



**Women's Quest for Identity in the selected works of
Anita Desai & Shashi Deshpande**

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	page 5-6
Chapter 1	
Introduction.....	page 7-13
Chapter 2	
Anita Desai's Novels: Articulation of Women's Inner Crisis.....	page 14-34
Chapter 3	
Shashi Deshpande's Portrayal of Women's Predicament.....	page 35-54
Chapter 4	
A Commentary on the Two Authors and Their Selected Novels.....	page 55-62
Chapter 5	
Conclusion.....	page 63-65
Works Cited.....	page 66-68

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to explore, examine and analyze women's quest for a self-asserted independent/liberated identity; oppositional to the ones that are imposed upon them by the society. For that purpose the selected pieces of literary works are- Fire on the mountain, Cry the Peacock, Voices in the City by Anita Desai, & That Long Silence, Dark Holds NO Terror and Roots and Shadows by Shashi Deshpande. In all the texts mentioned above the age old notion of woman's position as innately inferior to man has been put into question. The authors have exposed the social and familial traditions through which women are trained to play a subservient sacrificial role in the family. The society portrayed the image of woman as a custodian of extra-ordinary moral virtues incorporated with devotion and sacrifice. At the same time they are seen as lustful characters, naturally instinct driven and incapable of rational thoughts. Thus the society justifies its constant domineering gaze over a girl child. The women are asked to put up all sorts of repressions and suppressions in the name of family honor and modesty. From their very childhood they are given a false notion of themselves as unworthy of having autonomous individuality. There comes a time when women themselves start to believe in the man-made sexual hierarchy. They grow a tendency to live only for others which eventually lead up to self-denial. They try their best to become the "ideal woman" as if it is the only supposed goal of their lives. And with complete honesty they pass onto this socially acquired false "identity" to their daughters even if it needs a good amount of pressurizing. Thus the society imposed identity has been a major tool for suppressing women, depriving them of their true individual selves. So, the journey through which the female protagonists of the given texts go in their identity quest to eventually arrive at the assertion of a correct self-definition and

Rahman

emancipation as a sovereign human being will be thoroughly explored, examined and analyzed in this dissertation.

Introduction

A society can never progress without the lively participation of its female members along with their male counterparts as approximately half of world population is composed of women. Although the place of women in society has varied as per age, culture and region, this place has never been equal to man for centuries. Regardless of what advancements have taken place in the previous decades, women are still struggling for the recognition that they are to be treated equal in all spheres of life. The ugliest truth is Man has reached the moon and back, whereas women have not found their voices yet.

It has been a very long time since we are living in a patriarchal society. Therefore, our culture is an expression of patriarchal standards. Most of the oppressions that are done to women are approved under the name of morality, values, norms, customs, tradition and culture. These patriarchal standards which are often too unfair towards women leave the women with no clear identity, individuality or self-will. A Woman is constantly defined in orientation to man and not vice versa. From her very childhood, she is told both verbally and nonverbally, that she is not worthy of the same respect, and importance that a man gets. Additionally she has to be committed to the, often unfair, demands of the male members in the family and in turn of that of the society. She is trained to be submissive, passive, and always in need of other's approval. She is not allowed to become angry or disappointed regarding the demands made on her. Further, she is expected to have boundless endurance towards others. The tendency to exploit and to endure exploitation is already so deep rooted in women's bones that the thought of rebellion does not even arise in their minds. She has been playing this role for so long that it seems like an eternal part of her life. Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* has aptly commented: "*Women have*

Rahman

been charged with deviousness and duplicity since the dawn of civilization so they have never been able to pretend that their masks were anything but masks” (Greer, 129). So deeply are the ingrained societal norms that even if the woman is educated she is not free from the bondage of the society. Despite the laws that have been formed in support of women we see too often women are unable to come forth and voice their emotions. She even believes in the misconception of sexual hierarchy which she projects in her life. The women who don't mold themselves according to the prescribed roles are sort of cast-off from the society and sometimes labeled as witches and/or bitches.

Even though women usually feel the two contradictory urges fighting each-other within themselves; the urge to succeed according to society's expectations and the urge to succeed as an individual in her own right. They are too often left with no choice but to try their best to become the “ideal woman” as if it is the only supposed goal of their lives. The continuous sublimation and suppression of natural desires, the inner struggle to be what they are not creates an intense anguish in them. Along with it the constant physical and mental dependency makes it impossible for a woman to live and develop as an autonomous human being capable of leadership and decision-making roles. Women's secondary place in the sexual hierarchy is reflected in their mindset through self-doubt, passivity, helplessness, overdependence, insecurity, seeking other's approval, competitiveness with other women and self-condemnation. She is hesitant to speak for herself or to act on her own behalf. She is defined entirely through interpersonal, usually domestic and filial relationships. Her “identity” exists primarily as being for others, rather than being for-herself. Thus, the identification of the self with the needs of others leads to loss of self-sufficiency. For an average woman without much education, getting married and becoming a mother, most of the times, are the only aims in life.

Betty Friedan in *the Feminine Mystique* elaborates the inherent patriarchal attitude of society when she writes: *The identity issue for the boy is primarily an occupational-vocational question; he will be a husband and father (his sex role identity) but he will also and centrally be a worker, while the girl's identity centers more exclusively on her sex-role whose wife I will be, what kind of family will we have;* (Friedan, 245)

Woman's biggest hindrance in attaining liberated autonomous selves up till this date, to me, is this society imposed [false] Identity as most of the predicaments of women are caused by adjustment to a ratified image that does not permit them to become what they are capable of being, which subsequently leads them to self-rejection. Through this hegemonic practice of self-rejection they are being confined almost as impersonal beings without individuality for ages. For generations woman have been trained to be "woman" by the society. This society made "ideal women" mask passes from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) talked of the transformations which women goes through by being restricted to domestic life, how lack of exposure and presiding in a confined dominion often makes many women despotic, cunning, tyrannical, and petty. (80) Hence, the victim becomes the perpetrator of patriarchal oppression. The mother-in-laws, who were once wives, aggravate their sons into mistreating their wives to take vicious pleasure from this.

Feminists stress that in a world owned and controlled by men, it is no surprise that women constantly find themselves in subordinate positions. Likewise a society subjugated by racist code relegates the black people to an substandard rank and makes them believe in this dogma, a society founded on sexist ideology denounces women to an inferior sex and makes them believe in it. Patriarchal ideology has been promoting the treatment of women as "an

Rahman

object”, “commodity”, “thing” and “the other” since ages. So, feminism is an alertness of patriarchal control, manipulation and tyranny at the substantial and ideological levels of women,s labor, fertility, sexuality, and individuality, within the familial and social contexts. Along with that, feminism appeals sensible actions by both women and men to alter this unwanted condition. Thus, feminist movement is an ongoing individual and collective struggle to attain equality, dignity, rights, liberty for women; to have control over their own lives and bodies both at home and outside.

Feminism comprises both the fight for women's equal rights as well as the aspirations towards the all-round liberation of women. Illustrating on the “all-round liberation” Gerda Lerner in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* states that, “*It (feminism) is not always a movement, for it can be a level of consciousness, a stance, an attitude, as well as the basis for organized effort.*”(Lerner, 237) Sushila Singh in her article " Recent Trend in Feminist Thought: A Tour de Horizon" in *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English* states that "*As a philosophy of life, it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep - seated causes of women's oppression. It is a concept of 'raising of the consciousness' of an entire culture*". (Singh, 22)

Feminists, especially the individual and existential feminists, accentuate the significance of the autonomy of the women exclusively; it emphasizes on abstract concepts of individual human rights and rejoices the pursuit for personal liberty, dismissing all socially defined roles. Feminists like Beauvoir insist women to intent for transcendence in their everyday activities instead of being content with remaining as 'the other' sex. She remarks, “*one of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to announce that a woman is an individual being. She is neither the —other*”; *nor an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of finding her own way to salvation*". (The Second Sex, 48)

Likewise feminism, the feminist literary works too have emerged as a response to the society's patriarchal attitude of constraining women within submissive roles. One of the most remarkable features of the contemporary Indian fiction in English has been the emergence of feminist literature – feminist in the sense of articulating the sufferings, aspirations and assertions of women in a conventionally male-dominated surrounding. In Indian context some of the eminent feminist writers we can name are Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Arundathi Roy, Manju Kapur, Shobha De etc. The authors I have chosen for research in this dissertation are Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. The selected novels are- *Fire on the Mountains*, *Cry the Peacock*, and *Voices in the City* by Anita Desai, and *The Dark Holds No Terror*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande.

Anita Desai's novels carry a sense of universal feminism. She has depicted the tyrannies, torture and violence confronted by women in Indian society through delving deep into women's psyche. Her literary themes of incompatible relationships, alienation, quest for independent identity and authentic existence almost unconsciously weave into her plots and characters. She has managed to make a place for herself in writing about the long term effects on the psyche of women in the family and the society and their attitude, compromising or otherwise. She discovers the inner functioning of her protagonists' minds describing the inner recesses and revealing the essential human condition by placing the individuals in states of extreme tension. Her Novels *Fire on the Mountain*, *Cry the Peacock* and *Voices in the City* deal with the psychic conflict of women-protagonists who are caught between a „personal self“ and a „societal self.“ These characters suffer a humiliation as far as their social, economic and cultural life is concerned but they also find themselves capable of struggling, compromising and realizing their

Rahman

true selves/identities by the end. They act as per the commands of their own will and defy the conventional codes of the social system. Her characters are distinguished by the merits of contemplation, introversion and a negation to surrender their individual selves. Her novels disclose her honest concern with the themes of anxiety, anguish and psychological adaptation necessitated by the threats to the individual's identity.

Shashi Deshpande's novels are a contemptuous critique of Indian society, and also "society" in general, and its standards that have always rendered only a secondary status to its women, down the ages. In her literary works we find women in a state of instability, going through mental conflicts and in the process, striving to establish a new identity as strong self-reliant individuals. Deshpande, by making her female protagonists undergo phases of self-introspection and self-reflection, made them grow themselves into more liberated individuals than what their biological nature or culture have endorsed. In *The Dark Holds No Terror* most of the commentaries of the author articulated through the main character Sarita; a lady doctor. She reflects upon her own situations in life as well as generalized accounts about the life of women in Indian society. Through the predicament of well-established career women, Deshpande illustrates the irony in the lives of so called 'liberated' women who are economically sovereign. Indian society places such a high significance on family relations and husband-wife relations, that even if they are not happy with the relationship, they dare not show it. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist, goes through mental conflicts. She undergoes an introspection of her own self, evaluating her actions and situations in life; not only of her past but also of her present married condition. She considers herself an archetypal wife to Mohan. When a catastrophe takes place and he has to remain under cover, she joins him. After a certain period she starts to question her husband's expectations about her. She no longer acknowledges him any authority.

She discards her previous image of mythical women like „Sita“. She is not ready to take on the burden of her husband's liability now, even though her former self might have done so. She looks back with much amusement at the figure she has presented earlier. Also in *Roots and Shadows*, at the beginning of the novel Deshpande makes her protagonists reveal only that side of their selves what their husbands wanted to see. But later they realize that such division of their selves is not possible. They cannot deny portions of their own identities. Their husbands have to accept their whole beings - not only their domesticated selves, but also the rebellious unconventional parts of their selves.

I think despite of having distinguished approaches in articulating the women's predicament the two selected authors complements each-other. Anita Desai delves into women's psyche while Shashi Deshpande tends to focus more on the social and external aspects of women's existence. This dissertation brings both the authors together so that we can find a comparatively bigger picture of women's predicaments. The message that they convey has a universal appeal to it and is still very relevant to this date. Researches regarding women's identity have been done on the selected novels of the two authors; however it has been done mostly from the existential point of view. Although a profound number of feminist readings have been done as well, yet total emphasis on addressing the quest for self-asserted independent identity as opposed to the society imposed hegemonic identity of women is unique about this dissertation. It is hoped that this dissertation will provoke further reading and research, and bring to light new aspects to the study of the selected novels.

Anita Desai's Novels: Articulation of Women's Inner Crisis

Anita Desai is a celebrated writer who introduced psycho-analytical approach for the first time in novel writing among Indian women writers. She frequently uses the stream of consciousness technique, flashbacks and interior monologues. She skillfully portrays the human condition in which the inner and the outer selves seek harmony. She is a master analyst of the human psyche; especially women's psyche. She crafts brilliant characters. Her protagonists are often gifted with self-esteem, sophisticated sensibility, delicate artistic abilities. They are thoughtful, romantic, sensitive, passionate, demanding, reserved, and above all intellectual human beings. They share an inevitable urge to be identified as independent self-sufficient human beings. Unlike many other women, they aspire to lead a purposeful life. They are not mere living beings with animalistic urges; they are human beings with emotional, intellectual, spiritual needs. The external basic things that they are provided with are however not sufficient to sustain their inward sensibility. From her first novel to the latest, all the protagonists including Maya (*Cry the Peacock*), Monisha (*Voices in the City*), and Nanda Kaul (*Fire on the Mountain*) crave for a way of living that will respond to their innermost cravings for emancipation and dignity for the self. Gajendra Kumar has correctly stated, "*The recurring themes of Anita Desai's novels are identified-woman's struggle for self-realization and self-definition, woman's quest for her identity, her pursuit of freedom, equality and transcendence, her rebellion and protest against oppression at every level.*" (Kumar, 18)

Desai's first novel *Cry the Peacock* (1963) is about marital disharmony and maladjustment in husband-wife relationship. Larger portion of the novel consists of Maya's interior monologue. Maya is the daughter of a rich advocate in Lucknow. Her mother being dead,

she is the only female member of the family. Her elder brother having gone to America for career purpose; she is the one who gets all the attention from her father. The excessive affection or we can call it pampering, Maya gets from her father makes her have a naive perception of life. Her father's over protective love does not allow her any independence to think and grow as an entity. Having brought up under the indulgent attentions of her father, Maya yearns to have similar attentions from her husband Gautama as well. But unfortunately life is harsher than her expectations. She is not anymore a pampered daughter in her father's house. She is now a „wife“. Maya misinterpreted the term „wife“ to be a companion of the husband in all spheres of life, which is not the case in real life. In real life wifedom is a confined allotted space where a girl enters after her marriage, where she will be provided few basic things and in return she ought to perform a long list of things repeatedly for years to come. After a certain time Maya starts to realize this fact. To many women of her society this is pretty normal, but Maya finds it suffocating.

Maya's marriage with Gautama was more or less a marriage of convenience. Gautama and Maya's father were friends, they belonged to the same profession and also they were about the same age to each other. Maya's marriage to Gautama lacks the emotional attachment which is in contrast to her joyous childhood. Maya is highly sensitive and imaginative; on the other hand Gautama is exactly the opposite- unimaginative and insensitive. It is a contrast that continues to grow up as the novel proceeds. Not by any means Gautama is a „villain“ character. Instead he can be considered a very good husband in „normal“ sense as he performs the „duties“ towards his wife. He simply finds Maya's physical and mental demands often too naïve and does not worth his precious time. Thus, Maya's most sensitive emotional and physical urges are denied by Gautama's practicality.

Gautama's insensitivity towards Maya's feelings is very evident throughout the novel. Maya experiences the first emotional crisis in the novel when her pet dog „Toto“ dies. She being deprived of a love bond in her marital life lavished all her affection towards Toto. When she discovers that Toto is dead, she first could not stand the sight of her beloved dead dog and she rushed to *“the garden tap to wash the vision from her eyes”* she thinks that *“she saw the evil glint of a blue bottle”* and grows hysterical and finds the setting sun *“swelling visibly like... a purulent boil”* (Desai, Anita. *Cry the Peacock*: 5-6).

Her grief is inflamed by Gautama's casual and unsympathetic statement, *“It is all over, come and drink your tea and stop crying. You mustn't cry”* (Desai, 7). Further, instead of consoling her, he leaves her to meet a visitor who has come to see him. He forgets about Toto's death, Maya's grief altogether. After a while Gautama informs Maya, *“I sent it away to be cremated. ... It is all over. Come, won't you pour out my tea?”*(6) As she tries to do so, she spills the tea into the sugar-pot, tea-strainer topples into a cup, the lemons slip to the floor and there is chaos. Just then the servant announces a visitor and the husband escapes, *“ordering tea to be sent to the study; forgetting her, forgetting her woes altogether”* (6). This incident may have no significance in Gautama's eyes, but it has immense impact over Maya's sensitive psyche. Such an apparently insignificant incident demonstrates the ever-widening gap between Maya and Gautama. Maya reflects upon it as, *“Something slipped into my tear-hazed vision, a shadowy something that prodded me into admitting that it was not my pet's death alone that I mourned today, but another sorrow, unremembered, perhaps as yet not even experienced, and filled me with this despair.”*(7)

The crisis in Maya-Gautama relationship is not emerged in one day but it has developed gradually over the course of four years. In these four years Maya has made numerous attempts to

build up a mental bridge, to make an emotional attachment with Gautama. Every time she was made to feel neglected.

She craved for his company. She spent sleepless nights consumed with his desire. She thought to herself, "*his companionship was a necessity. I required his closest understanding. How was I to gain it? We did not even agree on which point, on what grounds this closeness of mind was necessary*" (Desai, 19). On the other hand, Gautama took no interest in things which fascinated her, "*Yes, Yes, he said already thinking of something else, having shrugged my words off as superfluous, trivial and there was no way I could make him believe that this, the night filled with these several scents, their varying essences and associations, their effects on me, on us, were all important—die very core of the night of our moods tonight*" (20). This emotional participation of her and the utter lack of it from Gautama is the root of the maladjustment that breaks Maya more and more. In this regard Germaine Greer says, "*Loneliness is never more cruel than when it is felt in close propinquity with someone who has ceased to communicate. Many a housewife staring at the back of her husband's newspaper, or listening to his breathing in bed is lonelier than any spinster in a rented room.*"(Greer, 40) Thus, from an everyday pampered hypersensitive young-bride, she is transformed into a neurotic, homicidal maniac within four years of her married life. The essential reason behind that is he sees only the upper surface of her life and showing coldness in case of responding to her inner feelings, her physical and mental needs.

Maya's sexual urges are emphasized in the novel through two symbols- the peacock's voluptuous dance and the mating calls of the pigeons. She relates herself to the peacocks that mate only after the combat. She reflects upon them, "*living they are aware of death. Dying, they are in love with life.*"(96) Their cries blend in Maya's thoughts with her own anguish. Identical to

Rahman

the peacocks, her inner-self cries for intense love and she is denied of such love. Maya's desire for a physical as well as emotional attachment is represented thus,

“She longs to be with him, be close to him, make haste in undressing... but when I went to rouse him from the couch, with a touch, I saw that he had closed his eyes not with mere tiredness, but in profound, invulnerable sleep and was very far from any world of mine, however enticing.” (Desai, 93)

Commenting on the coldness from Gautama's part Maya says,

“Showing how little he knows of my misery or how to comfort me but then knew that concerned me. Giving me an opal ring to wear on my finger, he did not notice the translucent skin beneath, the blue flashing veins that ran under and out of the bridge of gold ... telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me.. it is his hardness - no, no, not hardness, but the distance that he coldly keeps from me. His coldness, his coldness and the incessant talks of cups of tea and philosophy in order not to hear me talk and talking reveal myself. It is that loneliness in this house.”(Desai, 84)

Gradually the lack of participation in the relationship from Gautama's part increases as he devotes more and more time to his work. Therefore Maya is pushed aside. She suffers from an agonizing sense of insignificance. She lacks the sense of belongingness. In Gautama's family, the air is heavily charged with rational, economic and socio-political discourses. Their conversations revolve around talk on parliament, of cases of bribery and corruption, of political treaties and of distant resolutions. Maya finds herself incapable of participating in these conversations and they also knew it. They discuss about babies, shopping, meals and marriage with her, for they feel

she is too immature for discussing serious topics with her. It makes her feel herself inferior to others. If she had a sense of belonging, a sense of pride and identity of her own, she would not feel so inferior. Moreover, her being childless further inflames her sense of alienation. She feels isolated among all the members of the house. All these faculties eventually lead her up to complete alienation. She gradually becomes more and more introvert. She cherishes the memories of her father's house and in her moments of affliction exclaims to herself: "*No one, no one else, loves me as my father does*" (112).

Maya's psychological condition starts to deteriorate more and more as she recollects a prediction made by an albino astrologer in her childhood. According to the prediction, she or her husband would die during the fourth year of her marriage:

"My child, I would not speak of it if I saw it on your face alone. But look, look at the horoscope. Stars do not lie. And it is best to warn you, prepare you, prepare you Death to one of you. When you are married — and you shall be married young... Death — an early one — by unnatural causes." (Desai, 33)

The complete emotional segregation between the husband and the wife supplements her inner distress and disintegration. She is convinced that it is she who is going to die. Being intensely in love with life she turns hysteric over the fear of death: "*Am I gone insane? Father: Brother: Husband: Who is my saviour? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am dying. God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no, I'll never sleep, again. There is no rest any more—only death and waiting*" (Desai, 98). Confronted by the dreadful choice of life or death, she decides that it is Gautama who has to die as he is detached from and indifferent to what makes life livable. She therefore gathers enough courage to finally murder her husband. When she did that she was not

Rahman

in her own. She was mentally imbalanced. The committing of the murder does not solve her predicament; instead it pushes her further into the deeper darker corner of mental illness, which results in her committing suicide later on.

Through Maya's tragic end, Anita Desai has personified the intense yearning of the woman to be understood by her male partner, to break free from the suffocating space that is allotted for her by the society. Throughout the novel Desai illustrates how woman who does not conform is pushed aside, isolated and ignored. Almost the entire society stands against such women. The moment one woman refuse to conform she is immediately opposed by a whole bunch of people and constantly subjected to alienation. She is too often left with no other way out but to conform to the society's demands from her, it is that she is a „woman“ and she should remain a „woman“; she must not cross the limit by cherishing her individuality. Most of the women who refuse to conform at first eventually end up yielding after being exhausted by facing constant opposition from her family members, and people from the society. Maya does not conform till the end. She instead chose to kill and die. What she has done is never a recommendable solution, still through what she has done the author presents an extreme condemnation of women's often having „no way out“.

After going through the novel it becomes quite obvious for the readers that Maya is a victim of society imposed false identity. From her very childhood Maya is not taught to be an independent individual. She is pampered so much that she ended up being over-dependent. She lacks self-sufficiency. She is molded in such a way that she inevitably suffers from crisis for an autonomous identity. She does not know what she should do as she does not have first-hand experience of real life. She has been brought up to be a super-sensitive girly girl who would live most of her time in her private dream world unaware of the hardships of outdoor life. Her father

loves her daughter but this love is not beyond social framework. Like most fathers, her father too measured her through the socially available notion of womanhood. Therefore he always treated her as per the notion that women are to be protected, provided with the needs, and pampered as if they are unable to grow as autonomous individuals capable of taking utter responsibilities of their own lives. Therefore, he loved her daughter as if she is his own precious property, not as a separate independent individual. This fact becomes more evident when he marries Maya to his friend Gautama. He does not think once about her personal choice. He considers his decision to be the decision of his daughter; as his daughter does not have a separate individuality, she must not have a choice of her own. The false notion that her father held about woman's identity, he transmitted it to her daughter which she projects later in her life. Consequently Maya could not grow up as an autonomous individual under the shadow of her father. Later on she suffers from self-denial, lack of confidence, fear of facing the reality and over-anxiety. Gautama just like Maya's father takes her as a being without individuality. He does not consider her thoughts and emotions worthy of his precious time. His negligence towards her individuality hurts Maya more than any physical torture. A simple consideration of herself as a human being with individual needs would make the entire story otherwise. But unfortunately neither her father nor her husband did that. What makes Maya special and fit for to be „protagonist“ is that she, in spite of how she was brought up, did not get flowed with the current. Although she projected the socially acquired false identity to a certain time as she lacked the sense of self-sufficiency but an inner voice never let her compromise with her individual needs.

In the novel Anita Desai discussed about Maya's friend Pom, who is married into an orthodox, tradition bound family. When she fails to get pregnant timely, she is subjected to loads of rituals, prayers and pilgrimages - all in the hope that she will give birth to a „son“. However,

Rahman

Pom is quite satisfied with her life. She believes that a woman's contentment lies in nothing beyond being rich, having a son and doing what the mother-in-law thinks appropriate. Maya, too, at the beginning of her married life tried to mold herself to fit in her present surroundings but unlike Pom she could not do it at the cost of her individuality. For her, her emotional and spiritual fulfillment is the most essential thing in life. Maya's another old friend Leila who is a teacher of Persian literature. She got married to a man dying from tuberculosis and with him, there is "*the fatality of his disease*" (57). However, Leila consoles herself by saying: "*it was all written in my fate long ago*" (39). Maya after a certain point detached herself from both Leila and Pom because they are always ready to conform and mold themselves as per the demand of their surroundings; they have no say of their own.

Anita Desai portrays several women characters in the novel who are socially liberated and have modern outlooks but none of them possesses the attributes that would qualify them as a self-sufficient liberated woman. They have no distinct identities. Instead all of them possess a deep hunger for people's attention and approval. For instance, Maya's sister-in-law Nila is an independent, financially privileged, modern woman. But for Maya, being independent is not synonymous with leading a life of gratification, for „independent“ includes awareness of spiritual needs which she does not possess.

Maya could not gather courage to socially stand against all odds. Yet through mentally isolating herself she affirms her self-sufficiency at least to herself. She stood against the current which is never easy. As Germaine Greer in her book *Female Eunuch* states that, "*It takes a great deal of courage and independence to decide to design your own image instead of the one that society rewards, but it gets easier as you go along.*"(25) From an outer perspective she might not gone a long way, but she had to go through long agonizing transitional phases to arrive at self-

affirmation. She undertook the long psychic journey which starts from a weak dependent girl to a woman of strong determination. By the end of the novel she makes her stand very obvious. She demonstrated obvious disgust towards living an entire life in the socially allocated confinement, living for the sake of serving others, and doing the assigned things for years without any individual fulfillment. Unlike the other woman characters of the novel she could come out of the socially allotted domain for woman to assert her individuality. Unlike the other women figures of the novel she resisted the current to defend her individuality till the end, even though she had to meet a tragic end for it. That is what makes her distinguishable from other woman. She is not one from the crowd of identical women. She is an independent distinctive human being standing on her own right.

Nanda Kaul from the novel *Fire on the Mountain* is a widow who is living in isolation in Carignano. Her husband Mr. Kaul was the ex-Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University. In the novel the readers are told that in spite of her age she is quite elegant, and graceful. After a long period of playing the role of a good wife and mother she has now withdrawn herself from all sort of duties, responsibilities. She has detached herself from all kinds of familial bonding. She has developed the skill to rejoice loneliness. She dislikes all human company so much that even the arrival of postman or maid annoys her.

All through her life Nanda Kaul did not enjoy playing the typical traditional wife and mother role and the duties associated with it. She did everything only because she had to. She is thankful that her secluded stay in Carignano has liberated her from the shackles of traditional wifhood and motherhood, "*She had been glad to leave it behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy, difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again*" (Desai,

Rahman

Anita. *Fire on the Mountain*: 30). She is so tired of living for others all her life that now she wants nobody near her. She seeks complete loneliness; she wants to live for herself. Therefore, the stay in the hills of Carignano is perfect for her. She shuns all human company and has no regret for this. She re-affirms to herself, "*Is it wrong?*", "*have I not done enough? I want no more. I want nothing; can I not be left with nothing?*" (17)

When Nanda comes to know through a letter that her great-granddaughter Raka is on her way to Kasauli[situated in Carignano], Nanda Kaul is utterly disturbed by this, "*All she wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself, in this period of her life when stillness and calm were all that she wished to entertain.*" (Desai, 17) To Nanda Raka is merely an intruder who is coming to break her sacred silence. The letter also indicates that Raka must be taken care of. Nanda thinks to herself again, "*have I not done enough already?*"(40)

All her married life she has been a dutiful wife handling the household affairs with great skill. Still the house was not hers; it never represented her with all its "*dark furniture, all rosewood.*"(43) She can recall the agonizing memories of the repetitive unpleasant tasks that she had to do years after years. All the time she has been engaged in thankless and boundless household works. Attending to the needs of her husband and the children, she could not get a day for her own self; sewing, sweeping, cleaning, supervising cooking, issuing instructions to the servants, taking care of three children, receiving the husband's guests, visitors. Besides all those enduring the male guests' shameless flattery was an additional burden. She recalls the sore memories of child bearing, child rearing, familial confinements along with all kinds of humiliation and exhaustion. Regarding such condition of many wives from the society Germaine Greer states that,

“The housewife is an unpaid worker in her husband's house in return for the security of being a permanent employee: hers is the reductio ad absurdum of the employee who accepts a lower wage in return for permanence of his employment. But the lowest paid employees can be and are laid off, and so are wives. They have no savings, no skills which they can bargain with elsewhere, and they must bear the stigma of having been sacked.”(Greer, 31)

Irrespective of what happens to Nanda, her husband was content appearing elegant before the guests, colleagues and other people. Her life as a wife and mother was meaningless to her. Through the outsiders’ lens she enjoyed all the comforts and social status being the wife of a Vice-chancellor. But deep down her psyche she felt used, and neglected. His extra martial relation with Miss David the mathematics mistress was another big reason for her unhappy married life. It is her unbearable sense of emptiness, vacuum of un-fulfillment and absolute loneliness even in the midst of a large number people that made her want to live in seclusion in Carignano, *“She did not live here alone by choice—she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to nothing.”(15)*

However, Raka finally arrives. With huge surprise Nanda observes that Raka is far different from what she had expected. Unlike other children of her age, she *“preferred to stand apart and go off and disappear to being loved, cared for and made the centre of attention”* (Desai, 48). Nanda Kaul’s frustration intensifies seeing her great granddaughter Raka is not showing much interest in her. This young girl has never known what happiness is. Raka, despite of being a child she has developed an extraordinary affection for solitude; all she wanted is to be alone amongst the rocks and pines of Kasauli, *“It was the ravage, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her: the ravine where yellow snakes slept under grey rocks and agaves*

Rahman

growing out of the dust and rubble, the skeletal pines that rattled in the wind, the wind-levelled hill-tops and the seared remains of the safe, cosy, civilized world in which Raka had no part and to which she owned no attachment.”(50) She does not like even the company of other children. Raka is a product of a broken marriage. Unfortunately she had to see the violent attitude of her father towards her mother. The shocking exposure to brutality of her father at such an early age has shattered her human sensitivity and the urge for companionship. Raka represents those numerous children who are exposed to relentless suffering for no faults of their own.

Like Raka, Nanda Kaul's childhood friend Ila Das is another significant character in the novel. Nanda Kaul has always supported Ila Das in her need. Through Nanda Kaul's recommendation to her Vice-Chancellor husband, Ila Das got appointed as a lecturer. She had to resign from that work later on, as she couldn't adjust with the humiliating means of the new Vice-Chancellor. Afterwards she worked as a social activist in the Himalayan foothills amongst the peasants, wood cutters, road laborer and goatherds. Her passion for eradicating some conspicuous errors in the milieu earned her wrath of certain miscreants. One of them is Preet Singh, who plans to marry her seven year old daughter to an old widower who has six children. Ila Das stands against such callous act. Later in the novel Preet Singh takes heinous revenge on her by raping and strangulating her: *“quickly he left the ends of the scarf, tore at her clothes, tore them off her, in long, screeching rips, till he came to her, to the dry, shrivelled, starved stick inside the wrappings, and raped her, pinned her down into the dust and the goat raped, broken, still and finished”* (Desai, 143).

Through Ila Das Anita Desai presents an example of woman's courage to confront social problems, even if it needs challenging male authority. Ruth K. Rossenwasser aptly states, *"As a heroine and a feminist, Ila Das combines energy, determination and courage to protest male*

dominance which relegates women to positions of subservience and submission" (Rosenwasser, 102). In the novel Ila Das comprehended the significance of education to prepare women to look after their own well-being. Being a social worker, she tried her best to reform the lives of the poor and the oppressed village women. Ila Das felt it essential to "*shoulder our responsibility and do what we can*" (Desai, 130).

The news of Ila Das's getting raped and murdered breaks Nanda Kaul into pieces. Her anguish is identified in these words: "*No, no, it is a lie! No, it cannot be. It was a lie-Ila was not raped, not dead. It was all a lie, all.*" (Desai, 145) In the novel Anita Desai created characters such as Nanda, Raka and Ila Das demonstrate high sensibility that is expected from a sensible human being. Nanda, Asha, Tara, Ila, Raka etc. represent different phases of womanhood in a society. Through these characters the author has put question marks on the position of women in present-day society where marital, filial, social and communal relations have nearly lost their right sense and where women are meant to live stunted life.

In the novel, the protagonist Nanda Kaul had to undertake all the things that a woman is expected to undergo to be a „woman“ in socially endorsed ideal sense. She lived a successful life in many people's eyes; as wife, mother and grandmother. In all the socially acquired identities, one thing gets lost- her identity as a self-sufficient individual that she is not merely a mother, a wife or a daughter; she is also an independent human being. For most part of her life she lived as a „non-entity“. Just like Maya from *Cry the Peacock*, her individuality was ignored, as if she had no individuality at all. Her husband never recognized her as a partner of equal stature. He merely treated her as an essential tool for the orderly running of his household, meanwhile ran full-blooded affair with Miss David. The people of her surroundings, including the female ones, saw this treatment as a very normal thing to do; as if woman does not have individual needs, she

Rahman

is merely living for others and in this sacrifice is her fulfillment as a woman. In patriarchal views women do not exist beyond their physical realm. They can only feel what is physical, they only need the physical needs, they are mere physical beings, and they do not possess independent individuality; they are utterly for others. Thus, commodification and manipulation of woman depriving them of their emotional and spiritual needs is justified in patriarchy. The socially provided stereotypical false notion of womanhood misleads the males as well as the females of the society. Woman who fails to fit in this imposed image suffers from guilty feeling.

The life of Nanda Kaul represents the huge number of women who live their lives only for the sake of others; the children, husband, family and the society. Their individual flairs are denied, their wishes, needs, talents are submerged deep in their hearts. Nanda Kaul's quest for a liberated self has been an internal quest, a passive quest. She longed for a space where she would no longer need to wear masks of imposed identities upon her, where she can be all by herself. Living in seclusion in Carignano provides her with this desired „space“ for herself. She cannot tolerate others in her private space anymore. She wants to let the nature touch her. She wants to live for once at least in her true image asserting that she is on her own a complete human being, she does not need others to make her complete. She is able to decide her own identity; she does not need someone else to give her an identity. She has been a good obedient wife, a caring-sacrificing mother, a presentable woman, and many more. She has been enough „woman“. Now she wants to become a mere human being, nothing more nothing less. Likewise “*A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man.*” (Beauvoir, 33) Nanda also wants to be addressed as a human being, not by her sexual identity. She wants to get rid of all the identities that have been imposed upon her. Talking about two conflicting identities Betty Friedan says, “*It is not possible to preserve one's identity by*

adjusting for any length of time to a frame of reference that is in itself destructive to it. It is very hard indeed for a human being to sustain such an 'inner' split - conforming outwardly to one reality, while trying to maintain inwardly the value it denies.”(Friedan, 41)

In *Voices in the City* the protagonist Monisha, a sensitive sensible woman, is trapped in ill-matched marriage and suffocative environment of her husband’s house. Her condition resembles Maya’s [from *Cry the Peacock*] condition in the ways that she is also childless, delicate and a sufferer of an ill-matched marriage. Monisha’s husband Jiban’s house is overcrowded since it is a joint family. It does not provide Monisha with the essential space for privacy. Her intellectual pursuits make her unlike many other Bengali women. Her wardrobe is stocked with Kafka, Dostoevsky, Hopkins and French and Sanskrit works. Far different to her, the ladies of the household usually talk about their dowries, dresses, jewelry, recipes, house decoration, guests, children, husbands etc. For this reason they see her as the „other“ and not us. Simon De Beauvoir precisely says, “*Women's mutual understanding comes from the fact that they identify themselves with each other; but for the same reason each is against the others.*”(Beauvoir, 39)

Monisha and Jiban have wedded each other having incompatible personalities. Their nuptial relationship lacks mutual understanding and love bond. Jiban is narcissistic. He does not give attention to feelings of his wife Monisha. Barely a chat takes place between them. There is a huge emotional gap between them in spite of their physical nearness. As a result she suffers from an overwhelming sense of loneliness. For him, she is like an outsider in his family. He feels more attached to his family members, especially his mother, than to her. Thus Monisha deprived of a

Rahman

sense of belongingness in her married life. She struggle a position of her in such context. She lacks a clear identity of her own.

She finds herself "*trapped in an emotionally, bankrupt and joyless matrimonial bond with all outlets of escape plugged for her*, (Desai, Anita. *Voices in the City*: 16). Monisha's mother-in-law, her husband and his sisters act like constant bodyguards to the extent that she is not allowed to 'speak to her own brother and sister. She is under relentless observation.

A joint family with countless traditional bindings makes it impossible for Monisha to live with. Even Monisha's nephew Nikhil is annoyed by this. He thinks this is extremely detrimental to individual growth and freedom. Monisha gets her first shock at her reception ritual in the house. She is made to touch the feet of a large number of aunts and uncles. Afterwards her life is reduced to cooking, washing and other household works. Amidst so many people of the house she is made to be alone. She is reduced to peeping out of the barred windows to catch a glimpse of stars. She longs for the free air of Kalimpong [in Darjeeling] where she belongs to. 'The solitude of the jungles there, the aqueous shadows of the bamboo groves and the earth laid with great fallen leaves.' all these are lost to her in Calcutta [her in-laws house]. Her arrival from Kalimpong to dusty crowded Calcutta. is not at all convenient, comfortable to her.

Monisha gradually secludes herself to her own private world. Her participation with the social milieu remains only to the physical extent. She states to herself that, "*I am different from them all. They put me in a steel-container, a thick glass-cubicle and I have lived in it all my life without a touch of love or hate or warmth on me. I am locked apart from all of them, they cannot touch me*". (Desai, 109)

Being unable to take the option of religion to get comfort Monisha states that: *If I had religious faith, I could easily enough renounce all this. But I have no faith, no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to and so I must stay* (Desai, 111). Her predicament becomes even more miserable as she is childless. Her desire to have a child works in her unconscious mind becomes evident when she, seeing a Kangaroo lying in the Sun, thinks to herself. *'A Kangaroo lies on its back to sun, the soft honey fur on its belly, but its pouch alas is empty* (119) It is saddening point is that in a patriarchy ridden society a woman gains little status only as a mother, while sterility is seen as a stigma for a married woman.

Further adding to her misery she is charged with theft. Her image receives a shattering blow under the accusation. Her self-image crumbles down as Jiban says, *—why didn't you tell me before you took it?— Monisha falls down to reach the rock bottom in her husband's family whence she has to pick herself up unsupported by her husband and has to struggle to attain her individual status,*"(Desai, 121) After the charge of theft, she chooses complete detachment from her husband and in-laws. Locked in her room, she concentrates on reading books and writing diary which helps her forget everything else, it gives her a sense of self-importance. At night she sneaks up to the topmost floor to enjoy communion with vast dark emptiness: *"I'll have only the darkness - only the dark spaces between the stars, for they are the only things on earth that can comfort me."* (138) At this point she undertakes a massive amount of inner conflicts. Within her is mostly the struggle between two identities; her self-identity and the „other identity“ that is imposed upon her.

Shattered by this inner conflict between the two selves, Monisha loses all interest in life. She grows obsessed with „death“. She sees the color of death everywhere around her, the city is „black“, her wardrobe is black, so are the minds of her family members- *“starless and darkness”*

(139). Her alienation from her husband, the family, society, associated with an inner urge for emancipation lead her to negate life as a whole; a life that is dedicated to nothing. "*Life without emotion, without passion is merely another form of death,*" (122). Between mean existence and death, she identifies herself with the latter, for it is death which emancipates her from the brutal assaults of life.

Monisha's death has an emancipating effect on her brother Nirode, and her sister Amla. It provides them an opportunity to introspect and lastly reach a fresh awareness about life and also particular roles in it. To Amla, Monisha's death has pointed the way for her and "*would never allow her to lose herself.*" *She is now prepared to accept the challenges of life, to go through life with her feet —primly shod,*" because Monisha has shown her a glimpse of what lies on the other side of the —*stark, uncompromising margin.*" (Desai, 248) In Monisha's ashes Nirode discovers the vitality and enthusiasm in life. For the first time, he decides to take matters into his hands and he also begins to identify with the sufferings of others. When Monisha was alive, he watched her woe with indifference but when she passes away, he insisted on taking her away, so that she could have a little bit of peace and relief in solitude before final annihilation of her body: "*At that moment Nirode's silence broke and fell away. In a brief flash of comprehension, he realized what he must do. He must take Monisha away.*" (Desai, 246)

Likewise Maya from *Cry the Peacock*, Nanda Kaul from *Fire on the Mountain*, Monisha in *Voices in the city* undergoes the tussles of trying to fit in to the society imposed identity. Her tragedy lies in her inability to compromise, to mold herself to fit in. "*Monisha can be regarded as a victim of traditional familial ideology and patriarchal oppression. Her unfulfilled sexuality, her metaphorically and literally barren marriage, her lack of privacy, her waiting upon men, her*

material dependence despite her education and her violent death are all marks of her sexual colonization."(Sachdeva, 24)

At one point of the novel Monisha's life becomes unlivable to her. But this does not come in one day. The constant ridiculing of her individuality, absolute disrespect from her husband, above all the ever-growing sense of psychic confinement leads to this point where life seems „unlivable“. Monisha being over-educated for a woman, being a woman with high self-esteem and being childless, her sufferings surpasses her capacity to endure. She is ridiculed every time she did something for her individuality. She is cast off by all. She becomes an outsider, almost a stranger by the end of the novel. And all these ill-treatment of her takes place just because she is different; she is a woman who still has the urge to cherish her individuality. She was a threat to the convention, so it was urgent that she is ridiculed to such an extent that she eventually surrender to the social system of molding the woman into a socially acceptable „woman“. But she chose to die, instead of compromising her individuality. For outsiders who took fun in everything it was not a big deal. All these blaming and ridiculing things are very normal to them. But a big combat was taking place within the psyche of Monisha. It is the struggle between the identity that she asserts for herself and the identity that the society wants her to adopt. By her tragic death she finally voices her inner voice, successfully putting a big question mark on the face of the establishment. Once again, death is never the solution, yet her statement is worth noting, *“Life without emotion, without passion is merely another form of death,”* (Desai, 122). Again one must note that death is not her willful choice. She being a sophisticated sensitive person with intellectual capabilities unfortunately finds herself under such a mentally suffocating trap from where she found no other way out but to negate life as a whole. The society did not recognize her as an independent individual equal to her male counterpart, but

Rahman

she asserts herself as an independent self-sufficient individual. She fails to find a voice living such a life, so she gives a voice to herself by death. As Michelene Wandor aptly writes, "*the dominant male culture imposes the language of silence on women. A woman's fragmentation, isolation and lack of identity make it impossible for her to relate her own situation to that of any other oppressed group or to seek a way out.*" (Wandor, 7-8) Monisha breaks the silence by giving a voice to her unuttered urges and anguishes that has been suffocating her for years. She not only breaks the silence of hers, but also presents women's suppressed voice as whole.

Shashi Deshpande's Portrayal of Women's Predicaments

Philip Stevick in *Theory of the Novel* states that, "*the novel records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience. The Protagonist of the novel follows a pattern of disillusionment from potential fulfillment to actual accomplishment from a hopeful naivete to a resigned wisdom.*" (Stevick, 14-15) Shashi Deshpande's novels that are selected for this dissertation also have a similar progress. All the protagonists -Jaya, Sarita, Indu begins in a state of confusion. Gradually as the novel develops, they undergo a process of introspection, contemplation and self-realization to eventually emerge as an integrated self-sufficient independent individual who live their lives on their own terms.

Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is a depiction of the relentless „silence“ in the lives of many educated middle-class housewives, especially in Indian context. She has used the device of first person narrative to provide the readers with a sense of realism and authenticity. In the novel, Jaya, the protagonist of the novel, represents those middle-class educated wives who are too burdened with restricted marital lives to follow their aspirations.

The novel begins with Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their current house to a flat in Dadar, Mumbai. Mohan is involved in malpractice in the company he works for. An inquiry against him is in progress and it is very much likely that he will be proven guilty. As a consequence he and his family may lose social reputation as well as losing his job. To escape such social defamation he is moving with his family to Dadar flat.

Jaya submits to her husband's will and accompanies him, without questioning, to their current exile. Here she enjoys a comparative freedom: "*I was free, after years, of all those monsters that had ruled my life, gadgets that had to be kept in order, the glassware that had to*

Rahman

sparkle, the furniture and curios that had to be kept spotless and dust free, and those clothes, God, all those never - ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again." (Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*: 25)

Here she gets space for self-introspection, contemplation of her present and past life. She recalls her seventeen years' married life, and her personal failures and distresses associated with it. Adele King writes regarding Jaya's stay at Dadar flat, "*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.*" (King, 97)

From her early childhood she has been told tales of Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. She did not want to fit in to the socially endorsed frame for woman like Sita, Savitri or Draupadi. She recalls that she was not interested in marrying Mohan but after the passing away of her father everyone in the house became desperate to get her married as early as possible and get rid of the burden. Her aspirations were never recognized and she was sort of forced into the life of a regular housewife. Jaya says to herself, "*why I married Mohan; the truth is that he decided to marry me, I had only to acquiesce.*" (Deshpande, 94) Vanitamami advised Jaya at her marriage day that, "*if your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it; take up a hobby instead – cats, maybe, or your sister's children*" (31) She has been repeatedly reminded that the success as a „good“ wife should be the sole motive of her life, irrespective of what she wants. A good wife always stands by her husband and prioritizes his happiness in every moments of life.

Jaya once asks Ramukaka pointing the family tree, "*I'm not here! and he replies, —How can you be here? You don't belong to this family! You're remarried, you're now part of Mohan's family You have no place here.*" (43) Jaya wanted to ask further, "*if I don't belong to this family,*

what about the Kakis and Ai? They married into this family, didn't they, why are they not here? And what about Ai, who single-handedly kept the family together, why isn't she here?" (LS, 43)

Jaya has everything conventionally a woman would want in a marriage – an engineer husband, social status, and two children. Dada, Ramukaka and Shantakaki opine in Mohan's praise, *"He is quite good-looking, no squint, no glasses, even teeth....He has a good career, hard-working, ambitious, will go far....No vices, doesn't smoke or eat in hotels, comes from a good Brahmin family."* (91) Even Jaya describes his nature as, *"Mohan has always had very clear ideas about himself. He was a dutiful son, he is a dutiful father, husband, brother."* (91) Still she is not content with her married life as she feels an identity of her own is missing from her life.

In the early years of her marriage, she used to write fictions. At the initial stage Mohan has been encouraging her to write. In fact, he introduces her to editors of several papers and magazines. Her first published work was a story about *"...a man who could not reach out to his wife except through her body."*(74) Along with a prize, her realistic and authentic narration got her lot of positive feedbacks from the readers and the publishers. She was determined to make an identity of her own as a prominent writer. But after the book is published Mohan assumes that the story reveals their own marital life. He becomes very anxious that the book can injure his social reputation. Jaya in spite of knowing that there was no reality behind his allegation, she did not attempt to reason with Mohan, as she did not want to risk her relation with him. She thinks, *"Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that."*(74) Commenting on the expected stereotype roles from a woman, Beauvoir writes, *"Success is made more difficult for her as another kind of Accomplishment is*

Rahman

demanded of her; she must at least also be a woman, she mustn't lose her femininity."

(Beauvoir, 307)

After a while the writer within her inevitably arises again and she starts to write under a pseudonym. This time her stories are rejected one after another. Her neighbor Kamat informs her that her stories lack intense feelings as she has repressed her emotions. But she is unable to articulate her emotions, in case it should damage her relation with Mohan.

Jaya and Mohan are living together for years yet there is no love bond between them. To Jaya marriage is the pair of bullocks yoked together so that the yoked bullocks share the load between themselves, irrespective of whether there is affection between them or not. Deshpande repeatedly uses the term – „two bullocks yoked together“ in the novel to stress on the mechanical duty based relationship between the husband and the wife. Illustrating the mechanical marital life, without emotional attachment, that they are leading she says, *“It seems to me now that we had, both of us, rehearsed the roles of husband and wife so well that when the time came we could play them flawlessly, word-perfect.”* (Deshpande, 75) She further states, *“...it was ridiculous, he would have slept with me faithfully twice a week whether I brushed my face or not whether I brushed my hair a hundred times or not, whether I wanted him to or not - yes, there had been that too.”* (76)

Mohan is a typical patriarchal male with concrete ideas of how women should behave. His concept of a „good wife“ is highly influenced by the contemporary social views. To him, waiting for the husband“s arrival and have meal only after his eating is finished is the real strength of a woman. To him, a good wife is ever obedient and silent. He sees the ability of women to suffer silently as strength for them. He sees his mother as an exemplary „ideal woman“

who used to submit to the unreasonable demands of her dictatorial husband without uttering a single word of complaint. His sister Vimala is another example of archetypical „ideal woman“. She is brutally treated by her in laws for not been able to give birth to a child. At the time when she requires comfort, her mother-in-law criticizes her, *“God knows what_s wrong with her. She_s been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her away if you want to. I never heard of women going to hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don_t have heavy periods! What a fuss! But these women who_ø never had children are like that.”* (39) Vimala eventually dies of ovarian tumor, bleeding to death. All the torture she endures silently till her death. The photos of both the women, Mohan’s mother and sister, are put up after their death and venerated. While Mohan comprehends strength in such ability to suffer silently, Jaya sees, *“a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender.”* (40) Mohan considers woman’s anger as „unwomanly“. He says, *“My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her.”* (43) Thus, Mohan wishes his wife to tolerate his misbehavior without complaint.

Jaya was initially named „Jaya“ by her family, but later on Mohan changes it to „Suhasini“. This shows absolute control over her identity. She feels her split personality between the two names– Jaya means victory and Suhasini means soft, smiling and loving woman. Mohan wants Jaya to be Suhasini. Jaya understands the implied meaning of the name as she says, *“Suhasini who was different from Jaya, a soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped. When I think of her in this way, I know who it is that Suhasini reminds me of.”* (Deshpande, 55-56)

Jaya, like many other women, is left with no option but to change her way. Sarabjit Sandhu observes, *“In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man whether it be a love-*

Rahman

marriage or an arranged one the husband takes complete control over her. Whether the husband follows the right path or the wrong one, she has to blindly follow in his footsteps. When Mohan is caught in an act of malpractice and is supposed to be unavailable for certain period, he assumes Jaya would accompany him. Though she is unwilling to follow the example of Sita and Savitri, paradoxically, she is compelled by the situations and circumstances..." (Sandhu, 40) Even in the present issue of Mohan's involvement in corruption, she is expected to obey him silently. He further attempts to shift the burden of guilt-feeling and impose upon her by saying, *"It was for you and the children that I did this. I wanted you to have a good life, I wanted the children to have all those things I never had."* (79) She carefully watches the double standard behavior from Mohan. She did not make any demand for luxuries, and yet, he assumes that a wife is happy when provided with materialistic comforts. He does not let her to grow as an independent individual. He wants that she be happy but within the domain of his authority.

Jaya for long seventeen years of her nuptial life she successfully managed to repress her emotion. She learns to resist her anger as Mohan sees it as *"unwomanly."* (83) She asks Kamat with great sarcasm, *"Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?"*(87) Jaya, in order to keep her marital life as a happy one, gradually transforms herself to fit in to the ideal of womanhood. She learns to ignore her own wishes and act as per her husband's: *"I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts. Only silence."*(89) She starts dressing up and appearing as per Mohan's liking. She eventually gets so utterly engrossed into the family-fold that from a liberated woman, she is altered into an ordinary docile house-wife. She desperately sticks to her husband as if her life rests on him. At times she is overwhelmed with the anxiety that what if something bad occur to Mohan, Jaya thinks to herself, *"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.” (96-97) In playing the role of a devoted wife and a loving mother, her real self is overwhelmed. She does not object to the alteration of her name from Jaya to Suhasini, merely to keep Mohan content.

In Dadar flat after undergoing a period of self-introspection, Jaya recognizes that her marital life is full with silence. If she suffers, it is in silence, if she revolts, it is also in silence. As a critic, Michelene Wandor appropriately writes, *the dominant male culture imposes the language of silence on women. A woman's fragmentation, isolation and lack of identity make it impossible for her to relate her own situation to that of any other oppressed group or to seek a way out.* (Wandor, 7-8) Jaya realizes that along with her surrounding people, she as well has further added to her victimization by not resisting it. She feels the essentiality to break the silence, listen to her inner voice, fight her own battle and work out her own solution to assert her identity as an independent individual. Moreover, she also realizes that a successful relationship between husband and wife is possible only through mutual understanding, respect and compassion, and obviously not through power politics within four walls. Therefore, she determines that from now onwards she will not anymore compromise her individuality. Now she will write what she likes to and will not wait for Mohan's approval and she is not ready to take the burden of Mohan's guilt anymore.

Jaya voyages from ignorance to awareness going through a process of self-introspection. After attaining self-realization, she emerges as a self-reliant individual. She becomes more enthusiastic about life than she previously was: *“there is always hope.”*(91) She asserts to herself, *“I'm not afraid anymore.”* (91) She eradicates „Suhashini“; the silent, submissive wife of Mohan, and asserts „Jaya“ which stands for „victory“.

Shashi Deshpande's second novel *The Dark Hold No Terror* is about gender oriented struggles of an educated, economically sovereign, middle-class woman Sarita. From the very childhood she is made conscious of her gender. In the novel, the cold relationship with her parents and with her husband leads her to quest for a liberated self.

Since her childhood she lacked the sense of importance in her family and missed love from her parents. Sarita's brother Dhruva was always given priority against her by her parents. She remembers the festive mood in the house on the occasion of her brother's naming ceremony. The impression that she was a burden to her parents is profoundly implanted in her mind. Her parents', especially her mother's, adoration of her son at her daughter's cost represents the preference for boys over girls in most societies around the world including the Indian societies. In many a so called enlightened societies the birth of a son is still seen as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage. Sarita's mother's over-involvement towards her son is explained as A. Anandalakshmi opines: "The birth of a son gives a woman status and she invests herself in her son's future, creating a deep symbiotic bond."(Anandalakshmi, 31)

The crucial moment in Saru's life is when her brother Dhruva accidentally dies by drowning. Her mother immediately accuses her of intentionally letting Dhruva die by drowning. She screams, "*You did it, you did this, you killed him*" (Deshpande, Shashi. *The Dark Holds No Terror*: 23). Sarita has been haunted all her life by this allegation. She is haunted by this allegation so much that she too has grown a sense of guiltiness on her part. Sarita's mother's such insensible biased behavior makes Sarita insecure in her own family leading to a sense of alienation and estrangement. Her impression of being unloved and unwanted is so severe that she

begins to hate her own existence as a girl or woman. On reaching puberty she cries, "*If you are a woman, I don't want to be one.*"(26)

She is treated so viciously by her mother for being a girl for years that consequently she grows immense abhorrence towards the traditional social format of womanhood and she sees her mother as an embodiment of socially endorsed "ideal woman". Adesh Pal connotes, "*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 flare up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others.*" (Pal, 74-75)

She grows grave hatred towards her mother and she wants to hurt her as severely as her hatred. She admits to herself, "I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer."(Deshpande, 48) As an act of revolt she leaves home for Mumbai to seek medicine as a career.

Deprived of love and security from her childhood, Sarita thirsts for love: "*I was insatiable, not for sex but for love. Of my being loved, of my being wanted.*"(40) When she gets attention from Manu, a college mate of hers, she falls in love with him. She having lack of love in her life, she sees Manu as a redeemer. She thinks to herself, "*How could I be anyone's beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without.*"(66) Relating herself with the tale of the fisherman's daughter she thinks: "The fisherman's daughter couldn't have been more surprised when the king asked her to marry him than I was by Manu's love for me."(66) Later on she marries Manu, a lower caste Hindu, as a revolt against her parents and with a hope to get the lost love in her parental home along with her identity as an independent individual.

Saru's marital life goes pretty well for few years. But when her success as a prominent doctor surpasses his achievements, this becomes the root of her strained conjugal relation with Manu. Manu being an underpaid lecturer is insecure with his wife's rise in position. He feels inferior and ignored when people, instead of him, greet and pay attention to his wife. In a reflective mood Saru thinks to herself, "*He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband.*"(72) As a consequence Manu does not love her as he used to earlier. Certain behavior of Manu worsens the situation between the two. At night in the private moments he starts to behave like a sadistic rapist, not like a love mate. Through such beastly sexual assault he attempts to gain a sense of masculine superiority. And through such dominating sadistic behavior he tries to over-shadow the fact that his wife's achievement surpasses his. Sarabjit Sandhu makes a relevant comment: "*The ideal man-woman relationship in the Indian context (as the dominant man and submissive woman) is so prominent that even the most brilliant and so called forward male is incapable of looking at woman in terms of equality.*" (14)

Consequently Sarita feels:

"No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal in favor of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favor god help you, both of you. And so you must pretend that you're not as smart you really are, not as competent as you are, not as rational as you are, and not as strong either. You can nag, complain, henpeck, whine, moan, but you can never be strong. That's a wrong which will never be forgiven. Don't struggle, don't swim against the tide. Go along with it ..."(Deshpande, 77)

She begins to hate such conjugal relationship, which is based on demand and necessity, not on mutual affection. In a seminar, when she has to deliver a speech about the career of a doctor; whether it is suitable for girls. Instead of the prepared speech, she imagines telling the girls with great sarcasm:

"A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA, you should be a BA. If he is 5 feet 4 inches tall, you shouldn't be more than 5' 3" tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety nine rupees. That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor - nurse, executive - secretary, principal - teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous." (Deshpande, 78)

She thus blasts the unwritten societal codes concerning women's social conduct and man's lame superior ego which is intolerant towards a woman who is smarter than him.

Sarita in order to save her marriage, gets ready to sacrifice her beneficial profession. At one point she asks if he would be happy if she leaves her medical practice: *"I want to stop working. I want to give it all up...my practice, the hospital, everything."*(79) Manu discourages her from doing so, as alone Manu's income is not enough to carry on their present standard of living. yet, night time sadistic sexual torture on Sarita continues. She lives nightmares after nightmares. She puts up all these to save her marital relationship and for the sake of the children. Being confused regarding what she should do, she continues to endure the humiliation silently. Thus Shashi Deshpande presents the irony in the lives of educated well-earning so called "outwardly" liberated women, who in spite of being financially sovereign have to compromise their individual feelings and cope up with their marital discomforts to the best of their abilities.

Rahman

Saru is informed about her mother's demise. She visits her parental house as an escape from the sadistic intentions of Manu with the hope that now she won't have to go through the humiliation of her taunting mother. And also she has an explanation now to give to her father for her returning home on account of her mother's death. Last time, fifteen years ago, she left her father's home with a pledge never to return. She returns home with the hope of getting some solace. Saru yearns for security and emotional attachment. She wants her father to support her. But she fails to make a meaningful attachment to her father. She attempts to share her issues: "My husband is a sadist."(89) Many times she wants to tell her father, "Baba, I'm unhappy. Help me, Baba, I'm in trouble. Tell me what to do."(84) But her father fails to understand and simply leaves the room. Yet, one positive thing in her father's house is here she gets a space to reflect on her relationships with her husband, her children, her parents and also her dead brother, Dhruva.

Manu writes letters to her showing his concern, ignoring the fact that why she has left home. She satirically expresses her anger: "*What right had he to blithely assume that all was well between them, that her feelings for him were unchanged, that whatever was wrong had nothing to do with him? The ego of the male ... unwilling to believe that he had lost the art of pleasing, assuming that marriage, possession, gave him a lifelong right to affection, love and respect.*" (Deshpande, 91)

Sarita feels and reflects upon her life thus: "*Everything in a girl's life, it seemed, was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male. But what did you do when you failed to please? There was no answer to that.*" (Deshpande, 63)

After much introspection Sarita reaches depths of self-actualization. She realizes, "*that's what all of us have to face at the end. That we are alone. We have to be alone.*" 42 She realizes

that she cannot attain happiness through anyone else be it a husband, a father or a child. She can attain peace of mind only through her own efforts. She arrives at the conclusion that escape is never the solution. If she has the courage to face life boldly, by breaking out of the conventional identity as a submissive self-compromising wife, she would be able to become a self-sufficient independent individual in her own right. Finally, She is ready to face Manu that she has to be treated on an equal footing and he ought to accept her as she is, without any compromise from her part. Although Sarita is discontented with her marital life, but in her quest for the sovereignty and wholeness of her identity she, instead of cutting away her relationship with Manu, decides to take a tactful assertion of her identity within the nuptial bond. In the end she leaves her father's house and goes back to Manu with a determination to assert her identity.

Emphasizing the essentiality of asserting one's identity as an independent individual Betty Freidan states: "*For woman, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment — autonomy, self-realization, independence, individuality, self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted.*" (Friedan, 282)

In *Roots and Shadows*, The patriarchal attitude of society presented in the novel demonstrates how women are forced to live their lives within a fixed framework. The protagonist Indu's quest for identity resembles with the other protagonists; Jaya of *That Long Silence* and Sarita of *The Dark Holds No Terror*. Indu is an educated and intellectual woman who is from her early days of life grown up in a tradition bound Brahmin family which is dictated by her father's parental aunt Akka. Akka is a rich and childless woman. She exercises absolute control over the other family members. She can be described as extremely bigoted. She is so preoccupied with

Rahman

the caste system that she is fearful of getting „unclean“ by the touch of lower caste nurses. She even enforces women of the house to not utter their husbands“ names, as it may reduce their life span. However, Indu“s aunts and other women of the house including Kaki and Atya yield themselves to Akka“s commandments, to the socially imposed role and assume themselves as the ideal wives.

In the novel Indu aspires for self-sufficiency. She ultimately discards all the age old dogmas and superstitions predominant in the society. Her education and self-awareness leads her to standing against Akka. In the entire family, she is the only obstacle on Akka“s way to forcing her bigoted thoughts over others. Indu“s desperate yearning to attain individual liberty does not allow her to abide by the orthodox authority of Akka.

Since Indu“s childhood the other women of the house tried to instill the orthodox views in her mind. She says, *“As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat, with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. And I...I had watched them and found it to be true. There had to be, if not the substance, at least the shadow of submission. But still, I had laughed at them, and sworn I would never pretend to be what I was not.”*

(Deshpande, Shashi. *Roots and Shadows*: 28) Indu states with immense anguish, *“My womanhood...I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up.”* (29) She realizes the irony of entering into womanhood by the term that she was „unclean“. (29) When she had her first menstruation she was told, *“You're a woman now...You can have babies yourself.”*(29) And she began to hate herself as she was told, *“for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything.”*(29) She says, *“I felt*

hedged in, limited by my sex. I resented my womanhood because it closed so many doors to me."

(29) The relentless reminder of her sex based identity irritates her psyche. The continuous awareness of being a „woman“ hinders her development of individual identity.

Being suffocated in a tradition-bound patriarchal family, she decides to get married with the hope that it will provide her with freedom from the familial confinements that she is subjected to and also would give her a sense of belonging. Afterwards her marriage with a lower caste man Jayant, a man of her choice, indicates her longing for breaking out the stiff barriers caste system, which is predominant in her family. She relishes her taking such step against the current and conventional people like Akka.

But soon after the marriage, with immense shock Indu finds that Jayant too, like the patriarchal society, demands her submission. Her escape from family relationships has taken her into another trap *"I've got away. But to what?..."*(Deshpande, 87) Regarding this ugly truth in women's lives Beauvoir says, *"She will free herself from her parents' hold; she will open up her future not by active conquest but by passively and docilely delivering herself into the hands of a new master."* (Beauvoir, 353)

Jayant disgusts any expression of desire on Indu's part. He deprives her from having a sense of sexual fulfillment in nuptial life. She tells Naren later, *"Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly and says, 'no, not now', when I had taken the initiative."*(Deshpande, 91) She further says, *"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. I am still dead."*(92) Like the other household women of Akka's house she too has become "still and dead."

She attempts to rather focus onto education and her career as a writer, but the imposed burden of socially endorsed womanhood does not leave her at peace. Even though she is reluctant, she has to carry on the unsatisfying work of writing for the magazine only for Jayant's satisfaction. She is made to write what suits the magazine and not her own conscience.

Commenting on the repetitive topic for writing that is imposed upon her she says, "*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 key. I couldn't go on. Beter this than that.*" (Deshpande, 78)

Later replying to her cousin Naren's advice on writing about women she says, "*What the hell shall I write about, tell me, Naren? Women's lives and frustrations? Family life and domestic quarrels? Love with a capital L, and marriage as the ultimate happy ending? Or maybe I'll get bolder and write of menstrual pains and the pangs of child-birth, the ecstasy of orgasm.*" (78)

She gradually submits to his will in the name of husband-wife mutual affection. Later on she understands that it is not for love but because she does not want conflict. She says, "*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...*" (Deshpande, 36) She had pretended before Jayant, by not revealing to him her whole self but only that small portion which he wanted to see. She says, "*...my marriage had taught me this too. I had found in myself an immense capacity for deception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage.*" (38)

After getting married a woman goes through a radical change. Self-less devotion to her husband and family often leads her to ignore her need of self-fulfillment. Indu also goes through the same experience; as 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.”* (49) She realizes that, *“It’s not he who has pressurized me into this. It’s the way I want it to be. And one day I had thought...isn’t there anything I want at all? Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own? At that moment a savage truth had stared me in the face... Without wants there is no ‘I’.”* (49) Anguished, she wonders: *“Are we doomed to living meaningless futile lives? Is there no escape?”* (52)

Indu visits her ancestral [Akka’s] house after a long gap of eleven years, in order to attend her cousin Mini's marriage. She left home when she was eighteen to marry the man of her choice. Her stay in her ancestral house provides her with an opportunity to re-evaluate her life from past to present. There she is stunned to observe that despite her being well-educated she is no different from them. And her husband who is apparently an educated modern man is merely another typical Indian husband, like their husbands. Like the other women of the house that circumambulate the Tulsi plant to expand their husbands' life span, she too has been playing the role of passive obedient wife to keep her husband Jayant pleased and content. She previously measured herself smart, educated, and liberated; now she comes to the agonizing conclusion that she is no better than her Kakis and Atyas.

In her ancestral house Indu gets to know from Narmada about the initial stages of Akka’s life that has shaped her perception of life. Akka got married at the age of twelve while husband was in his thirties. At such a tender age she had to endure brutal treatment of her in-laws without uttering a single word. She twice attempted to escape such brutal treatment by running away

Rahman

from there but she failed. In getting caught she was ruthlessly tortured by her mother-in-law and was locked up for three days. Adding to her miseries, her husband wanted to bring a mistress in the house. Moreover, as Akka failed to give birth to a child, her tormenting at the house of her husband left an ineffaceable mark on her psyche. From her own experience, she tells Narmada Atya regarding married life that, “Now your punishment begins, Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels.” (70) Indu comes to the realization that for a woman it is a two way struggle – one against the sexist male mentality and the other against the societal women who advocates such mentality.

In the novel Deshpande also highlights the difficulties that middle-class families face in finding compatible grooms for their daughters. The case here is of Indu’s cousin Mini. Just like Mini, for many girls it is marriage that matters and not the man. Often finding a man becomes very difficult therefore parents tend to be desperate and at one nod from the man they settle the marriage. Therefore, Mini too is ready to marry any man that would say „Yes“ and she expresses her frustrations thus, “...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. And then, sending the horoscope and having it come back with the message, —It doesn_ t match. And if the horoscopes matched,...they would say, —She_ s not modern enough. And if I dressed up well because someone said the boy wanted a smart wife, they would say, —She_ s too fashionable for us. Or too short. Or too tall. Or too dark. Or something....And finally, if everything was fine, there was the dowry. (86) Indu reflects that an arranged marriage is nothing “but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue?”(93)

Mini is desperate to get rid of the unbearable taunts and painful remarks from her family members. She says, *“Oh, I don_ t know. And I don_ t know. And I don_ t care. He_ ll bok after me. And no one can say to me, How old are you? And not married yet! What a pity! I_ m tired, Indu. I don_ t care what kind of a man he is. Once we are married, and he becomes my husband, none of his flaws will matter.”* (Deshpande, 88) She further confesses to Indu, *“What choice do I have, Indu?...Of course I am marrying him because there_ s nothing else I can do. I_ m no good at studies. I never was. I went to school because ...I had to. And then to college because Akka said. So I went. But I failed and it was a relief to give it up. There_ s only one thing I_ m really good at...looking after a house. And to get a home, I have to get married. This is not my home, is it?”* (90)

Indu reflects on Mini’s statement, *“Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country. Surely it was time they stopped asking it. What choice do I have? Surely it is this, this fact that I can choose, that differentiates me from the animals. But years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so that you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out of your cage of no choices.”* (Deshpande, 92)

Mini’s pitiful condition has very serious impact on Indu. It instigates her to reflect on the life of Indian middle class women. She realizes that this is the approach of society to make women internalize the self-denial so that they would submit themselves without complaint. She observes that, *“The women had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered ... have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a life time of disuse?”* (96)

Rahman

Finally, after much self-introspection and disillusionment she reaches a point of self-realization, she undergoes a complete psychic transition. Her viewpoint widens as an outcome of her newly attained self-awareness. After attaining internal harmony she emerges as an integrated complete being; a self-sufficient individual. She chooses to go back to her husband's house but this time with her newly developed independent self and the essential courage to assert her own identity. From now onwards Indu is determined to make her own decisions in life and also live life on her own terms.

A Commentary on the Two Authors and Their selected novels

In this dissertation, all the six selected novels; *Cry the peacock*, *Fire on the Mountains*, *Voices in the City*, *That Long Silence*, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, and *Roots and Shadows*, reflect real life situations. The novels have exposed the negative aspects of patriarchy that have been leaving its crucial mark on people's everyday lives for centuries and it is still going on. The society imposed false hegemonic identity of woman is an obvious product of patriarchy through which subjugation and marginalization of women has been done for centuries. The society imposed false identity of women, which is frequently discussed in this dissertation, does have a huge influence on people's social conducts, familial, professional, and above all marital conducts. It provides a false notion of womanhood and through a long process of internalization women are made to believe in it. It says that women are innately inferior to men, they are naturally instinct driven, and incapable of rational thinking. It further provides the false notion that women are not complete on their own; therefore they must be taken care of by a male authority. They are not for themselves but for the sake of others. They lack independent individuality. They must be dedicating themselves in things like household chores, child-bearing, child-rearing, taking care of husband's pleasure, obeying to the commands of her in-laws etc. Women must keep themselves within the stereotypical gender roles. They must not compete with man in professional fields. They should not cherish their individuality. All these stereotypical false do's and don'ts of womanhood are also very evident in the selected novels for this dissertation. All the six protagonists of the given novels suffer, for a major portion of their lives, from a sense of insufficiency without the approval of others. The women of the novels, including the protagonists, try their best to fit into the identity that has been socially provided unto them. And if they fail to do so they fall under immense frustration. Thus the century old hegemony is

Rahman

evident in the novels; where a woman is made to believe in a false notion of herself and if she fails to be what she is not, she even feels guilty for that. In the novels we also see the mothers, aunts and other female characters try to pass the false identity onto their next generation, which they themselves internalized previously. Through this the novels indicate to an age old custom that has been shaping the society for generations; where the previous generation family member, mostly the female ones, teaches the next generation this socially acquired false identity of women.

The protagonists, Maya, Monisha, and Nanda of Anita Desai, and Jaya, Sarita, and Indu of Shashi Deshpande, share some similarities and dissimilarities among themselves. They and their agonizing journey to self-assertion are not by any means isolated from the society, in fact they are representatives of societal women of our very society and their everyday struggles. Thus the protagonists are very much relatable ones to the readers and also relevant to this date. They all share a common ground. They all belong to middle-class traditional families where they have been constantly taught to become a “woman” from their very childhood. And later on in their lives they were treated as non-entities by their husbands, and other members of the house including the female ones. As an outcome of the conditioning of them from their childhood they too for a certain period of life tried their bests to fit in to the mold to be accepted by others. None of them could escape the agonizing experience of going against their will, just to be accepted by their husbands and in-laws. They all had to undertake several psychic transitions to accomplish the journey towards self-assertion. And it was never easy. When we closely look at the novels we find they were not mentally prepared to undergo such transitions. It is the situation that made them undergo such transitions. They all were deprived of love, compassion, and above all their mental, spiritual, and physical needs were not fulfilled. Not that they were deprived of the so

called “basic needs”, but they were deprived of their individual needs. In this case they represent the countless number of women of the society that are frequently deprived of their individual needs. Sexual urge can be a suitable example of such deprivation where a man is only focused on fulfilling his urges irrespective of what the wife feels about it. Too often women are not provided with proper sexual fulfillment by their husbands because of such negligence from the male partner’s part. They consider women as object and without individuality. Therefore they ignore women’s individual needs; so is the case with the protagonists of the selected novels. They are not given essential attention from their husbands and also from their family members, which results in growing of a sense of alienation in them. This sense of alienation traumatizes them. But it has some positive effects too. Because of this sense of alienation they focus on themselves, and their individuality. They reflect upon their lives which eventually leads them to a certain realization of themselves. Yet, because of their social conditioning it is very difficult for them to assert-themselves immediately. They go through a phase of dilemma to ultimately assert their selves. They finally admit to themselves that it is their lives and they are the ones who should take complete responsibilities of their lives. Ultimately they could do it only because they had the inner-urge to break free from the societal confinement for a woman. Like many other women of the society they too tried to fit in to the mold but unlike most other women they did not compromise their selves, which make them special. Their resistance against the current represents a change in the flow that has been going on for centuries. Women are being non-entities, individuals without individuality for centuries. The protagonists of the novels signify turn in this flow. Likewise they share many similarities among themselves; they have many differences as well. It is mostly because of the individualistic differences between the two authors. Anita Desai’s writings are highly influenced by western existential and feminist thinkers

Rahman

like Nietzsche, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Virginia Woolf, Kate Chopin etc. So, naturally her central characters reflect that as well. They are highly sensitive, passive, and deep thinkers. Meanwhile, Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are comparatively more practical and active. They too reflect upon their lives, but they do not delve deep into it unlike Desai's women. For example, when deprived of sexual fulfillment Desai's women Maya and Monisha isolate themselves mentally and go deep into depression. On the contrary, when deprived of sexual fulfillment Deshpande's women Jaya and Indu find other men like Kamat and Naren. Moreover, Deshpande's writings carry a certain essence of "Indianness". Unlike Desai's protagonists Deshpande's ones do not attempt to escape patriarchal confinements altogether, but they find out a space of their own within the confinements. In such case we can say, Deshpande's central women are more realistic and more Indian. They do not think of breaking the marriage as a solution, but finding the deserved position within the marital bond. Desai's women are slightly different. They tend to escape the patriarchal dominion altogether. Thus, Desai's protagonists are more western than Deshpande's ones. It also can be argued that which writers' women are more liberated. Such difference in the degree of liberation clearly depends on the difference in the socio-cultural upbringing of the writers themselves.

In the novels the two authors present a wide range of relatable characters and their predicaments, especially of women, relevant to that of today's society. For instance Maya from *Cry the Peacock* is a sensitive, naïve girl who later on goes through a state of neurosis. Maya's Husband Gautama is a careless husband who is ignorant of her wife's needs. Maya's father is on the other hand very caring of her daughter. But he cares his daughter in a way as if his daughter is a beautiful doll without individuality of her own. Maya's mother-in-law and sister-in-law both represent those financially well-off women of the society who seems liberated from outside, but

from within they are no different from many other women who lack individuality of their own and do everything for others' acceptance. Maya's friend Pom and Leila are among the ones who cope. They seem to be satisfied with life existing merely as a wife and daughter-in-law. When asked about their pathetic condition in life, they try to show happiness in their face and reply- everything is in my fate and I am content with whatever I have. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda Kaul is an old generation women who longed for a space for herself all her life. She represents those old generation women of the society who had to spend all their lives taking care of others and having no time for themselves, and in return they are treated as objects. Nanda Kaul's great-granddaughter is a very young girl, still in her childhood, who is exclusively introvert and this is as an outcome of her parental conflicts that she witnessed. Nanda Kaul's husband Mr. Kaul, similar to Gautama, is an ignorant husband who is always busy with himself. Nanda's childhood friend Ila Das is an active bold woman. she stood against social injustice and eventually became a victim of brutal rape. She is victim of gross male domination and objectification of woman. Preet Singh is the one who rapes her and murders her. Monisha from *Voices in the City* is a sensitive, educated woman with intellectual capacity. She is neglected by her husband and ridiculed by her in-laws for cherishing her individuality in way that does not suit the stereotypical role of woman. She is further ill-treated by her in-laws for not been able to give birth. Monisha's husband Jiban is an example of an impotent man without a say of his own. He is self-centered and accompanies his mother in ridiculing his wife Monisha. Jaya of *That Long Silence* is stopped from chasing her dream. She wanted to be a writer, but she was asked to stop writing of her own choice. She had to choose between writing and her marital life. It shows how women are often needed to give up their passion for the sake of saving their family. Jaya's husband Mohan is an absolute patriarch, who thinks women should not raise their voice at any cost. He

Rahman

gives example of his mother and sister Vimala. Both of them died, but did not raise their voice at any cost. They sacrificed their selves to save their marriage. Vimala was badly tortured for not been able to give birth. Yet, she remained silent. Mohan sees this silence as a positive aspect of women. Just like Vimala, Vanitamami too thinks of sacrifice as woman's only option for a happy married life. She advises Jaya that she should not complain even if her husband has two-three mistresses. *The Dark Holds No Terror*'s Sarita is a middle-class successful career woman. Despite of her being successful in her profession, she faces dilemma in taking bold steps against her husband's misbehavior. There are countless women like Sarita in the society who faces frequently such issues. They are respectable educated successful women in their social lives, but in home they are treated like just another housewife and they hesitates in protesting it in the fear of losing their marital lives. Sarita's husband Manu is someone who is a gentle middle-class educated college teacher in his social life. in private moments of nighttime he behaves like a schizophrenic. he treats his wife Sarita like a sex-object. He rapes her every night for hours and indulges in all sorts perverted activities against her will. The next morning he again becomes the gentle man of the house. Such hypocrisy disgusts Sarita. Manu is jealous of his wife's surpassing success in professional field. His male ego is hurt. Therefore he indulges in such disgraceful activities towards her, so that she remains a sub-ordinate to him. It is an indirect declaration of his superiority; to show that to him she is nothing but a sex object, a thing to be used and thrown. Manu represents those male members of the society who are educated, thoughtful, open-minded and gentle, yet for some reason cannot tolerate women's equality. When confronted with women of their equal caliber, or even more, they start to feel insecure. Woman as inferior is deep rooted in their minds. That is why they cannot tolerate woman of success and intellectual ability, woman that they cannot dominate. Another character of the novel, Sarita's mother represents

those women who after a long period of remaining as a victim of socially imposed identity, now they want to force it upon their next generation. Sarita's father, like Gautama, is another example of careless man. He is utterly unaware and disinterested of his daughter's feelings. In *Roots and Shadows* Indu is an educated enlightened woman, who breaks out from the shackles of her tradition bound family to marry her man of choice. But after a certain time she finds herself shackled again in her marital life. Similar to Indu a huge number of women find themselves shackled again and again. First in their father's house, after in their husband's house, and finally end up under their son's domination. Indu's cousin Mini is example of those women who have no other way out but to submit to the social demands. She wants to escape from her relatives' taunting by marrying any man that says „yes“ to her. She admits to Indu, whatever her future husband is, she is ready to marry as after marriage everything is same; she will have to play the submissive, compromising, serving, enduring “wife” role anyway. Indu's Husband Jayant can be simply described as another „man“; self-centered, ignorant of his wife's individualistic needs, and expects Indu to fulfill the socially imposed gender roles. Indu's another relative Atya, just like Pom, Leila, and Vanita Mami, sees no other way but to cope up with the situation. She unwillingly submits to Akka's commandments because she finds it too difficult to resist the current. She thinks following is less disastrous than resisting. Another significant character of the novels is Akka. She previously was a victim of domestic violence. She was married at a very young age to a man of over thirty and was trapped within the tormenting dominion of her in-laws. In later part of her life Akka herself becomes a dominating woman who strongly upholds the outdated traditional rules like caste system, worshipping the Tulsi tree, fasting for increasing husbands' life span, not taking husbands' name etc. and forces others to follow it. Through all the characters mentioned above Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande present a huge variety of

Rahman

relatable characters and their predicaments what makes the novels selected for this dissertation still relevant to this date.

Conclusion

The society imposed false identity of women which is a major patriarchal tool for depriving women from attaining their true identities as independent complete individuals is thoroughly illustrated in the selected pieces of literary works; *Cry the Peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain*, and *Voices in the city* by Anita Desai, and *That Long Silence*, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, and *Roots and Shadows* by Shashi Deshpande. In the novels the authors made it very clear that the society people, both man and woman, are still quite influenced by such age old false identity that has been imposed upon women for generations. Both men and women's perception of womanhood is through this framework. They carry a lot of stereotypical misconceptions about women and whenever they conduct with a woman they act as per their misconceptions. Ironically women themselves also carry such misconceptions about themselves. Therefore inevitably women are being generalized. Their individualistic features are overlooked. As a result of their social conditioning from their childhoods they try their bests to be what they are not. This results in self-denial ignoring their individual fulfillments.

In the novels the sufferings of women as an outcome of giving in to a false identity is demonstrated in detailed descriptions. The authors, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, clearly attempted to convey the message about the essentiality for women to assert their own identities. Only through asserting their self-governed identities they can attain a liberated self, a space for themselves, and would be able to leave a mark on the society as individuals. The authors suggests that women cannot expect their individual needs, both physical and mental, to be fulfilled unless they themselves take their own responsibilities; merely complaining against the patriarchy is never enough. If a woman does not consider herself on equal level to man, how can

Rahman

she expect her man to treat her as equal. If she does not cherish her own individuality, no one else will do that. Therefore it is very essential that she asserts herself first as self-sufficient independent individual on same level to man. Germaine Greer in her book *The Female Eunuch*, emphasizing on the significance of self as the starting point states that, “*She could begin not by changing the world, but by reassessing herself*” (Greer, 4). In order to assert herself she must break out of her present identity which is never hers, but was imposed upon her by the society. She must widen her perspective to think out of the box and to come out of the misconceptions of herself, as only through true realization of herself would she be able to live on her own terms.

Women’s journey towards a liberated identity as opposed to the one imposed by society initiates when a woman questions and defies the social system of patriarchal hegemony. Such defiant attitude of questioning the socially accepted order gives rise to feminist sensibility. In the novels Maya, Nanda, Monisha, Jaya, Sarita, and Indu embody such feminist sensibility. They represent those very few women of our society who ultimately succeed in breaking free from the shackles of social confinement to emerge as self-sufficient independent individuals. In the novels the quest for an identity of their [Maya, Nanda, Monisha, Jaya, Sarita, and Indu] own was never easy. In order to develop a whole and harmonious self, at both emotional and intellectual levels, they had to undergo dilemmas, social condemnation, mental tortures, agonizing self transitions, disillusionment, alienation, and sometimes even neurosis. Yet, once they have asserted their true identities, they finally have their own goals of life; with complete responsibility taking their own decisions. In contrast to their earlier selves; submissive, docile, fearful, dependent and suffering in silence, now they are liberated in their thoughts and deeds; they are now determined to live on an equal footing with men. Through them the authors set examples of women who strive courageously to break out from their social conditioning to finally emerge as autonomous,

independent individuals taking complete responsibilities of their own selves, living lives on their own terms.

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Rahman

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