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It highlights the novelist's feminist concern without really being a feminist in the real sense of the term not propagating any serious feminist theories. The women of Shashi Deshpande, operating within the framework of a male-dominated and tradition bound society are conscious of the fact that they have no autonomous self hood. These protagonists are also aware of their predicament as victims of inequality. They are in search of their authentic identity and distinct self. They are still greatly dominated by men and the society in general.

The concept of Indian womanhood is based upon the mythic models from the Ramayana and the Puranas. The entire image of Indian woman has been personified by the model characters of ideal women liked Sita. and Savitiri. A high idea of womanhood prevailed in India. During the Vedic age women were elevated to the height of Goddesses. But in due course of time this attitude changed. A woman found herself living in a world where she has been reduced to the status of second sex and compelled to assume the position of the other.

The study of Deshpande's novels reveal that her main concern is women. The novels expose how even an educated, economically independent woman take a long time to become conscious of their marginalisation. Her novels relate to woman's sense of isolation, the need for self recognition and the quest for identity. The writer's concern is the women's survival in the society which is gender biased. Deshpande is of the opinion that one needs to contribute to survival in one's own way and not in the way that someone else had decided for her. In the same way for a woman to survive, her co-

dependence should be weakened and her own inner directions must be strengthened. Women should be ready to exercise autonomy and be free to pursue interesting and challenging career. The sweeping changes taking place on a global footing in relation to woman's self position, power politics, their rights and responsibilities, prospects and problems, are prime motif of her novels. She is not interested in the issues just pertaining to women but deals with human issues which are all of interest to all humanity:

I have no doubt at all that it is the women's movement which has made it possible for an increasing number of women to have more space to breathe. I know that as a writer I am privileged to be living at a time when the women's movement has made it possible for my voice to be heard, for the things. I write about to be taken seriously as issues that concern all society and not just dismissed as Woman's Stuff. (133)

The novel *The Dark Holds No Terror* deals with the theme of identity, based on the problems faced by a career woman. It is imperative to comprehend that women struggle to find and reserve her identity as a human being.

The darkness gets removed when one is ready to face the situation to attain autonomy. The crisis of identity is the root cause of all problems. The darkness is dreadful when feared but enlightening when faced with clarity and understanding. The entire process of self analysis made Saru realize that it was her sense of superiority over her husband that destroyed their relationship.

Darkness is a weakness of human mind which is overcome through self-discovery. Emotions of anger, hatred, frustration, lovelessness grow in and around this darkness and cause terror and despair to the victim. It is only when Sarita discovers that she has been her own enemy, when the knowledge comes to her that her anger, frustration, her guilt and terror are the manifestations of her own inner darkness descends on her insight into understanding Dhruva's fear-... But now, after so many years, I know, Dhruva, why you came to me to escape from the dark And how you felt when I told you to go away" (DHNT 205)

Shashi Deshpande presents a realistic picture of modern Indian society. Though modern trends in lifestyles have been adopted by the modern women, psychology remains oriented and tradition bound. The changing time requires women to play more challenging roles outside the confines of the house. This requires her to maintain a delicate balance between man and woman.

In Deshpande's works one may explore and underline gender specific issues with her liberal humanist ideologies. She deals with a new culturally specific working feminism and expresses her concern for women. To understand Deshpande's position with respect to feminism the historical context of colonialism and its exploitation of gender issues should be considered. Generally, women in all walks of life are marginalized at many levels-as women, as working class, as 'coloured/dark.' The racism in India operates differently. There is still an obsession with 'fair complexion,' in Indian Society especially as applied to marriageable women. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru the protagonist remembers being constantly reminded by her mother as a girl:

"Don't go out in the sun, you'll get even darker."
"who cares?"
"we have to care if you don't. We have to get you married (DHNT 45)

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Deshpande presents an honest picture of human conditions. It depicts the life journey of Saru and others in the novel from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge. The narrative has been woven with the hurt of pain and agony. The terror of silence, the fear of isolation, the burden of guilt, the repetitive patterns of life, the aches of ignorance and the joy of discovery and the final reaffirmation of faith in life. To the novelist life has to be lived. Shashi Deshpande conveys in all her novels the message that relationships within the family need to be built on fruition values of understanding and trust rather than on the prescribed rules of patriarchy. Thus in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Sarita the central figure, is a career woman who brought her and her family great material ease and comfort. Paradoxically, her success in the profession caused her marriage to go to pieces. Saru feels like a lifeless puppet that laughs and smiles because of the ventriloquist. She realizes "Perhaps my ventriloquist is my profession. For, as long as there is a patient there is nothing" (DHNT 22) She returns to her primitive environment to try to locate herself. As D.W. Winnicott the psychoanalyst says: "Sarita's so careful to hide her true self that she is now unable to find it. To find it, therefore, she has to go back to the point where it all started." (96).

Saru at last realizes her true identity and self. In projecting her protagonist in conflict with the hegemonic power structure and the social institutions, Shashi Deshpande expresses her true sense of her feminist concern effectively.

Roots and Shadows records the suffocation experienced by Indu the protagonist in a society governed by the age old customs and traditions. Indu seeks to liberate herself from the shackles of traditional roles and social conventions which are impediments to their progress. Indu is akin to Nayantara Sahgal's women-Kusum of *Time to be happy*, Saroj of *Storm in Chandigarh* — for whom freedom does not merely signify the defiance of old established traditions and conventions but in reality it lies in becoming aware of oneself as an individual. Indu, in her quest to be independent and complete, realizes that there is beauty and security in life

through reconciliation. She is a representative of women torn between age old traditions and individual views. She as a journalist, a writer and a novelist seem to believe that it is her responsibility as a creative writer and as an educated woman to liberate not only herself but also to contribute to the liberation of other less privileged and down trodden women. Her predicament and the predicament of women in general was passing through a transition from old cultural, socio, economic forces that were greatly affecting the pattern of human life.

Thus women are responsible for perpetuating patriarchy by refusing to change themselves, by not rebelling against patriarchy and by dominating those who are weak. Indu's awareness of the sanctity of familial bonds restrains her from fleeing from the domestic scene. Though these bonds appear to be unreasonable in the beginning, Indu realizes that going against them would rupture the family ties. Forced by Akka's will to adorn the mantle of the family matriarch, she displays maturity and strength in executing her duties and responsibilities. Indu gradually learns to be bound by them as a typical traditional woman. Indu decides that she would no more submit herself to the dictates of others, and would not allow Jayant, her husband to determine or limit her career or her sphere of activity. This decision proves that she has nurtured herself into an individual. A bold and challenging woman of determination who chooses to live life in accordance with her own wishes. She negates all feminine limitations, capable of making independent decisions and also acquires the power to change others. Ultimately her search for freedom results in her emergence as a bold and challenging woman of determination.

Jaya, the protagonist in *That Long Silence* succeeds in liberating herself from the prescribed and interiorized role of other. It also deals with her effort to find her own identity as a human being capable of thinking and acting on her own initiative. She is torn between the claims of traditional values and modern educated woman's urge towards individuation. She is trapped by the instinct to be herself. The novelist uses the path chosen by Jaya to articulate the dilemma of the educated middle

class Indian Woman. The process of self-definition of Jaya creates awareness about many significant issues concerning women's existence in a changing society, the issues regarding creative writing by women-women's writing, female sexuality, motherhood, wifehood, and the necessity for discarding silence as a strategy for survival. In reality, one finds the urge for educated women like Jaya and Saru to extend themselves beyond the confines of domesticity, although they emerge on the surface as successful emancipated women with fulfilling career. They are yet to extricate themselves from the patriarchal imposition. Like Jaya, though modern in their outlook, with an impulsive urge to be empowered they are rooted in traditional and conservative attitudes. Jaya apart from being a housewife she is a creative writer too. She realizes that she alone is responsible for both her achievements and failures. She says:

"Like one of those multi coloured patchwork quilts that kakis make for any new baby in the family. So many bits and pieces-a crazy conglomeration of shapes, sizes and colours put together." (21)

She begins to create a space for herself through her writing. Her attempt to find her own voice as writer turned into a significant creative activist is successful. She thus follows the diction, "Do as you desire." This helps her to break her own silence and the silence of others. She comes out of the weight of her own silence that had curbed her creative genius. Having faced the truth for her failure she courageously moves forward and emerges discovering significantly her identity as a writer and as an individual with a liberated woman's consciousness.

If Saru, Indu, and Jaya are involved in fighting their own battles for identity and recognition, Urmila of *The Binding Vine* fights her own battle to forge herself as a woman of substance. She believes strongly that women should have the courage to express themselves and explore the evils of the society. They should muster up courage and determination to fight for their rights. Like Saru, Indu and Jaya who emerge as individuals finding strength to do what they want to, Umiila finds a space of her own, exhibiting courage and capacity to purge the society of its evils. She draws

the attention of the society to the inequality of gender and attempts at changing societal roles and attitudes. She firmly believes that things are improving gradually and at a slow pace.

The Binding Vine, with its assortment of women who are victimized in one way or the other, show that these characters may be independent to some extent but at the same time, they are bound by tradition and the norms of the society. They seek fulfillment within the family orbit. Urmi actively undertakes to drive out the cloud of misunderstanding from the minds of several women around her and becomes instrumental in changing and raising their consciousness against conventional false notions. Shakutai, illiterate woman imparts wisdom to Urmi. Shakutai struggling with the burden of life, engaged in her daily chores assimilating the pains of living with a sense of detachment gives life-sustaining message to Urmi; "The main urge is always to survive". (203). It is significant that all these characters in their moment of intimacy and bonding build a new relationship at some cost. Mira, Akka, Urmi, Inni, Shakutai, Sulumavishi and Kalpana being bound by love rise above all shades of misunderstanding, and thus obliterate their anguish, pain and suffering. Thus they discover the overwhelming binding vine of love, and instill in each other the glimmering hope of the spring of life. They also overcome their own sense of loss.

A Matter of Time diversifies a host of complex issues like the theme of self-realization of a community of women with a common heritage of oppression. Sumi gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from the utter desolation and trauma of being a deserted wife. Sumi without any ill feelings gracefully frees Gopal from marital bonds. Unlike any other woman she asserts her identity, and desires to be economically independent. She now revives her creativity. For Saru, Indu, Jaya and Urmi, marriage is the be all and end all of their existence. But for Sumi, the courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit is all that matters. She has reached a stage of self-fulfilment. She is dauntless in adversity. When all the agonies of life corner her, she stands alone and courageous with her teenage daughters,

Aru, Charu and Seema. She is modern and liberal in her outlook on life. She defies the outdated social opinion and ill treatment of a woman subjected to desertion by her husband. Sumi rises above the consequential problems, humiliations and frustrations. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure.

Small Remedies explore the role of silence in preserving the self from a total loss. The novel is multi-dimensional with death at its foreground, music at its background and the complexes of existence as its concern. It is a profound piece of writing about love and loss, grief and hope, rebellion and sacrifice, and "above all about the promethean will to resist, endure and survive"(27-28). Savitribai Indorekar, the doyenne of Hindustani music of the Gwalior Gharana, recounts what she wills to reveal.

The scar of having been refuted by her own child and the agony of rejecting that child is safely hidden behind her rigid refusal to speak of Munni, her daughter. Madhu makes efforts to probe into the suffering woman/mother but the aged singer determinedly avoids it. But by constantly remembering her personal grief and aligning it with Savitribai's strength and in concealing her own sorrow. Madhu is trying to rediscover herself. Thus she succeeds in reinforcing a pro-woman vision and asserts her solidarity with another suffering woman. Shashi Deshpande does not resist women dreaming, but she resists the structure that does not allow women to assert. Her characters are strong women snuggling to find their own space.

The novel is not only the story of the great artist, Savitribai and Leela, but also the story of Madhu and her various stages in her life's journey. She had to travel a long way to find her identity that she had been searching for-Me, a Woman.

Shashi Deshpande's novels, like those of Jane Austen's have narrow range. Her novels present a typical, middle class house wife's life. Her main concern is the urge to find oneself. To create space for oneself. To grow on one's own. The recurrence of certain themes is significant in the novels of Deshpande. More prominently themes dealing with the predicament of educated women belonging to

the middle class. Deshpande's characters are all human beings. To quote: "My characters take their own ways; I've heard people saying we should have strong women characters. But my writing has to do with women as they are. (12).

While remaining well within the bounds of the Indian middle-class respectability, the novelist raises questions pertaining to gender issues and the position of women in society. Most of Indian writers in their works have dealt with women's issues. They have ended up glorifying the virtues of Indian Woman, like patience, devotion and abject acceptance of whatever is meted out to them. But the novels of Shashi Deshpande is different because it explodes the myth of man unquestionable superiority and the myth of woman being a martyr and a paragon of all virtues.

The relentless probing of man-woman relationship by the author makes the reader label her as a feminist, and question her stand as a feminist. Although she vehemently denies being a feminist she boldly voices out the frustrations and disappointments of women. The modern women are torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. The crisis of adaptation and attachment with family and home pull them asunder. The plight of the working woman is even worse. It is aggravated by their problems of marital adjustment and quest for their identity and assertion of their individuality. The middle class Indian woman represent a vast majority of working women who are struggling to make their ends meet. Deshpande presents a very conventional idea of feminism. She is not a radical. She seems to believe in gender equality achieved through women's share in material welfare, access to resources and benefits, participation in the decision making process. She also believes in control over one's body as prerequisite for women's empowerment.

Choice is the right of both man and woman but choice is relevant only when there is knowledge. In the same way freedom is relevant when there is responsibility. Deshpande admits that her writings emerge from her suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in the Indian society. Though she has reservation about being called a feminist or 'a woman writer' she agrees that her writings are the

experience of the difficulty of playing different roles enjoyed by the society. She quotes: "My writings come out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea society has of me as a woman." (44)

That Long Silence is a seething critique of the social institutions like marriage or family. The novel is mostly concerned with the silence of women like Jaya, Kusum, Mohan's mother and others and how these women have become victims of patriarchy because of their own silence. The Long Silence is the history and evolution of woman. It promises a better future for women through self-analysis and self-understanding, through vigilance and courage. The novel projects two central issues of female bonding and resistance to patriarchal ideology. Feminine solidarity or female bonding runs as a strong undercurrent. The title of the novel *The Binding Vine* reflects its predominant theme-i.e. a female world in which women come together in a feeling of fellowship. The other powerful theme is that of resistance to patriarchal ideology. The narrative locates this resistance in different modes of experience. Urmila is not dependent on anyone for her survival. She asserts her economic as well as psychological independence. Urmila's creative writing is the voice of resistance which registers a protest against the patriarchal attitude to the issue of rape. In the case of Kalpana and Mira two forms of the gender violence are juxtaposed. Kalpana's unconscious state represents the silenced subaltern, and Mira's poems and various writing itself becomes a mode of resistance. The fictional structure finally provides utterance to the voices of Kalpana and Mira, when the press forces the hospital not to move Kalpana out and when Urmila makes definite plans to publish Mira's poems.

Deshpande succeeds in her attempt to redefine human relationships, especially man woman relationship in the context of the changing Indian Society. As Desh Pal puts it: "Shashi Deshpande's is not only a feminist concern, it's essentially psychological. Her effort is to lay threadbare the inner psyche of her characters."

In an interview to Gita Viswanatha, Deshpande reiterates the fact that she has no models to

emulate. All her works are about the social issues, and ideology and human relationships. She considers the complexity and the reality of life one lives in. The reality that she portrays is the lived lives of human beings in their triumphs and failures. Some common themes run through most of her novels: the biased treatment meted out to the daughters, the silence of women, and the strained relationship between man and woman.

Deshpande has her own style and technique of presenting the plot and structure and portraying the characters in her novels. The events and incidents described in each chapter of every novel is interwoven and narrated in a natural process. It can be said that her novels have a close knit plot. In the past too much of attention was paid to the story or plot overlooking psychological aspects. Some novelists gave importance to the traditional methods of storytelling, some tried to experiment with vocabulary, variations of time sequence, alternative endings and beginnings. Plain narrative or story telling is still the most common technique employed by the novelists who make their presence felt through their narratives.

The first-person narrative is usually employed by the novelist to make her stories appear more realistic and credible. In reply to the question of what use is creative writing, she replied that there are nobler reasons for a writer to write. The writer wants to change society, to protest against injustice, to rebel against existing wrongs and to reform the society but above all the urge to communicate. A writer writes not only of herself but also of the society she is living in. However, the society as the background the basic focus is always human beings. The narrative technique employed by Shashi Deshpande is a combination of the first person and third person narrative along with flashback devices which lend force and realism to her novels.

Roots and Shadows is essentially a woman's narrative because the story is told by a woman (narrator/writer) and largely about women. The narrative strategy is rather circuitous. As Parag Moni Sharma observes.

We enter her narrative with a prologue which may as well pass of as an epilogue. The setting of the

prologue is the eve of Mini's wedding and we leave the novel with Indu resolving to "pay for Mini's wedding." However, the novel's narrative 'present' lays Indu's post-Mini wedding reality. What follows is a continuous vacillation between the narrative present anti last reminiscence, Indu's inner space and her public sphere. Each intones the other into a mosaic of narrative pattern that affords no easy way out for the reader. One is co-opted into the narrator's process of self-assertion and self-discovery. One could only understand the present in relation to the past and the past in relation to the present. For Indu, the narrative reminiscence is a process of continuous realization that life is beyond absolute truths. (123-24)

The image of "multicoloured patch work quilt, sums up the narrative pattern in Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Long Silence*. Like the multicoloured patch work quilt there is a configuration of various stories, situations, various shades of experiences and feelings, reminiscences, fantasies, visions, and imaginings. There are also comments and reflections on life and literature, particularly on writing and women's writing. Like story telling this is a tradition carried out by the older generation of women handed over to the younger generation. "This technique is best described by the narrator Jaya herself, who is telling her own story.

Though Deshpande's primary focus is on the man-woman relationships in Indian marriages, she is also concerned with exploration of various human relationships within the family-the relationship between mother-daughter, father-daughter, husband- wife, siblings etc. It is in this respect she progresses from the particular to the unusual. The intrinsic aloneness of human being (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*), the recognition of responsibility in choice (*That long Silence*), the meaning of Dharma in one's life (*The Binding Vine*) takes her beyond feminist concerns. It is Deshpande's human centeredness that makes her more than just a significant author of our times.

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's women are tolerant, obedient and submissive. They tried to play the role of traditional women, the embodiment of tolerance,

suffering and courage. However, they observe that meaningful co-existence can come only through understanding and freedom to survive. They resolve to break that long silence. When silence and tolerance is broken, women become aggressive, self-assertive and rebellious. It might be a belated rebellion but a sure assertion of their individuality which cannot be easily brought. Tolerance and suffering; silence and surrender are seen as marks of goodness but there is a compulsive sense of self-expression and assertion. They realize that one has to believe in one's self they will begin their life anew. As Kamini Dinesh observes, "The wife, in the end, is therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife - one who has broken the long silence, one who is no longer afraid of the dark." (204)

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