Chapter 4

FEMINISM IN SELECTED NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE

1. The Dark Holds No Terrors(1980)

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the story of Sarita, often referred to as Saru in the novel, and her convulsions and conflicts. The novel reveals the life of Sarita, who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother. She is not given any importance; no parental love is showered upon her even on her birthdays. Her brother's birthdays, however, are celebrated with full enthusiasm including the performance of the religious rituals. When her brother is drowned, she is blamed for it. Her mother, in particular, always scolds her for being responsible for her son’s death: “You killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” \(^1\) (TDHNT 173)

Due to her mother’s accusation, Saru begins to wonder if in reality, she had killed him. It is much later, after rethinking and pondering over the event, after her mother's death, that she realizes the accidental nature of her brother’s death.

Sarita (usually known by the diminutive Saru) is humbled and modest, very sensitive but lacking in self confidence as a middle class women, she is aware of her own limitation. Yet, she longs to break away from the rigid traditional norms and adopts to be an anti matriarch who yearns for a new environment where the mother cannot thrust her will on her. She hates her parental home and her quest leads her to discover the hidden strength in human being which shapes life to a pleasurable and possible one.

As Saru stays at her parental house, she gets a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her dead mother, her dead brother, with her own children. Her earliest memories are those which speak about the gender discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother Dhruva. Saru has had an insecure childhood. As her sense of reasoning and questioning develops, she feels she is unable to tolerate the preference shown towards her brother. She feels jealous of her brother when he gets all the parental care and attention. She struggles to attract her father’s attention and succeeds only to some extent. Saru’s mother, who believes a girl to be a liability and a boy an asset, instills a sense of insecurity in her daughter’s mind.
When, as a child, Saru rarely speaks to her father, Dhruva, her brother, often has long conversations. Her father

“used to take Dhruva out for a ride. He used to sit on the small seat specially fixed on the bar of the cycle giving rise to the impression that daughters are their mother’s business.” (TDHNT 105)

Saru is always considered a burden to be eased, or a problem to be solved or a responsibility to be dispensed with. There is always a puja performed on Dhruva’s birthday. His birthdays and other religious rituals related to him are given top priority and celebrated with much pomp while her birthdays are barely acknowledged and this disparity of treatment makes her to think that to think that her birthday is only a matter of displeasure for her mother. Saru laments thus:

“But of my birth, my mother had said to me once...It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible. And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains.” (TDHNT 169)

Saru’s mother’s strong preference for her brother drives her to a sense of restlessness and alienation. The partisan attitude of her parents has a devastating effect on Saru. She becomes rebellious in nature. When her brother dies by drowning in the pond accidentally, she mutely watches the whole scene without rushing to his help. Since then, she is haunted by the thought that she is responsible for his death. Even her mother finds her guilty. She points out, “You killed your brother.” (TDHNT 146)

Premila Paul attempts to lay bare Saru’s mind when she says:

“Dhruva's demise had always been subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment.”

Life becomes more desperate to Saru after Dhruva death. There are no celebrations at home, her own much awaited birthday passes off in silence both at school and at home. Saru's mind is filled with deep and indelible scar her mother constantly pines for her dead son and rejects the presence of her daughter. At every given opportunity Saru's mother snubs her. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the adolescent Saru's mind with feelings of hatred towards her mother as Adesh Pal observes:
“For Saru the very word “mother” stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being... thus the strange childhood experiences false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others.”

Saru’s hatred gets intensified and as she attains puberty she resents the onset of her womanhood. “If you’re a woman I don’t want to be one”. (TDHNT 62)

Filled with a sense of shame her monthly ordeal, she resents the traditional practice in orthodox home when she is treated like an outcast during the three days. Thus rejection by her mother during the early impressionable years leads to psychological insecurity in Saru. She is prone to constant and recurring dreaming. She begins to express her feeling through the acts of defiance which spring form her resentment against her mother as a young girl and then as a child. She hated her, she wanted to hurt wound her, and make her suffer. Saru gets hurt when mother says: “You will never be good looking. You are too dark for that.” (TDHNT 61)

She hopes for a miracle to happen and that day she would grow up and be beautiful. But when it actually happens, growing up becomes shameful for Saru. The rigidity of do’s and don’ts prescribed by the domineering mother makes her grow more wild and defiant. Later, she goes to Bombay to study Medicine in spite of her mother’s opposition. Luckily for her, her father encouraged her. Saru’s mother doesn’t understand the importance of girl's education, as reflected below:

“But she’s a girl... 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?” (TDHNT 144)

Further she thinks that Saru is their responsibility and they can’t ever evade that responsibility. Later, when her mother fails to argue with Saru, she becomes hysterical and starts accusing her of her brother’s death. “...She let him drown... She killed him.” (TDHNT 145)

This accusation hurts the tender heart of Saru who keeps on saying:

“I didn't. Truly I didn’t. It was an accident. I loved him, my little brother. I tried to save him. Truly I tried. But I couldn’t. And I ran
Saru grows up and acquires education against her mother’s will. As an educated young lady, her sense of reasoning and questioning develops. She can, no more, tolerate inequality between brother and sister. She remembers how her brother was named:

“They had named him Dhruva. I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly, a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone. . .” (TDHNT 152)

The mother is very attached to her son. Her attitude is a typical one—after all, he is male child and therefore one who will propagate the family lineage. In another sense, also, the male child is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give agni to his dead parents. The soul of the dead person would otherwise wander in formant. The first thought, when Sara hears the news of her mother’s death, is:

“who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died.” (TDHNT 17)

When Dhruva was alive, her mother’s discrimination between the two had been very apparent to Sarita. As she grows up, resentment and hatred drive her to leave home and obsessively seek success in medical college.

Saru's confrontation with her mother reaches its peak when she decides to marry Manu. Her choice of a boy from a lower caste is a sign of her rejecting the traditional ways and values her orthodox mother adheres to. She recalls the conversation with her mother when she confronts her with her intention of marrying Manu:

Her mother, being an old, traditional, orthodox woman, does not want her daughter to get married to a person who is from a lower caste:

“What caste is he?

I don't know.

A Brahmin?

Of course, not.
The word her mother has used, with the disgust, hatred and prejudice of centuries so enrages Saru that she replies “I hope so.” (TDHNT 96) Thus, the little rebel of Yore who used to resent her mother’s gender-bias mutely becomes overtly defiant.4

After her marriage Saru is hurt to hear from a mutual acquaintance that her mother has said, “let her know more sorrow that she has given me.”(197)She even thinks at one point that she is ‘unhappy and destroyed’ in her marital life because her mother has cursed her. But gradually her hostile attitude towards her mother changes to a positive one. She even begins to see her mother as the creative essence the feminine. She makes efforts to understand her and even identify herself with her mother. Valli Rao finds this as“search for her own feminine side and for the reunification her split self ... and finally we see ‘rebirthing’ her of individual personality separate from her mother’s.”5 Thus, she finally emerges from her ordeal a person more whole, more capable of accepting and forgiving herself than she has been at the start.

Sara revolts against her parents and runs away to get married to a person of her own choice. As she always feels insecure in her parents’ home, her marriage to Manu is a means of that love and security which she had always lacked in life. He is the ideal romantic hero who has come to rescue her from the insecure, loveless existence. And she is hungry for love:

“I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted.” (TDHNT 35)

Saru starts fantasizing about Manu. The one-dream dominates her psyche is the age-old feminine dream of submission to a conquering male. In her imagination Manu is tender imperious and passionate. Later it is Saru who revives the acquaintance with him. As they speak with each other, he also becomes interested in her. When Manu expresses his love for her, she feels flattered. She becomes exultant for having evoked feeling in someone who is emotionally hard touched.

“And that he, a man set apart from the others, above others... should love me seemed even more incredible. The fisherman’s daughter couldn’t have been more surprised when the king asked her to marry him, than I was Manu's love for me.” (TDHNT 66)
However, the very thought of marriage unnerves Saru. Perhaps it is the fear of sex, the unknown. Till they get married, Manu and Saru are quite innocent in their relationship. This may be because of their middle-class inhibitions. Marriage opens the, sesame of all enjoyment for Saru. After the first moment of apprehensions, there is never anything withholding in her. Saru who has lacked love in her life finds a saviour in Manu.

“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.” (TDHNT 40)

Manu and Saru’s marital life becomes quite good. As Manu says ‘when we're together, its heaven... (TDHNT 38) To Saru all this seems to be difficult to believe. She feels that all these things could only happen to girls in movies.

Saru, by marrying Manu, has a permanent break in the relationship with her mother. At a point Manu fears that cutting Saru off from her parents will be painful for her. But Saru, on the other hand, feels quite detached from her parents. She explains this in a more scientific manner.

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

The mother in her turn successfully erases from her mind every trace of Saru and even predicts the fate of Saru’s marriage. Thus: “It’s love for a few days, then quarrels all the time.” (TDHNT 69)

It is from this moment that Saru takes a vow never to see her parents. Saru is happy with Manu, though they live in her dingy one-room apartment. But soon this happiness turns out to be only an illusion. As long as Saru is a student, Manu has been the breadwinner. They had peace at house despite its filth and stench. But problems begin to slowly creep in the moment Saru is recognised as a doctor. Her economic independence makes Manu feel thoroughly insecure and this casts a shadow on their married life. The seeds of jealousy are sown in him when there is an explosion in the nearby factory. Burnt and mutilated bodies pour in where Saru has to attend on
them. After this incident, Saru emerges as a successful reputed doctor almost every morning. there is a knock at the door and her visitors’ demand her medical attention, young and quite unused to her profession is thrilled with her new job but Manu's behaviour begins to change. He feels totally ignored as Saru gets all the attention. Saru initially fails to notice this change in Manu but later realises that:

“the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same things that made me inches taller made him inches shorter.” (TDHNT 42) The warmth between them cools off and the harmony is disrupted.

She succeeds and emerges as a successful, well-known and reputed doctor. At the same time, her marriage; begins, to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. She is happy until she begins to establish herself as a doctor. Now the situation undergoes a change. Till now, “he had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband.” (TDHNT 37)

Her inability to procure time for herself and her family (husband and children) upsets her family life. Manu, her husband, cannot tolerate people greeting her and ignoring him. He cannot express it openly but says out of irritation: “I am sick of this place. Let's get out of here soon”. (TDHNT 37)

He does not love her the way he used to earlier. Sara realizes it: “now I know that it was there it began … this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage.”(TDHNT 37)

She starts hating the man-woman relationship which is based on attraction and need and not love:

“Love . . . how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against; futilely ... turning into the thing they called “love.” It’s only a word she thought Take away the word, the idea, and the concept will wither away.” (TDHNT 65)

This is an awkward situation in which she is placed. At a personal level, she feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment which she had once developed. It is now replaced by a
psychological conflict which is uncalled for but inevitable, given the situation in which both of them have been placed. Most of the solemn duties towards her husband and children are unattended to. The children do not get proper love and care from their mother as she gets late in returning home. The husband sits waiting:

“I came home late that night... When I came home I found him sitting with a brooding expression on his face that made my heart give painful, quivering little jumps.” (TDHNT 71)

While there is a decline in her conjugal relationship, her status in society rises day by day. It may imply at one level that her rise in importance is inversely proportionate to the fall: in the importance of her husband, creating a conflict between her achieved position and the ascribed position of Manu.

Saru the “two-in-one woman” is a successful doctor during daytime, and a “terrified trapped animal” at night. This traumatic experience necessitates her to crave for freedom from domineering influences. She wishes to become a free individual and wants to have an identity of her own with purpose in life. Saru, as she understands the meaning of her name, lovers living as a human being. She says: “My life my own.” (TDHNT 220) Somehow she felt as if she had found it now the connecting link.

“It means you are not just a strutting grimacing puppet, standing futilely on the stage for a brief while between areas of darkness.” (TDHNT 220)

Her works keeps Saru away from Manu for longer and she reaches home late at night for which he sulks. His ego is hurt by her success, he feels inferior and this sense of inferiority makes him brutal in his behaviour. Though normal by day, he turns a treacherous rapist at night and to assert his masculinity through sexual assaults upon Saru. Her dream of finding happiness in marriage is soon shattered. Now Saru does not share good and cordial relationship with her husband. She scorcs the world ‘love’ and refuses to believe that such a thing can never exist between man and woman Gradually, Saru changes her attitude towards Manu and her marital life. The world around her and her place in her relationship becomes so insignificant that Manu’s position and place in life becomes relatively unimportant. Saru views sex as dirty word. With her
responsibilities increasing outside home, she recoils from Manu’s love-making and he takes her rejection of sex as rejection of himself.

People visit her for different purposes which widen the gap between them. The financial ascendance of Sarita, at the same time, renders Manu impotent. The only way he can regain that potency and masculinity is through sexual assault upon Sarita, which, for him, becomes an assertion of his manhood leading to a sort of abnormality at night, as he is a cheerful normal human being, a loving husband during day, turning into a rapist at night. It terrifies and humiliates Saru so much that she cannot even speak about them, even to him:

“and each time it happened and I don’t speak. I put another brick on the wall of silence between us. Maybe one day I will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death.” (TDHNT 88)

Marital life is nothing but a queer combination of several forces acting upon two human beings in different capacities to fulfil the marital ambition and play a vital role in the society. The given roles of these two human beings do undergo a change both at the functional and psychological levels. This is precisely what happens to Saru when with her economic independence, reinforced with the fact that-she earns more than Manu, she still feels stripped of her independence by virtue of being assigned to the job of a house wife i.e. bringing up children and supervising; the interest of her husband. Tired of both the duties, indoors and outdoors, she wants to leave the latter one:

“Manu, I want to stop working. I want to give it all up . . . my practice, the hospital, everything.” (TDHNT 72) But Manu does not want her to leave her job as they cannot maintain the same standard with only his income: “On my salary? Come on, Saru, don’t be silly. You know how much I earn. You think we can live this way on that?” (TDHNT 73)

Saru just wants to be his wife so that he doesn’t resent her any longer. Though in the beginning, his beastly behaviour and sexual sadism confused her, now she has reached a stage when she is not able to bear it any longer. She can’t stand his brutal behaviour and also that she is prepared to sacrifice everything as long as he leaves her alone. But Manu diapproves of Saru’s idea of leaving her job. When he asks her to go on with her responsibilities, Saru feels that it is “sheer
necessity” that holds them together. She thinks deeply. She finds she has every reason to break away from her marriage of convenience, shorn of genuine love. She says to herself: “I have to orient myself, I have to be more sure, more certain.” (TDHNT 69) Saru establishes herself as a career-oriented woman and her profession satisfies heir ego.

Her predicament is contrary to the assertion of most feminist that financial independence brings security to woman. Saru thinks that it is easier for the women in the past to accept such way of life for they did not have to struggle and therefore had no other choice. There was nothing else for them except to resign themselves to their destiny. But in Saru’s case, her way of thinking is conditioned by the age she lives in. What really irritates Saru is Manu’s assumption that marriage gives him a lifelong right for affection, love and respect. Saru has established herself as a successful doctor and earns bread and butter for the family. This state of affairs sets the ball of disunity in their relationship rolling which gradually acquires momentum beyond anyone's control. Saru has initially been a display model to Manu but later, Manu becomes an outright cruel person and starts insulting Saru in a way as displayed below:

“Monstrous onslaught on her person and personality. He attacked like an animal that night. I was sleeping and I woke up and there was this ... this man hurting me. With his hands, his teeth, his whole body.”

(TDHNT 201)

Manu is a typical traditional husband who always prefers to beat the centre and his wife on the periphery. Saru’s friend Vidhya also notices this and mockingly tells Saru when in her modesty, prefers to sit “… down among the audience how Manu envies her growth. She tells Saru “see that you stay there ... or else Manu won't like it.” (156) Saru hates Manu’s pretentious attitude. Her understanding is that Manu needs a woman who is subservient and obedient. Silently Saru bears Manu’s brutality quietly as though a wall of silence has between them. She fears that a stage may be reached when she may be walled alive so that she may die a slow and painful death. She realizes that her feelings have had no effect on Manu who is cheerful during day time behaves like a beast during night times. She is unable to put the two men together and unfortunately this dichotomy never ceases. After a conscious effort in evaluating the relative merits of a marriage and an arranged marriage, she inevitably compromises with her fate for having opted for a marriage and for which she has herself to blame.
This burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force unbalancing the marital balance that normally sustains conjugal relations. With this growing feeling of disenchantment and imbalance, separation becomes inevitable. At this juncture of life, Saru hears the news of her mother’s death and goes back to her parents’ home, though emotionless.

The traditional Hindu woman in her rises up only disappears too soon. Alienated from her husband, she comes to her parental house to see her sense of belonging to the world but the same eludes her. Initially, as Saru comes to her father’s house, she feels like a ‘stranger’, as Sudama standing at the gates of the palace of Krishna and Rukmini. She conscious that she is no ‘Sudama’ in rags, bare feet and filled with humility. But she gets a cold reception at her father’s house. At times Saru even regrets her visit: “why had it seemed so important to come here, and, at once?” (TDHNT 17)

Saru is presented simultaneously as an individual and as a female. The novel begins with Saru visiting her father after a gap of fifteen years. On hearing through a friend about her mother’s death a month ago, Saru wants to visit her father’s house from where she had left as a young woman. Defying her parents to marry the man Manohar (known the diminutive Manu, a name no doubt carrying overtones the legendary patriarchal law - giver who saw the world from a male centred perspective) whom she loved. She now returned to it as a well established doctor and a mother of two children more out of an urge to escape from the hell of life she is passing through. She appears to be confused, hopeless, and almost thoughtless and a recluse.

“She was not apprehensive, though not eager either, for moment of confrontation. She glanced back at the rickshaw in which she had come. She hadn’t paid the man as yet if keeping a route open for retreat.” (TDHNT 15)

She does not feel at home at her parents’ place where once she was born and brought up. Everything looks strange to her in spite of the fact that there is no change in the setting:

“Inside here, though, there were no changes. The same seven pairs of large stone slabs leading to the front door of which she played hopscotch as a child. The yard was bare as always.” (TDHNT 11)
Though she comes back a totally changed woman, everything looks strange to her. Her father sounds strange while talking. The absence of affability in the house sets her pendulum rolling between the two houses:

“As she drinks her tea… too sweet and strong … he (father) sat gingerly on the edge of his chair like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest. And that, I suppose, is what I really am. What gave me the idea I could come back?” (TDHNT 14)

She cannot say all that she wants to. All this happens due largely to a guilt consciousness that she has developed:

“then can never be any forgiveness. Never any atonement. My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (TDHNT 198)

Saru yearns for security and emotional attachment. She wants her father to support her and her feeling raised against Manu's brutality. She even rehearse these thoughts and recites them as if she was reading out a clinical history of an unknown patient. But when the real moment comes she blurs loudly and crudely, “My husband is a sadist.” (TDHNT 199) Her father fails to understand her vocabulary like sadism, love and cruelty. Painstakingly Saru makes every possible effort to explain to him about her problems and when she speaks to him, is not as a daughter but as a woman to a man. Saru's father expects that they should talk like matured persons because he feels that this kind of relationship of intimacy or sharing has never occurred even between him and his wife. He says “Silence had become a habit for us.” (TDHNT 199) He enquires Saru about the events that have happened and gradually his unnatural composure and indifference have disappeared. Saru eagerly tells him everything about Manu's brutality and expresses her helplessness. She says:

“I couldn't fight back. I couldn't shout or cry ... I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure.” (TDHNT 201) She expects moral supports from her father and she becomes more frantic and requests him. “But you've got to help me, you've got to. You did it
once. And because you did I went to Bombay, met him and married him.” (TDHNT 204)

On listening to Saru, her father simply leaves her and goes away. Saru lives an isolated and lonely life. She expects sympathy from her father but to no avail. Rather, her father, after listening to all the failures in her life in adjusting with her husband, turns his back on her pretending to put rice on the stove. She wants her father to listen to her but her father’s unchanging attitude saddens her. She thinks that they are like people that “are fated to be strangers.” (TDHNT 105) Many times she wants to tell her father, “Baba, I’m unhappy. Help me, Baba, I’m in trouble. Tell me what to do.” (TDHNT 44) But her feelings remain inside her. At times she regrets for having come to her parents house, as she is reminded of her children, her practice, and her patients. In all these memories her husband doesn’t figure at all. Her visit to her father’s house is a kind of escape from the sadist husband and her loveless marriage. It’s a kind of solace from her hectic daily routine too. Staying with her father and Madhav who makes no demands on her and on her whereabouts is a relief to Saru. The whole day in her house is completely dedicated to her own desires and comforts. She also reminiscences the kind of life she had lived as a child.

Under such circumstances, Saru feels that if it had been an arranged marriage, she would have got support from her parents. But now she suffers from both: suffering as well as guilt consciousness. These feelings remind her of the fate of one of her friends:

“If mine had been an arranged marriage, if I had left it to them to arrange my life, would he have left me like this? She thought of the girl, the sister of a friend, who had come home on account of a disastrous marriage. She remembered the care and sympathy with which the girl had been surrounded, as if she was an invalid, a convalescent. And the girl's face with its look of passive suffering. There had been only that there, nothing else neither despairs nor shame. For the failure had not been, hers, but her parents, and so the guilt had been theirs too, leaving only the suffering for the girl.” (TDHNT 199)
She at last receives comfort from her father who advises her to forget about her role in the death incidents of her brother and her mother. He further advises her that she should learn to encounter adversities as they come along in one’s life, and she must be prepared to meet the present problem of facing her husband Manu. Earlier the disillusionment in her marital life makes her look for other avenues. Even affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao are temporary substitutes for her unfulfilled marital life.

To Saru, Boozie is a handsome and masterful man. Everything about him right from his language, his swift progress through the hospital wards etc. appears to Saru, as if he does everything in perfect coordination. Later Saru realises that Boozie’s interest in Saru is not that of master and student but that of a man and woman. Though it looks strange to her, she responds fittingly to his flirtatious manner. Very soon their relationship reaches a stage where Boozie helps her with enough money to set up practice in a decent locality. She manages to fulfil her desire of attaining higher education and also better quality of life, which otherwise may not be possible for a common girl like her. Speaking her mind, Saru says:

“I told myself my relationship with this man couldn’t, wouldn’t hurt Manu. It was just a teacher-student relationship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me...that was just his mannerism and meant nothing. It had nothing to do with me and Manu.” (TDHNT 91)

Saru has contempt for Manu for not questioning her as to why Boozie has given her so much money for opening a new consulting room. She becomes more and more resentful of her husband, who deliberately closes his eyes to Boozie displaying his affection towards her in public, at the inauguration in her consulting room.

“I could feel the stares. Everyone’s except Manu’s. Who would not look at us? And I should have hated him then... not Manu, for he had done nothing then for which I could hate him, but this attractive, ravishingly masculine man who was doing this deliberately. Attracting attention to the two of us. But, funnily enough, it was not him I hated. It was Manu for doing nothing. This man... no, I could not hate him,
knowing what I did about him. That behind the facade of aggressive, 

virile masculinity there was nothing at all.”

Although Saru’s social and financial status grows, the no peace for her at her home. Her feelings on being economically independent individual are worse. In fact, economic independence, though asserted by feminists, brings no fulfillment to her. Another extramarital relationship of Saru is with Padmakar, often called as Padma. He was her class mate in medical college, whom she meets years later; medical practitioner. Padmakar forces to have more deep relationship with Saru, but after a few incidents, she dissuades him from doing so as she wants to bring an end to the relationship. This relationship is neither soothing comforting to her. She becomes clear eyed with no illusion left about love or romance, says she:

“And I? Now, I knew it was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love?Romance? Both, I knew too well were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of Our is neither love not romance, but sex. Fulfillment happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And me sex was now a dirty word.” (TDHNT 133)

Commenting on Saru’s relationship with the two men Kamini Dinesh says:

“In The Dark Holds No Terrors also there are other men, but the relationship gives no solace. On the other hand homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padma bring to the disillusioning realisation that there can be no happiness or fulfillment in these relationships. They cannot be an escape route from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has, finally to fall back on herself.” 6

Saru happens to meet her two childhood friends, Smita and Nalu. While Nalu is a spinster, who teaches at a college, Smita is housewife. If Nalu moulds herself with an air of dignity and confidence, Smita surrenders herself totally to her husband. Smita has given up her identity; her name is changed as Anju, short for Geetanjali, as her husband is fond of Tagore. Saru also despises Smita for her servile dependence on her husband. When she compares herself to Nalu, she doesn’t seem to be happy on being labelled as a woman who is fulfilled just because of her marriage and two children. She says “But that would be as stupid as calling me fulfilled because
I got married and I have borne two children.” (TDHNT 121) contrasting the joys and sorrows of a wife, a mother and that of a spinster, Saru thinks it is difficult to estimate the value of happiness, and fulfillment among them. Saru has contempt for the traditional concept according to which the sole purpose of a woman's existence is to please her husband.

“Everything in a girl’s life... was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male.” (TDHNT 163)

Saru remembers Mai Kaki’s advice to keep her hands soft and smooth, so that her, “husband will never let go of them.” (TDHNT 163) But Saru’s husband has let go of her hands because Saru has failed to please him. When invited by two students to speak on the topic, ‘Medicine as a profession for women’, Saru starts to rehearse an imaginary speech on the relationship that exist between a husband and a wife, and also imagines an old fashioned couple where the wife walks a few steps behind her husband.

“That’s important, very important because it's symbolic of the truth. A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he’s an M.A., you should be a B.A., if he’s 5’4 tall, you shouldn’t be more than 5’3” tall. If he's earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees.” (TDHNT 137)

In some other connection also, Saru expresses the same opinion:

“Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor- nurse, executive-secretary, Principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it isn’t worth it.”

“He’ll suffer, you’ll suffer and so will the children. Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it’s unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales till in your favour. God help, both of you.” (TDHNT 137)

Saru therefore advocates the feeling that women should pretend that they are smart, competent, rational or strong. Woman can nag, complain, henpeck and moan, but should show themselves
as strong personalities. “Don’t struggle, don’t swim against the tide. Go along with it; and if you drown nevertheless, well, that’s an easier death after all.” (TDHNT 137) A woman is expected to behave in accordance with whims and fancies of her husband. Economic independence and independent identity are not meant for a woman.

Acute confusion prevails upon Saru. She feels that she has done injustice to her mother, husband and children everybody else. When Saru goes away to her father’s house she does remember the little needs of the children, like sending Renu off to school every morning and covering Abhi withblanket every night. However, these thoughts do not compel her to go back to her house.

The wheel finally comes full circle. Saru tries to compromise with the situation and the novel ends with a tiny hope of resettlement. The psychology of a woman placed in such a situation is given a physical revelation. She receives a letter from Manu of his arrival. The bitter emotions strengthen further. It is not the scorn for her husband and a sense of vengeance that gathers storm, but her sense of guilt that sweeps her off her feet. She reacts to every situation and becomes sensitive to every sound, all the time conscious of Manu reaching and knocking at the door. She asks her father not to open the door when Manu comes, perhaps believing that after being tired of knocking, Manu would depart. At the same time, she waits for someone to come and support her:

“If only someone would tell her what to do, she would do it at once, without a second thought. It was strange that after all these years of having been in full control of her life now had this great desire to let go. To put herself in another’s hands.” (TDHNT 88)

Taking into consideration the personal life of a character, one accepts the fact that every individual fantasizes about sex. But in the realm of every fantasy, there is a tinge of reality. This reality is at times gloomy and at times it leads towards the fulfillment of emotions. Saru grows arid through the process of growing she inevitably comes across a number of novel situations which she could not have imagined, e.g. her entrance to the college life as a very simple, straightforward and studious girl, but later on, affected by the company of her friends, coming out as a totally changed person; her becoming a woman and all the time being reminded by her mother of the same:
“You should be careful now about how you behave. Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it’s only your father who’s around.” (TDHNT 55)

And ultimately she starts hating her own womanhood:

“I can remember closing my eyes and praying . . . oh god, let it not happen to me. Let there be miracle and let me be the one female to whom it does happen.” (TDHNT 55)

The agonizing feelings bred by such growth are monstrous. With the physical growth, she is, now, supposed to have passed one phase of life. The barriers of society spread their frightening tentacles over her. She feels abhorrent, helpless:

“A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my mother.” (TDHNT 55)

She develops hatred towards her mother who always comes in the way of her progress. The writer has shown the gap in the mother-daughter relationship. In other words, it is a conflict between the old and the young: the traditional and modern. The position of woman, that is underscored by author, appears to be a blend of acceptance and rejection; flexibility and rigidity; fantasy and reality; and above all volt and compromise. All these characteristics are inextricably blended in Saru who represents a section of society which can be termed as middle class in the modern industrial social structure. In her is a trauma that is logically produced by a bitter conflict between the imposed and the willed. She is brought up in a traditional atmosphere but the education she receives makes her a changed person with a rebellious attitude; towards tradition. As an educated young woman she does not accept anything without reason. Her mother almost forces her to stay within the four-walls of the house. She does not give her the permission to take admission to the medical college but Saru does not even listen to her:

“I’m not talking to you…You don’t want me to have anything. You don’t even want me to live.” (TDHNT 128)

Here, a kind of hatred towards the mother is shown as if the mother who puts all the restrictions on her daughter without considering the fact that the times have changed and the next generation
is passing through a transitional period where the daughter is sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

Now, education invokes in her a consciousness which was not present in the older generation. In many cases, as Maria Mies says:

“the non-conforming conduct of the women is not the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives.”7

This is exactly what we see in the character of Saru representing the middle-class working woman in modern India. She rebels against the traditions but ultimately tires to compromise with the existing reality. This is largely due to the fact that she-is passing through a transitional era. Thus the whole development of the novel can be observed in four phrases, i.e., flight from reality; frustration; submission; and ultimately an attempt to reconsolidate.

“And then the two came together, I knew where I was and what had happened. Panic and sensation came back simultaneously. I turned my head slightly, fearfully, and saw him beside me snoring softly. No more a stranger, but my husband.” (TDHNT 11-12)

This bitter experience of her protagonist which she to use as some sort of a prologue to the book inevitably brands her as a feminist of the top order which she is not. In fact her own confessions and assertions of her protagonist tell us something to the contrary/implying to the questions of an interviewer as to what extent does she consider herself a feminist, Deshpande says:

“I have no doubts at all that I am a feminist. In my own life, I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually, and mainly out of my own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I read books about it.”8
Similarly accommodating are the views of her protagonist Saru when towards the conclusion of the book she proclaims:

“They came to her then, all these selves she had rejected resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... persons spiked with guilt. Yes, she was all of them; she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again.” (TDHNT 220)

In fact, Saru’s revulsion to the physical act with her husband is something unexpected, as her marriage to Manu was her own decision. It was a love marriage much against the wishes of her mother.

Against the backdrop of centuries of male supremacy and consequent apathy for the girl child Saru’s revulsions against the attitude of her husband is something that is very natural. However, at the end she behaves like a typical Indian woman who in spite of all earlier bitterness cannot forget the marital bliss of early years even though that is very short lived. After all Indian women are famous for making sacrifices. They make sacrifices for everybody they consider to be their own and sometimes even for outsiders. And perhaps with this spirit of sacrifice she broods over her past and is filled with a sense of guilt and remorse! Obviously the protagonist through her such actions proclaims harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and conflicting selves which is the typical Indian attitude.

Siddharth Sharma is right when he says this about her:

“She is neither the typical Western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage.”

As an India author, Shashi Deshpande belongs to the saner group who choose marriage and motherhood even though her vociferous remarks against the creature called the husband, immediately surfaces to the mind
“...The dream, the nightmare, whatever it was, continue changing now, like some protean monster, into the horror of rape. This was not to be death by strangulation; it was a monstrous invasion of my body. I tried to move, twisting my body, wriggly under the weight that pinned it down. It was impossible. I was pinioned to a position of abject surrender of myself. I began, in sheer helplessness, to make small whimpering sounds, piteous cries. The small pains merged all at once into one large one and still the body above mine, hard and tense, went on with its rhythmic movements. The hands continued their quest for new areas of pain. Now the horror of what was happening to me was lost in the fierce desire to end it. I could not, would not bear it. I began to fight back, hopelessly, savagely.” (TDHNT 11-12)

And suddenly, when I thought I could bear it not longer, the body that was not mine relaxed. The release was so abrupt; it shocked me into an unfamiliar faintness. When the syncope wore off, I realized I was free. There was no weight pinning me down now. But I could not move. It was just not exhaustion, though there was that too. It was more as if my mind had deserted my shamefully bruised body, disowning it, making it insensate.

2. Roots and Shadows (1983)

For ages, woman lived under the protection of either parents or husband or her children. This pattern of living, even though made her life safe and smooth, in reality, drove her into an unenviable state of slavery and dependence. The new education has awakened her to her real self. As result of this, she starts craving for independent and self-reliant status in life.

And in order to achieve this, she begins to shed her timidity and shun abject surrender to the protective cover provided by man. The modern, educated young woman questions the man’s wilful unconcern for woman’s wishes, likes and dislikes. Until the sixties and seventies man alone was looked upon as bread-winner and woman was confined to the household. In the modern era, woman too makes money independently. She not only earns money but also attends to her household chores. Undoubtedly, the modern, educated young woman’s struggle against the age old slavery, suffering and suppression is a welcome development. But, this striving of the
modern woman to be free and self-reliant is often debilitated by her timidity and diffidence. In
the course of this crusade, she suffers from certain weaknesses and complexes which have been
very honestly highlighted by Indian women novelists. Their heroines are all agog to retain their
individuality in the teeth of “disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten their identity”.  

The novel deals with “a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It
depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with the male world and the society in
general.”

Indu comes back to her ancestral place from where against the wishes of her father and the other
members of the family had accepted so many years ago to get married person of her own choice.
She comes back to attend the funeral ceremony of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. The large
family is on the threshold of change though everybody unaware of it. And the key to their future
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lies in the hands of Indu.

The new education has gradually made her conscious of futility or emptiness of the various long-
preserved notion; taboos about the woman, and she has started opposing breaking them. And this
crusade at times makes her feel; and alienated. This new woman is Indu, the woman protagonist
of Shashi Deshpande’s first published novel Rootsand Shadows Indu, an educated young
woman, is highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent complete in herself. She
brushes aside all the age-old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society. As a motherless
child, she was tended by the members of the joint family never denied her any amount of care
and affection. Old Uncle, Kaka, Atya and other family members always cushioned her position in
the family. But now she finds the dominant Akka senior member and a mother surrogate in the
novel even the family to be a hindrance in achieving her goal of attaining independence and
completeness. Indu, from a tender age, has always hated Akka for her narrowmindedness. She
resents her for not going to the hospital as she says: “God knows what caste the nurses are...or
the doctors. I couldn't drink a drop of water there?" (RNS 21)
Indu is projected against the women belonging to the older generation. Thus, the writer has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in the Indian set-up. One set is represented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitra Kaki, Kamla Kaki, Atya, Sunanda Atya; and the other set is represented by Indu. To the old generation, a woman’s life is nothing

“but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren.” (RNS 128) And the ideal woman is the one who doesn’t have her own independent identity. “A woman who sheds her ‘I’ who loses her identity in her husband’s.” (RNS 54)

Indu rebels against the suffocating authority of Akka and the oppressive atmosphere of the family where women have no choice but to submit and accept their lot. Right from her childhood, it is dinned Indu’s mind by the women members of the family that she is a female and that she has to conform to the pattern of behaviour expected of females but Indu resents this:

“As a child, they had told me I must be obedient unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way; they said, for a female to live and survive.” (RNS 158)

Besides being an educated young woman, Indu is very sensitive to the situations. She aspires to become independent and complete in herself but finds so many hurdles coming in her way. She finds dominant Akka and her family to be a great hindrance to achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. When she studies in the college, Akka doesn’t allow her to meet the boys and cultivate friendship with them. So, later on, Indu leaves the house and gets married to Jayant, who is her own choice. We find that she leaves one house and enters another to be independent and complete, but ironically enough, soon she realises the futility of her decisions: “Jayant and I. ... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasize.” (RNS 14) She speaks about her own incompleteness thus:

“This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete: myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it. . That was somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone.” (RNS 34)
The exaggerated importance assigned to a woman in terms of virginity is also responsible to a great extent in enforcing strict restrictions on her movements as soon as she reaches the age of puberty and as the girl matures; her mother’s authority weighs more heavily upon her. Indu bitterly recollects how crudely the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her:

“My womanhood... I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day-I had grown up. “You’re a woman now”, Kaki had told me.“You can have babies yourself I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me, badly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And who had all the child’s unselfconsciousness about my own body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it. And don’t forget, she had ended, ‘for four days’ now you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything.” (RNS 79)

She starts fighting against her womanhood, she hates the utter feminity of the girl’s hostel where she resides, and narrates the incidents that reveal the tactlessness of her relatives in that period of traumatic, pubertal transitions. The idea that her body is unclean has been planted in her mind.

Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological function of the female as mother and has apathy towards bearing child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her.

Simone Beauvoir observes:

“For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals meaning and her feeling of shame appear. If they were already present and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on.” 13

Indu differs from Narmada, Atya, Kaki, Sumitra, Kamala, Sunanda and Kaku who follow tradition as a virtue. They strongly believe in age-old conventions and practices. She also differs from Mini who though educated, lacks will power hence, sacrifices her individuality. Though Mini is deeply aware of her peculiar position, she makes no efforts to come out of the tangles of
the society and be independent. Indu on the other hand, rebels against the narrow conventions more particularly, the tyrannical authority of Akka on matters of education, love and marriage. She reacts:

“...there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate”
(RNS 68), and here it is “A Declaration of Independence.” (RNS 68)

Defying, the traditional role she is expected to play, Indu seeks fulfillment in education and career. She works as a journalist for a woman’s magazine but gives it up out disgust for writing only about women and their problems starts working for another magazine. As Indu explains reason for shift:She stops working for the woman magazine:

“Women, women women ... I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the keys.”(RNS 85-86)

Indu strives to seek a new environment where nobody specially people like Akka, can exercise their wills on her. She marries Jayant, a man of different caste but of own choice and leaves her parental home. In her very meeting with Jayant, she is swept off her feet. He gives feeling of solidity and certainty. She hopes that her marriage with Jayant would enable her to realise the need “to belong”, to be “wanted”, “needed” and “loved” and, as she desired, the most primary thing for her is to own the freedom to express her true self to the world. But she painfully realise that she has walked into just another trap. She does not heed the warning of Akka, who has no good opinion of intercaste marriages,

“Such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages... it’s all right for a while. Then they realise....” (RNS 68)

Indu leaves her ancestral house and enters into another to be independent and complete but very soon, she realises the fruits of her decision. In the words of Indu:

“Jayant and I... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasise. I think of the cries that had filled me earlier... I want to be loved, I want to be happy. The cries are now stilled.” (RNS 13)
She feels that she had been deceived and made to hide her feelings “as if they were bits of garbage.” (RNS 38) Her marriage with Jayant suppresses her femininity and her human demands. She is physically and spiritually dissatisfied with her husband who takes her for granted and expects her “to submit.” Her love towards Jayant makes Indu to accept what he wants and does. Her love marriage degenerates into a mere psychological affair and makes her feel that she has abused her body’s sanctity. She realises that her marriage with Jayant has denied her of the fullness of experience and, therefore satisfaction or happiness. The paradox of the situation is that Indu is not completely happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot live without him. Indu speaks about her own incompleteness when she says:

“This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant I had not known it... that there was-somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant. And lost the ability to be alone.” (RNS 31)

Indu laughs at the idea of not calling one’s husband by his name as it shortens the age of the husband. Later, she realize that she too is not different from other women as she always wants Jayant to be with her. The only difference is her reason for thinking so. After she gets married, she does all the activities which her husband would like. She herself notices:

She says:

“When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant, when I dress I think of Jayant, when I undress I think of him. Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him. And I can't blame him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be. . . . Have become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own.” (RNS 54)

Being tied up in marriage with Jayant, Indu comes realise that it is because of him that her life is meaningful one view and also meaningless in another view. And she wonders why she is trying to please him all the time: “Have become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own.” (RNS 49)

Perhaps, marriage has taught her the things like deception and artificial show: “Her desire to assert herself had driven her from affection to hypocrisy.” Indu herself realizes: “I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see...I hid my response as if they were bits of
garbage.” (RNS 41) All these bitter facts of losing her identity into her husband frighten and scare her. The paradox of the situation is that she is not happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot live without him. She has achieved completeness with Jayant but she does not want this sort of completeness.

She has sworn never to conform to the concept of the ideal woman represented by her aunts and other tradition-oriented female relatives - the one who does not have an independent identity, a woman who shed her ‘I’ and loses her identity to her husband’s. But Indu realises that with her marriage to Jayant she has in fact conformed to the notion of the ideal woman. The conventional rituals performed by her orthodox female relatives in order to secure safety and long life for their husbands are ridiculed by Indu. Accordingly, she determined never to perform such self-effacing rituals that justify her existence only in relation with a man. But her introspective assessment of her marriage makes her realize that she is in reality not very different from her conventional relatives and that by shaping herself to suit her husband’s model of a wife, she is unconsciously falling in line with the traditional women performing self-effacing rituals, and she is dead set against.

Indu who considers herself independent and intelligent who is proud of her logical and rational thinking and who sets out to reform Indian womanhood, has become, after her marriage, one of those archetype submissive Indian woman whose identity is only an extension of her husband’s. Perhaps marriage has taught her things like deception and pretentious show. Her desire to assert herself has driven her from affection to hypocrisy. On the other hand, Jayant, in spite of his seemingly western style of life, behaves no different from average Indian male. Her marriage makes her feel that there was something shameful in total commitment.

“It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I’m like that, he turns away from me I’ve learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I’m passive. And unresponsive.” (RNS 83)

Consequently, Indu learns to repress her sexual desire to maintain the status quo in her marriage. While Jayant effectively desexualizes Indu in refusing to accept her sexual personality and indirectly moulds her identity according to his prescriptions, Indu articulates her sexual confusion, “A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is ashamed of it.” (RNS 83)
Indu realises that her overwhelming love for Jayant is disturbing and her total self-surrender to him is frightening. She fears that she is turning into an “ideal” Indian wife only obeying her husband’s wishes and fancies. At one stage she even contemplates leaving her husband, not because she doesn’t love him but because she loves him “too much” and is ashamed of her love and her total dependence on her husband. It makes her feel like an anachronism. She hopes she can be her whole self again by being away from him and living by herself. She says:

“Sometimes I wonder if I will leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be myself, my whole self again.” (RNS 88-89)

Indu recollects that she has surrendered herself to Jayant step by step, not mainly for love but to avoid conflict and that she has clung tenaciously to Jayant, to her marriage, not for love alone, but because she is afraid of failure and, moreover, she wants to show to the world and her family that she is a success. She resorts to deception by putting up a facade of happy married life which, as she feels, has taken its toll on personality. She looks upon marriage as a system which makes one so dependent. She considers love to be a big fraud, a hoax, a trap - a process of making one humble and dependent her. To her, “sexual instinct”, “maternal instinct”, “self love”, “interest” appear rational and meaningful. Among the many compromises that she has made in order to keep up resemblance of a happy marriage, the most distressing one is she has given up, her ambition of being a writer, on her own. Further, as a creative writer and working in a magazine, she loses her enthusiasm to write on being forced by the editor suppress facts and present a glossy picture to the readers. Angered by the editor's attitude, she is even more hurt when her husband, instead of supporting her, asks her compromise and commands her not to resign her job. He says:

“That’s life! What can one person do against the whole system! No point making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget have a long way to go.” (RNS 17)

When Indu is at the cross-roads of her life with her sense of certainty, confidence and assurance withering away, she gets the opportunity to go back to her ancestral home. In contrast to Indu, Mini, Indu’s cousin at her ancestral home, prefers to adopt the traditional life style. She seeks
refuge in the traditional ways of life, for there is no other way out for her. When Indu asks her about her choice of marrying Mini’s passive acceptance shocks her. Mini says:

“What choice do I have, Indu? ... of course I’m marrying him because there’s nothing else you can do.” (RNS 125)

Marriage, in the traditional Indian society, only means fear, agony and frustration on girl’s side. Indu learns from Mini that nothing could endure except compromise and that she has to learn to be content with her lot. In the words of Mini:

“Any man, Indu? Yes, any man. Any man who says ‘Yes.’ You don’t know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav - Kaka running around after eligible men... if the Horoscopes matched, there was the meeting to be Arranged. And all those people coming... and Asking all kinds of questions... and they would say, “she’s not modern enough”... “she's too fashionable for us.” Or too short, Or too tall, Or too dark, Or something... And I, feeling as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl... I am tired Indu. I don't care what kind of a man he is. Once we are married, and he becomes by husband, none of his flaws will matter.” (RNS 126)

While staying at her ancestral house, Indu reviews the things of the past. She learns that Akka’s life is a stunning example of how a woman has been subjected to frustration and disappointment. As Atya narrates Akka’s silenced streaks to Indu, she realises that she has not really made good effort to understand and analyse Akka and her behaviour. She understands how, in the name of child marriages, women like Akka were treated inhumanly and beastly.

Indu was brought up in a family where tradition under the patriarchal roof is strongly supported and straying from it is considered a treacherous act. On the contrary, since education and modernity are slowly creeping into the younger generation, especially among the people like Indu, tradition is anathema to them. Kaka tells Indu:

“...elders were to be feared, respected, and obeyed. We used to sit up when they entered the room, and touch their feet when we went out; ... You youngsters now... you’re a different breed altogether.” (RNS 46)
Indu knows how women in the patriarchal social set-up are subjected to ill-treatment and humiliation and how the situation becomes even worse when unfortunately a woman loses her husband. The burden of widowhood is forcibly thrust and violation of the set rules condemns the woman's life to the position of outcasts. Widowed women should get their heads tonsured; otherwise, their status is reduced and orthodox widows would not eat food cooked by them.

Indu’s decision to cut off all family ties in a conscious choice to break out of the confining cage of subordinate womanhood. She is cognizant of the fact that her female relations have succumbed to the dictates of male authority and she says:

“...years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so that no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper; movement so that you can no more move out of your of no-choices.” (RNS 125)

She is made deeply aware of her own shortcoming terms of being a complete woman in the eyes of the conventional women who have their own standards of judging people.

“Nothing about me... my academic distinctions, my career, my success, my money...none of these would impress her. To her I was just a childless woman. To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand children... they were still for them only successes a woman could have. I almost forgotten this breed of women since I had left home.” (RNS 116)

She refuses to be a mother of a child, though acknowledges the truth of the maternal instinct. She does welcome a child wholeheartedly. Her non-real marriage non-real love makes her feel trapped in a negative situation as it starts to shatter her positive struggle to be independent for selfhood and intellectual liberation. Female sexuality feared as a threat which undermines a woman's own honour and that of her family. Religious tenets and cultural ethics always emphasized the child-bearing function of woman and condemned her pursuit of sexual pleasure. Woman is, therefore, enforced to be sexually passive and submissive even towards her own spouse and as a quester for sexual satisfaction, woman is not ethically accepted. Finding sexual personality repressed within her marital relation Indu strives for expression and acceptance through an extra-marital affair with her cousin, Naren:
“I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought and it will be like erasing-the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don’t need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado.” (RNS 152)

This bold assertion of her has sparked off contradictory statements. In the words of P. Rama Moorthy:

“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. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu’s exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of human existence.” 14

But P.Bhatnagar has a totally different perspective. In fact what Indu has committed is never to be accepted in a traditional family set up. She says....

“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 modern Indian woman?” 15

Perhaps by presenting Indu in a more deliberate way, Shashi Deshpande answers the double standards adopted in our society, where men alone take liberties seeking sexual pleasure even though they are married. According to Manu, a wife must ever remain devoted to her husband and always please him while he is alive. After his death, she should never think of any other man. Even though the husband be of bad character and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be constantly worshipped as god by a faithful wife. A vicious husband must be worshipped, but bad wife may at any time be superseded by another wife. Though the widow is enjoined to remain faithful to her husband's memory, a husband after having lost his wife may marry again and again. In such a society, the sexual emancipation on the part of Indu is evidently an assertion of her individuality, her newly emerged identity. 16 Impressed by Naren’s air of detachment, she feels she may achieve her freedom and fulfilment if she can become detached like him. Her mind
keeps harping on this theme of detachment and she wonders if she will ever reach that stage, a stage of “... no passions, no emotions and unruffled placidity.”

Indu experiences a sense of freedom in her relationship with Naren. She feels a need to open up to him, and therefore, she talks about herself and her failures. The newly acquired sense of freedom that Naren’s friendship gives her, makes her give in to her natural impulses. She who had rejected Naren in the beginning when he tried to make love to her saying she is essentially monogamous, but, later, offers herself twice to Naren with total abandonment. Though she doesn’t mind love-making as a sin or crime, the next day she starts thinking of the enormity of what she had done:

“I will now brood on my sin, be crushed under a weight of guilt and misery.” (RNS 155)

Indu tries to reason out each and every action. Her mind starts musing over the reasons for giving her body to Naren. She anatomises each and every action in terms of situation that paved way for her involvement with Naren mind further oscillates over matters like sin, crime, and wrong.

“Apart from wronging Jayant? Wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, dishonourable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with Naren.” (RNS 188)

Indu doesn’t believe in love. To her there is no such thing as “love” in real life though it exists in books and movies. According to her “it is a big fraud.” It is not the only thing in life. And if somebody believes in it, he or she is trapped and becomes humble and dependent. The concept of love is false for Indu, so Naren asks her what the truth is. At this her answer is:

“The sexual instinct . . . That is true. The material instinct ... that is true too. Self interest, self love . . . they are the basic truths, you remember Devdas? I saw it with some friends. They sobbed when he
died for love, but I could have buked. A grown man moaning and crying for love. God! A grown man moaning and crying for love. God! how disgusting!” (RNS 173)

Young modern women like Indu are sandwiched between tradition and modernity. As a child (girl) she was always told to be obedient, submissive and unquestioning. She used to laugh and always thought that she would never try to show what she was not. But marriage changes everybody. To her great shock and surprise, she found that Jayant had not only expected her to submit but had taken her submission for granted and she also, without being aware of it, submitted herself to him step by step in the name of love. When the realization came to her, she found it was not love but an adjustment as she never wanted conflict in her married life. As it was a love-marriage, she did not want to give any chance to her parents to blame her for the step taken by her. She wanted to prove her success. We see her pathetic state:

“The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this . . . that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure, I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success…And so I went on lying, even to myself.” (RNS 115)

Here, the writer has very rightly and minutely put forth the situation in which young modern women, who are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, who leave behind the conventions and take the initiative to join modernity, are entangled.

According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one’s own conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as action. As O.P. Bhatnagar says:

“In the end, comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life.”

But, unfortunately, she herself has failed to do so either for fear of failure or because of timidity. The very fact makes her see herself as a sinner and deceiver and becomes a cause of her sufferings.
Those who leave behind the convention and take the initiative to join modernity are entangled as Maria Mies observes:

“The non-conforming conduct of the women is not the consequence of an external necessity but of a changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the equality between man and woman, but want to right to an individual life and the rights to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives.”

After Naren’s death, Indu discovers through old uncle that beneath the veneer of his care-a-damn attitude, Naren was a person with strong feelings, expectations and disappointments and that he preferred disappointment and suffering to negation of feelings. She also learns from the old uncle that one need not be ashamed of their attachments, as nobody can escape from them and that attachments and love are the law of life. He reminds her that the world is made up of interdependent parts, therefore depending on others is natural, and need not be regretted. Old uncle also makes her realise that freedom and fulfilment can be achieved by those who have the right perception of life and abide by certain rules of life. There have to be some rules so that life can have both dignity and grace. One can always find measures of freedom within these rules. This knowledge gives Indu a new perception of life. She understands the true meaning of freedom and fulfilment, for marriage to her appears to be only a means to procreate:

“Behind the facade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought “together... to meet, make and reproduce so that the generations might continue?” (RNS 3)

Another ambition or ideal dream for Indu is to attain the state of “detachment” and “loneliness” and be perfect in herself. To achieve this she had made Naren her reference group. She always wanted to be like Naren—completely detached and non-involved. However, she wonders if she would ever reach the stage of no passions and ambitions and being satisfied. To her surprise, she finds herself involved and attached in many ways. She expects others to show concern for her, e.g., she wishes that her parents invite them (Indu and Jayant) formally to their place though her father does not find it necessary to give a formal invitation. In the same way, she expects too much from Jayant which results in frustration:
“I am grading expectations down. Each month, each day, I expect less and less and less from . . . why can’t I compromise for what he can give . . . deep affection, yes; total, absolute commitment.” (RNS 61)

According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one’s own conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as in action. Indu realises her position in her ancestral house, the responsibilities, fears and frustrations do not touch her. The turmoil and distaste that had filled her slowly begin to seep out of her. She is viewed as an assertive woman with an emerging new self. Through Naren’s preaching of detachment, she is able to rebuild her lost vision. She suddenly realises what she lacks, “I knew in that instant what it was that my life had lacked. It was the quality of courage.” (RNS 150)

Slowly Indu realises that there was nothing shameful in her feelings for Jayant. It did not make her less of a human being. The whole world is made up of interdependence wants to project her true self to Jayant instead of a pretentious one she has been showing to him all these There is an air of affinity and responsibility in the things does. Indu reflects:

“Here, in this house, in this family, was a role waiting for me. A role that I could, perhaps, act out more successful the one I had tried until now. For, had I not, so very felt myself just a mouthing, grimacing puppet, dully saying the lines I had to, feeling, actually, nothing? Had I not felt Myself flat, one-dimensional, just a blurred figure Merging into the background? Whereas here, I Would stand sharp and clear...” (RNS 143)

Indu is now able to reconsider her feelings towards who in her opinion was “indomitable and bigoted”. Indu realizes that Akka knew that she would be able to indomitable courage and strength thus fulfilling responsibilities and that she must seek freedom with bonds of obligations and responsibilities. For Indu wants to live without fear..., “fear of being unloved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing without the fear of failure.” (RNS 174)

Akka’s decision of making Indu guardian to her property leads to much consternation among her relatives. Their wants are unending, their love is hypocritical, their affection is filled with jealousy, hatred and envy. As Indu observes:
“There are strong and the weak. And the strong have to dominate the weak. It’s inevitable. And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones. That’s why she put the burden on me. And now, it is an obligation. I have to carry the burden. And to do that, I have to be hard. If I’m soft, I’ll just cave in.” (RNS 159)

To a woman like Indu these feelings are different to stomach. It is a kind of defeat and surrender, for the truth is that in the politics of a family, one can see their quest for money and power. Indu is now an autonomous being, able of, through trial and error, and now she is heading to own way to salvation. Indu’s musings on life and her problems also reveal the truth that she has been running after shadows (illusions) in search of happiness, and that the source of her unhappiness is her roots (tradition). She has been told since her childhood about her role in life as a female. She has rebelled against this traditional role for fear of becoming like one of her predecessors at home. She tries to prove to the world that she is first and foremost an individual, who is capable of making her own decision, and achieving success. It is a fear of suppression by the patriarchal society that makes her fight, turn aggressive and assert herself. “I would be most emphatically myself. Indu” (RNS 143). Until and unless the roots, which are the source of her fears, are not uprooted, Indu cannot achieve fulfilment, she therefore decides to destroy the roots, eliminate her fears, confront her problems with courage and what she feels is right. She also learns to see life in a fresh light. Indu extends support to Vital, an orphan living with the family. In fact, Indu seems to be grown up with better understanding of the situation than that existed earlier in the family.

Indu’s search now is towards detachment. Her mind keeps in tune to the theme of ‘detachment and loneliness’. In her heart of hearts, she wonders whether she would ever reach the stage of ‘no passions, no emotions, and unruffled placidity’. She realises that she has attached and involved herself in multiple ways like any other human being. She also yearns for the support of her family members. She expects others to show concern for her.

Similarly when Naren says that he is going back to his work, the word echoes in her mind and she feels like a deserted and abandoned child. She tries to draw herself more towards the sense of detachment as was emphasized by Naren very often but realises painfully her failure and shakes off the feelings of detachment. She is aware that what she want is not “this very not – caring” but
involvement. “I wanted involvement, not detachment” (RNS 89) Similarly when Naren says that he is going back to his work, the word echoes in her mind and she feels like a deserted and abandoned child. She tries to draw herself more towards the sense of detachment as was emphasized by Naren very often but realises painfully her failure and shakes off the feelings of detachment. She is aware that what she want is not this “very not – caring” but involvement “I wanted involvement, not detachment” (RNS 89)

She affirms:

> “Now I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary uneven edges of myself. And free. But not detached. I would, I knew, never hanker after detachment any more The very word brought back Naren's eyes as he lay on the grass near the tank. Detachment... it was for the dead, not the living.” (RNS 186)

This prompts P:Bhatnagar to comment that:

> “It was Naren who made her realize that she was not as she had believed earlier, detachment and involvement. Naren’s detachment made it possible for him to remain unaffected by anything. He could never be anybody’s husband or beloved. Her rejection of him had left him completely untouched, where as she knew she could shatter Jayant completely with her rejection which made Jayant so precious to her. No, she did not want detachment and non-involvement which are meant for the dead not for the living.” 19

Indu now understands that her love is not a restricting but a uniting bond which shall lead her to lose herself to Jayant, so that their lives shall be full of harmony and peace. Indu’s vision gets cleared as she decides to reveal to Jayant her whole self, her weaknesses and her strengths, her virtues and vices as well. This understanding makes her position clear in her family. As Jayant says:

> “But then, new pillars take place of the old. You’re a pillar now yourself, don’t you know Am I? Yes, that’s true.” (RNS 11)
Indu learns that there is beauty and security through reconciliation. She is happy when Jayant tells he is prepared to publish her work if no publisher comes forward. She cries, “Happiness, I never knew it was made up of such little things.” (RNS 13) Harmony and understanding of the mind that facilitates between conflicting selves and the opposing ideals is the true basic Indian attitude. Indu is exercising her potential self to a fuller use by asserting as an individual, pushing aside all her fears and doubts about herself. Moreover she continues to maintain her individuality in a house full of tradition bound men and women. Indu’s predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary Indian society where the society from the old cultural modes is in transition moving along with new socio-economic forces acting effectively on the pattern of human lives. Indus represents any woman placed in the transitional period who is torn between age old tradition and individual views. She is fully aware that these bonds are unreasonable and yet she wants to be bound by them as the typical traditional woman. She knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realizes that it would be an act of wisdom to keep the traditional family ties without losing her individuality.

With the realization that she loves and needs Jayant she decides to get back to him taking care not to be influenced by him in career matters. She wants to restart her life built on the foundation of honesty and she decides to be her true self in her relationships with Jayant, she doesn't want to be like the one whose feelings are suppressed just to please Jayant. She achieves freedom and does what she thinks should be doing. She also decides not to share with her husband affair with the dead Naren as she thinks that this has nothing to do with Jayant. She returns “home”, to Jayant “equipped with that quality of courage” necessary to face the challenge of identity crisis that her marriage with Jayant had always posed - returns to suffer, to question and to find roots.”

Commenting on Indus decision to start writing according to her own wishes and not to use Akkas money to enrich herself, Usha Tambe says, “The important point is that she is making independent decision.”

Indu asserts her position as a human being equal to that of a man and does not want to submit herself to anyone’s dictates. This is the long and the short of her bitter struggle through conflicting trends between the age-old traditions and the emerging new ideas. The author seems to have carved out the character of Indu to effectively depict her own reflections on the travails of a modern Indian women passing through the contemporary transitional stage in the evolving
social values. Sarabjit Sandhu succinctly summarises this aspect of the matter in the following words:

“Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the West.”

Indu’s acceptance of western values and her search for liberty with a precondition of unfettered growth and maturity of personality, despite the insidious conflict between tradition and modernity, ultimately results in her emergence as a human being evolving basically as a woman of determination not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society. S.P. Swain appropriately sums up Indu’s growth when he comments thus:

“The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman’s masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening visions of the feminine self’s struggle for harmony and sanity... She is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer.”

In the old family pattern, as Shashi Deshpande has put it, “... the two met briefly only in the darkness of the night.” So there was hardly any occasion for conflict. But with husband and wife constantly thrown together in the present pattern, and with the wife sharing in many of the responsibilities, which were earlier supposed to be only his, there has arisen the problem of incompatibility maladjustments, expectations and despair. The society continues to be male dominated and the attitude towards women remains the same. Women are, however, becoming more and more conscious of the various emancipation movements, hence their predicament.

The way an intelligent and sensitive person like Indu, who was so particular about her affections, is made by the writer to resolve his 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. It leads us to wonder whether the morals of the
women have really gone down so low that they commit this sin only to prove that they do not lack courage, and whether this is really representative of the modern Indian women.

Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the West. There was a time when the Indian woman was hailed as a “Pativrata”, “a Sati” and something which has to be protected by man, but now she is a changed person who is aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her individuality, her place and role in the family and society. Indu represents this very woman. And now the question before the society is whether to reject and condemn her or to encourage and cooperate with her in her efforts to establish a new image.


Shashi Deshpande is one of the prominent contemporary, woman writers in India, writing in English. Her novels raise important issues including: a woman’s quest for self; an investigation into the female psyche; an understanding of the mysteries of life; a woman’s encounter with the difficulties in the contemporary Indian society. The women in her novels are interrogating and defining their identities as a wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and above all as human beings. Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors, If I Die Today are few of her works which mark the beginning of the quest of woman for herself. The theme finds a fine treatment in her later novel That Long Silence (1989) for which she was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award.

That Long Silence is the story of Jaya, the protagonist, who remains a sufferer in her childhood and adulthood. In That Long Silence, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the irony of a woman writer who is also a young house wife. Being a writer she is supposed to present her views and ideas before the society but still she remains silent probing into her past, struggling with her present and trying to establish a rapport with her future. She is an intellectual who finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men.

The novel opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their well-settled, comfortable house to their old house in Dadar, Bombay, where they had stayed immediately after getting married when their financial condition was not good. They shift into their old apartment in order
to escape the scene as Mohan has been caught in some business malpractice and an inquiry is in progress. Here, in a small old flat, Jaya gets out of touch with her daily schedule and becomes an introvert. She sits deep in contemplation, thinking of her childhood and tries to analyze herself.

Consequently, her husband loses his status, and she her identity, her selfhood. She comes to realise as follows:

“real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces.” 24 (TLS 1)

From the above text it is clear that Jaya is a fragmented self with a tormented consciousness. Evidently, she does not know her identity and does not enjoy individuality of her own. She sees herself as someone's daughter, wife and mother, having no status of her own. She therefore says:

“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.” (TLS 2)

The last clause of the last name of infanticide, and unquestionably suggests the unethical practice on the part of a wife especially when she maintains perfect secrecy about it. If we read between the lines, the secrecy is a pointer to the lack of freedom for the wife.

As Adele King in her book-review says: “Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.” 25

Jaya, to begin with, is a “conservative, educated, middle-class smiling placid, motherly woman” (TLS 15-16) who learns to suppress her own wishes and act according to her husband’s. She who cannot dare to protest, (“I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts. Only silence”. (TLS 143)

She has finally unlearned her silence, refuses to be led by nose and affirms with confidence, “I’m not afraid any more.” (TLS 191)

Jaya’s husband, Mohan, is an engineer who cares for money, status and material comforts. Working in the purchase section of his office, he prospers well, looks arrogant and brash. Unfortunately, he is caught taking commission and an enquiry is on. He has to leave his Churchgate bungalow to Jaya’s humble Dadar flat. He takes her so much for granted that she is not consulted about shifting. Yet she acquiesces to his decision and follows him. However, Jaya seems to have gained confidence as he begins to lose it being in trouble. When Mohan demands
the key, Jaya refuses to hand it over to him. She opens the door herself symbolising her refusal to be servile, She is aware that “It was not he who had relinquished his authority, it was I who no longer conceded any authority to him.” (TLS 9)

Her Dadar flat is in no way comparable to her elegant, well-furnished Churchgate home. Yet, she is perfectly at ease here, relating herself easily to her neighbors and servants. Away from the routine, she is now prepared to look at herself with utmost objectivity and examine her relationship with her husband. Adele King observes, “Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time-she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.”

Emulating Mohan’s mother and sister, she tries to adjust and compromise with her lot though every compromise shatters her individuality. “She surrenders herself so totally that she is afraid of expressing her likes and dislikes. Now she is a stereotyped housewife who is nervous, incompetent, needing male help and support”. (TLS 76)

“Outwardly she is a satisfied housewife married to an apparently caring man, with a comfortable home, with no dearth of material comfort. But on scrutiny, it is revealed that to achieve this stage of fulfillment as a wife, Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refuses to fit in with her image as a wife and mother besides a failed writer”. As Suman Ahuja observes:

“Jaya caught in an emotional, eddy, endeavors to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying, albeit in vain, to rediscover her true self, which is but an ephemera... an unfulfilled wife, a disappointed mother and failed writer.”

On the occasion of Raveti’s birthday, Jaya as well as her daughter, Rati, feel that Mohan loves his niece Raveti more than Ms own daughter. But she does not say anything to Mohan as he only dismisses it as her “writer’s imagination” and nothing more. She always wishes to proceed as per her husband’s wish.

Generally, a woman’s identity is defined by others, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e., as a daughter, as a wife, as a mother, etc. The question “what a woman does” is never asked, but “who she belongs to” is always considered important. She doesn’t have an identity of her own. Her name keeps on changing according to the wishes of others. In That Long Silence, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya
and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born and Suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means a “soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman.” (TLS 16) Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. The former symbolizes revolt and the latter submission. The dreams of her childhood, to change the ascribed situation of woman resulting in achieving her goals, are shattered by the environment, the surroundings, and above all by the society which imposes all sorts of restrictions on women. She is absolutely helpless and is unable to do anything to improve her situation. Ultimately, she tries to adapt herself to the main current. She longs to be called an ideal wife. She revolts in silence. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and he calls it “strength”: “He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender.” (TLS 36)

All this certainly doesn’t show a natural and harmonious relationship between the two when we see that one is unable to express his or her real feelings to the other. Their physical relationship always ends up with Mohan’s question whether he has hurt her. It obviously shows a forced relationship and not a natural one. Jaya doesn’t immediately react to the situation but the reader is informed through the flashback technique used by the author. Lying alone in a small house, her mind travels through the past and the present and thus covers the whole span of her life. At times the author uses the technique of stream-of-consciousness to project the minds of the characters, and thus making the story authentic and realistic.

Ruminating on the past, Jaya sees how her marriage has reduced her to a mere automation. She realizes how she wasted away the most valuable time of her life in arranging and re-arranging things, dusting, polishing, washing, cleaning the fridge and changing the sheets. She is bewildered to find in her diaries that she had spent her life engrossed in such trivialities as what she bought, how much paid for it, the dates the children's schools had begun, the servants absence, the advance they had taken, etc.

Jaya, as a girl, was taught by her father to have confidence in herself. He named her Jaya which stands for Victory and has encouraged her to be resilient and courageous. He has made her feel that she is someone special, and someone different from the other girls who would normally becoming housewives. He would dream that Jaya either bags an international award or goes to
Oxford. However, his untimely death shatters her dreams and makes her to reality that she is after all like any other middle class girl destined to be a wife and a mother.

When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she at all times, tries her best to follow his advice. It also throws light on her being closer to her father than to her mother. Even when her mother scolds her or questions her going out and returning home late, she complains against her mother to her father. Social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man. Generally, a woman’s identity tends to be defined by others. Due to her sensitive nature, Jaya is very particular about moulding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied. In the very beginning of the novel, we see that she tries to reason out with her father as to why she should not listen to the songs broadcast on the radio, but ultimately she keeps silent, suppressing her desire.

As a child she was chided by her grandmother for asking too many questions was told that no husband could be comfortable with a woman who asked question and retorts. It is ironical that although Jaya has no question or retorts for Mohan, theirs is no comfortable relationship. Her early training at home has made her obedient and submissive towards her husband. Her relatives taught her the importance of being with a husband.

   “a husband is like a sheltering tree. And it was as if she had said 'mau' to me. I ignored her. After so many years, the words came back to me. A sheltering tree. Without the tree you're dangerously unprotected and vulnerable.”  (TLS 32)

And Jaya proceeds to “keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies”.  (TLS 32)  Jaya, since her childhood, has designed her life in according family member's desires. She marries Mohan not out choice but out of convenience. He is from same caste, decent looking and has a good job. Jaya has no reason to reject him. She says: “And, if there had been no reason why I should married Mohan, there had been no reason not to marry him either.”  (TLS 93)  As a girl Jaya is not very practical and she romanticises love. But when she grows up into a young woman, circumstances make her look at marriage practically, not romantically.
Generally, a woman’s identity is defined in terms of her relationship with man as a daughter, a wife and a mother. It means virtually a woman doesn’t have an identity of her own. In keeping with the ritual of re-naming the bride on the wedding day as in some Brahmin communities, Jaya also has been renamed as ‘Suhasini’ by Mohan. ‘Suhasini’ means a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman, who makes herself loving and also lovingly nurtures her family. With this new name, it appears that the light-spirited and courageous Jaya has been reduced to mere proud housewife and mother. Jaya wants to retain her own name given by her father, meaning victory. Her refusal to adopt the name ‘Suhasini’ becomes manifestation of resistance to the stereotyping that is inflicted on every woman in the Indian society. However, Jaya’s rejection of the name ‘Suhasini’ now remains as a token of victory as she cannot afford to insist on for long as she has been taught to regard her husband as a tree of projection and so represses her anger and resentment.

Jaya has abundant resources within to become a good writer. In the words of Vimala Rama Rao:

“Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English fiction who poses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is an achievement” 28

In the early years of her marriage, Jaya has been on the threshold of acquiring name as a creative writer of some merit. It is Mohan who has been encouraging her to write. In fact, he introduces her to editors of various papers and magazines. On Mohan’s advice, she begins writing middles, “light humorous pieces about the travails of a middle-class housewife.” (TLS 148-149) these mere skimmings over life give her any satisfaction. She is an intense thinking woman longing to confront life through her fiction. She has made a good beginning with a story about a man:“...who could not reach out to his wife except through her body?” (TLS 144)

This has won a prize for its realistic portrayal of life. Yet Mohan assumes that the story portrays their personal life. He is very apprehensive that people of his acquaintance may assume that he is the kind of person portrayed in the story. But Jaya knows that there is no truth in his accusation, still she does not try to reason with Mohan, as she does not like to risk her relation with him. Jaya says:
“Perhaps, if Mohan had been angry, if he had shouted and raged at me, if he had forbidden me to write, perhaps would have fought him and gone on. But he had only shown me his hurt. And I had not been able to counter that. I had relinquished them instead, all those stories been taking shape in me because I had been scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage.” (TLS 144)

Yet her writing lacks the intensity of expression which troubles Jaya. Kamat, her neighbour on the first floor, comes to her rescue. He analyses her stories objectively and tells her how she could make them “more forceful and hitting.” (TLS 148)

Kamat also tells her that she has been feeding on wrong sentimental notion, “women are the victims”(148)... He rebuilds her morale and suggests her to send her writings women's magazines. Kamat who is a hard critic knows that Jaya is capable of giving greater credence to the wives, mothers and aunts and says:

“I never can imagine you writing this. This you, I mean, I can see the woman who writes this…, he’d narrowed eyes as if focusing on some vision, she’s plump good humoured, pea brained but shrewd, devious; skimming over life…”(TLS 149)

Jaya is unhappy that the writer in her could not come to light in the estimation of Mohan to whom she “… had been no writer, only an exhibitionist” (TLS 144). She, however stop writing. But she writes the kind of stuff which pleased the publisher and made her husband feel proud of her as a writer, but she herself has fallen like animposter. She writes a column for a woman's magazine where a character called ‘Seeta’ says and does things in which Jaya does not believe herself.

“That column, yes, it had made me known. My profile silhouetted in stark black that accompanied each article frightened me each time I saw it. It was like seeing someone masquerading as myself, or as if I was masquerading as the woman who wrote that column.” (TLS 119)
It caters to the taste of Mohan, editors and readers. But later on, in her moments of self-analysis and self-scrutiny, she realises that the Seeta column—a patriarchal construct, no doubt—is:

“the means through which I had shut the door, firmly, on all those women who invaded my being, screaming for my attention; women...I could not write about, because they might resemble Mohan's mother, or aunt, or my mother, or aunt. Seeta was safer.” (TLS 149)

Jaya, suppressed at every stage of her life, compromises to conform to the role of an ideal Indian woman. In order to become an ideal wife, she has to snip off the bits of her that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. As a result, she has been masquerading not only as the writer of ‘Seetha’ but also as ‘Suhasini’.

Jaya smother her despair at being forced to live a life of deception. She feels that she will ‘break down’, that she can't go on, and ‘can't cope’ but does not give expression to these feelings because of her fears—her fear of hurting Mohan and jeopardizing her marriage, her fear of destroying the veneer of the happy family she tries to project and her fear of failing as a writer.

In the Indian context, marriage is absolutely a sacrosanct contract and the images of the devoted wife and husband conforming to the concept of ‘ardhanarishwara’ have been held up as the imminent reality of the relation between the sexes. Discussing gender, Catherine Stimpson says:

“Cultural laws of gender demand that feminine and masculine must play off against each other in the great drama of binary opposition. They must struggle against each other, or complement each other, or collapse into each other in the momentary, illusory relief of the androgynous embrace. In patriarchal cultures, the struggle must end in the victor of the masculine; complementarily must arrange itself hierarchically: androgyny must be a mythicfiction.”

Jaya, more or less, feels in the same way when she says:

“Man and woman- it was then that I realised the deep chasm between the two. They are separated for ever, never more than at the moment of total physical togetherness.” (TLS 98)
Marriages in India “... never end, they cannot – they are a state of being”. (TLS 127) This is mainly because of the necessity of conforming to cultural edicts. As a result, marriage seldom corresponds to the personal experience or aspirations of the individuals involved so that the relationship is often like Jaya’s description of her own marriage. “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.” (TLS 7)

Sometimes, Jaya appears to be not very different from other women - Nayana, who despises her drunkard husband but craves for a son; Mukta, the widow who Mohan’s mother, who suffers her husband’s humiliation silently and Jeeja, who thinks that a woman without kumkum on the forehead is nothing. When the choice of selection comes between her husband and family, unhesitantly Jaya chooses to be with her husband, however assertive independent individual she may be. She holds on to her marriage and sees Mohan and herself as a pair of bullocks yoked together. In her own description, her married life is:

“A pair of bullocks yoked together ... a clever phrase, but can it substitute for the reality? A man and a woman for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat preserved 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.” (TLS 8)

The image of the pair of bullocks yoked together suggests that yoked bullocks should share the burden, between themselves, but no one knows whether they love each other or not. The image of the beasts performing their assigned duties mechanically undermines the relationship of husband and wife, who are united in marriage for love, but not for leading a mechanical life which results in ending up in mutual hatred and distrust.

The loveless married life which causes the wife and the husband to drift away from each other results in total failure. By implication, the character of Jaya represents modern woman's ambivalent attitude to married life. It is only by negating her own personality that a woman who is powerless in patriarchal order can survive. Jaya in order to maintain her marriage as a happy one, slowly transforms herself to this ideal of womanhood, where she learns to repress her anger. Jaya always works up to please her husband. Jaya even transforms her appearance to suit his
idea of a modern woman cuts her hair and wears dark glasses. She ultimately gets so completely absorbed into the family fold that from a fiercely independent woman she is transformed into the stereotype of a woman. Jaya desperately clings to her husband as if her life depends on him. At times she is beset with the fear that something may happen to Mohan and Jaya feels:

“The thought of living without him had twisted my insides. His death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. If he had been a little late coming home I had been sure he was dead. By the time he returned I had, in my imagination, shaped my life to a desolate widowhood.” (TLS 96-97)

Jaya’s story, in the larger context, is the story of generations of women. She accepts the reality of the situation and her existence, in relation to her family. Jaya has no necessity nor has she a wish to look outside; she wants to be safe looking after her husband and children. The outside world has so far not, affected her life, though at times she feels dissatisfied with her life.

Jaya, in search of an individual identity, turns back ruthlessly on Kusum, and she fails to show understanding has not maintained any human relationship with Kamati in hour of the need. Further, Jaya realizes that this reaching beyond the self is not a deviation from womanliness but a means of fulfillment, to find her identity as an individual. Jaya learns to reorder the relationship with her parental family, husband, children and dependents. The memories of the past modify her expectations about the present.

The relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and enduring. But this relation between Jaya and Mohan is an epitome of failure and an emblem of disgust, disappointment and depression. This is so because there was no love between them. This disgust of living with a man who does not love the woman the way she expects him to, is a burning problem the educated woman has to face in the contemporary society. Marriage in India means marrying the husband's family traditions. The psychological and social realities in which women live have remained virtually unchanged.

This lovelessness in her marriage draws Jaya towards Kamat, a middle-aged lonely intellectual who is not rich or socially significant as Mohan. But he is warm, friendly and companionable. He treats Jaya as an equal and Jaya is completely at ease in his company, sharing with him
things which she cannot tell others including Mohan. Her intimacy with Kamat is characterised by a spontaneity ease, but more important in their relationship is perfect understanding and friendship between them. That is why his sudden death is a great blow to her.

For Indian women marriage and motherhood are considered mandatory for fulfillment and happiness. One of the primary tests of gender differentiation is the dominance of a man over his wife, the superiority of the male over and every woman is to endorse this ethics in the relationships with man. Jaya is the representative of this unequal status woman in our society

In the words of Tapan Basu,

“...Jaya who has input, a life time in surrender of her will to social and customs that had relegated women to a second class status”. 

The introspective and inward-probing Jaya represents girls brought up in middle-class families in the post – Independent India. Parents in this class inculcate in a certain duality, sometimes unconsciously: on the hand impulsive desire to be emancipated and liberated and on the other hand an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative Shakuntala Bharvarni aptly comments thus

“The women of today, therefore, speaking the language of psychology, has a near schizophrenic personality; one side steadily “accepts” while the other craves to speak, to think and express the life of the mind.”

Jaya is caught in this dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife to her husband and secondly, struggling express the emotions of women’s experience, but seldom expressing them in a male-dominated, chauvinistic society

One of the most structured patterns of Indian society is the roles assigned to man and to woman--woman is the follower, man the leader. Woman is the sufferer, man the ordainer. Woman is of the home, man of the world. Deshpande describes it thus “Sita following her husband into exile. Savithri digging Death to reclaim her husband. Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's trials...” (TLS11) If it is so, as Dr. K.Madhavi Menon observes: “When woman asserts her right to take a different path and ceases to be the silent sufferer, there is hostility.”

As it happens in the case of Jaya who reflects:
“No, what have I to do with these mythical women? I can’t fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together.... It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful: and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?” (TLS 11-12)

The soft and cosy shell of matrimony which most Indian women snugly fit into can break any day and leave the couple exposed as prey to horror and trauma. Mohan takes it for granted that Jaya is going to follow his decision. When he gets involved in malpractice, he makes his wife and children responsible for it, that he cares for them so much that he goes out of his way to get the things done. Though Mohan explains to assure Jaya’s company with him, he never looks into her demands and neither does she communicate anything directly to Mohan and hence, there always remains a gap between husband and wife and silence prevails in the house.

Jaya has her first and the only outburst with Mohan soon after her marriage. But then she was fresh from the “Jaya for victory” past. As Jaya is a newly married bride, she is also new to the accepted mores of married life. Jaya learns to be silent; she keeps her grouses to herself, stays withdrawn under the shell of silence. Mohan, steeped in the norms he had learnt in his own family says to Jaya, “My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her.” (TLS 83)

Jaya feels hurt and becomes angry at the accusations Mohan flings at her during a quarrel, but she is struck dumb:

“I was full of a sense of angry confusion. What was I charging me with? And, Oh God, why couldn't I speak? Why couldn't I say something? I felt foolishly inadequate having nothing to offer him in exchange for all the charges he was pouring on to me.” (TLS 119)

Jaya had already killed Suhasini. When unable to be Mohan's angry accusations, she breaks her silence to retort back unable to restrain herself, she points out bluntly that she has given up writing because of him. The altercation between them reaches to a stage where Jaya for the first time in her seventeen years of marriage, experiences real anger which robs her of words.
“But as if I’d been struck dumb, I could say nothing. I sat in my place, pinned to it by his anger, a monstrously huge spear that went through me, excruciatingly painful, leaving me cruelly conscious.” (TLS 121)

When silence fails as a protective cover, hysteria becomes the only shield. Jaya says, “I must not laugh, I must not laugh.” (TLS 122) Jaya keeps telling herself, considering the gravity of situation. She knows about Mohan’s involvement in a case of bribery and the fears of prosecution, loss of job and societal disgrace on Mohan's part. In fact, she does laugh at Mohan and finally lands herself in a more hopeless situation

“Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly. When finally, I recovered myself I was alone in the room.” (TLS 122)

Mohan leaves home without a word after she uncontrollably laughs at him. She bursts out into a hysterical laughter which upsets Mohan so much that he leaves Dadar flat without a word. Jaya understands Mohan’s agony. He is agonised to see Jaya in place of Suhasini:

“Mohan’s eyes, as he spoke of her, were agonised, the eyes of a man who’d lost a dear one. Suhasini was dead, yes, that was it, she was one Mohan was mourning, she’d walked into the sea at last. No, the fact was that I’d finally done it I’d killed her. No, that was not right either; we had killed her between us, Mohan and I.” (TLS 121)

When Jaya laughs hysterically at the absurdity of marriage right in front of her husband while he is expressing his perplexity at her lack of concern, she appears to be echoing a man woman's laughter. She thinks: “Am I going crazy...”( TLS 125) She is not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Her inner conflict and turmoil are so bitter that she unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not be frustrated and disappointed after disapproval of her action by the society.

His absence unnerves Jaya and she thinks she would fall apart. She begins to vegetate. When Mohan is no longer around, Jaya realizes that she has no face to show to the world in the absence of her husband. It is he who provides comforts and gives meaning to her life. Further, Jaya feels
that she is secure only in the care of Mohan, his absence and walk out makes her wade through the waters of uncertainty, she becomes rudderless and others are no substitute.

Disappointed and frustrated the way Mohan left her, she goes out of the house and walks aimlessly in the streets and alleys of Bombay, because she cannot go on with the crushing burden of her marriage thrust on her. Hopelessness and despair thicken further with the disappearance of Rahul who has gone with Rupa and Ashok, their family friends on a holiday trip. The most trying moment comes to Jaya in her life when she finds two male accomplices fondling the breasts of a narcotic-smoking well-to-do girl at the bus stop. Extremely shocked by the behaviour of the two men, Jaya begins to doubt the credibility of her romantic ideas about the woman being the victim. All her revolutionary ideas sag as she fails to combat her first encounter with reality. She realizes that the fact of her own children being distanced from her together with her husband's accusation of having let him down are sufficient to shake her revolutionary ideas. The narcotic-smoking girl’s contemptuous attitude shears her of all her self-assumed importance of a “glass-house existence”. She realizes that she is secure only with Mohan.

She feels that she should bear the responsibility of Mohan’s shady business practices since she shares his desire: for greater wealth. Jaya moves to accept mutual responsibility marriage. Painfully, she realizes that she has tried to make Mohan the scapegoat for her failure as a writer and blame her parents too like “glowering teenager”. (TLS 153) She considers her husband to be a “sheltering tree” and by doing so, she tends to underrate her responsibility.

So also Jaya in That Long Silence knows that her husband had cheated, but cannot leave him just for that. When Jaya finally comes out of her emotion upheaval, she has sorted out a few problems with herself. She at one point feels that she hasn’t achieved anything in her life but soon even this feeling of desperation goes when she reflects:

“What have I achieved by this writing? The thought occurs to me again as I look at the neat pile of papers. Well, I’ve achieved this I’m not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I’m Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible.” (TLS 191)
Further, Jaya’s realization prompts her to say:

“While studying Sanskrit drama, I’d learnt with a sense of outrage that its rigid rules did not permit women characters to speak Sanskrit. They had to use prakrit - language that had sounded to my ears like a baby’s lisp. The anger I’d felt then comes back to me when I realize what I’ve been doing all these years. I have been speaking prakrit myself.” (TLS 192-93)

Though brought up as a unique personality, at this stage in her life, she does not wish to belong to this special category. Mohan’s going away stuns her and awakens her to her real place in life. Life for her is believed fully in relationship with others. Not like Anita Desai’s Monisha in Voices in the City, who never wishes to be related to persons or things, which is afraid of love, of relatedness, and thereby of losing her identity. Jaya feels that she can have her identity only if she has Mohan with her. She journeys a full circle, from searching for her identity in loneliness to her relationship with Mohan and her children. But though it is a full circle, it is not the same point to which she returns. Having realised her position, now she rejects even the image of two bullocks yoked together signaling a loveless couple. Now she has belief in herself - she can choose now. The intense searching of the self has brought knowledge of life which cannot be lived in a vacuum. Jaya does not look at herself and Mohan as two bullocks yoked together in marriage. Instead she looks at herself and Mohan as two individuals with independent minds.

“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.”(TLS 191)

For her, it is not “women are victims”, but it is “women also can assert and change themselves”. Further, Jaya realises that one cannot remain static throughout one’s life. One must change and hope for men also to change.

“...it's possible that we may change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this Life has always to be made possible.” (TLS 193)
A change is discernible in Jaya, a change in the direction and at the right time. The earlier impulsive becomes a mature woman. With the “All well” news Mohan and the arrival of their son Rahul, she finds herself slipping into her marital life again. Feelings of Jaya evolve one by one, to strengthen her feeling of looking back her way her come.

“What Mohan will be back ‘All well’ his telegram says. Does he mean by this that we will go back to being ‘as we were?’ Does it mean that, now that Mohan has sorted out his problem, and no longer fears prosecution, joblessness and disgrace, we can go back to our original positions? I mean that he will come back and give me a carefully edited version of what has happened—as he has done so often till now—and then ask me, ‘What do you say, Jaya?’”(TLS 192)

Now Jaya will not say what he wants her to say.

As Indira Bhatt puts it, she seeks: “a reorientation of her relationship and also Mohan’s new awareness of his relationship to her.”

Jaya makes a powerful statement on the totally unfair system prevailing in our society of the subjugation of women. As she realises, it is fear on the part of woman that has allowed the subjugation to continue. Women need not succumb and assume the roles cast upon them. She says, “…in this life itself there are so many cross roads, so many choices.”(TLS 192) Women have allowed victimisation instead of bargaining for partnership. This prompts Sarala Parker to remark that:

“The important insight that Shashi Deshpande imparts to us through Jaya is that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their victimisation instead of putting the blame on everybody except themselves.”

Jaya understands that she also has contributed to her victimisation and that she had to fight her own battle and work out her own solution. Accordingly she feels the necessity to break the silence, articulate her predicament, and establish her identity. She knows that there is always room for discussion and compromise. It is not the fault of men alone that has caused the feminine discontent. A patriarchal order can be subverted if only women take their ranks in the
order of intelligence and individuality. Jaya shows, as P RamaMoorthy affirms, that, "...It is possible for a woman to live in the world where men also live." 35

She decides that she will live from now onwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She will make adjustment but it will not be a servile one. Her giving up writing for the newspaper column ‘Seeta’ symbolises giving up her traditional role-model of wife, now she will write what she wants to write and will not look up at Mohan’s face for an answer she wants. This makes her voyage of discovery complete.

To make the story authentic and appealing, Deshpande has used the device of first-person narrative to ensure its credibility by making the protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman.

In order to have a well balanced conjugal life, it is imperative that husband and wife be at par with each other. They should supplement and not supplant each other. Further, they should know each other well physically as well as emotionally. It is this harsh reality that Deshpande tries to project through the female protagonist who, at the end, chooses to break her long silence of the past.

Mohan’s character is perhaps deliberately weakened in order to glorify the image of woman as a prudent wife, compromising and adaptable to the situation. Jaya describes the character of her husband thus: “His old air of authority and confidence. Then the old self vanished, leaving behind a sad, bewildered man.” (8) She further compares him with Graham Greene’s Scobie, a sad, obsessed man reconciled to the future.

Thus, in the novel, Deshpande has presented not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later on reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Her inner turmoils are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not to be frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her actions by the society. She is unable to unfold the truth. Her image becomes like that of a bird who has got wings and knows that it can fly, but, somehow, does not In the same way, Jaya is aware of her abilities and she knows that she can expose them openly, but somehow, she does not. She always remains silent which indicates that the traditional roles of women soil have primacy over all the newly-acquired professional roles.
Thus, Jaya has deliberately annihilated the creative aspect of her personality by ignoring the subject of women's suffering which is so close to her heart. In accepting the role of a traditional housewife, she has actually negated her own self her own identity. Jaya, as we find her in the novel, finally decides to come out the cocoon when life becomes intolerable to her. Her stay at the Dadar flat makes her realise that she has really distanced herself from her true inner self and that this distancing is due to her desire to act according to the wishes and patterns of others. So long she has acted as her father’s daughter, as Mohan’s wife, and as her children’s mother, without realising that she has a personality too and that she has an independent existence of her own. Hence, she firmly resolves to break the icy silence which has plagued her family since long. She wants to get back to her old, happy days by setting the present situation on a right track. Now she decides to “... plug that ‘hole in the heart’. ...I will have to speak, to listen; I will have to ease that long silence between us.” (p. 192) This decision is her own and she now moves towards ‘setting limits’. This decision may not be so drastic or so startling, but it is of far-reaching significance in the conjugal life of Jaya and Mohan. Clearly, it will break the ice in the relationship of wife and husband. It is to the credit of Jaya that she takes the initiative in this matter. No one’s pride is at stake. Moreover, it promises a happy life of understanding between the two, and if they have learnt the right lesson out of the present imbroglio they will not create such a situation again. Jaya’s initiative in breaking ‘that long silence’ is decidedly a welcome step towards restoring normalcy and happiness in the family. Through her the novelist wants to send a message to the entire humanity as to where lay the roots of domestic joy and bliss.


Shashi Despande’s work The Binding Vine is a perfect example to highlight the extent of forced sexual relationships. Mira is the long dead mother-in-law of Urmila the protagonist in the novel. Young Mira is subjected to rape in her marriage. Mira’s poems and diaries engage Urmila’s attention and series of agonies Mira underwent in her life. All her diaries stand as silent witness to the tragic tale of a sprightly girl, as Urmila understands...

“...suffered and wrote poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at the age of twenty-two.” 36(TBV 48)
Through her poems, Mira becomes a symbol of female oppression. Mira’s poems as they are in her diaries, are none but her school note books. Her sense of questioning anxiety and uncertainty are felt in her heart, and her poems are the true reflections of the latent feelings.

“...Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm will I emerge a beauteous being? Or will I suffocating, cease to exist?” (TBV 65)

Mira’s writing reflects the extent of forced sexual activity. Mira’s situation reflects, the suffering of many such unfortunate women living in the world around us. Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on the women folk by the male species, merely on the strength of brute force. Life, which seems terrible to Mira, is normal to most women of their time.

The long silence that had become the hallmark of woman’s existence is broken by Urmila, the protagonist of The Binding Vine. The earlier women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande have already begun to question their roles, functions, attitudes and even behaviours. They have realised that they have to unshackle themselves from bondages which have chained these woman’s for centuries. They are aware that the age-old societal norms and their preordained roles have subjected them to severe suffocation and humiliation. They finally succeed in knowing about themselves but only within the limited preview of their own lives. In a way these women have no interest to raise their in feelings as modern feminists do with the capacity to purge society of its evils and blaze forth in a trail of glory.

Urmila of The Binding Vine is one who is ahead of her predecessors by her endeavours to help other women. Often referred to as Urmi, she is an upper middle class career woman. She is also a grieving mother who has recently lost her one year-old baby daughter, Anu, and consequently has become highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitivity which leads her to befriend the helpless Shakutai, whose daughter Kalpana lay in comatose state in a hospital after being brutally raped. The mutual support and sympathy between Urmila and Shakutai in coming to terms with each other’s grief is remarkable. Normally Urmila’s meeting with Shakutai would not have happened as Shakutai belongs to different strata of society. It is the same sensitivity which also makes her delve into the poems of Mira, her long-dead mother-in-law and understand the mind of the young Mira who is subjected to rape in her marriage. In spite of the best efforts made by her friend cum sister-in-law Vanaa, Amrut and Inni, her own mother, to bring grieving Urmila back to normal life,
Urmila seems to be taking her own time to cope with the untimely loss of her daughter. Vanaa’s sincere attempts to revive her courage become futile. Urmila turns away from the solicitous care of her mother and Vanaa prefers her to cope with her grief all by herself. Commenting on Urmila’s attitude, S.Indira writes:

“Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow she holds, on to it as she believes that to let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss.” 37

Mira’s poems and diaries engage her attention. Through her diaries Urmila establishes a communion with her and tries to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl, who suffered and wrote poems: “... in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty two.” (TBV 48)

Through her poems, Mira becomes a symbol of female oppression. While reading Mira’s poems, jotted in her diaries which are none but her school note books, Urmila senses a message being deciphered like a: “message tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell.”

Urmila understands that Mira was a favourite daughter of her father who was obviously proud of her intelligence and talent which made him present Mira a book of poetry. Urmila also understands that Mira had a deep desire of being recognised as a good creative writer and a poet but for her fear of being laughed at, if she expressed it aloud. Her questioning, anxiety and uncertainty are all felt in her heart, and her poems are the true reflections of her latent feelings:

Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm
Will I emerge a beauteous being?
Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist? (TBV 65)

Mira’s writing reflects the extent of forced sexual activity Mira was subjected to rape in her marriage. Perhaps her situation reflects the mute suffering of many such unfortunate women. Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on women-folk by the male species, merely
on the strength of brute force. In the words of Adrienne Rich: “it is not rape the body alone but, rape of the mind as well”.  

Mia dies in child birth after four years of loveless marriage. Every day and every moment that she spends, that she spends there is a cry of and anguish. These feelings:

“runs all through her writing a -strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married.” (TBV 63)

To her sex becomes: “the sting of scorpion to be borne by women.”

In one of her poems, Mira lament:

“But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels round her fingers and tremble, fearing the coming of the dark-clouded, engulfing night?” (TBV 66)

Urmila understands that Mira’s marriage is only a ‘black clouded’, haunted night she awaits with dread. She begins to hate the word "love" as it is uttered always by her husband. To her, love becomes a hateful thing and all that she desires to be left alone. As Urmila narrates a passage from the papers found in Mira’s old trunk. They speak about the relationship she shared with her husband and her feelings towards husband are almost void:

“I don't mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when he does that... can't he leave me alone?” (TBV 67)

Utterly lonely, Mira lives in that alien house whose inmates treat her as a mad woman. The anguish in Mira thus the mothers of these silent suffering victims stand by their unfortunate daughters as they dare not to defy the norms of the society. While Mira’s mother kept silent and stood helpless at the misery of her daughter, Kalpana's mother hovers over the family name.

Urmila now becomes a regular visitor to Shakutai’s home in the slums to inquire after Kalpana’s condition. Shakutai on the one hand is proud of her daughter’s beauty but, on the other hand, resents her behaviour. She holds her daughter responsible for her own tragedy.

“She’s shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me. What could I do? She was so self-willed. Cover yourself
decently; I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should have seen her walking out, head in the air caring for nobody. It's all her fault, Urmila all her fault.” (TBV 147)

Shakutai’s outburst brings to light the partisan attitude prevalent in the patriarchal society. If a girl is raped, for no fault of hers, she alone is censured, and victimised. Thus Shakutai, in spite of all her motherly love and sympathy for her daughter, sees that Kalpana's bold independence as the real reason for this catastrophe. The only conclusion that Shakutai is able to arrive at is:

“... we have to keep to our places, we can never step out. There are always people waiting to throw stones at us, our own people first of all.” (TBV 148)

Besides the reality of Kalpana being raped, the police prefer to record it as a car accident. Dr. Bhasker severely protests in rage at the case being reported as an accident. He tells Urmila that there are obvious signs of rape on the badly mauled Kalpana. Even the police officer tries to convince them that this case must be recorded as an accident in the name of female honour,

“...think of the girl and her family. Do you think it'll do them any good to have it known the girl was raped? She's unmarried, people are bound to talk, and her name would be smeared.” (TBV 88)

Hence, it is advisable that the victim chooses to remain silent and anonymous rather than attract notice by making hue and cry demanding justice. Even after her nightmarish married life with a husband who neglects her and finally leaves to her live with another woman, she still lives and is much worried about the issue and subsequent effects of marriage prospects on Kalpana. Dr. Bhasker puzzled at this strange behaviour comments: “Women are astonishing. I think it takes a hell lot of courage for a woman like that even to think marriage...” (TBV 87)

Urmila, raged at the indignity heaped on Kalpana, wants to report this matter to the officials, but Shakutai begs Urmila not to do that. Urmila tries to explain to Shakutai that Kalpana is not at fault and the man who did this to her is the wrong doer and therefore, he is to be blamed and not she.
“She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn't anything wrong. Why can't you see that? Are you blind? It is not her fault, no, not her fault at all.” (TBV 147)

Urmila is shocked to find that everyone wants to hush up a rape case, and in the process the rapist is able to get away scot free. Further, Shakutai too does not like the case to be registered and given publicity: “…even if it is true, keep it to yourself, doctor, do let anyone know of it.” (TBV 59)

Instead of pointing to the bestiality and violence perpetrated by the rapist, most people like Kalpana's mother find it easier to blame the girl:“And if you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they will leave you alone.”(TBV 146)

The noted Indian English novelist Mulk Raj Anand feels:

“No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male into wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust.”

Though Urmila is filled with all sympathies for Kalpana she is unable to do anything. In a way, she remains as a mute spectator. Shakutai, at a point, even wishes for her daughter’s death. She says: “but sometimes I think the only thing that help Kalpana now is death.” (TBV 178)

Urmila’s crusade for helping Kalpana does not receive gushes forth:

“They called me mad they, who cocooned themselves in bristly blankets and thought themselves warm when I spoke of my soul that boiled and seethed.” (TBV 99-100)

Like Jaya (TLS), Mira too resents the new name given to her at the time of marriage. Her protest is vehement when she bursts out:

“Nirmala, they call, I stand statue - still. Do you build the new without razing the old? A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira.” (TBV 101)
Urmila is confident that she understands Mira, her plight, her suffering and every flicker of her emotion. She confesses:

“I’ve worked hard at knowing Mira, I’ve read her diaries, gone through her papers, absorbed her poems, painfully, laboriously translated them into English. And now, I tell myself, I know Mira.” (TBV 174)

Urmila understands that even as a child Mira has hated the way her mother has been surrendering herself to her husband. She opposes every inch of her mother's advice, who says, “never utter a no; submit and your life will be a paradise.” (TBV 83) Urmila knows that the life which seems terrible to Mira is normal to most women of her time. But Mira is not an ordinary woman. Urmila wonders how Mira could survive a life denied of choices and freedom and living with a man whom she could not love and other people with whom she had nothing in common to share with. She thinks that “perhaps it was her writing that kept her going that kept her alive.” (TBV 127)

Seeing Mira through her poems, Urmila learns that Mira even felt the burden of her femininity. She realises that she too was trapped like her mother with no further escape.

“Whose face is this I see in the mirror, unsmiling, grave, bedewed with fear? The daughter? No, Mother, I am now your shadow.” (TBV 126)

Pain, joy and fear are inextricably intertwined. The pain of childbirth results in the joy of seeing one’s own child and no one, not even Mira is spared of this anticipatory joy of giving birth to a child her creation, all the way. Even in the midst of vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped forever Mira is aware of the new-found love for her unborn child. But Mira is unfortunate even in this - she dies in childbirth: “having bled to death within an hour after her child was born.” (TBV 136)

Thus Mira stands as a classic example of the multitude of unfortunate women who are forced into a loveless marriage and finally succumb to the lust of their husbands. Urmila’s involvement with Shaukutai, her sister and daughter bring light the manner in which the stamp of the traditional culture is operative in the sexual disparities between men and woman of the lower
class. Kalpana, Shakutai’s daughter, is raped and the mother assumes that her daughter has been injured in a car accident. On examination, the doctor confirms and informs Shakutai that she has been brutally raped and in the process she is physically and mentally injured. Shakutai sees her Kalpana who appears to be lying like a vegetable dead or alive. Shakutai is shocked and hysterically she tells Vanaa: “It’s not true; you people are trying to blacken my daughter's name.” (TBV 58)

Urmila, to her surprise, realizes how the imperatives physical protection, economic support and social approval undermine the instinctive sympathy of the mother for her daughter. While overhearing a conversation between Vanna and Dr. Bhasker, the doctor-in-charge, Shakutai recoils in fear against the word ‘report’ and she cries:

“... don’t tell anyone, I will never be able to hold up my head again. Who’ll marry the girl, we are decent people Doctor.” (TBV 58)

The mother like the rest of the society blames her daughter for the state she has arrived at. She is relieved when the doctor's report describes Kalpana’s rape incident as an accident. Regardless of the fact that Shakutai has been abandoned by her husband for another woman, she is extremely anxious to get Kalpana settled. Mira too was a victim of physical abuse years ago but neither then nor now there is approval even at her home. When the hospital authorities wanted to shift Kalpana to a suburban hospital, Urmila rages in protest and decides to take the matter to the press, so that Kalpana’s case may get the required justice. So far, Indu (RS), Saru (TDHNT) and Jaya (TLS) have fought their own battles. Urmila is Shashi Deshpande’s first protagonist who decides to fight another woman’s battle. She succeeds in annulling the transfer of Kalpana to another hospital. Back at her home Urmila’s friend Vanna and her mother Inni cannot understand her deep involvement with the girl. Vanaa always warns her: “It’s none of our” (171) Despite all this opposition, “Urmila pursues the case and sees that eventually it is reopened. The police are asked to present their new investigations. With the help of Malcolm, Urmila presents Kalpana’s case in the press. Very soon the issue gains public attention and the government orders a deep investigation. Soon there is a demonstration of protest outside Kalpana’s hospital. Number of women pours in from all walks of life. The pictures of women being jostled and roughed up during the demonstration are all reported in papers. But for Shakutai exposure to the media is as bad as Kalpana being raped. The fear of humiliation in society resulting from exposure of such
incidents grips Shakutai. The women in the assembly and all local women activists now stand in solidarity. Initially resentful, Shakutai now seems to be slowly realising the enormity of the situation.

Shakutai’s morality is enhanced and overwhelmed at the demonstration and tides of protest from women folk. She says: “the whole World is my friend.” (TBV 179)

Later, the police investigation brings the rapist into light. The final revelation opens up to find Sulu’s husband Prabhakar who had always lusted after Kalpana. This revelation shatters Sulu who immolates herself in guilty despair, leaving behind her grief-stricken sister, Shakutai, and for the first time, Kalpana’s mother asks: “Should I tell the police?” (TBV 194)

If marriage is the only means of security for people like Shakutai, Mira and Sulu are women who are physically vulnerable even within the secure structure of marriage. Urmila learns from Shakutai that Sulu always lived in constant terror of being thrown out her house because she cannot have children. Urmila accusation of her mother for leaving her with her grandparents in her childhood brings to light the degree to which India women are subjected to domination by their husbands. She explains to her daughter that it was her father and not she who had sent her away, for he did not trust his wife in matters relating to childcare. This is because once in severe urgent Inni had left the infant Urmila under the care of a man servant. Inni pours out all the anguish of a helpless woman, who has nothing to do before the stern dictates of her husband. She says:

“He didn’t say anything to me, he just took you away … I begged him, Urm, I cried, I promised him I’d never leave you alone, but he wouldn’t listen. Nothing could make him change his mind. You know your Papa… I didn’t want you to be sent away to Ranidurg, believe me Urm, I didn’t want that, I wanted you with us, I never got used to the idea your being in Ranidurg, I wanted you with me…” (TBV 199-200)

Urmila is aware that women at different levels irrespective of their social backgrounds are given raw deal. It could be so in the case of low class illiterate women from chawls like Shakutai and Sulu or the urban-bred, educated women like Urmila's mother, Inni, her friend Vanaa, and her mother-in-law, Akka. Urmila is furious of the way even educated women submit themselves to safeguard their marriage. While Urmila is a modern woman, Vanaa traditional, even though
educated, and is a social worker by profession. She is submissive and obedient to her husband. Vanaa’s constant repetition of “Harish says” irritates Urmila and she reprimands Vanaa: “Assert yourself, you don't have to crawl before him, do you?” (TBV 80)

Later, Urmila becomes much more irritated with Vanaa who is unable to assert herself before her husband even in matters where she should be making the choice. She secretly longs to have a son. Soon after the birth of their second child, who happens to be a daughter again, Vanaa tells Harish about her desire to have a son. Harish decides to have no more children and quotes population figures and wonders at her wish which silences her. She even begins to think, “He is right” Urmila, on listening to this, becomes furious and bursts out: “You let him bulldozer you, you crawl before him...” (TBV 81)

She also admonishes Vanaa for trying to cope with her domestic duties single-handedly and argues with her when she tries to speak on behalf of her husband.

“Why can't Harish help?”
“He comes home so tired...”
“You know, Vanaa, what you're going to become, coping with everything the way you are?”
“What?”
“A super-woman”
“Good! And doesn’t that make Harish a Superman? ...”
(TBV 81)

As Urmila observes, the common idea of holding the mother to be sole responsible for taking care of the children has remained the same without any new signs of change. From the days of Inni to the days of her granddaughter Mandira, confining women to the subjugated roles of mothers and wives has not changed at all. The little Mandira, who strongly believes that a woman's primary duty is to take care of her family, resents her mother going to work leaving her and her sister in the care of an ayah. She tells Urmila scornfully: “When I grow up, I’m never going to leave my children to go to work.”(TBV 72)

In spite of belonging to the modern educated urban society and being exposed to the liberal revolutionary ideas and changes shaping in the western world in the name of women's liberation movements, the role and position of Indian women has been just relegated to that of wives and
mothers only. The unfairness deeprooted in Indian society towards women comes as an illustration with the marriage of Akka. She is made to marry a widower with a child. Instructions and warnings often come to her even before her wedding could take place, that her prospective husband has been greatly involved with the memories of his wife and now after her death, all that interests him is only his son. Further, she is informed that his marriage with Akka is only to give his son a mother. As Akka keeps narrating her story to Vanaa, Urmila thinks: “The cruelty, the enormous cruelty of that silenced us.” (TBV 47)

Stories like this are only a tip of an iceberg that describe the fate of many women who are made to live, and are for stoically to accept marriage under the pressure of societal norms. To those women, marriage is the only goal in the life of a girl and the most difficult task on earth is to find a groom. Taking all these threadbare facts into consideration, Akka willingly agrees to marry Kishore's father, with the growing shadow of his dead wife.

Acquaintance with Shakutai provides an opportunity for Urmila to have a glimpse at the lives of women living in slums. Shakutai’s husband leaves her with her parents and goes Bombay in search of livelihood. Even after six months he does not make any effort to take his wife there. Finding it difficult to stay any longer in her parent's house, Shakutai herself goes to Bombay to join him. Since he does not have a fixed job and a regular income, they have to put up in their relative’s house however humiliating such life to Shakutai is. With three children born, the burden of the family falls on her. In spite of her doing all kinds of work to support her family, husband deserts her for another woman. It suddenly dawns on Shakutai, who has an irresistible desire to have mangalasutra in gold. How foolish her desire is. She tells Urmila:

“Then one day I thought the man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this thing made in precious gold? That's been the greatest misfortune of my life marrying that man.” (TBV 110)

In spite of bearing the burden of such worthless husband and struggling all alone to find a good life for her children Shakutai finds her always blamed if something in family goes wrong, as she tells Urmila:

“What can you expect, they say, of a girl whose mother left her husband? Imagine! He left me for another woman, left me with these children to bring up.” (TBV 147)
As Urmila understands from the lives of Shakutai and Sulu, absence of insecurity in marriage haunts them. Affectionate and good-natured Sulu tries to help her sister Shakutai in every possible way. Despite resistance from Kalpana, she takes over the responsibilities of bringing her up. Urmila also learns that she has a penchant for house-keeping and decoration which goes unrecognised by her husband who never bothers to appreciate her work. There is the constant hidden fear lurking in her. Shakutai tells Urmila:

“After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he is angry with me, what if he throws me out...? Nobody should live like that, Urmila, so full of fears. What kind of life is it?” (TBV 195)

Urmila understands how self-confidence of a vivacious girl can be shattered by the Indian institution of marriage system which transforms her into a fearful and nervous woman. But, Shanthi Sivaraman observes: “Urmi is different ... wants to assert herself and not crawl before man.”

Urmila does not display any radical attitude towards the institution of marriage. In her conversation with Dr. Bhasker Urmila plains her clearcut feelings on the system associated with marriage. Urmila is of the opinion that marriage is a necessity for women and especially for women like Shakutai, marriage means security, as it provides safety from other men. At the same time Urmil’s own marriage to a man of choice whom she knew from childhood is far from satisfactory. There is incompatibility springing mainly from Kishore’s withdrawing nature. When Vanaa advises her to be more careful about relationship with Dr. Bhasker, Urmila thinks:

“But how can Vanaa, secure in the fortress of her marriage to Harish, understand, what it is like-marriage with a man who flits into my life a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind? Often, after he has gone, I find is myself a frantic grappling for his image, as if in going he has taken that away as well.” (TBV 164)

Long separation from her husband sometimes gives her an opportunity to think of another relationship and there even moments when she overcomes a longing for physical gratification during her husband’s long absence from her their home. Her friendship with Dr. Bhasker
provides an opportunity to satisfy her urge, for Dr. Bhasker has declared his love for her. Though Urmila perilously comes close to respond to Bhasker, she just holds back and thinks: “It much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue chastity and being a good wife.” (TBV 166)

To Urmila, happiness in her marriage was magical, while to her mother a constant preoccupation with her husband’s feelings. It is this marital bond that makes Urmila reject Bhasker’s overtures - a decision which could not be taken firmly by Shashi Deshpande’s other protagonists, like Indu Saru and Jaya. Urmila never dares to overstep the boundaries chalked out in the system of marriage. Whether this virtue is ever acknowledged by husband or not, it goes unsaid. Urmila loves her husband so dearly that when Dr. Bhasker; her whether she loves him, Urmila confesses: “I love husband and therefore, I am an inviolate.” (TBV 165) In another context also she reiterates: “Yes, I was honest when I told Vanaa I am safe.” (TBV 165)

Commenting on Urmila’s relation; with her husband, J.P. Tripathi says:

“Urmila, the sailor’s wife and college teacher, is more reliant and has an identity different from that of husband; she is self-respecting and does not want to live on Kishore’s money. She is, however, a sensitive vine and needs Kishore as an Oak to entwine herself around.”

Urmila, at every turn of the novel, emerges fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. Her encouragement to Vanaa to be more assertive in life and not be just a door mat, her sympathies with Shakutai, her effort to take up the task of translating the poems written by dead-mother-in-law from Kannada to English and her strong intention of publishing them are praiseworthy. She takes cudgels on behalf of the rape victim Kalpana and becomes instrumental in publicising the case which in normal course of Indian hypocritical societal situation could not be possible to the lower class. No other character in Shashi Deshpande’s earlier novels is so rebellious like Urmila. Till now all her characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. Moreover the protagonists in the earlier novels are aware of the inequalities in society but they do not attempt to set them right. Indira Nityanandham observes: “The Binding Vine is a refreshing change from the first three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonists here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact that though here are Miras and Kalpanas and Shakutais, we also have our Urmilas.”
Urmila may be educated and exposed to Western ideas but nowhere does she show that she agrees with Simone de Beauvoir’s belief that marriage diminishes man but almost always it annihilates woman. Besides, Urmila is able to see the contrast between her life and the terrible life that these women have been forced to lead. There is Mira’s mother who, going by Mira’s account of her, could not think of a life of her own separated from the destinies of her children. Even though Mira lived a generation ahead of Urmila, she comes across as a person aware of her identity, and as one who is aware of her assigned roles of mother and wife. A page in the diary of Mira has ample evidence of this:

“I remember the day the astrologer came home. He read all our horoscopes… only my Mother’s horoscope was not read. Don’t you want to know your future? I asked her. And she said What’s there? In my life apart from all of you? If I know all of you are well and happy, I’m happy too. Did she really mean that? Will I become that was too, indifferent to my own life, thinking it nothing? I don’t want to. I won’t. I think so now, but maybe my mother thought like me when she was my age. It frightens me. No, it doesn’t, I’ll never think my life, myself nothing, never.” (TBV 101)

Urmila realizes the difference between her life and lives of the others and thinks: I've managed, but: “I've been lucky, that’s all. While these women... they never had a chance.” While Kalpana’s mother moans, “Why does God give us daughters...?” (TBV 60)

To Urmila, who is mourning death of her infant daughter Anu, the thought is jarring:

“We dream so much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them the world we dreamt of for ourselves.” (TBV 124)

Urmila’s grandparents who brought her up believe in giving freedom to girls. Thus, she had the freedom to make choices and so naturally plans the same for her child:

“I will let her soar, I had thought, I will let nothing not even my love. She will go far, she will climb high do anything she wants.” (TBV 124)
Later, Shakutai’s self-accusation reminds Urmila of her father’s confessing guilt when he was dying of cancer. With a penitent tone, he begs for her forgiveness for leaving her at Ranidurg when she was young. Having lost her daughter Urmila now realizes that she too is not free from the guilty conscience and the morbid self-questioning within herself, whether or not she had been a good mother to Anu. She feels that perhaps the answer lies in carrying the burdens of the dying and the dead as life would acquire meaning by that very act. Urmila is practical unlike the pseudo feminist Preeti who is overenthusiastic to fight for equal rights for women. To her, Preeti is a symbol of the shallow female opportunist without integrity. Once she talks with Urmila regarding the judgement in a case filed by a husband against his wife to reinstate their conjugal rights. Preeti says excitedly that the judge had delivered his judgement stating that a wife could not be forced to have physical relationship with her husband against her will. On reading this judgement Preeti joyfully cries: “... Isn’t it radical, absolutely earthshaking in this country, I mean? Can you imagine the consequence?” (TBV 37)

Soberly, Urmila reminds Preeti that one judgement by a single judge will not make any difference to womankind. She further says that laws cannot women’s lives and there are not many women who can appeal or file in a court of law in such matters. Preethi’s request for Mira’s story to make a film out of it is turned down by Urmila and this perhaps brings out Urmila’s moderation even in her feminism. She values the sanetity of womanhood and marriage.

Urmila too does not exhibit male-hatredness. She has no desire to seek a world without men. She only wishes for a world where women are treated equal to men. Luckily for her, she finds like-minded male friends, one is Dr.Bhasker to whom Urmila is not just a wife of somebody but an individual with an identity of her own. He even falls in love with her impressed by her passion for truth and justice. Malcolm and Dr.Jain are also essentially humane and have great respect for Urmila.

The sudden revelation of the rift between Urmila and many of her people make Urmila ponder once again how difficult relationships are, with too many chasms to bridge. As Urmila now understands that the relationship between her Papa and Inni, Baiajjs and Aju, Vanaa and Harish, Vanaa and her daughters, Shakutai and Kalpana are all filled with love and compassion, but it does not prevent them from being cruel to each other, ignited by clashes of egos, desires and self-centred interest Each relationship can be wholesome only when the people themselves are
whole. Further, Urmila realizes that the great divide in us is the hardest to bridge and the most
difficult one is to accept and live with. When the fates of Mira, Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu are
considered, Urmila regains her courage. She learns that accepting freedom and advantages of her
life as a gift, she now decides to be content with her life with a hope that her husband Kishore
will remove his armour of withdrawal one day and thus he could facilitate her to reach him.

Anu has gone but she still has her son Karthik. Urmila realizes that, however burdensome our
ties are, however painful our experiences are, one can never give up. In the words of Urmila:

“we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves
to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we
find this anchor.”(TBV 137)

The main urge is always to survive, to get on with the business of living, even if it comprises a
daily routine that takes a hundred trifling matters, bringing an order and rhythm to it. She
entirely agrees with Mira who says: “Just as the utter futility of living overwhelms me; I am
terrified by the t of dying, of-ceasing to be.” (TBV 203)

Shashi Deshpande seems to be engaged in a constructive process of consciousness rising. Her
object is to enable more affluent women to share awareness of sexist’s experiences that create
co-operation and pave the way for uniting people to find themselves with a strong cord
sisterhood. Urmila and Vanaa help each other in their distress and suffering. Vanaa helps Urmila
to come out of her emotional crisis.

This novel is remarkable as it introduces the concept of female bonding, the desire of one woman
for female bonding, and helps another who is less fortunate. This is a positive development in
Urmila unlike the other protagonists of Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors and That
Long Silence who are involved in fighting their own battles and have strong feelings and strive
for the need of sisterhood. Urmila strongly believes that women should have the courage to
express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indignant at their
uncomplaining attitude in the name of family honour.

As Urmila realizes that love prevents one from being cruel, and it is this love that makes one to
accept as it comes through detachment. This is the only adhesive that binds people and prevents
them from falling and refills and nurtures the sapling of life, with compassion and tolerance even Shakutai cries as Urmila understands,

“this is how life most of us, most of the time; we are absorbed in the routine of living. The main urge is always to survive.” (TBV 203)

The need to express one’s feelings and the need to be heard by the society is an all-pervading urge for the present day women. If Indu and Jaya are fulfilled individuals, it is because both of them attempt to write, face resistance and find the strength to decide what they want to write. Unlike them, Urmila draws society's attention to her protest, and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. Urmila is seen, at the end of the novel, recollecting the bonds of love that provide the “Springs of Life” (TBV 203) for human survival. She is not a rebel against the system because she believes that things are gradually improving though at a slow pace.

Traditionally, in all societies, marriage and family are considered to be society’s most sacred institutions and they are the source of comfort and nurture the members living within it. And since we live in a society which is largely patriarchal and is therefore, male-dominated, wherein marriage is a power—relationship between the husband and the wife along economic lines to begin with, later acquiring political, social and even emotional overtones. Women feel they are born to suffer they say; it is life- nothing can be done about… Newspaper and television reports are full of stories concerning violence on the streets. Yet many incidents take place within the home. A woman has more cause to fear her husband, than an assault by a stranger. It is more difficult to know the extent of violence against wives, since it is probable that many incidents go unrecorded. They may occur because women feel shame or guilt about admitting that their marriage has gone wrong. Alternatively they may fear that telling someone will lead to further attacks or that nothing can be done to help them;- Violence tends to begin with marriage!

Bearing this in mind, explanation can be sought in marriage itself. Within marriage the position of the wife is more vulnerable because she is dependent on her husband, and leaving him means risking of losing her home, breaking up a family and admitting to failure.

The cause of wife-assault can be related to the way in which society sees a woman as the property of her husband and she is subjected to be under his control. The home is regarded as a private area in which people are allowed to behave as they wish. It is implied with the marriage
that marriage itself empowers the husband legally to have intercourse with his wife, never mind her consent, her health, her emotional state. If a woman is raped by a stranger, either she kills herself or has to live with the memory of it. But if she is raped by her own husband? She has to live with the rapist and has to subject herself for being raped repeatedly by her husband without any hope for reprieve. Rape as a form of personal violence, is not merely a physical assault and symbolic of the degradation of psyche. It is in fact a conscious process of intimidation by which men keep all women in a state of fear.

REFERENCES
1. Deshpande Shashi, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Penguin Books Ltd, New Delhi, 1990, p173 (All subsequent references indicated parenthetically are to this edition of the novel, abbreviated as TDHNT)


16. Manu Smriti Chapter xi


