru found that her father had never opened the cupboard which had contained the few precious things his wife had had. Saru offers to do so and she gives Madhav the couple of good sarees that were there -- one for marriage occasions and the other for haldi-kumkum -- so that his mother can wear the nine-yard sarees. Madhav suggests that Saru could keep the sarees for Renu to remember her grand-mother by. She tells Madhav, "'A grand-mother she never saw. Who she didn't know existed until a few days back. A grandmother who never cared for the child's existence. Why pretend, Mahdav? I don't have any good memories of my mother. I want nothing of hers.'" (pp.58-59) The mother had not forgiven the daughter before her death and the daughter has not forgiven the mother even after her death. It is this conscious, perhaps unconsciously deliberate, bitterness which is preventing her from understanding herself.
Surprisingly Saru was once in the same kind of situation that Madhav is in. Saru's mother wanted her to be a science graduate so that she could be married off early. Madhav's father wants the boy to be a priest. Saru takes up medicine and marries Manu partly at least to spite her mother; Madhav has decided to study accountancy because it is paying, and when later his mother wants him to go to Bombay in search of his younger brother who has run away, Madhav refuses because his examination is only one month away.

But unlike Madhav's, Saru's mind is obsessed with hatred not only for her mother but for Manu and herself also. "Both of us despise ourselves. What he does to me, 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." (p.98) But she feels pity for Manu, "hating him and yet pitying him too." (p.96) This fact of pity for the man who tortures her every night is an indication that she has the sensibilities to rise to a higher level of understanding.

What awakens her sensibilities is the change in the mode of her life in her parental home. When she was once standing near the gate, a school-girl asked her what the time was. She
replied, "'Past twelve, I think'. ... There was satisfaction in ignoring the minutes. And how proud she had once been to have a watch with a second hand." (p.164) This is almost typical of her life with her father and Madhav. Time, the hardest task-master of all, is here a kindly, generous friend. Leisure gives her the time to ponder on herself. Her father does the marketing, Madhav cooks the morning meal and Saru the evening meal. Both Baba and Madhav wash their clothes in the morning, Madhav cleans the utensils in the afternoon, and Saru washes her clothes then.

The neighbours, who had known her since she was a child, do not allow her to forget she is a doctor and she has to attend on them though she has not brought even her stethoscope with her. She is no longer a split personality, one woman in two—-one during day and another at night. Most surprising of all, she is getting to look more like her mother, not only in the kind of work she does, not only in the way she lives—living on two sarees only, one on the person and one on the clothes-line, not only in the way she combs her hair and ties it into a knot at the back of the head instead of having it cut short as she used to formerly, or applying kunkum, but in the way she looks. She has not cut her nails since she came
her palms are roughened though she churns the curds for butter; the soles of her feet have hairlike fissures; she wears slippers only when she goes out. On the day she came she had shown her father and Madhav the photos of her children Renu and Abhi, and she had felt intense resentment when they had remarked that they looked like her late mother. A few weeks later, her father remarks on the similarity. "'For a moment I thought ...' he stopped again. 'You looked like...''' (p.164) Saru knows what he had intended to say. "Mai-kaki had said it the other day. 'Saru, do you know you look amazingly like your mother now?' It neither annoyed her nor pleased her, that remark." (pp.164-165) In the evening she sits on the still warm washing-stone while her father and Madhav do their little bit of gardening and the water falls into the bucket with a pleasant sound. "The friendly soothing voices and the warmth suffused her with an intangible feeling of peace and happiness." (p.166) "Now, for the first time, she finds herself, waveringly, hesitantly making her way back to her real self." (p.124) (Italics added.)

Another psychic fixation she suffers from is the death of Dhruva. She herself is not sure of the extent of her responsibility for her little brother's death. She thinks she tried to save him, but her mother's almost heartless
insistence that she killed him has developed in her a guilty
conscience. When she comes home to her father, there is
naturally some awkwardness in the beginning, but later she
discovers that the father had been always on her side though
he had not the courage to support her against her mother. He
tells her that he never believed she had been responsible for
Dhruva's death. She does not believe him of course, but that
provides the occasion for her to recapitulate what had
actually happened and the extent of her responsibility, that
she had tried but not succeeded. She had thought that it was a
nightmare and she would wake up and Dhruva would come out and
follow her. Instead of running home and calling for help, she
sat under a tree until she got drenched in the rain. When she
went home, they asked her about Dhruva's whereabouts and she
denied all knowledge of it. That was how her mother started
accusing her, and the accusation had a terrible effect on her.
She tells her father, "AND every night he comes and accuses
me. Yes, Dhruva. He looks at me as if I killed him.'" (p.181)
She tells him that she had not taken Dhruva out. "'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. I knew
nothing and still you blame me. You think I'm guilty. Oh my
God..."
"It was not just weeping, they were not just tears. It was an explosion, something that hurt with the sheer force and violence of it." (pp.182-183)

"It was one of those moments of truth that come on the instant of waking. No, not just one truth, but the whole of it came to her then with an absolute unshakable certainty. (And wasn't that enlightenment after all?)" (p.192) This occurrence of her recapitulating everything relating to the incident acts as a purgation of her guilty feelings.

The thing which has primarily driven her from her home in Bombay is the sadistic behaviour of Manu. Because of her sufferings at night, the touch of human beings has become repugnant to her. The death of her mother was an opportune chance for her to go to meet her father. Of course, she holds Manu responsible for the tragedy that has befallen them. She finds him, though not openly, less handsome than he had been.

And he used to be slim. Very slim. Not any more. He has put on weight. And that has, somehow, not made him more of what he was, but less. As if that extra flesh has blotted out something else. He no longer has that keen looking-into-you gaze he once had. Actually, he's still as good-looking as he used to be. But why is it that he no more seems an attractive man? I'm not the only one to think that way. I rarely see any woman giving him a second look. And it isn't just because his chin
is no more sharp, but rounded, or that his hair is perceptibly thinning on top. No, it's something more than that. Something missing in the eyes, in the face, in the man himself. And, oh God, maybe I'm the one who's taken it away from him! (p.48)

This description of Manu by Saru is accurate but that is not the reason for her leaving him and coming to her father's place. Nor is it that he did not develop into a Shelley. Nor is it because he has become a psychic case, a divided self, a sadistic monster at night and a normal man by day. It is because she has a guilt consciousness about him. She became a successful doctor while he could not become anything better than a second grade lecturer in a second grade college. An interviewer asking him how he felt when his wife earned more than he did brought on the crisis of impotence. She offered to give up her practice so as to restore his self-confidence and self-respect, but he did not agree because they could not have kept up on his meagre salary the standard of life they had become used to. Her taking the help of Dr. Boozie was the last straw. He could have asked Saru about Dr. Boozie's flirtation, but he did not. Saru tells us, "I never revealed that [Dr. Boozie's impotence] to any one. Not even to Manu for he asked me nothing. And they began then... the silences that grew between us. Just grew and grew like Jack's beanstalk." (p.94)
So she goes home hoping that her father will be a refuge, but finds that she has to be her own refuge. In other words, she has to understand herself, which she has not done until now. In fact, she has never tried to, assuming that whatever she felt and whatever she did was right, proper, and justified. She did not comprehend that what she was doing was an immediate, unthinking, instinctive reaction to somebody else's action rather than a thoughtful, appropriate response. She did not realise that she was essentially as egoistic as her mother if not more. Her study of medicine, marrying Manu, never telling her children that they had a grand-mother, and cutting her hair short to keep up with the times are essentially egoistic actions, some of them consciously and others unconsciously, directed against her mother. A time comes when she realises the cruelty of her behaviour to Dhruva and her mother. It is at this point of realization that she looked very much like her mother. That is, she has understood herself to some extent at least and has accepted herself. This is existential acceptance of herself. Existentialism emphasizes human existence, that is, the distinctive qualities of individual persons. Its emphasis is on individuality. It stresses the inner, immediate experience of self-awareness,
which involves recognizing personal responsibility for one's actions. When Saru understands the inner motives of her actions, her feeling of grievance against her mother loses its intensity and she, who had got upset when Madhu had remarked that Renu looked like her grandmother, does not mind when Mayi-kaki tells her that she looks exactly like her mother.

Saru's feelings for Manu are much more complex. She had admired him from a distance when he was a post-graduate student and the admiration became adoration when her mother objected to their marriage. After marriage for some time she was ecstatically happy and the idea that he as a lecturer earned less than she did as a doctor did not enter her head until the interviewer pointed out that the family lived on the wife's earnings. Of course, she had been disappointed that Manu did not prove to be a Shelley. When he developed inferiority complex and consequently became impotent, she felt pity for him. Later, he became a sadist and she was terrified of him. She hates him and hates herself even more. She does not blame him because he is not aware of it himself. Her going to see her father on the occasion of her mother's death was to escape the physical sufferings and his presence. He writes her a number of letters which she does not even open.
She receives almost a suitcase-full of them, which, she tells Madhav, may be used for heating water for bath. Manu even makes Renu and Abhi write her letters asking her to come back, but she does not reply.

Meanwhile, she had an opportunity to discuss the problem with her father. He listens to her but is helpless. He can only say, "'Now ... what can I do?'" (p.204) "So it was true. He had nothing for her. Nothing at all." (p.205) The only man on whom she was relying for help admits his utter helplessness even to advise her what to do. Saru has to fall back upon herself to search a way out of the crisis she is facing. Here the novel becomes more existentialistic than ever before.

An existentialist is a sensitive individual who finds himself alone, frustrated, fragmented and almost destroyed by the exigencies of life. It is a literature of despair, sometimes leading to suicide. He is alone and since God, according to Nietzsche, is dead, he has to depend upon himself for the discovery of new viable values through his own self-awareness. These values have to come from within and not from without. It may be seen that according to these norms, Saru is an existentialist and in her seeking happiness, she is a humanist.
The crisis is partly of her own making — the hatred of her mother which is the motive force of several of her actions, her egoism, her desire to be rich and distinguished, Manu's inferiority complex which makes him a sadistic creature, and the social life with her colleagues which is described beautifully with a touch of sarcasm. "Even our socialising was calculated, and worse, it had a dreary sameness about it that made a chore of a party instead of the exciting affair it had once been. But then we were, all of us, monotonously alike, our pattern of life as regimented as that of soldiers in the army." (p.157)

The loneliness of man in general and of Saru in particular, which is associated with the modern mode of life, is referred to in the novel not less than a dozen times. To quote a few: "... she felt as if she were seeing a mirror image of her own despairing loneliness in Nalu". (p.135) Or Saru's mother asks her husband to read that part of the *Mahabharatha* which deals with Duryodhana's death and remarks after listening to it, "'Yes, that's what all of us have to face at the end. That we are alone. We have to be alone.'" (p.194) Saru, too, refers to the death of Duryodhana later. She remembers her mother's words, "We are alone. We have to be
alone." (p.208) Again, "Perhaps the only truth is that man is born to be cold and lonely and alone." (p.219)

Saru's loneliness becomes worse because she thinks confessing the failure of her marriage even to her father is "like removing your clothes in public." (p.44)

The loneliness and terror can be such that the hero may think of suicide. Saru has undergone such trauma that she has thought of suicide several times:

"Baba, you don't know. I'm tired, so very tired, I really don't know how I can go on. If only I could end it all..." She caught his alarmed look. "No, don't worry. I won't do that. I can't. If I could, I'd have done it long ago." She scarcely knew herself how often the thought of suicide had occurred to her. (p.217)

But what had held her back was the fear of the label of cowardice.

In such circumstances, the only alternative, it would appear, is faith in God, but God is dead, according to Nietzsche. And if God is dead, man has to depend upon himself for the discovery of new values. At no time in the novel does Saru refer to God. Besides, when she returns home for the first time, there is no room for her to rest, since her old room has been occupied by Madhav. Her father tells her to go
and sleep in the puja room. She does so. "She lay down and closed her eyes. There had always been a medley of
smells in this room of oil and camphor, incense and flowers. The room was bare now, but pale ghosts of the old odours wafted about
her as she lay there. These, and the tarnished silver mango leaves that hung from the top of the doorway, were the only
indications that this had been a puja room once." (p.20) That means all the gods Saru's mother used to worship have been dispensed with.

Then she receives a letter from Abhi, obviously dictated by Manu, to say that they would be arriving that day, that is, within half an hour. She tries to pack her suitcase and flee, but there is no time. Her father tells her, "'You can't run away this way, Saru.'" (p.216) She remembers also what Madhav had said about himself when his mother had asked him to go to Bombay in search of his younger brother, "'I can't spoil my life because of that boy. It's my life after all.'" (p.208) The only thing that Saru can think of is escape. She is like a trapped animal. At this stage, when she is literally at the end of her tether that she sees the solution to her problem. Her father tells her, "'Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him.'" (p.216) She still does not get courage enough to meet Manu. At that moment she
hears the whistle of the train. She knows she cannot go away before Manu comes. In sheer desperation, she tells her father, "'Promise me ... promise me you won't open the door to him. Don't open the door when he comes.'" (p.218) He says yes and turns away, but she sees that his back looks pathetic, the back of a defeated man. Then suddenly comes to her the enlightenment, "If we can't believe in ourselves, we're sunk." (p.220) Then come to her all those selves she had rejected -- the guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife. She is all these. She has to accept these selves to become whole again. But she is something more, too. She realises that she has been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance had long since disintegrated because she had been afraid of proving her mother right. She sees that she had been her own enemy. Then there is a knock on the door. She opens the door thinking it is Manu's and she is ready to meet him, but it turns out to be a neighbour's child come for medical assistance. He wants her because his sister is having fits. Medical help is her primary duty and she goes out, but before going, she tells her father, "'And, oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes, tell him to wait, I'll be back as soon as I can.'" (p.221) And then "there were no thoughts in her, except those of the child she was going to help." (p.221)
One of the recurrent images in the novel is of darkness and the terrors it is associated with for some people. Saru can never forget her little brother who used to get too scared at night to sleep alone and so creep into her bed quietly. Saru recapitulates, "Poor little scared boy, who never grew up to know that the dark holds no terrors. That the terrors are inside us all the time." (p. 85) For the young, the terrors are from the darkness outside; for the grown-ups, it is the darkness of the ignorance of oneself that is the root of all terrors. Overcome your ignorance; in other words, become aware of your real self and the terrors will be no more. Once Saru realises the guilt complexes deep down in her psyche, the ghosts of the past are laid to rest.

The novel ends in medias res, that is, with no definite conclusion stated or implied. "No conclusion" is probably the best conclusion this novel could have. The author has left it to the sensibility of the reader to think of an appropriate ending for the story, and one can think of several, for each of which something can be said. Saru would divorce Manu and allow him to keep the children; she would divorce him but take the children under her care; she would go back with him with the understanding that he would submit to psychiatric
treatment; she would live with her father with her children.

Dr. Srinivas Iyengar thinks that Saru will go back with her children. He writes, "Sarita cannot forget her children, or the sick needing her expert attention; and so decides to face her home again." 8

P. Ramamoorthy comes, however, to a different conclusion.

"Saru who ran away from her husband and children, who refused to meet her husband, is now ready to confront him. This does not mean that she will go back to her husband but it only suggests that she is capable of facing Manu and asserting her own rights and individuality." 9 I think she will live with her father and bring up the children herself. 10 Like a true existentialist, she has found new values for herself by which to live. She has become her own refuge. And by finding happiness for herself in treating sick persons, she has become a humanist. Her humanism has been influenced by existentialist values.

8 Indian Writing, p. 758.
9 "My Life is My Own," in Sushila Singh (ed.) Feminism, p. 126.
10 It may be mentioned here that Ms. Deshpande states in the interview given to Ms. Lakshmi Holmstrom that there was no real reconciliation between husband and wife. ("Shashi Deshpande talks to Lakshmi Holmstrom," in Wasafiri, Spring, No. 12, (ed). Susheila Nasta, London, 1993, p. 24i.)
Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is a very good novel and has been much written about, as it deserves to be. The novel has several facets, and critics have divergent views on what the novel is about. The most obvious one is that it is a feminist novel, a point of view supported by the author herself. In an interview given to M.D. Riti, she said, "I approached Virago [The publishing house in London] because I thought the feminist angle in my novel might appeal to them."¹¹

R. Mala writes, "They [The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence] deal with the Indian woman in disharmony with her sexual, cultural and natural roles."¹²

Keki Daruwala calls the novel "one long rumination on relationships."¹³ But few critics have mentioned except in passing that an important aspect of the novel is the

¹¹ *Eves Weekly* June 18-24, 1988 (Bangurnagar, Goregaon, West Bombay), p.27iii.


protagonist's attempt to find herself. Adele King states, "Like Deshpande's other works, these novels [The Dark Holds No Terrors and That Long Silence] are primarily concerned with the plight of the modern Indian woman who is seeking to understand herself." All the protagonists of Ms. Deshpande are not merely educated but go out to work, except for Jaya. Indu is a journalist, Saru a doctor, Urmila a lecturer in a college and Kshama the head-mistress of a high school. But the author appears to have greater sympathy for Jaya than for the others. Talking to Dr. Vanamala Vishwanatha, Ms. Deshpande concedes, "Maybe not being a working woman, I have been able to feel more for a housewife who is most devalued ... women who do not go to work, who are literally trapped ... And yet I agree with you, now that I am working, having a life outside the family is very important for woman." In Jaya we have an educated woman with the potential to develop into a good writer of stories and novels like her creator. But she becomes unhappy when her husband does not want her to express herself through writing stories. "Ms. Deshpande unhesitatingly admits that the novel is based on her own marriage," writes Shashi K.

15 Dr. Vanamala, p.12i.
Jha in her review of this novel, the review entitled "A Region of Uneasy Peace." When I met Smt. Deshpande in April 1995 and requested for her comment on the statement she said that it was true.

When Jaya attained some kind of a popularity as a writer of some paltry stories and "middles" for the Sunday edition of a newspaper, she was requested to send her bio-data. She wrote, "I was born. My father died when I was fifteen, I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live." She is being cynical and sarcastic at her own cost. The only thing "achieved" by her positively is the negative action of the abortion of her third pregnancy. She writes she was born. Could she have existed without being born? How was she responsible for her birth? Can a child decide to be born, any more than choose its parents? Her father died, for which she was not responsible either. She got married to Mohan, because Dinkar, whose duty it was as the eldest brother in the family (since the father was no more) to get a younger sister off his hands, thought Mohan to be an eligible bachelor. That is, she has not done anything.

constructive or imaginative. The tone suggests that she thinks she is not likely to do anything worthwhile, wherein lies her cynicism.

The story begins with Jaya as a child, of whom her father had high expectations — she would get the Ellis prize and go abroad. She loves film music which her father considered "disgusting mush." (p.3) His own tastes were austerely classical and all his attempts to make her love Paluskar and Faiyaz Khan had failed. Unfortunately he died when she was taking the school finals, but she went on to get her degree at the Elphinstone College, Bombay.

The atmosphere at home was strictly traditional and she married without a murmur ("He had decided to marry me, I had only to acquiesce." (p.94) Mohan, the bride-groom, changes her name to Suhasini, as is the custom, and Suhasini's models are mythological figures like Sita, Savitri and Gandhari. She accepts that a husband and wife are like a pair of bullocks yoked together and it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. She has also accepted her aunt's statement that a husband is like a sheltering tree. Her dream of a happy home is the kind of advertisements they show in theatres before a picture begins: "The kid with the endearing
moustache of milk; the tender, smiling mother rubbing Vicks on her son's chest; the even younger mother feeding her baby with Farex; the brother and sister running hand in hand to adoring, smiling parents and chocolates — I loved them all. Those cozy, smiling, happy families in their gleaming homes spelt sheer poetry to me. For me, they were the fairy tales in which people "live happily ever after." (p.3)

Mohan manages to get a transfer to Bombay where they live in a one-room flat at Dadar belonging to Dada. But within a year he gets allotted a comfortable and prestigious block at Churchgate. He gets two kids and purchases equipment befitting a middle class family. And as far as Suhasini is concerned, she has become a house-proud woman. She is like the sparrow in the story of the crow and the sparrow; "Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe. That poor idiotic woman Suhasini believed in this." (p.17)

The analogy of husband and wife being like a pair of bullocks, or the husband being like a sheltering tree or the wife being an extremely narrow-minded, egoistic sparrow suggests that they do not live as truly human. "When people are treated as things and come to regard themselves as things
that can be managed, controlled, shaped, and exploited, they are prevented from living in a truly human manner."^{17}

But Suhasini slowly turns into Jaya. Mohan does not like Jaya to write stories as her creative imagination directs. When she writes a story (for which she gets a prize) about a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body, he thinks that she has revealed their private life to the public, though that is not the case. He does not know that life has to be transmuted before it can become literature. But when she writes trivial, inane stories and "middles" under the name of "Seeta" for the Sunday edition of a newspaper, he is proud to introduce his wife to his friends as a writer. He is even happy when his friends call him "Mr. Seeta".

But Jaya continues to write stories stealthily. However, as Kamat, whom she consults, points out, the stories are too restrained. He tells her to spew out her anger in her writing. She has to take herself seriously, without skulking behind a false name. And she had stopped writing.

Along with this came several disillusionments. "First there's love, then there's sex -- that was how I had always

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^{17} Calvin, S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey, *Personality*, p.319.
imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I had realised that it could so easily be the other way round." (p.95) "Often I had told myself: love is a myth, without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unendurable." (p.97) Once when she had gone to meet Kamat,

His eyes had looked steadily, almost dispassionately at me. And my body had responded to that look, that voice, that touch. I had almost felt his body on mine, becoming part of mine, I had felt his mouth on mine, I had almost been able to smell and taste his lips.

... At that moment, however, I had instantaneously rejected the body's response. I had moved away from him...

There had been nothing but an overwhelming urge to respond to him with my body, the equally overwhelming certainty of my confusion. 'Jaya' he had said and I had become only Jaya. It had annihilated Mohan entirely. (p.157)

The marriage of Mohan and Jaya is almost on the rocks:

"We had never come together; only our bodies had done that." (p.98) Jaya, however, cannot resist her body's irresistible need of Mohan. That is why, when he goes to Delhi without telling her, she thinks of herself as a deserted woman. She resists Kamat, but the evening he dies,

"I had washed myself -- my face, my hands, my feet -- and gone in to Mohan. I had waited patiently until he had finished reading and turned off the light. Then, deliberately, I had turned to him, I had touched him and caressed him until he had
responded, until he had been aroused and made love to me.

'The relation of man to woman is the most natural of one person to another.'

Natural? There's only treachery, only deceit, only betrayal." (Italics added.) (p.158)

For her, Mohan was only a surrogate for the dead Kamat in this act. Hence it was an act of treachery to herself, fraud against Mohan and betrayal of Kamat.

Much later, after Kamat's death, when Mukta had explained his utter loneliness, Jaya had reflected: "I knew it now. 'Jaya' he had said, and I had run away. He tried to reach out to me in his loneliness and it had frightened me. I'm Mohan's wife I had thought, I am only Mohan's wife, and I had run away." (p.186)

Once when she goes to see Dr. Vyas to request him to take care of Rajaram, Jeeja's son-in-law, who had been stabbed in a gambling brawl, he promises to do so and says in parting, "And drop in some time with your husband of course' ... Was it impossible for me to relate to the world without Mohan?" (p.167)

Though M. Deshpande is a feminist, she does not argue for sexual freedom but only for equality with men. It is
significant that of all her heroines, only Indu has an extra-marital affair. But there is little doubt that HR. Deshpande is disgusted with the queasy prudishness of women about sex morality. It would look as though sex-prudishness is a part of the collective unconscious of Indians. A woman may be genuinely good in everything else -- she may be honest, kind, helpful and sympathetic, but if she is known to have sex relations with somebody apart from her husband, she will be looked down upon. Jaya remembers with regret her sheer bad manners towards Leena. She was a contemporary of Jaya in college but senior by a year or two. Jaya was a new-comer, home-sick, lonely, friendless and frightened, and it was Leena who on her own befriended her. She got books for her, accompanied her to breakfast because she was nervous. However, Jaya shut the door upon her simply because she heard from somebody that Leena spent her week-ends with a married man. Years later, Jaya realised her priggishness and tried to make up for her silly behaviour, but Leena refused to recognize her.

For a novel written at a time when HR. Deshpande declared herself a feminist and got the novel published by a feminist press, there are more satirical thrusts at the middle class
than feminist protests. To begin with Mohan himself. He conforms to every formula associated with the middle class husband; he is insensitive, priggish and over-ambitious. Mohan decides to marry Jaya because she speaks English fluently like a convent-educated girl that she is. He had earlier happened to be simply fascinated for a few minutes by three well educated, fashionably dressed women speaking English and was so much impressed that he had decided to marry a girl who could speak English like them. Later, he happens to over-hear Jaya speaking in English and he tells Dinkar that he wants "an educated, cultured wife" (p.90), and what he means by "educated, cultured" is one who can speak English, as if they are necessarily synonymous terms.

But he does not want to admit that his mother had been a cook. During Jaya's first pregnancy, when the smell of oil and spice had made her sick, she asked Mohan to cook. And she rather naively added, "'I am sure you cook well. After all your mother was a cook.'" (p.81) No woman would ordinarily say such a thing to her husband, but Jaya's state of health was probably responsible for it. Mohan denied angrily that she was one. But Vasant, Mohan's brother, had told her once, "'Whenever mother was called out to help in the cooking..."
anywhere, it was a great day for us, we could be sure of a good meal that day. Invited or not, there we were, all of us at the right time. Except Monanna.'" (p.87) Mohan speaks as though the profession of cooking is something to be ashamed of. Only a prig would find it so. He apparently thinks that the respectability of his present position would diminish if it came to be known that his mother had been a cook.

Such people think that poverty is something demeaning, therefore, pretend that their birth had been in consonance with their present position. They do not realise that rising from a low situation in life is a creditable thing. In The Dark, Dr.Boozie pretends that he was born to all the comforts which he now enjoys. Dr.Kulkarni, in If I Die Today, puts on similar airs, Dinkar's wife Geeta goes with her husband to America and "since going abroad, Geeta had forgotten, or had tried to forget, her middle class origins, behaving as if her life had always been lived in bacteria-free prosperous suburbs. She openly despised this part of Bombay, not just its filth and squalor, but the kind of people who lived here." (p.42) This conceited sense of superiority is probably the most disgusting characteristic of many middle class people who have prospered.
Another characteristic which is typical of the middle class and of Mohan is the desire to keep up with the Joneses. This is in fact a universal human weakness and even Jaya with her finer sensibilities is no exception. Jaya does not question Mohan how he gets what he wants: "It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay, that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I would have the things we needed... decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, travelled first class." (pp.61-62) Their Churchgate home is a symbol of their climb up the ladder of social success. It had gadgets that had to be kept in order, the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture and the curios that had to be kept spotless and dust-free," (p.25) all adding to their meaningless vanity.

Mohan is particular, too, about the new trends in fashionable appearances.

"Why don't you," he had said one day, looking at me intently, critically, "cut your hair up to here," his hand lightly brushing my shoulder, "you know, like Mehra's wife." (sic)

And so in a few days, I had cut my hair, "upto here like Mehra's wife (and Gupta's wife, and Yadav's wife and Raman's wife.") (p.96)
Again, Mohan does not want Jaya to put the clothes to dry on the railings on the balcony of their Dadar flat. "Never do that', Mohan had said to me. 'It doesn't look nice for people like us.'" (p.134) (Italics added). This is almost comical because the area where their single-room flat is situated is not particularly known for keeping up appearances or cleanliness. In fact, the building is so dirty that he cries, "'Why doesn't some one clean up this place?'") (p.7)

He is very particular, too, that his wife and children should be on close terms with their neighbour at Churchgate. After all, Rupa is the wife of a civil servant and the daughter of an I.C.S. Jaya explains with tongue in cheek, "We met as families once a week, Rupa and I rang each other up twice a week, we went shopping together, we saw movies together, we were members of the women's club... and yet the truth was that Rupa and I were strangers." (p.87)

Some of this kind of prudish behaviour is referred to in other novels of Mrs. Deshpande, but such a concerted attack on middle class hypocrisy we do not find in any other novel of hers. This prudish way of life leads to a falsification and fragmentation of human existence. Existentialism is, as has
been explained before, against estrangement and alienation. It means living with a certain meaningfulness. Man is free to choose and he is responsible for the choice. Man should strip away his illusions and examine the motives realistically and live an integrated life. Mohan has an egoistic philosophy, the motive of which is to grow rich and respectable, since poverty in his boyhood had made him suffer psychologically and physically. This leads to his unauthentic life, the result of which is guilt. Mohan has feelings of guilt and when he sends Jaya a telegram from Delhi, she hopes that "All well" in the telegram may mean a move towards authentic living. But actually Jaya and Mohan are the opposite of each other in the sense that she has the makings of an existentialist and he has not. Her honesty with others and more importantly with herself reveals her integrity of character. She has the intelligence, too, to understand the implications of a saying or the possible repercussions of an action. This will be borne out by an analysis of the novel.

As mentioned earlier, Suhasini has been given some practical advice on the occasion of her marriage to Mohan: a husband and wife are like a pair of bullocks yoked together, and the husband is like a sheltering tree. Suhasini had
accepted them as literally true, but with the passage of time, Jaya sees that the sayings have implications which the simple Suhasini had not been able to understand. Without the tree, you are dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. And so you have to keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies. This follows logically. That is, the tree will not flourish and support you unless you feed it with proper nourishment.

The other axiom, that of the pair of bullocks, is repeated five times -- twice on page seven, once on page eight, once on page eleven and once on page one hundred ninety-one, but with slightly different emphasis each time. The first time Mohan and Suhasini came to the Dadar flat, she looks at themselves as no more than a pair of bullocks: "A pair of bullocks yoked together .. that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here." (p.7) The second time Jaya uses the imagery, she writes, "... a pair of bullocks yoked together. Then the focus shifted and there were instead a man and a woman climbing the dingy stairs." (p.7) On the next page, she says, "A pair of bullocks yoked ... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for reality?" Jaya has now learnt that voluntary and perfect co-ordination between two individuals is far from the reality of life. On pages eleven and twelve she
saying, "Two bullocks yoked together, ... it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. Going in different directions would be painful, and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?" Here it is implied that animals are primarily interested in avoiding pain, but human beings, being on a higher plain, may choose pain if it is the better choice existentially speaking. At the end of the novel (p.191), Jaya says, "Two bullocks yoked together -- that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It's wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves." (Italics added.) If two human beings are yoked together, and if they have no choice about how to act, then there is no significance in being human beings. "I have always thought there's only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances." (pp.191-192) Why does man require a second life for redemption, since "in this life itself there are so many cross-roads, so many choices?" (p.192) The direction of the path of Jaya's life, the milestones which stand for the evolving significance of the imagery of the two bullocks yoked together, are a path from unauthentic to authentic life, for choice is an important tenet of existentialism since it implies responsibility.
As if the reader is going to miss the significance of the importance of choice in one's life, Ms. Deshpande quotes from the *Gita* the last important words of Krishna to Partha. He expounds everything of philosophy to him and at the end of it all, when the reader would expect the Lord to pronounce, "Do as I have told you," suggests instead, "Do as you desire," leaving the responsibility of the final choice to him only.

The mention of Maitreyee and her philosophy three times in the course of the novel serves the same purpose as does the imagery of the two bullocks yoked together. Yagnavalkya was an ancient philosopher mentioned in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and he offered his philosopher-wife Maitreyee half his property. She asked him if that property could give her immortality and when he said no, refused it. She wanted immortality and not material wealth, while Jaya is satisfied in the earlier part of her married life, with the material aspect of things. It is only later that she gets involved in self-discovery. It is pertinent to note here that what Jaya finally means by self-discovery or self-identification is the same as what Maitreyee means by immortality, though Jaya does
not believe in immortality (moksha) at all. She goes along with Mohan who knows what kind of life he wants to lead and what kind of home he wants. Thus it is a case of the blind leading the blind. In the earlier stages, Suhasini’s main occupation had been to keep a diary of all the petty things she purchased, their prices, the servant’s absences, etc., etc. She was a house-proud woman. "Life would go on for us as before, punctuated by dreary quarrels, the children’s successes and failures, their estrangement from each other, from us, our resentment and bitterness, old age for us, perhaps widowhood for me -- this was our future. Nothing else was possible for people like us." (p.5) "Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel." (p.7) Jaya finds family life intolerable and the relief comes in the form of a special disaster. "It came like a prize packet, neatly tied with coloured ribbons, a gift to me from my husband." (p.4) Agarwal advises Mohan to lie low and Jaya and Mohan shift to the Dadar flat. She has the keys of the flat in her bag and he stretches out his hand to take the keys, but she ignores the importunate hand and opens the lock herself. "I have to be honest with myself. It was not he who had relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer
conceded my authority to him. But I have to be fair to myself as well. That was no sudden, cruel volte-face on my part; no, it was part of the same subtle resistance I had offered, the guerilla warfare I had waged for so many years." (p.9) The boredom of unchanging pattern, the unending monotony were over, but, above all, the illusion of happiness was gone. And with the illusion gone, existence fills the vacuum. With an intelligent, thoughtful young woman like Jaya, delving deep into herself does not take much time. There was a time when she had not believed in "myself," or self-identity. Rather she had believed in attachment or relationship. She had ruminated, "But what was that 'myself'? 'Trying to find oneself' -- what a cliche that has become. As if such a thing is possible. As if there is such a thing as one self, intact and whole, waiting to be discovered." (p.69) But now her target is self-identification. "It is only by actualizing their potentialities that they can live an authentic life. When they deny or restrict the full possibilities of their existence, or permit themselves to be dominated by others or by their environment, then they are living an inauthentic existence." 18 Several critics hold that Jaya is "rethinking her

18 Ibid., p.323.
past in an attempt to find herself."¹⁹ Shashi Deshpande in this novel offers readers an intimate and domestic chronicle of the subtle tyrannies suffered by women and of the pain of coming to self-knowledge, or at least to the conditions which must be fulfilled before self-knowledge can be attained."²⁰

The point of self-knowledge may be said to have been attained at the end of a stay of ten days at the Dadar flat when she found self-revelation a cruel process. They had gone there with the intention of staying for twelve days, but Mohan goes to Delhi without telling Jaya after a quarrel. She writes her experiences on the night of the tenth, Rahula and Vasant return on the morning of the eleventh and Mohan is due (according to his telegram) the next morning, when they would go back to Churchgate. These ten days are probably meant to be symbolic, symbolic of the ten days of the battle of Kurukshetra when Bhisma led the Kaurava forces. Once he fell on the tenth day, the end was in sight. It is significant that the Mahabharatha war has been interpreted by some not as


a record of political rivalry between two fraternal parties for power and possession but as an allegory for the eternal conflict between good and evil in the human heart. Jaya's opening the door of the Dadar flat herself instead of surrendering the keys to Mohan is the first bolt shot in the war apparently between man and woman, but really it is her first step towards understanding herself. Through reflection, which is the result of articulating her predicament, she has realised that the ultimate end of an individual has to be not fragmentation but self-identification even though, as Joseph Conrad says, "... No man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge." \(^{21}\)

For the story of a novel narrated in retrospect, the repeated use of the word "silence" sounds ominous but is really ironical, for the story is about silence being broken and not kept. By narrating the experiences of the past, Jaya has broken a silence sustained for the previous seventeen years of marriage. The silence is not Jaya's alone but of all Indian women of the past, present and possibly the foreseeable future. The word 'silence' has been used again and again in a variety of contexts and with different persons, but always

with reference to suffering. Mohan refers to his mother's suffering as "toughness", but Jaya could easily see that it was "a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender." (p.36) Mohan's sister dies of an ovarian tumour, but without a murmur, looked down upon by her mother-in-law, "her silence intact." (p.39) Nayana, the maid-servant of Jaya, has a drunkard for a husband who illtreats her but there seemed to be "no anger behind the silence." (p.51) Jaya herself stopped writing stories because her husband was upset about it and she became "silent." (p.144) That in India even women with education and fine sensibilities suffer in dumb silence as much as the illiterate and ignorant is the most forceful feminist protest that M.F. Deshpande makes in this novel. Women have put up with stupid traditions like their names being changed at the time of marriage, their being confined to allotted slots like daughter, wife and mother until they are shifted to another slot by men. Then they have to consider themselves lucky if they die before their husbands! They do not protest, since they have no identity of their own, against not being mentioned in the family tree of the father or of the husband -- all this in silence. But now Jaya has erased the silence in her heart.
Her father named her Jaya or Victory because she was born on September 3, 1939, the day World War II began and nobody, not even Churchill, was as certain of victory as he was. Jaya has justified his faith in the victory of the battle for self-identification. The father could not have chosen a better mascot.