Alienation and Lack of Communication
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Like the American novelists Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry James, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande too deal with the theme of alienation and lack of communication. In the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande the female protagonist and other characters are alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents, from husband and from their own selves because they are not the average human but individuals made to stand against the general current, stream of traditions and social norms and struggle against it. Alienation is related to the emotional and mental moods and attitudes of characters.

“Man and wife do not as a rule live together, they only breakfast together, dine together and sleep in the same room. In most cases the woman knows nothing of the man’s working life and he knows nothing of her working life (he calls it her home life)”¹

The study of isolation experienced by women in a male dominated society is a significant modern trend. In the Indian society women are not allowed to play any active role in decision making. They are ignored or brushed aside. As a result they experience discomfort and feel trapped in
an oppressive environment. In most case the hostile environment frustrates the aspirations of the individual either leading them to their annihilation or a humiliating compromise.

The most significant social issue that Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande focus on, is the institution of marriage – particularly in the novels where woman is the protagonist. When a woman is caught in the trap of marriage, she reveals an evident lack of trust in marriage and marital relationships. Every attempt the woman makes to redefine herself inevitably ends up in lack of communication. This leads to alienation. The novels of both the novelist are progressively a search of the self for a heightened female awareness.

_Cry, The Peacock_ is the story of a ‘father’s child’. The novelist here reveals those tendencies of human relationship which emerge out of psychic disorder on some of the inner plane. The relationship of a daughter and a father is conditioned to the extent of affecting the married life of the daughter.

Maya is motherless. Her relationship with her father is very important in the novel. Maya’s father – Rai Sahib is a benevolent despot. He focuses all his attention on her. Instead of providing her freedom to grow independently he offers her a life of protection. Her father used to take her
in his arm and wipe her tears and pacify her, irrespective of the gravity and trivialities of her fears. Though Maya grows up physically, her father never provides her a chance to grow out of her childhood and think independently. “As a child, I enjoyed, princess like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian Mythology .... being my father's daughter, of the lovely English and Irish fairy tales.”

On the other hand Arjuna, Maya’s brother, is a rebel against his father’s autocratic life style. Arjuna has rejected his father's values by using a bicycle while he was given the money to buy a car, by moving about amongst ordinary people in the heat, by his little escapade in search of freedom. On his playing with washerman’s son and fly kites his father scolds him: What is the matter Arjuna? Is this not good enough for you? What do you go into those slums for? I have sent you to the finest college, where you can make worthy friends and you turn to city loafers.”

Arjuna goes forward to find a higher aim in his life and parades in ‘Quit India’ movement. Maya’s father exhibits a strong reaction to his activities. Once while all the three sitting on a tea table, their father seeing Arjuna’s name in the newspaper, being conscious only of the sticking plaster on Arjuna’s forehead, and not of tea – cups, leaves the room
without a word. “And then Arjuna had left. We had never seen him again and never spoken of him again nearly forgotten him.”

In *Cry, The Peacock* the novel we have important married relationships which attract our attention. They are Maya and Gautama’s relationship, Leila’s relationship with her husband, and the married relationship of Gautama’s mother and father. Maya – Gautama relationship is a problematic one which reflects total lack of mutual understanding. It is not that there is no bond between them. As Maya herself confesses: “But do not presume, no one must presume that our marriage was an empty one, a failure.” They belong to different kinds of backgrounds. Maya was a motherless child and brought up under the excessive care of her father. She has a ‘lopsided view of life’ with not much stamina to withstand sorrows and miseries of life. Her life was very smooth and easy going, free from all practical problems Maya remains disturbed by a childhood fore – warning of coming danger which is unavoidable and after marriage faces marital discord and neurosis. This novel dwells on the problems of domestic life especially in husband – wife relationship which arise due to incompatibility of temperaments of the couple. As a result Maya and Gautama experiences marital disharmony and alienation and lack of communication.
A suggestive picture of this discordant relationship is given out at the beginning of the novel with the death of Maya’s pet dog Toto. Maya is an issueless woman and Toto occupies the place of her child, symbolically. It is a reality too hard to bear for Maya that Toto, her child is no more in this world; it also lifts the curtain from the prediction of the Albino. To alleviate her suffering at the death of Toto Maya needs the assuring warmth of Gautama’s company, but on the contrary when Gautama returns, he adopts a careless attitude and shocks the waiting Maya. He sends the body of Toto on a municipal van and asks her to stop crying. He says “it is all over. Come, won’t you pour out my tea.” But Maya remains lost in the memories of Toto. Gautama again says, “Maya do sit down. You look so hot and worn out. You need a cup of tea.”

At this time a visitor came and Gautama leaves Maya alone to attend the visitor. Maya feels alienated because the incident is intolerable to her. She cries in despair: “Yes – it is his hardness – no, no, not hardness but the distance he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, his coldness and incessant talks of cups of tea and philosophy, in order not to hear me talk and talking reveal myself. It is that. My loneliness in this House.” For her “Toto represents everything that Gautama is not.”
The second part of the novel enables Maya to express her inner life, her moods, her emotions and despair, her fear of death and her search for identity. This part gives indication of her psychological abnormality. Gautama is unaware of the sentiments and changing moods of his wife and her loneliness, and also that her morbid thoughts and feelings are also because of her husband. After some time Gautama comes back to Maya and touches her cheeks and hair lovingly and tenderly. At this Maya “forgets all about the indifference of Gautama to her.”

Maya clings to Gautama’s arm like a child, even though she knows he distastes this. Gautama tolerates her hold for sometime but soon he moves away. Then they stroll up in the lawn talking without any purpose. Maya thinks “…… we strolled up and down the lawn talking desultorily, not really listening to each other, being intent on our own paths which, however, ran parallel and closely enough for us to briefly brush against each other …..”

The fact remains that there is an ill – matched couple and however they may try to come close, their paths remain diverse. Maya finds her husband indifferent towards her feelings and life. Money is more important for Gautama but for Maya passions are more necessary. “It is always money, or property – never a case of passion and revenge, murder and
exciting things like that – basic things."\textsuperscript{13}. Gautama is attracted by the clear night and its shining stars while Maya is impressed by the spaces of darkness among the sparkling stars. She sees: "Death lurked in those spaces, the darkness spoke of distance separation, loneliness – loneliness of such proportion that it broke the bounds of that single word and all its associations and went spilling and spreading out and about lapping the stars, each one isolated from the other by so much."\textsuperscript{14}. This is a major cause of alienation.

When Gautama recites a couplet of Urdu, she hears it but she says, "…. my heart stretched, stretched painfully, agonizingly, expanding and swelling with the vastness of a single moment of absolute happiness and my body followed its long sweet curve, arching with the searing, annihilating torture of it."\textsuperscript{15} There is a gap between the family status of Maya and Gautama. Maya belongs to high class society while Gautama is from middle class. Whenever the members of Gautama’s family assembled, they talked of political, social and intellectual concerns and deliberately left Maya out of it. Maya feels that all the family members are busy in their own lives and indifferent to her while in her father’s home her father paid full attention towards her. Gautama’s house is like a desert for Maya and she thinks that in the house the days of life are fewer and she is
going nearer to death and feels alienated in the struggle for life. She is afraid of death. She considers that the family members of Gautama and Gautama himself are alive and active she wants to live with them, share her emotions, her feelings, her fears but she failed in communicating with them. She is a motherless child and sees the shadow of her mother and wants the love and care of a mother from her mother – in – law. But her mother – in law is quite busy in her dispensary, her crèche and her workshop for the blind and the disabled. She can’t give Maya the love of a mother. She has no deep interest in Maya, but she shows her interest in her only because she hopes to get another cheque from Maya’s father in aid of her many charitable institutions. For her mother- in- law Maya is “not even one of those human beings whose comforts and health she felt responsible for but merely one of those outsiders who could be used for this purpose and were therefore necessary, though not necessarily loved.”¹⁶ In this sense Maya’s dream of getting mother’s love is destroyed and she feels herself isolated.

For Gautama his clients, cases and their details are so much important that they occupy him most of the time. He even rejects the plea made by Maya to visit the South so that she might see the performance of Kathakali dance. But Guatama dismisses her desire in a matter of fact way,
without caring for the intensity of her desire. He remarks, “I suggest you wait till a Kathakali troupe comes to give a performance in Delhi, as it is bound to sometime – perhaps in winter. It will be less expensive.\textsuperscript{17} this is enough to show that both lead an “explosive life of communication”\textsuperscript{18} where one’s tastes and preferences are of no concern to the other.

One day Gautama arranges a party for his friends. Here Maya observes that Gautama who always remains serious, untouched by feelings was “… entertained by the sight of his more sentimental cronies ….\textsuperscript{19} Maya could not tolerate this behaviour. Gautama ignores her when she joins them and she feels rebuffed, rebuked and rejected. She rushes back with too many questions in her mind which she wants to ask to Gautama that why he is indifferent to his wife? Why he is acting against his real world and entertains his friends? Why he is not giving his company to her? Why he can not belong to her world of emotions, of poetry, of sensation? After this incident Maya’s soul becomes alienated and feels tormented. She feels that they belong to the two different worlds. “… we belonged to separated worlds, and his seemed the earth that I loved so, scented with jasmine, coloured, with liquor, resounding with poetry and warmed by amiability. It was mine that was hell. Torture, guilt, dread, imprisonment – these were the four walls of my private hell, one that no
one could survive in long. Death was certain”\textsuperscript{20} There is an incompatibility in their attitudes and temperament. She rushes back, flings herself before the mirror and examines her face minutely, finds it flashy, charming and attractive, but not a “face that a man like Gautama could love”\textsuperscript{21}.

The reasons for this “ever widening gap in communication between the husband and wife”\textsuperscript{22} are more than one. Their modes of life are so formed and they are so convinced in themselves about it that there is not much scope for alteration and changes. There is an incompatibility in the attitude and temperaments of Maya and Gautama. Anita Desai shows a lack of sexual interest in Gautama. He does not even notice “the translucent skin when he gives an opal ring to her. There are very rare moments when he look upon her and admire her beauty. Maya is described by critics as a demanding and sensual lady “the one most aware of her body”.\textsuperscript{23}

But whereas Maya wants Gautama to love her physically and passionately he shies away from physical contact. She longs for manhood, for male company. Maya’s physical needs being left unfulfilled consequently lead her to frustration and alienation. Intensely agonized and frustrated she tells Gautama straight to his face: “Oh, you know nothing, understand nothing nor will you ever understand. You know nothing of me
and of how I can love. How I want to love. How it is important to me. But you, you have never loved. And you don’t love me.”

One good reason for the alienation of Maya and Gautama and their different attitude towards life and romance may be that there is difference in their age. Gautama is in his late thirties and has no passion for romance while Maya being young has deep passion for romance. Maya wants to be loved by Gautama but he seems to have detachment like Budhha. But this is not grasped by Maya because she conceives life as a brief episode into which all experiences, all success and all virtues must be crammed, for which Gautama tells her – “What an occidental you are … where did you pick it up? Surely coming from a family of God-fearing Brahmins.”

Gautama is unaware of and hence and unable to fulfill the physical needs of Maya. No doubt he loves Maya but not physically. Gautama shrinks from contact because he is afraid of emotions. When Maya asks him for love, he agrees “love? Love that is without any ambition without any desire, without any life except that which keeps it alive, burning, yes, that is well.” When Gautama agrees with Maya for the sake of her happiness, the sense of alienation overpowers her. Gautama and Maya when passing through the passage where Toto had lain dead, and Maya tells him that she misses Toto. But Gautama has forgotten the very existence of Toto. He
asks her who was Toto? To Maya, Gautama’s words sound as “grim as any death sentence, absolute and unredeemable”\textsuperscript{27}. She hears the cry of peacocks coming from the jungles. She says about the love life of peacocks: “Before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other’s breasts to strips and fall bleeding, with their beaks …… Living they are aware of death. Dying they are in love with life. ‘Lover, Lover’. You will hear them cry in the forest when the rain clouds come, “Lover I die ……”\textsuperscript{28}.

Out of her fear of death and lack of the sense of security every such response from Gautama, “Which falls short of her expectations takes her to the brink of disaster.”\textsuperscript{29} When in excitement she clenches her hands, she sees her skin stretched streams of blood rising and plunging. She asks Gautama: “Is there nothing, I whispered, is there nothing in you that would be touched ever so slightly, if I told you I live my life for you?”\textsuperscript{30} She seems to hold Gautama responsible for her unfulfilled desires in the marital relationship she is also angry with him because after four years of life together she is compelled to come to the sad conclusion that she would soon lose her already rudimentary self. She grows anxious on account of the threats to herself preservation and neurotically perceives Gautama’s death as a solution. She persuades Gautama for a stroll on the roof and pushes him down to death. Having done the deed and having taken
recourse to psychosis she relaxes and openly declares that unlike her, Gautama has not been in love with life and so according to the prophecy he had to die. “It had to be one of us, you see, and it was so clear that it was I who was meant to live. You see, to Gautama it didn’t really matter. He didn’t care and I did.”

Her divided self, lack of self analysis, the fast withering spirit and the receding contact with outer world leave the core of her integrity impaired. Maya finds herself spiritually ruined. And out of frustration she pushes Gautama to death and burdened with this knowledge, is haunted by self contempt, self accusation, self hate and drags herself into complete darkness of the world of the insane and ultimately commits suicide.

*Voices in The City*, tells the predicament and alienation of all the three major characters Nirode, Monisha and Amla. Nirode develops a mother – fixation and “grows closer and dearer to her.” In his childhood days his mother actively tends her children and this offers security to them. His deep rooted attachment to his mother is exposed in his illness when he mutters in fever his concern for his mother. He does not need Monisha to nurse him. Nirode is deeply shocked by his mother’s unfaithfulness to his father. He cannot tolerate her illegal relations with Major Chadha who once used to live next door to their house Kalimpong. This relationship leaves
him shorn of all his confidence in relationships. He develops a violent
distaste for them. He writes a play which is quite autobiographical. He
shows, “….. a blithe young ‘box – wallah’ who has too much to drink at
night club, reaching down a dark street. He stumbles and falls into an open
main hole…”33

The ‘blue sky’, ‘purple hills,’ ‘white snow,’ ‘bright birds,’ and ‘gemmed
loveliness’ of his childhood turn black. Nirode’s mother writes beautiful
letter to him and address him as “my golden son”34 But the letter for Nirode
is like ‘a warm, enveloping succubus in the shape of a “bright winged
butterfly”35. The reading of the letter is like “sinking his teeth through a
sweet mulberry to bite into a caterpillar’s entrails”36.

He refuses his mother when she desires him to sign the paper of
transfer of money in his name in a bank. Nirode tells Monisha. “Tell her to
go shove it up that old major of hers, all her stinking cheques …. I’m done
with signing my name, believing my name or having a name”37 alienated
from his mother, Nirode turns rootless. He loses his faith in life and
develops an attitude of ‘complete negation.

Nirode is an anonymous and shabby clerk in a newspaper
establishment but he calls himself a ‘journalist’. He fails in the mission of
his life and he is unwilling to accept the bitter truth of life also. He wants to
rise in the world and he hates the worthlessness of his job and life. He wants to achieve more success than his brother Arun. But pride and fear over powers Nirode. He makes plans but does not have the will to do so. Infact he suffers from loneliness and alienation.

“News, newspapers, newspapers ..... all that’s safely in the dustbin as far as I’m concerned. I have banged the lid on to all that. I no longer work at stately offices at he Patrika. I no longer sit paring my nails while a fresh supply of glue is mixed so that I can get down to my illustrious job of pasting cut – outs into the Patrika scrap – books.”³⁸ This shows his dissatisfaction with his present job. This sense of alienation instigates him to prefer death. Nirode says to his friend Bose that he has reached that point now. “I always know I should arrive at it one day .... When it should be impossible, physically impossible to work under any man, by his orders, at a given time, at a meaningless job ....”³⁹

Nirode himself knows by instinct that, “he was a man for whom aloneness alone was the sole natural condition, aloneness alone the treasure worth treasuring. But he had already gone too far in his confidences, he found himself incapable of retracting”⁴⁰. Nirode is alienated from his near and dear ones. He is fed up of his flat also because he feels sick and oppressed by the dirty scene and odour there.
After knowing the immoral relationship of his mother with Major Chadha, he feels a sense of alienation in himself and says: “God, that makes we want to get away; pack up and clear out as far as I can get from here; there’s nothing but goodbye, goodbye in that sound.”

Living in a large joint family where each of the family members including Jiban is “so stolid so rounded, with a prosperity that has entirely to do with rice and rich sweetmeats and the security of government posts and pension.” Monisha finds herself bare and disappointed. The tradition and culture followed by Jiban’s family is different from Monisha’s bent towards individuality and freedom.

Monisha’s marriage with insensitive Jiban is against her own will. It is arranged by her father. He knows that Monisha has morbid inclinations by nature and non-entity Jiban is a good match for her. Although Aunt Leila has made inquiries about the family of Monisha’s in-laws and knows about its unsuitability to Monisha’s taste and has reported it to her parents, her parents go forward with the marriage irrespective of their daughter’s tastes, liking or disliking of a man to whom she is to be married.

Monisha finds nothing conducive to her in the nature of her husband and his self-centered family members. After her marriage, conflict between them is started when the family members see her morbidity with
suspicion and she observes their petty mindedness. She is married into a family which curbs her individuality and restricts her within the ritual routine of an ideal wife and homemaker. She ruefully exclaims: “Look at me, my equipment, my appurtenances, my black wardrobe, my family, my duties of serving fresh, chapattis to the uncles as they eat, of listening to my mother in law as she tells me the remarkably many ways of cooking fish, of being Jiban’s wife.”

Monisha longs for passions and real emotions which Jiban is not able to provide into his big joint family. Monisha, like Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, lacks love for her husband and fails to establish any life giving rapport with him. Shanta Krishmaswamy says that Monisha’s need for nurturance and for being nurtured is left unfulfilled by a husband who is incapable of ‘husbanding’ her in his traditional masculine role.

Like Maya in *Cry the Peacock* Monisha is emotional, sensitive and feels alienated due to lack of communication with Jiban, her husband. She recognizes the emptiness in her life and questions – “Is this what life is then, my life? Only a conundrum that I shall brood over forever with passion and pain never to arrive at solution? Only a conundrum is that, then life?” The result is that she is full of the feeling of alienation and fails
to synthesize, “the ideas of personal freedom, domestic duties and social responsibilities.”

Monisha is fully and conscious of her condition. She can comprehend the intellectual sterility of women who “like the female bird in the cage,” is never given an opportunity to fly. She mourns the wastage of “lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men, self centered and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical, waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying bars that shut as in the old house, in old city.” Madhusudan Parsad says that Monisha’a marriage with Jiban suffers discord from “the oppressive lack of privacy – her total incommunication with her nonchalant husband, the absence of love in her life.”

Monisha is totally dissatisfied with her present. So she adopts a strategy of escape into the past. Like Maya, she is also a miserable misfit amongst her in laws. So she weaves a web of her own and remains imprisoned in its privacy. She turns to ‘Gita’ in search of a philosophical guidance. She feels alienated from her husband and ponders over the problems of attachment and detachment. Her neurotic pride creates an unhealthy self – esteem. In her isolation she is not free from the ego involvement. She feels: “In my silence, I find has the power upon others.
The refrain ‘I am different from them all’ echoes throughout the diary. And it brings disaster for her. Monisha’s parental indifference and familial disorder also affect her psyche. As a neglected child she grows morbid and neurotic, and this trait continues to foster even after her marriage. Like Maya, Monisha’s childlessness is also a cause of her mental imbalance. The traditional Indian society looks down upon a childless woman. In society a childless or a barren woman is considered to be a curse and she has to face social, religious and familial problems. A woman gains a status only as a mother. Without this she has no existence, no meaning of life. For this Monisha is ill treated by her husband too. When her husband comes to know this reality, he starts spurning her and refuses to communicate her. She becomes desperate and lonely for her physical inferiority brings about spiritual breakdown. The awareness of her low profile in family and in society is punched unceremoniously into her daily, so much so that it becomes one of the reasons of her inferiority complex and alienation. All the female members of her husband’s family and traditional Bengali women living behind the black bars are the target of her contempt. Monisha is not born to sit and wait for meaningless death. For her the choice is between the meaningless life and non-existence and she chooses the later; “...... here is the answer – here, here, here. Look. I
will scream. I cannot believe – but here it is. Look through these bars, into this cage of doves – look, look at the terrible answer. …… Wounded and bleeding, but scurrying about their cages, pecking up grain, while over them fly blithe budgerigars like animated splinters of rainbow. These stay on the ground restless, in flues, and bleeding. The dove’s stigmata – what does it mean? How can it be possible? How can they live, eat, work, sing, bleeding through life?”

One more incident which shows the hollowness of the love relationship of Monisha and Jiban is that Monisha’s mother in – law accuses her of stealing money from Jiban’s wardrobe. Monisha takes this money to pay his hospital bills, and she remembers about this after her husband’s departure for his office. Monisha is badly hurt by the indifferent behaviour of her husband. The hollowness of the relationship between husband and wife can be noted when she tells the whole matter to her husband. Jiban instead of saying “…. Why did you not tell me at once? 51 Says “…… why didn’t you tell me before you took it?”52 this shows the loveless relationship between Monisha and Jiban. Monisha decides to choose solitude and withdrawal. She rejects her husband and in laws. She also, like Maya in Cry, The Peacock becomes the victim of emotional alienation. She finds herself living among strangers. Expressing her sense
of anguish and disillusionment after the unfortunate incident, she writes in his diary: “I am accused of theft. These pettiest of people they regard me as meaner than they. They think me a thief. To be regarded so low by men and women themselves so low, it is to be laid on a level lower than the common earth. I find that, I am alone here. I find on this level that solitude that becomes me most naturally. I am willing to accept this status then and to live here, a little beyond and below everyone else in exile.”

Monisha however, is in sharp contrast with Maya of Cry, The Peacock. Maya craves for contact, relatedness, communication which when unfulfilled lead her to alienation. Monisha is secretive by nature and considers any contact or communication dangerous. Maya is attached in marital life while Monisha is detached from it. She suggests to Nirode “of course, I know, keep it all to yourself, a secret quite, private, all your own, to keep and gloat over. It will hurt so much to show.” In playing the role of housewife she always pines for privacy for, solitude:

“I am glad they give me so much work to do, I am glad to be occupied in cutting vegetables, serving food, brushing small children’s hair. Only I wish I were given some tasks I could do alone, in privacy away from the aunts and uncles, cousins and nephews. Alone I could work better and I should feel more whole but less and less there is privacy – but I wish they
would leave me alone, sometimes, to read. Or that Nirode would come again and take me away to sit under a tree with him.”

Locked in her room, she reads books and feels self important. At night, she creeps up the top most floor and enjoys a communion with vast, dark emptiness, she considers this as an hour of freedom. But it is infact a flight from conflict.

Monisha knows about the worthlessness and hollowness of her life when she listens to the song full of love and passion sung by a street woman singer. But Monisha does not understand the language of the woman because she has never enjoyed the passion of love in her whole life. Nirode receives a letter from Monisha and comes to know about her arrival in Calcutta. Then slowly the message filtered in, “Monisha in Calcutta and over the still Cemetery, a pale down breeze wandered silently in through the window.” Cemetery is associated with death it suggests that death dwells in Calcutta. Monisha is in Calcutta which means that she is near her death. She is leading a lonely and melancholic life. Monisha is like a setting sun because her dreams are shattered. In Calcutta she finds people with low and diseased mentality where a woman has no identity, no individuality, no meaning and no existence of her own, always hankering after the tradition and social conventions made by the male dominated
society. She finds everything suffocating and strongly feels the absence of freedom in life.

Monisha reads Gita to cool herself down and draws this conclusion that the total detachment will enable her to achieve peace in life. Now only darkness and silence soothe her disturbed mind. She says: “This empty darkness, has not so much as a dream. It is one unlit waste, a desert to which my heart truly belong.” Monisha realizes that her life is a waste and she is imperfect and handicapped. Under this pressure of despair and alienation she decides to commit suicide. She wants to discard other and enjoy her aloofness. She wants to reject life because she thinks that by rejecting life she will gain calm and peace. She pours kerosene oil in herself and sets fire to herself.

Monisha and Jiban’s marriage is the most pathetic illustration of maladjustment in marriage. It presents an intensive involvement and soul – crushing apathy. Monisha’s journey towards her horrible death presents her spiritual and physical transformation in black, mourning colours. She is transformed from a quite, sensitive, mild, self centered, beautiful girl into a barren, neurotic, diary writing woman. She has a sense of helplessness and disappointment and finds no alternative to know the real meaning and aim of life. Her bitter childhood, ungratifying married life, torturing in laws,
traditional Indian social atmosphere, her alienated self, humiliated ego by the charge of theft cause her mental imbalance. She becomes neurotic and begins to live in the ivory tower of her pride, cutting all her relations from her family. She opts for a violent end to establish her triumph over her in-laws by defeating their attempts to subjugate her.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Shashi Deshpande presents an intense mental conflict of the central female protagonist Sarita, a sensitive woman in her late forties and a doctor by profession. Sarita the heroine of the novel is an introvert and nervous middle aged woman who finds herself isolated from her parents because of having a traumatic childhood and pins all her hopes for happiness and security towards her husband. She is the victim of those processes of oppression which torture a girl child within the institution of family and the male dominated society. The novel opens with Sarita’s return, after a gap of fifteen years, to her father’s house where she escapes from the sadism of her husband and hope to seek refuge.

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* remembers and still resents the discrimination made by her mother between the son and the daughter. Sarita is now a successful doctor, married to a man she had loved and has two children. Yet the bitterness that was created in the childhood persists in pushing her constantly into proving her capability and competence. As a
girl child the mother considers Saru the responsibility which is to be fulfilled by getting her married. In this respect she is different from her brother Dhruva who might always stay with his parents “He is different. He is a boy.”\textsuperscript{58} This fact is drummed into her.

Saru is neglected in favour of her brother Dhruva. Dhruva’s birthday is celebrated with enthusiasm and includes the performance of Puja. In contrast to this, there is no celebration or Puja on Saru’s birthday. After Dhruva’s death Saru thinks that now her birthday will be celebrated like her brother but it is not so. Her mother keeps accusing her of Dhruva’s death. This charge saps Saru’s potential for growing into a normal human being. Unconsciously she suffers from a sense of guilt and is unable to decide her role in Dhruva’s death.

“The hysteria, the screaming, the words that followed me for days, months, years, all my life. You Killed him. Why didn’t you die ? Why are you alive when he’s dead.”\textsuperscript{59} Discriminative and oppressive treatment experienced in her childhood lays the foundation of the future fragmentation and alienation of Sarita. A child who is not loved and cared by her / his parents is likely to develop a deep-rooted sense of fear, insecurity, rejection and alienation. Being unwanted has a disastrous effect on one’s self esteem. Her mother does not treat her as a human individual.
She considers Saru a burden, a responsibility. She argues against Saru’s desire to study medicine with her father.

“… And don’t forget medicine or no medicine, doctor or no doctor, you still have to get her married, spend money on her wedding. Can you do both? …. Let her go for B.Sc. ….. You can get her married in two years and our responsibility will be over.”

Saru feels alienated and shocked that there is no affection, no emotional attachment between the mother and daughter and she is no more than a responsibility. In her anger and hatred against her mother, Saru refuses to talk to her. “I’m not talking to you. I’m not asking you for anything. I know what your answer will be. No, forever a ‘no’ to anything I want. You don’t want me to have anything; you don’t want me to do anything. You don’t even want me to live.” But her father supports her and she takes the admission in Medicine. Here she experiences a freedom, a kind of new life and a rebirth. Her last confrontation with her mother occurs when she goes home for her first vacation. Her mother does not want her to marry Manohar, a youngman of a different cast. But the more vehemently they opposed, the more determined she became to marry him. “If you hadn’t fought me so bitterly, if you hadn’t been so against him, perhaps I would never have married him.” This brings the final break in
their relationship the mother says that she will “pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me.” she declines a suggestion to go to her daughter even when her end was near by saying that I don’t have any daughter I had a son and he died. Now I am childless.

The early days of married life gives a sense of fulfillment to Saru. She realizes her individuality through Manu’s love for her. “I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved of my being wanted.” An explosion in a nearby factory discloses to her neighbour that she is not only a house wife but a doctor. This makes her socially superior to Manu who is a lecturer in a third rate college. People praise Saru but they completely ignore Manu.

As time passes, her involvement in her profession, lack of communication with her husband, difference in social status - distance her from Manu mentally. The old flame of regard and care gets extinguished. There is a monstrous maniac, a sadist shaping inside her husband Manu. She explains to her father: Do you understand, Baba? He was his usual self. Absolutely his usual self. There was no change in him, no difference. And how could I say to that man …….. why did you do it? Had he done it at all? I begin to think after a while ….. how could any man do such a thing and be so unchanged ? ….. may be a nightmare. This situation results in
her alienation from her husband causing emotional barrenness in her. The split in Manu’s personality adversely affects Saru and becomes the immediate cause of the disintegration of her subjective self. Both Saru and Manu are victims of conflicting emotions from each other but the gap of communication prevents them from discussing, analyzing and understanding the complex states of their minds. Saru who at a later stage comes to understand the intricate nature of their mutual relationship, says, “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 hate him for doing it to me.”

Sarita tries several times to speak to him but always fails. The gulf between her and him widened because of her silence. She even thinks of divorce but the thought of her children Renu and Abhi prevents her. She expresses her helplessness in this regard. “I should have spoken about it the very first day. But I didn’t. 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 a slow; painful death ……. and it seems I can do nothing to save myself.

But she had tried. Once twice she had been on the brink of speaking out. Not to him. No, not that. She had said the words of herself at first,
tasting them, savouring their texture, their flavour on tongue ....... my husband is a sadist .......

Can I divorce my husband ?

Any reasons ?

He's cruel."67

The main reason of the alienation and the lack of communication between Sarita and ..... is the status difference. Sarita is transformed into a money – making machine with no time left for her emotional self. She is afraid of being left behind in her race of success and material achievements. The traditional and social norms of the male dominated society make her life drab and joyless in which Man is consistently described as being more aggressive, independent, dominant, active, competitive and self confident than women, Woman are consistently described as being more tactful, gentle, sensitive emotional, expressive, dependent, neat and quite than men. All these social traditions are broken by Saru. She is superior to her husband in her qualifications social status, mental caliber and in many other respects. And Manu’s male pride is hurt by it.

The other reason for their alienation is that Saru has the deep rooted mentality of an unwanted child. The need of parental love is essential for
the well-being of an individual’s mental health. Right from the beginning of her life, she does not belong to any place or person. She is “like a homeless refugee “…… which is my room ? I have none.” She is lost, she is rejected by her mother and by her father in such a complete manner that the sense of being rejected kills her hope, curiosity and sense of expectancy. After getting married, her happiness is short lived and she cannot drink the cup of joy because her mind is convinced that she can never be loved. In the institution of marriage her feminity being brutally crushed, she loses forever the dreams of sentiment and passion. “Love “ Romance ? Both, I knew too well, were illusions and not relevant to my life.”

Due to her physical trauma she cannot socialize or mix with people and participate in any event in a lively manner. Her child’s birthday party and outing with family are disappointing experiences for. “I felt a deadly fear ….. I was isolated from everyone from the whole world.” Her power to love, to give and receive affection seem to have been damaged. She has no companion. No one shares her thought processes. She is alone really alone.

In the end Sarita decides to leave her husband’s house after the death of her mother, to take care of her father but in reality to escape the nightmarish brutality her husband inflicts on her every night. But here she is
treated as a stranger. She thinks herself as an intruder. She feels as if she is unwanted and unexpected. Here too she feels loneliness and alienation and realizes that “No, she could not call it house. It was not home. Nor was this home. How odd to live for so long and discover that you have no home at all.”

Her relationship with her husband has failed and she cannot find emotional support from her father either. She is haunted with the question of loneliness of human beings. She remembers the views of her mother that “we come in this world alone and go out of it alone…….”

In *That Long Silence* Jaya a failed writer, is haunted by memories of the past. In her small suburban Bombay flat she grapples with the events of her life, among them are the differences with her husband, frustrations in their seventeen year old marriage, disappointment in her two teen aged children. She finds her life nothing but failure in which everything has gone against her wishes. Jaya is full of anger against the way of the world where the future of a woman is associated with her husband, children and her family. She is Shashi Deshpande’s “angry young woman” whose anger takes the form of silence.

In *That Long Silence* the protagonist is full of false illusions which are eventually shattered when she faces the bitter truths of life. In the early years of her marriage Jaya takes great interest in looking after her family
affairs. Her activity revolves around her two children and husband. She believes that “well – educated, hard working people in secure jobs, cushioned by insurance and provident funds, with two healthy, well – fed children going to good schools”\textsuperscript{74} are destined to remain happy.

Life changes for Jaya when her husband, Mohan indulges in malpractice, as a result of which he now faces an enquiry and is at the point of losing his job. During her brief stay in the small flat Jaya has to encounter both her past that comes to her in the form of memory and her present in the form of rude shock received from Mohan’s accusation that his malpractice is due to Jaya’s and her children’s comfort. He says : “It was for you and the children I did this. I wanted you to have a good life, I wanted the children to have all those things I never had.”\textsuperscript{75} She can’t understand that why she is responsible for the crime which Mohan has committed himself.

The fact is that life has never been the same for both of them. Mohan has changed. So has Jaya. Her only career as a housewife is in jeopardy. Life becomes meaningless for both of them, as she confesses : “The truth was that we had both lost the props of our lives. Deprived of his routine, his files, his telephones, his appointments, he seemed to be no one at all; certainly not that man, my husband, around whose needs and desires my
own life revolved. There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing for me to do, nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy….”  

She recapitulates her past married life and finds that she cannot reach her husband beyond physical togetherness. This realization isolates her from her husband. Jaya feels the two of them as “a pair of bullocks yoked together” by socially affiliated marriage but in reality they are free from their respective tasks, finds themselves as two separate human beings. Jaya says, “a man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman.”

Insensitive and unimaginative as Mohan is, he remains unmindful of Jaya’s mortification. He is unable to realize that all these years Jaya has simply followed him in his plans and desires. This has rendered her incapable of taking any initiative. He mistakes her lack of initiative as indifference himself and levels baseless charges against her. “…I’ve always put you and the children first, I’ve been patient with all your whims. I’ve grudged you nothing. But the truth is that you despise me because I’ve
failed. As long as I could give you all the comforts. It was all right. But now, because I'm likely to lose it all … “79.

Mohan experiences a vacuum in their lives. Mohan’s life is built on externals such as money, status and material comforts. In the present circumstances his status in relation to society has been reduced almost to that of a non – entity. He has a conventional approach to life and all his thoughts and energy are focused on acquiring wealth and status. In fact, his childhood, which was characterized by deprivations, lies at the back of his mental make – up. For him, these externals of existence are the summum bonum of his life. His love making to Jaya is “a silent world less”80 physical act but it involves her emotions too. His love making begins with insincere wooing and end in offering her “his hunched back”81. it breeds in her a sense of loneliness and she becomes emotionally alienated from him. Thinking of her need of Mohan’s love she feels, “…. I could stay apart from him. Without a twinge, I could sleep with him, too without desires.”82

Jaya feels alienated from her parental home by the elimination of the girl child from the ‘family tree’. Once Jaya’s Ramu Kaka excitedly shows her the family tree prepared by him. Jaya is shocked to find her name missing. Shocked and surprised, she asks her uncle why she is not there.
The uncle gets irritated at her foolishness and retorts: “How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family! you’re married, you’re now part of Mohan’s family. You have no place here.” At this she wants to ask Ramu Kaka why Kakis, Ai and Ajji who belonged to the family by reason of marriage, do not have a place on the family tree.

The main reason of Jaya’s alienation is the conflict between her inner world and the outer world and clash between the traditional and the modern. Jaya feels frustration in such a traditional social milieu where women are taken for granted, and they lose their identity and become just an appendage to their husband. Mohan’s father was a drunkard and he would come home late every night compelling his wife to wait with a hot meal to serve him. He wanted his rice fresh and hot, from a vessel that was untouched. Mohan describes how one day he threw his rice plate at the wall as there was no fresh chutney that day. The poor wife picks up the plate, cleans the floors silently and then goes to prepare fresh chutney. Describing the incident Mohan comments that women of those days are tough. Jaya’s views are different from Mohan: “He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender.”
Deshpande’s women protagonists emerge from a male dominated society which is conservative in its outlook of life. Educated as these women are, they are conscious of their individuality and desire to live their lives according to their own frame of values. But the socio – cultural values which they imbibe from tradition bring them into conflict with their own set of values and cause alienation and fragmentation of their personality.

In *That Long Silence* Jaya is a convent educated woman with a strong sense of her individuality. She is advised by her aunt Vanitamami that “a husband is like a sheltering tree.” She tries her best to mould herself into the role of a traditional wife. But years later as Vanitamami’s words come back to her, she feels disillusioned. Silence has been an integral part of Jaya’s married life. It is a form of expressing her anger. She can’t express it literally because Mohan does not like her to lose her temper and she “realized that to him anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’.”

Fissures tend to appear in their relationship as Mohan accuses Jaya for her indifference towards his problems. Jaya refrains from defending her or denying anything he says to her as that is of no use. She says : “And I realized that even if I spoke, he would not listen to me. He had armed himself with an anger that seemed not quite real, but underneath it I could sense a genuine hostility. He accused me of not caring about the children,
of isolating myself from him and his concerns, even of some obscure
revengeful feelings that were driving me to act this way. My own feeble
defences had no chance before this fierce onslaught.\textsuperscript{87} Here the novelist
shows Jaya as a failed and alienated wife. When Jaya’s realistic story of
man – woman relationship wins the prize Mohan is critical, for according to
him, Jaya has disclosed their personal relationship to the world, dishonoring there by the sacred vows of marriage. Jaya is crestfallen at this
accusation, but she can very well understand that Mohan is unable to
distinguish between art and life.

“I had known then that it had not mattered to Mohan that I had written
a good story, a story about a couple, a man who could not reach out to his
wife except through her body. For Mohan it mattered that people might
think that the couple was us, that the man was him. To Mohan, I had been
no writer, only an exhibitionist.”\textsuperscript{88}

In order to maintain their relationship Jaya stops writing realistic
stories and tries her hand at imaginary incidents of a house – wife’s life
under the pseudo name ‘Seeta’. Surprisingly, Mohan likes those stories
and even begins to take pride in her wife’s caliber as a writer. The stories
under the ‘Seeta’ column are appreciated by the public and Jaya becomes
famous as a woman writer. But Jaya is not happy inwardly; she knows that her Seeta column had nothing to do with reality or with her real self.

Jaya’s failure and alienation lies at another front also her teenaged children Rahul and Rati. Both are a source of disappointment to her. She is not comfortable with the way they have developed. Rahul is temperamental and a cynic. He is not good at studies and he does not want to be either. She wonder that how little she knows about her own son: “It seemed amazing that I knew so little, almost nothing, about my son. Whatever had given me the damn fool ideas that once I became a mother, I would know my children through and through instinctively, yes, this was what they had told me: you become a mother, and everything follows naturally and inevitably – love, wisdom, understanding and nobility. But now I felt as helpless to deal with this despairing boy as I had with the floppy–headed, vulnerable infant I had brought back from the hospital. I had the same fearful sense of being unable to cope, the same certainly of being a failure.89

Rahul is over–dependent on Jaya, who herself is unsure about her own motherhood. Rati has never become the kind of girl she has propped–up – “grave, serious, independent, understanding .....

89 Jaya who until
now, was blaming herself as a failed wife, finally concedes her defeat as a mother also:

“A mother? Despairingly I relinquished my halo. No, I had been unfit to be trusted with the entire responsibility of another human being. How had I dared to take it on? Mohan’s wife, Rahul and Rati’s mother – I can crawl into that hole, I had thought, a warm and safe hole, but here I was now prodded out of it by cruel, sharp selves.” So Jaya is a failed wife, a failed mother and a failed writer, alienated from her husband, children and from her-self. Failure in the traditional concept of the female, and the resultant guilt causes her alienation and estrangement.
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