

Chapter V

Conclusion

Indian English fiction has successfully brought out the dilemmas, controversies and problems that a 'New Woman' faces in its projection of women as the central figures by Indian women writers. They represent a humane version of a woman in family and in society. As they are the centre of the narrative they present the life's experiences from a woman's point of view. The stress and tension that they feel are due to the clash between male ego and female longing for freedom.

Shashi Deshpande is a prose rhapsodist of feelings, sentiments and emotions passing through human consciousness. Deshpande specialize in depicting the undulations of the female ego or self under the pressure of critical human situations and emotional relationships. Her attention is also focused on feminine suffering in the complex cultural stresses and strains in Indian society, having strong past moorings. Deshpande explore human relationships in modern Indian society, particularly the husband-wife relationship.

Deshpande's fiction, long and short is so clustered with inhibited, vulnerable and dependent women characters that, Usha Bande in the book *Victim Consciousness in Indian-English Novel* quotes Prema Nanda Kumar, who, in some kind of desperation says:

Here are a legion of Indian women who form a colourful quilt, so typical of the spreads found in middle-class households . . . what a varied stuffing. Women dying suddenly, women dying slowly, women dying as young brothers, women dying as grandmothers, women with too many children, women with no children, women who are crazy,, women who are pseudo-

intellectuals, women who are practical, women who are psychos, brothers
wives, household's sisters, abandoned wives, widows etc. . . . (114)

Deshpande's fiction is primarily an exploration of the problems of being a woman. M. R. Verma and K. A. Agarwal in the book *Reflections of Indian English Literature* quotes what G. S. Amur remarked in his preface to her novels are true, all of which appeared in 1980's and 1990's: "Women's struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and, most important of all, as human beings is Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories" (6). She concentrates on the theme of meaninglessness and physical confusion suffered by women in tradition-oriented institutions. Deshpande's women, like those of her predecessor, are tolerant, obedient and submissive.

Shashi Deshpande expresses the position of women in a patriarchal society – someone without a clear sense of purpose and without a firm sense of her own identity. Anuradha Ray in the book *Patterns of Feminist Consciousness in Indian Women Writers: A Study of Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock, Nayantara Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh, Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column. Rama Mehta's Inside the Haveli and Shashi Deshpande's That Long Silence* quotes the words of Adele King: "she does not place herself in the centre of a universe of her own making, but rather is always painfully aware of the demands and needs of others" (84).

The woman of Shashi Deshpande is born and brought up in Indian tradition and culture. Though she is educated and influenced by western ideas, she is not at all ready to leave her roots that are in the family setup. She does not want to have an anti-male

approach nor does she expect her world where men are reduced to only a sex-gratifying object. Her expectation is that in her marriage and family she should have her own place equal to that of man. She should not be considered inferior to man nor should she be granted any subordinate position in marital relations. She feels that woman's sexual need should be given the due importance and should not be ignored. All forms of injustice and gender-biased attitude must cease to exist. Above all she should be treated as a human being equal to man in every sense. She should be treated as a 'person' and not 'the other' with the recognition to individuality and identity of her own. Her struggle is towards this kind of emancipation.

Shashi Deshpande is very much influenced with the psycho analytical characters. She reveals the subconscious and unconscious psyche of her characters. Her heroines are sensitive, self conscious, brilliant and creative. They revolt against the traditional parental family and run away from the suffocated atmosphere of the narrow minded society. The psycho-analytical level proves that women have come a long way from a search for identity alone. The woman's writing deal with the inner lives of women. The painful areas of female experiences are explored. They expose the deep lying wounds in the protagonist's minds. There is a wide gulf between the inner and the outer world. The inability to bridge this gap leads them to deep anguish.

Heroines have the spirit of a liberated woman who can face things without flinching. They have to be a forceful personality to assert their individuality. Within their limited moving 'space' they prove their potentials. At no point do they sacrifice their self respect, independence, and judgement as they are always alert in observing their

surroundings. In spite of these virtues these characters have a willingness to acquire self-knowledge and to improve themselves.

Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists are all educated, proactive and progressive, moving on undaunted. They rebel against the dictates of their domestic duties and social sanctions, challenge 'male-devised orthodoxies about women's nature, capacities and roles' and existential insecurity. Progressing along the axis of delimiting restrictions, self-analysis, protest and self-discovery, they try to create both physical as well as psychological space for themselves to grow on their own. Being the representatives of the new generation of self-actualizing women, they seek to eke out new ways of dealing with their problems, instead of running away from them and realizing that the solutions lie within themselves. They have a balanced, practical approach to their problems. They realize that victory doesn't lie in the subjugation and destruction of the male, rather than bringing him to see the indispensability of each other's space. They start up as rebellious and discontented but end up renewed and rejuvenated.

Shashi Deshpande's select novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* trace the quest for self-definition of women, who are educated and modern but who cannot quite shake off their background and the manner in which they have been brought up. These three novel deals with marital relationships, the protagonists moving out of the house in search of identity. In these novels, Deshpande tries to address particularly the problems of middle class women. Her modern, career-oriented women try to redefine human relationships in the view of the newly acquired professional status.

That Long Silence is the only one to explore the problems of female self-expression through a career. In a world slowly opening out doors of opportunity to women, the urge to extend themselves beyond the confines of domesticity is very real for many educated women. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Indu in *Roots and Shadows* are, on the surface, successful emancipated women with fulfilling careers; Deshpande shows that in reality, they have not yet emotionally extricated themselves from patriarchal impositions, both direct and indirect.

The female protagonist Saru, Indu and Jaya goes journeys from ignorance to knowledge through suffering. Going through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realization, they emerge as a confident individual, fully in control of themselves, significantly more hopeful and able to accept life just as they do. If Indu is a journalist and Saru, a doctor, Jaya is a successful columnist and an aspiring novelist.

Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* experiences undefeatable trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life. She tries all her efforts to make her marital life smooth. Although Saru is economically and ideologically independent, sadly economic independence of women in Indian context has not automatically resulted in full fledged autonomy. They are caught in a conflict between individual aspiration and social demands. The financial ascendance of Sarita renders Manu impotent. The only way he can gain potency and masculinity is through sexual assault upon Sarita. To escape from this torture, she even prepares to resign from the job. But he is not prepared to lose her income and comforts it brings.

Saru searches for a refuge and wonders whether her parental home can be one. On introspection she realizes that she is her own refuge.

*“You are your own refuge;
there is no other refuge.
This refuge is hard to achieve.”*

The epilogue of Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* authentically reflects the biological dread and psychological difference that women experience, which makes them, their own refuge. The conscious effort to break the psychological barriers and an acceptance of androgynous society by both the sexes may make the dream of a balanced society a probable one. Patriarchy is the first hurdle that has to be crossed in this process of realization.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru’s seeking of her refuge is more of a psychological process, where she is trying to overcome and reconcile to her secondary status in her family. Shashi Deshpande focuses on Saru’s relationship within the family. Her alienation at her parental house, her parent’s preference for the male child all this leads to the psychological knots in her personality. This becomes more complicated after her marriage to Manu. As she says,

And at last it had been Manu. Her abnegation to his tastes had seemed wholly natural at first. Now, for the first time, she found herself, waveringly, hesitantly, making her way back to her real self. I, as I would like myself to be. But hunting for that real self had become rather like a dog scrabbling for a long buried bone. Piles of earth flew up, but where the hell was the bone? Or, had there never been a bone at all? (124)

Saru’s success as a doctor reinforces her feeling of self-esteem. In the end, she realizes that her profession is her own and she will decide what to do with it. She is

conscious, “My life is my own” (220). She is fully aware that career is an essential part of her life and that she cannot sacrifice it in order to salvage her marriage. She succeeds in realizing her selfhood through her profession. So she goes out to attend a patient. Saru proves that economically independent woman like her can bring change in the society and that women as individuals can have some significant control over their relationship and professions. Thus Sumita Kukreti in her article “Female Protagonists in Shashi Deshpande’s novel” says: “Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* depict the journey of modern towards financial independence, emotional balance and social recondition” (195).

Indu in *Roots and Shadows* is an educated and determined girl who always wanted to be free and independent. As a journalist, Indu finds her job very unsatisfactory. The editor wants her to write what is acceptable to the public and so, she cannot really write what she wants to. She is unhappy with her career which forces her to be false to herself. When she is sour about the way she is forced to paint false journalism, Jayant her husband, takes it easy and advises her to compromise. She finds it difficult to compromise with her honesty and decides to resign her job. Jayant firmly disapproves of any such move and Indu helplessly continues in the same job, hating it at the same time.

Akka’s choice of Indu as her heiress gives her new courage and strength. She introspects her married life and realizes the need to seek freedom within the bounds of obligations and responsibilities. She decides to resign her job at once and devote herself to the kind of writing she has always dreamed of. Indu, thus, finally asserts herself as a writer and she realizes that her roots are to be an independent woman and writer while her shadows are to be daughter, a mother and commercial writer.

Indu suffers no guilt in her extra-marital relationship with Naren and decides not to tell Jayant about it. She takes firm decision: "I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant. What kind of a life can you build on a foundation of dishonesty, I had asked myself once. What kind of home have I built? Now I would go back and see if that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty. Nevertheless I knew I would not tell about Naren and me" (205).

Indu's predicament is representative of large predicament of women in contemporary India where the new socio-economic forces have shaken old cultural modes. When the Indian woman was uneducated, illiterate and ignorant, she was hailed as a pativrata, a sati, an honorable woman and soon. Now she has started becoming aware of stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her individuality, her place and role in the family and society.

Jaya of *That Long Silence* has been a promising writer and had even won a prize for one of her short stories. Mohan, her husband, encourages her to write and even introduces her to editors of magazines. However, he finds her themes autobiographical in nature and therefore, he objected her writing. In order to fulfill her roles as wife and mother, she is even prepared to sacrifice her career. Jaya begins to write light, humorous pieces in newspapers, where she need not present her views and ideas.

Jaya on introspection realizes that she has failed as a writer and that is because she has made enormous sacrifice on her profession and her aspirations to see that her marriage is not jeopardized. She knows that she does not speak in her true voice. She now realizes that she cannot be a complete woman if she remains a wife or a mother and ignores the other equally important self, namely, a writer what she really wants to write.

Thus, at the end, Jaya succeeds in creating a complete self balancing her domestic and professional roles. O. P. Bhatnagar in the article “Indian Womanhood: Fight for Freedom in *Roots and Shadows*” comments on her heroines as: “Thus, Shashi Deshpande makes her heroine choose security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is neither of victory, of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideas and conflicting themselves. That is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude” (5).

The female protagonists Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and Jaya in *That Long Silence*, who are caught between tradition and modernity, conventional and unconventional attitudes. These three women find their personal life smothering and want to rebel against their circumstances, but after a period of self-introspection, all the three reconcile to their situation.

Thus through these heroines, Saru, Indu and Jaya, Shashi Deshpande concentrates on the tortures and sufferings of middle-class Indian Women who are educated, sensitive and are conscious of their legal, social and conjugal rights. Deshpande highlights the household conflict between wife and husband operating at the emotional, intellectual and sexual levels. The novelist being fully aware of the patriarchal set-up of Indian society does not plead for any kind of confrontation or militancy between Man and women, between husband and wife. Deshpande has very exquisitely pin pointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the characters of Saru, Indu and Jaya, 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. Their acceptance of western values and their search for liberty with a precondition of

unfettered growth and maturity of personality, despite the insidious conflict between tradition and modernity, ultimately results in their emergence as a human being.

The three novels of Shashi Deshpande's – *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* – have analogous narrative structures. For the protagonist Saru, Indu and Jaya, a journey into the past, a return to their childhood homes is the necessary spark that sets them off on the path of re-definition and self-discovery. They realize that through a re-appraisal of the past, they could arrive at an understanding of the present and a pattern for the future.

In this three novels *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*, the female characters Indu, Saritha and Jaya spends the family life for a long period of more than ten years. During this period she tolerates the humiliation and the mental agony for a long time. They suppress all their wishes, but then at a point of time they bursts open their heart and put forth's their individuality. Similarity is that after a long stay in a family environment, Sashi Deshpande brings the women characters to a free and deserved life. She portrays her heroines in a realistic manner in all the dimensions of life.

Through these novels, Deshpande explores the traumas and agonies of being a woman. She is concerned with women's quest for self-definition. Deshpande's all her characters are concerned with their 'selves' and they learn to be 'honest to themselves.' Women's passivity and submersion in the traditional roles of wife and mothers end in their self-diminishment. Deshpande's women, however do not walk off this marriage which institutionalizes the essentialist construction of the feminine selflessness and masculine self-assertion and self-conquests. These women seek for an 'aesthetic space'

within the restricting confines of domesticity which is provided by various professions, occupations and creative activities.

Deshpande's contribution lies in her portrayal of professional Indian women which is a fast emerging class. She also deals with the excesses committed upon the female-fold for centuries leading to their deep but quiet suffering and their passive resignation. She shows how women revolt against it and try to search their own identity in the hostile world of male chauvinism. She has also consideration for a home – a home of peace and love that can provide security for women. She feels that security is an important requirement of women. If a home provides her safety, she may not revolt against the home. She is not for revolt for the sake of revolt but rather for revolt in the sector and degree to which it is required. So, she shows that there are some husbands who are good and some women who are not at all prepared even to raise their voice.

All Deshpande's protagonists are extremely intelligent, introspective and hyper sensitive women who embark on a quest for identity and the true meaning of life. In fact her fictional forte happens to be the exploration of the psyche of her women. Deshpande feels that women have a tremendous inner strength, but so much of that strength is used up in merely enduring. She has added a new depth, a new dimension to English Fiction.

This thesis attempted to study Shashi Deshpande's women protagonists as portrayed by her in her novels with a view to understanding and appreciating their trials and tribulations under the impact of the conflicting influence of tradition and modernity. This thesis has also analysed their response to the emerging situations in life so as to fit themselves in the contemporary society. It points out the fact that education, status, economic independence or similar signs of empowerment cannot make a woman entirely

free of suppression. It has stressed the need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position and see their own need for self-fulfillment as more important than the duty of sacrificing themselves for their husbands and children.