

Indian Female Protagonists Striving for Individuality

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Abstract

The political awakening of Indian women may largely be attributed to the movement which Gandhi initiated, and general improvement in the status of women in India owes a great deal to the infinite interest that Gandhi took from the very beginning. The women's movement in India was an integral part of the nationalist politics of Gandhi.

The pre-independence period marked the beginning of awareness of the suffering of women due to oppressive social customs. During this phase a favorable climate was created to improve the status of women through legal reforms. Many laws were enacted which tried to eradicate certain social evils. In this phase an awareness of the need to remove social disabilities of women was created. The doors of education were opened for them; women's organization emerged to represent the needs and cause of middle class urban women, political participation of women increased.

“Assert yourself. Don't suppress it.
Let it grow and flourish! Never mind
how many things it destroys in the bargain.”

(Roots and Shadows P.115)

Keywords: Alienation, Suppression, Awakening, Assertion, Individuality, Women's Rights, Self-Expression

Introduction:

An in –depth character study reveals the delineation of women with throbbing pulse, yearning for love and recognition, longing for self- expression and individual fulfillment. Indian women (Middle class women as portrayed by the three novelists) is in the grip of oriental tradition, they crave to shackle and come out of the Traditional frame cautiously, as they have seen and still observing the drastic consequences of Western feministic tendencies. They can't bear the loss of family, loss of husband “a sheltering tree”, loss of children yet they wish to emerge as a “New woman”. They wish to be the ‘conformist's and simultaneously the ‘non-conformists’.

Indian woman whose badge has been silent-sufferer and who is an upholder of Indian culture is an oft-repeated type in Indian-English fiction. She is shown to be enacting various roles of a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister's cog in the family machine but never as an individual claiming her life to be her own, wherein she could seek personal gratification and self-fulfillment. Indian women had been silent suffer right from the very beginning of history, though they had been praised in literature.

The alienation, neglect, suppression, cruelty, brutality of woman has generated in her awakening, a feeling to revolt against the taboos and age old traditions and customs and she has started opposing and breaking them. She is fighting for her rights. She has started asserting her presence, her identity.

Analysis:

Shakuntala Rao Sastry mentioned in Women in the Sacred Laws:

Where women are honoured, there the gods
are pleased, but where they are not
honoured, no sacred rites yield rewards.(96)

Yet in practical life, a son had been preferred to a daughter and daughters had been considered encumbrances. It is very difficult to agree with E.A. Horowitz arguments in A Short History of Indian Literature:

The seclusion of woman in Zenana is no Hindu
custom at all, but was introduced in India after
the Mohammedan conquest about the time
when the Plantagenet's rose to power in
England...(83)

Sita is not considered an epitome of female virtue, because she was bold enough to walk out on her husband when he put her through ordeal by fire but because she agreed to go through the test as desired by Rama.

It is a dichotomy of principles laid down to test men and women's virtues, which are responsible for men's esteem and women's disaster. As Neena Arora rightly says about Uma Mitra in This Time of Morning:

A woman is not allowed to be a woman in orthodox thinking. She has to be good and good means virtuous in the sense of chaste. Uma was a woman with appetites that her husband couldn't satisfy, so she indulged them somewhere. Men do it, and there's no comment. (114).

Uma has her physical requirements while Arjun is intellectually inclined. She lives life on her own terms in bold defiance of Arjun's Victorian attitude and Arjun never pays attention to Uma's requirements. She feels ignored and establishes another relationship, which results in her predicament. It is very difficult to agree with Asha Chaubey that Nita's behavior is to be highlighted by feminists:

Nita Narang is not allowed to smoke at her
pleasure while her father Mr. Narang
delights himself by ogling at lovely girls his
daughter's age. Nita is not allowed to go out
only because she is a girl and young.
Mrs. Narang proudly says,
We don't allow Nita to go out alone. Her
Father would not hear of it (This Time of
Morning, 1965,32)

Smoking or consumption of liquor by women in no way can be esteemed as feminist conception. It is not the issue perturbing women. Leela becomes a victim of the social patterns laid down by Man. She is a modest

girl from Benaras. She had never learnt to cope with freedom as she was never given any. She has to commit suicide only out of shame. She is not to blame for her act but it is an orthodox society and pervert tradition which has always kept women confined and not given her any opportunity to learn to protect herself. If a woman becomes pregnant outside conjugal bonds, she has to face humiliation and she is held responsible and blamed for the sin committed by an equal partner who is not even questioned.

Maya unlike a conventional woman fearlessly fights to assert her point of view. She has the courage to tell Gautam:

You know nothing of me and of how I
can love ! How I want to love. How it
is important to me. But you, you have
never loved.....(Cry, the peacock. P. 112)

Another character Indu upon marriage as
A system which makes one so dependent
(Roots and Shadows p.117)

She considers “love” to be “a big fraud, a hoax, a trap a process of making one humble and dependent.” (Roots and Shadows,173). To her “the sexual instinct,” the maternal instinct,” “self-interest”, “self-love”, etc. appear rational and meaningful. She revolts against the concept of monogamy to be observed by woman alone. She establishes extra marital relations with Naren; when this act makes her feel a bit guilty, due to old Sanskars, she awakens and resets it, “why did we makes such a monstrous thing out of this” (p. 169)

According to Sahgal the very notion of chastity has become obsolete. She says:

What is Virtue in women? Is it compliance with society’s laws or should it
be judged by a larger vision and standards?”

(Point of view. 1997; VIII)

Almost all her female protagonists have to break their conjugal ties when they find it stifling and all of them have been compelled to enter into fruitful relationship with another man but these women still remain as honourable as any. Marriage according to Sahgal is a holy bond and home is sacrosanct; but nothing is above the individual.

Sahgal women characters are strong enough to revolt against suppression and still remain honourable. They are self- assertive women who not only know what they want but also know how to achieve it. Despite all their so –called moral lapses, they are still admirable, strong women. The female protagonists of Sahgal are suggestive of the fact as to what extents a woman can go if still she is not taken care of. They assert that they are deprived of love, their respect, their being with in the family as well as society. A woman is no more a helpless child Simrit (The Day in Shadow) and Saroj (Storm in Chandigarh) face the challenges of life with courage and have the capacity to struggle to change their lives as they please and rest them if the need be”.

Bhabhi Bhattacharya in Women in My Stories says:

I think the women of India have more
depth, more richness than men. The
transition from the old to the new, the crisis
of value adaptation strikes deeper into the
lives of over women than our men folk.(2)

It is fully admissible with the case of female protagonists of Shashi Deshpande. Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, undergoes the arduous journey into herself and learns to free herself of guilt, shame, humiliation and fear and gained the assertion of will and confidence in herself. But her return to Jayant, after a transformed, a woman is suggestive of orientalism.

Saru, who had instructed her father not to open the door for her husband Manu, now tells her father:
and Oh yes, Baba, If Manu comes, tell him to wait. I'll be back as soon as I can. (202).

Saru who ran away from her husband returned to him, not as a submissive lady but as an assertive woman capable of asserting her rights and individuality. She could break the age-old image of woman. As Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* has this comment on the age-old image and contradictory position of women in history:

Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover, she is all but absent from history. She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction, in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell and was the property of husband. (44-45)

Similarly Jaya in *That Long Silence* leads life like an introvert often given to brooding and reminiscing with a lot of self-reflection in order to discover her true self:

And I was Jaya. But I has been Suhasini as well. I can see her now, the Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft smiling, placid motherly woman. A mother who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who caped. (16)

The dejections and disappointments of unrequited self-hood the illusions and pining of love and the yearnings for companionship continue to haunt Jaya. Jaya establishes relations with Kamat. Jaya's assertions of woman hood to Kamat, reflects her willingness to change the traditional motif of wifhood. Woman is bound by tradition and myth to keep her silence intact and present this face of marital bliss to the world. To Kamat, Jaya explains that there is no room for anger in a woman's life, only the absorbing routine of trivialities (*Silence* 147).

When Mohan leaves Jaya, she is altogether broken and disoriented for fear of the social stigma of a discarded wife. She realizes that there can be no solutions through "escape route" from within. Jaya has to find that strength to address her-self to these if she is to be emancipated and find her true self. She has to review all that has made up her and find her own hidden resources of strength to fight back. The meaning of Krishna's

words “Do as your desire” now downs upon her and she knows that she has to be herself and share her strength with Mohan too. Jaya is finest example to quote-Indian womanhood who seeks to come out of oriental traditional motif cautiously and seeks emancipation in accordance with Indian culture without damaging her honour.

Shashi Deshpande’s attempt to portray successfully the character of Shakutai in *The Binding Vine* needs appreciation. Shakutai is an Indian traditional mother in real sense; she is in close grip of Indian culture as well as socially male oriented tradition. In spite of rape of her daughter Kalpana by a relative she chooses to keep mum out of fear. She says refuses to Urmi to go against the man raped her daughter. She says:

What use is it blaming him? Woman like
 you will never understand what it is like for
 us. We have to keep to our places. We can
 never step out. There are always people
 waiting to throw stones at us, our own
 people first of all. I warned Kalpana, but she
 would never listen to me. “I am not afraid
 of any one” she used to say. That’s why this
 happened to her.. women must know fear
 (Pp.147-148)

It is certainly an established fact that Male is responsible for the creation of this fear. Woman bears cruelties, suppression, and injustice out of this fear. Fear of disgrace, has been created by male and Shashi Deshpande through her female protagonist Urmi has attempted to post-mortem this fear. Urmi helps Shakuntala in removing this fear.

Another important aspect of *The Binding Vine* is highlighting the position of women living alone and aloof. They are treated in the society like a coin lying on road every man would like to pick up. This is suggestive of another fear. Doctor Bhaskar seeks liberty of Urmi though an educated middle class women.

It is nonetheless aspect of the *Binding Vine* that Shashi Deshpande has peeped into the problems and fears of lower class Indian woman. Shakutai is a lower class woman representing and symbolizing masses of Indian women though other novelists portray middle class women in their novels.

Standing still I searched, Stretching
 out my arms, Sinking deep into the
 earth, Like the the banyan roots,
 Seeking the spring or life.

(Quotation in *The binding vine* P.151)

Shashi Deshpande is different from those novelists who have not taken up the social problems like the evil influence of rape, caste system, problems of down trodden women and dowry. Her novels reveal the variegated facts of women of all classes in modern India and as such assert the full-awakened feminine sensibility. The humiliating experience that undergoes in the process of getting her married, the factors which determine her acceptability viz. beauty, dowry, skill, matching of horoscope, caste, sub caste, colour, and creed are perceptively revealed in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. In the novels, Deshpande has exposed the desperate position of girls. Most of them have no choice in the matter of marriage. Joyce Carol Oates points out:

A woman is like a dream. Her life is a dream of waiting. I mean, she lives in a dream waiting for a man. There is no way out of this, insulting as it is, no woman can escape it. Her life is a waiting for a man. That's all. There is certain door in this dream, and she has to walk through it. She has no choice

(Joyce Carol Oates' "Them" P.367)

Shashi Deshpande has raised another issue in her novels i.e. prevalence of child marriages in India. Women become widows even before they reach the prime of their youth. Akka in *Roots and Shadows* was married only at the age of twelve. Six months after her marriage, was sent to her husband's home where she suffered cruelties by her husband. She was locked for three days in a room and was not given food. Her husband kept a mistress and as a result Akka could not give birth to any issue. Her husband had a paralysis attack and none other than Akka looked after him till death. The characterization of Akka presents real essence of Indian Women. They are not able to get rid of myths.

Another character similar to Akka is Mira Masi in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*. She had also been twelve years old when she was married and a virgin when she was widowed at the age of fifteen. She had to live in husband's family as a maid. Her longings to be drowned in the well symbolize suffocating unfulfilled life a woman allowed to lead for no fault of her. Indian women have been the victims of the evil practice of child marriages and it is still going on.

Anita Desai's novels are also rooted in women's problems. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, is married to an older and detached lawyer. She suffers total lack of communication and matrimonial silences.

How little he knew my suffering, or of how to comfort me....
Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft willing body, or the lonely wanting mind that waited near his bed.
(p.9)

Anita Desai has felt women's psychological disorders created by male. Man uses woman whenever and wherever he need for his sexual gratification but woman is denied that opportunity. She has tried to look into problems from women's point of view. Maya is compelled to a schizophrenic condition and she describes herself as "body without a heart, a heat without a body" (196). Monisha develops incurable claustrophobia due to oppressive lack of privacy, her sterility and due to suspicion of her in laws and absence of love.

The position of Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain* is no better. The marital incompatibility and emotional maladjustment ruin a woman's individuality, has explicitly been exposed by Anita Desai in both the characters. Sita's journey to Manori Islands and Nanda Kaul's stay a lonely house in Carignano Hills represents the women's visualization of reality and illusion, reasons behind their

loneliness, isolation, frustration and withdrawal. Sita understands that the truth of life lies in relatedness and not in escapism, in integration and not in disintegration. She gains the strength to face the harsh realities of life.

Nanda Kaul's husband has lifelong affair with another woman but she never revolts only to protect the grace of her vice chancellor husband. Man has always required sacrifice from woman. This is clearly indication of woman's inability to get out of clutches of myths, and tradition.

Emotionally the woman grows dependent on the male for love and warmth apart from security and stability. She is an adolescent in age and outlook. She tries to adjust to the outside world in her relationship with the male. But a setback from her lover ruins her relationship with the male. But a setback from her lover ruins her life. When the male leaves her alienated, confined in a house, the adolescent female becomes a case of paranoia and a figure without the will to live or fight. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* and Sarah of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* looks upon marriage as "a system which makes one so dependent" (*Roots and Shadows*, P 117) she seeks to come out of this entrapment. She painfully admits, "When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant, when I think of Jayant when I undress, I think of him (*Roots and Shadows*, p 54) Maya, unlike a conventional woman fearlessly fights to assert her point of view in *Cry, the Peacock*. She gathers courage to tell Gautam. "You know nothing of me and of how I can love! How I want to love. How it is important to me. But you, you've never loved....." (*Cry, the Peacock*, p.112) She emerges a New Woman with her own identity when she asserts her own being, on another occasion, when Gautam wants Maya to listen to him, she says "No" and further adds, "you listen to me tonight....!" (*Cry, the Peacock*, p.113) Maya thus represents the New Woman who fights to break this entrapment.

One more reason of woman's entrapment is her economic dependence on the male. The women become victims of their economic dependence on the male and of the cruel male ego. Men are associated with money which gives them the power to exploit as well as provide undue advantages of pleasures. The women begin to see them as their benefactors and protectors and so are responsive to their own sensual desires. Since society doesn't permit open exhibition of sexual feelings on the part of the female, she either suppresses her sexuality or secretly establishes extra marital relationships. Male can satisfy his lust anywhere but female is tied to social ethics. Uma Mitra has her own physical needs in *This Time of Morning*. Her husband Arjun fails to realize her needs. Why only a woman is deprived of her biological needs, when her counterpart is allowed all rights to enjoy. A woman has never been considered as a human being. They are treated as entities, and properties of the male. Saroj, in *Storm in Chandigarh*, is tormented by her husband Inder because she has confessed her premarital affair to her husband. Chastity becomes the weapon to torment Saroj though Inder himself is involved with Mara in an extramarital affair. The female is treated as the colony or the slave of the male and is exploited and oppressed, physically, materially and emotionally. She has been marginalized through patriarchy and imperialistic ideologies. The Male has emerged as a colonizer and the female as the colonized.

Desai's protagonists assert not in a pragmatic manner, but suffer in silence, perceive the agonies of existence and quietly withdraw into their own worlds. Monisha in *Voices in the City* lives in her own psychological world. Nanda Kaul retires to a hill station, Sita exiles in the Island of Manori.

The struggle of Deshpande's protagonists is not limited to simple rights and duties but has extended to the issues related to work, economic position, individual liberation of women: "Education, financial independence, control over her sexuality, and the moral choice"¹

Nayantara's protagonists move towards definite, and concrete feminist position. They are involved in raising consciousness and criticism of society with unequal gender roles and the power distribution. The issue at source does carry political intervention apart from social ethics and ideologies Nayantara's stress on political and ideological understanding of woman's position needs to be accounted for the analysis of her characters.

The central idea behind Storm in Chandigarh is to gather courage to take a stand against injustice reflects much influence on Nayanatara of Gandhian Philosophy.

Gandhaian Politics had also meant the open decision, the open action. No stealth, no Furtiveness and therefore on shame.

(Storm in Chandigarh - p.239)

Saroj expects equality and freedom but her husband, Inder is a different kind of person from a different cultural background. Saroj faces violent revulsion of Inder only. For her plain admission of her premarital affair, truth and innocence brings her tragic isolation. Inder is free to establish relationship with Mara but Saroj is meant for domination. In spite of her total, and warm involvement in her married life, Inder feels ill at ease with her emotional demands. Saroj's premarital lapse signifies the cultural difference. Man wants woman to be traditional, devoted and pure.

A thousand years from now a woman will still want and need a master, the man who will own and command her- and that's the man she'll respect. (Storm in Chandigarh).(p.102)

Nayantara like any other contemporary novelists propagates the ideas of liberation of woman and the ideas of freedom, equality and self -respect of woman much influenced by the Gandhian movements of independence. She has peeped into the woman's complexes developed due to her dependence on man. A woman is a person, an individual a human being and as such she can legitimately claim to be as free as man but as Indu wonders:

Am I on way to becoming an ideal woman? A woman who sheds her 'I', who loses her identity in husbands?

(Roots and Shadows p.154)

Nayantara exposes the dichotomy of ethics laid down separately for man and woman. In Storm in Chandigarh Saroj undergoes even beating for her premarital relationships but Inder never punishes himself for his faults of identical nature. Lydia and Nell, the two ladies who become Michael's wives successively in A Situation in New Delhi have to seek divorce because they find the husband's behaviour to be intolerable. Another female character Nadira undergoes torments defenselessly because she finds her husband Usman incorrigible. Nadira feels herself to have been wronged by her husband, as she has come to know that he is in love with Devi, even though she has not shown even one single symptom of frailty, as the narrator reports:

Nadira, looking on, wondered how he could, without going near a woman, this woman look as if he possessed her utterly, a latent sensuality about even this ordinary leave taking. It was the intangibles in her life with Usman that tormented her, nothing so explicable as adultery, though that was one of her demons too.

(A Situation in New Delhi. pp.80-81)

Sylla of Mistaken Identity establishes physical relations with Bhusan and marries his lawyer in the end. Uma in This Time of Morning has her own way of looking at life. She, when ignored, indulges into extra marital relationship. Through these female characters, Nayantara Sahgal exposes the reality of social structure. Her purpose of delineating such real and lively characters is to tell that in spite of compelled extra marital sexual relationships, these female characters, are not deceptive and false in their family relationships. According to Nayantara Sahgal the very notion of chastity has become obsolete and only women can be held responsible for such impelled acts. She says:

What is virtue in a woman? Is it compliance with society's laws or should it be judged by a larger vision and standards? ¹

Nadira is faithful to her husband. The way Nadira suffers torments defenseless is in Mrs. Sahgal's opinion, typicality of womankind, as her narrator in the novel reports; "Nadira turned around, her eyes with their look of more than childlike defenselessness, a creature of slaughter and sacrifice. Either that or a prized possession, in any case, womankind, not woman" (A Situation in New Delhi, P.82). The narrator provides an aperture for the reader to peep into Mrs. Sahgal's vision that for her womenfolk have been suffering defenselessly at the hands of men folk.

Nayantara's remarkable contribution as a novelist is deployment of characters male or female to fight against the dehumanizing forces that forces women towards silence, sufferings, and torments. Helene Cixous, in her article the "Laugh of Medusa" expresses how women should fight against this silence:

It is by writing, from and toward women and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than silence. women should break out of this silence. They should not be coned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (p. 879)

Women generally suffer only because they have no voice and choice. They simply conform, adapt themselves accordingly." Women had no choice but to submit, to accept". (Roots and Shadows, p.6) .Nayantara's first novel "A Time to be Happy" portrays the same tendency of acceptance and compromise and this tendency is also adopted by Shashi Deshpande. They leave indelible conflict in the mind between dehumanizing forces and the striving humanizing individualistic forces.

While Shashi Deshpande creates a world of women remaining with the patriarchal structures, gradually making space for self-assertion by creation a feminine language, a feminine sensibility, feminine reality and a female textual body, Nayantara goes ahead with creating new ethics, new codes, and new world for the happiness of women.

It is very difficult to agree with views published in a book article in Contemporary Indian English Novel about Nayantara Sahgal by B.D. Sharma and S.K.Sharma where they point out:

However these assertions should not be taken to mean that Nayantara Sahgal is a champion of women's complete liberation and likes women to have nothing to do with men. If her women characters, who are free from the dominance of men, had exercised adequate restraints over themselves and had shown leading spotless lives, she could have been regarded as a champion of women's complete liberation.(p.72).

The writer has ignored the aspects and conditions, which compelled the women characters of Nayantara Sahgal and subjected them to humiliation. The act of leading unrestrained life draws sympathy from the reader.

Nayantara goes beyond expectations to project need for women's liberation by delineation of male characters as spokes- person of women's liberation. Vishal Dubey of Storm in Chandigarh and Rishad of A Situation in New Delhi like woman not to remain subdued. "(Dubey) thought of his own country-women as the subdued sex, creatures not yet emerged from the chrysalis, for which the adventure of self-expression has not even begun. Whatever womanhood had once meant in India had been lost in the mist of antiquity. In its place these had long been a figure of humility, neck bent/ eyes down cast, living flesh consigned to oblivion." (Storm in Chandigarh, p.191).Vishal also expresses his concern over women's position.

"Women were not a subject for discussion. They were wives, daughters, and mothers. They belonged to their men by contract or by blood. Their sphere was sexual and their job procreation. They were dependents, not individuals".

(Storm in Chandigarh, p.191)

Rishad in " A Situation in New Delhi regards an arranged marriage without the will of a girl as an " organized rape". When Rishad comes to know that Pinky is going to be married against her will, he refuses to attend, the marriage. Existing social norms and customs treat women as a scapegoat and need to be changed. The issues raised by Nayantara Sahgal in her novels require reconsideration of women's existence she seems to be championing the cause of according equality to women. The view embodied in her novels is, that the same code of morality be applied to both men and women.

She raises a voice of protest against the practice of having one standard of morality for men and another for women.

Anita Desai also raises these contentious issues by creating microcosmic world. In the small and the domestic are implied the large and the political. She mocks at the beliefs and the customs, which are traditional in Indian families in her latest novel Fasting, Feasting. Each family welcomes birth of male child Arun, a "Puny physical presence" an asthmatic child, temperamental, spoilt, a bully; nevertheless far preferred than his sisters, Uma and Aruna. Uma has to leave her education only for the upbringing of her brother and Aruna is reminded of her name that she missed being Aruna. Anita Desai's portrayal of reality also encompasses troubled women turning to religion. Malashri Lal observes in her book review of Fasting, Feasting, published in The Book Review:

Anita Desai's expertise lies in the way she weaves a fine, clever story around them. For underlying the meaningless yet harmful traditions of Indian societal conditioning is the grave matter of inherited power, both

patriarchal and hierarchical.

Though Anita Desai too takes up the problems of a wife's adjustment in her husband's home, her approach is different from that of Nayantara Sahgal. The view embodied in her novels is that the solution of the problems lies not in constantly finding faults with the husband's behavior or to copy the bad habits of husband or to wear as male with a sense of equality. Tazi and Reba resent their elders not letting them smoke, drink, wear tight dresses, come back home late at night and pose for advertisements in *A Situation in New Delhi*. Desai approaches women's cause with a positive attitude. In her novels *Cry*, *the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, and *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, Anita Desai takes up problems causing estrangements in families as in each one of them the wife is unhappy with her husband. Each of the wife protagonists Monisha, Maya and Sita feels that she is not getting as much

Emotional attachment as she is entitled to have, with the result that the protagonist of *Cry*, *the Peacock* kills her husband, the protagonist of *Voices in the City* kills herself, and Sita, the protagonist in *Where shall we Go This Summer* leaves her husband's home to spend the summer on Manori islands. Emotional attachment, maladjustment and family bond require participation of both partners and Anita Desai as well as Shashi Deshpande reflect this psychological complexity of the individual mind. Here at this juncture Shyam Asnani's observation needs appreciation.

Mere living together under the same roof,
only the accumulating of a life-time's living
habits, without any real bond of intimacies
in spite of sex and children the human
substance between them dwindling is
nothing but the mockery of marriage. True
living lies in understanding each other in
mutual respect and trust, honesty and
freedom without a thought of dominance.(57)

What is pertinent to mention, is that only the female protagonists reconcile with the situation the male protagonists remain unchanged throughout the novels. This tendency of male oriented society is attacked and mocked by these novelists. Woman never wants to break the conjugal bonds, in spite of her estrangement, alienation humiliation and miseries. Though there is no change in the husband's attitude in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and up to the novel he remains as he was, yet Sita comes back to live with him happily. Saru in Shashi Deshpande's *Dark Holds No Terrors* is compelled to reconcile with the situation like any other woman in ordinary real life. It is wrongly assessed by many critics that Saru has reached the state of enlightenment to realize her duties as a wife. Saru is merely a woman and she is enlightened in a sense that she is a woman and no help will come from outside world, she has to gather her own strength to cope up with the situation.

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande observe that there is no alternative to the institution of marriage. Their works reveal the problems of married women and find how the quests for alternatives to marriage prove futile and the dissatisfied. Married women have to reconcile with the earlier position.

The movement of Shashi Deshpande's heroines from their parental homes to the outside world, through education and marriage, leads them to the extinction of their individuality and does not really initiate them into knowledge of self. When their husbands begin to Kill their very roots of existence, they defy their husbands and find a way of their own, but realizing " *Dark Holds No Terrors* " and " *My life is my own* " they return to their husband home, no longer as puppet but as assertive women, asserting their individuality and own rights. It is only

through self-analysis and self-understanding, through vigilance and courage, they can be to change their lives. They will have to fight their own battles, nobody is going to do it for them.

Women's role has been narrowed by socialization and excessive restraints put by society. Most feminists believe that pernicious effect of socialization makes women suppress their human potential and make them fearful. A member of the NOW's (National Organisation for Women) Carden Maren Lockwood board of directors expresses herself in the following words:

I want to have part in creating a new society
..I want women to have something to say in
their own lives... I have never, reached my
potential because of social conditions.(p.12)

The socialization hampers not only her career and prospects but also restrains her cultural and social behaviour. Jaya in *That Long Silence* in spite of her fair relations with Kamat can't pay her homage at the death of Kamat, only because society looks with suspicion the relations of married woman with another married man. Saru's career as a doctor in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Indu's career as a writer in *Roots and Shadows*, are marred by the traumatic married life and socialization.

Seen collectively and analyzing deeply the female protagonists of the three novelists, men are unable to provide sustaining relationships or incapable of reciprocating women's love. In her role women has been reduced to a mother, a wife, a sex object, and a property. While in her use of sexual freedom she is labeled as a whore, in her voicing of open anger she is branded as mad women. The present patriarchal world thus closes in on the woman's world and shuts out avenues of freedom. The male presence marginalizes her position completely. Socially, she is either ostracized or included in the mainstream of society as a mistress, a wife or a maidan. In all the worlds, the woman is the loser as the male restricts her world to certain limits, Economically, and emotionally, she grows dependent on the male and male take liberty to exploit her. She has to constantly struggle and carve out her passage in the dark, between the penalty for expression or suppression of sexuality. As Jane Miller Points out:

New questions become ask able, new
resistance imaginable as the challenge is
more and more openly made to the notion
that men have the measure of women of
indeed of themselves. (Miller193).

Conclusion

The flux of cultures and globalization of concepts has compelled Indian women to rethink her position and Jaya discovers her position which suits her best. Jaya's characterization is pertinent to quote here as she realizes her position and her plight is not result of her husband's attitude but due to the traditional social, political & economic patterns laid down for her by patriarchy. Almost all of the three novelists have portrayed husband –wife relationship with thrust, but there are a lot of issues concerning women's need to be assertive viz. commercialization of marriage, rape, dowry-death, eve-teasing inheritance of ancestral property, old age care, exposure where the novelists might endeavor in future.

Most of the Indian women stick to the traditional values even if they are highly educated and are exposed to modern ideas. They try to assimilate modern ideas without casting away their traditional image. Progressive women of India are bound to face the problems of adjustment. After her marriage, a girl undergoes some kind of

re-orientation, in order to adjust her ways to those of her husband and in-laws. The resultant conflict may create emotional disturbance, which in turn strikes a discordant note in her family life.

There can be no two opinions in visualizing the pitiable predicament of women and in pointing out that Indian woman has been treated as a territory. Existence of separate moral and social codes for male and female and the fear of disintegration perturb them from young age till death. That's why they are compelled to lead life like a caged bird. Almost all the female protagonists of these novels have been portrayed as "angry young women". Their anger is not against their husbands as wrongly analyzed by some critics but against the system against the traditional mode of thought and life. They seek to change the moral codes framed by male and Deshpande, and Nayantara Sahgal has endeavoured at various levels in demolishing the traditional image of women as a mere sex-object and an artifact. Prof. T.N. Singh rightly says:

Feminist writing will have justified itself only by bringing about a radical transformation in public attitude towards people realize that lovemaking and domesticity are by no means the sole concern of women. (12)

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