CHAPTER-II

SOCIOLOGICAL OPPRESSION

The Home and the World

“One is not born, but rather becomes woman” (unknown)

This chapter explores a more pronounced and growingly adverse sociological oppression and its impact on the condition of women, as reflected in fiction. Women are often handed out miserable lives of endurance, gross injustice and humiliation. Despite a neo-social façade of being educated and belonging to slightly different social strata – they are still subjected to the same treatment. Liberal feminists have championed equal rights for women to enable them compete with men in the public realm on equal terms. It should be noted that the injustice and exploitation are not going unnoticed and unprotected. Radical feminists have launched protests against and campaigned on a number of issues on the growth of equality for women. What such struggles and protests have actually achieved is a much debated issue.

The role assigned to women by society, especially the middle class women in India is invariably a mythical role of the ever- caring, sacrificing, dormant and silent creature. With these as focal point, many women writers in India have presented the stress and suffering undergone by the female characters in their novels in the post-colonial and post-modern Indian sub continent.

This chapter focuses on issues faced by women throughout their lives irrespective of their age or caste. Their fate and agony was no better than that endured by the famous Prem Chand’s women characters. On the other hand, throughout her novels, Anita Desai focuses on the personal struggles of English-educated middle
class woman in contemporary India as they attempt to overcome societal norms imposed by a tradition – bound patriarchal authors. Her novels move around women characters although she is preoccupied with the theme of incompatible marital relationships. Most of Desai’s works engage the complexities of modern Indian culture over and above the purely feminine perspective of the protagonists. In this way, both Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande project an extensive exposure of vision and address the problems of women in general. Thus these two writers constitute a new group of Indo-Anglican novelists who neither present the traditional position of women in Indian society nor dwell on the esoteric and largely utopian idea of woman empowerment in the sub-continental context. Also these two happen to be among the few writers who had a closer vision of the Indian milieu and the many sociological and psychological complications that exist in most emerging civilizations and established cultural systems that are tested by changing times, and undergoing certain inescapable alterations and convolutions.

It is in the new wave cinema and the old traditional cinema with verve for human and ethical solutions that this drive for identity had found its highest attainment and most satisfactory artistic accomplishment. The Indo-Anglican literature of this period then, represented a more mellowed and contributing role than a dominant presence. It is against this back drop that the contributions of Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have to be considered.

The main focus then is on the social circumstances of Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists Saru, Indu and Jaya and also the protagonists of Anita Desai - Maya, Nanda Kaul and Bimla. There is an attempt made to analyse their confrontation of the oppressive sociological situations thrust on them by the middle class Indian society in the name of tradition and culture.
The dictionary definition of oppression is - Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power especially by the imposition of burdens; the condition of being weighed down; an act of pressuring; a sense of demoralized state of dissipated physical and mental energies.

Oppression of women has been a feature of all major literatures of the world from the time of ancient civilizations of the world like, Indus Valley, the Greek and the Roman times to the Post modern 21st century. While this is true with women all over the world we can observe the prevalent further degradation of women in the Hindu, and Muslim communities of South Asia. These people face more complex problems where it is not merely lack of recognition of one’s ethical identity or intellectual brilliance or imaginative entity- but something that questions her economic independence. They suffer not merely an encroachment of their independence of mind but the very right of freedom to choose to do what they like. Further they fear physical threats that often lead to death. The problem is not just that of winning equal rights for women but of guarding against threats that come from various directions, against exploitation at every step, sometimes through violence, sometimes through love, or through cunning.

The conditions of rural India do not fall under what is popularly understood in the west as feminism and anti-feminism, both enlisted words that rather apply to the aristocratic, moneyed and upper middle class strata of the society. In the multi cultured Indian sub continent the word ‘feminism’ is heard in certain circles of the urban rich and neo-rich upper middle class and middle-class educated youth, and business class who do not qualify as aristocrats, whose personalities have an undercurrent of the influence of the British missionary convent education though there is a growing feeling of injustice and exploitation and an unkindled desire to
fight. Those who really suffer the worst atrocities do not and cannot put up a well orchestrated protest and fight but those who fight and can reach the press often do not have a convincing cause.

The literature of the last quarter of the century dating from 1990 – 2015 sadly lacks any leading literary figures of the stature of a Dickens or a Dostoevsky who could document the woes of a particular era with extraordinary vividness and commitment.

A couple of writers who have been successful in translating the spirit and substance of the untold suffering and humilities borne by the Indian women are from regional literatures- like that of Prem Chand in Hindustani, Sarat Chandra and Rabindra Nath Tagore in Bengali, All the three of them understood and emphasized with the traditional Indian women and have created numerous characters.

All the central women characters of Shashi Deshpande’s novels have a similar upper middle class, traditional family background. All of them rebel against these impositions laid down by their family and society at large. While Saru’s defiance turns her into a materialist, Indu turns into the scared rabbit that runs away from her over-possessive and over-dependent family. Jaya on the other hand retreats into the abyss of silence locking away her emotions and all human and natural reactions. The social, physical and financial circumstances of these three women are explored at length in this chapter. Each one of them struggles for space and liberty within the narrow confines of the glorified yet cliché-laden virtues of the Indian womanhood, like abject acceptance of her inferior status, painstaking patience, dedicated undiscriminating devotion and tolerance towards everything that is meted out to her. This stereotypical status puts women on a tall but precarious pedestal, thus restricting her movements to the small circle on the pedestal head. This is seen as a glorified
imprisonment of the soul and mind of woman by all the three of them, Indu, Jaya and Saru. They question the throttling cultural, traditional roles assigned to them from the times immemorial in patriarchal India.

Right from day one a girl is brainwashed into her role as being an assertive person. Women are not individuals in their own right. She should, on the other hand be the epitome of a considerate soul who should master the art of tailoring her needs, requirements, desires; wishes etc., only to quietly surrender them at the altar of marital supplication and always bear all this under the guise of a supreme tolerance. The traditional woman should be the quiet, patient, ever-present, never-heard angel of the house who bears the burden of domesticity and society with a smile. Sita and Savitri being the ideal figures push her back on the track in the event of any untoward observation and ensure that she remains the fair lady of the inner sanctum of the house who is never heard or seen.

The question in the minds of the three protagonists is ‘virtue’ as defined by whom and devotion to whom or to which moral or ethical edict. Confinement in heaven or hell is still the same.

Deshpande largely follows the general perception of the Hindu feudal family where both daughter and daughter-in-law are treated as dolls if they are afraid to express their views and as slaves in case they begin to show any inkling for self expression on independent thought and action.

Deshpande’s protagonists start their defiance from early childhood. In the case of Sarita, the protagonist of The Dark Holds No Terror is victimised by her mother who holds her responsible for the death of her brother Dhruva. Even before this she is marginalized as an appendage, a daughter who is bound to only leave the house and one who cannot carry forward the glory of the family name. The only time she is
required to be center stage was during the Haldi Kumkum festival, which is observed once a year. The rest of her life is shaped by these two social circumstances for which she is not responsible, which are not directly related to her personal life. The superstitions or the customs of the time have a disproportionately great influence on life. It is only during these celebrations that women folk, the daughter, wife, mother, daughter-in-law play a major role. These proud moments that Saru is seen reminiscing:

The attar tray. The rose-water sprinkler. These had been brought out each year for the Haldi Kumkuma held at home.

The one time when she became more important than Dhruva.

The daughter of the house who could apply attar drenched swabs of cotton to the backs of women’s hand. Sprinkle rose-water over them and distribute the flowers (TDHNT 23).

Girls had to be careful about their looks and colour. These matter a lot in attracting a good husband without much difficulty. The only quality that was assigned to a girl or a woman was her beauty or fair looks. She was degraded by her own family and a sigh of regret goes around when a girl is ordinary looking. These lines of Saru express her disappointment by the disregard her mother shows to her, ‘I was an ugly girl. Atleast, my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying … you will never be good looking. You are too dark for that. (24)

It is not necessary that the husband or the in-laws should perpetuate any emotional or physical violence or ill-treat her. Though such instances are common the outcome is only a lot of distress – and more than physical torture it is the
psychological agony – and the sense of humiliation that the situation pitches on them and breaks their psyche which is tragic.

It is this demeaning attitude and opinion that dent the confidence of women and turn a majority of them into dumb creatures who accept their fate silently and unquestioningly. Saru craved for attention and love that was denied to her. Dhruva, the brother and the only male child of Saru’s parents, was the pivot of all emotions and love particularly. He was the pride of her parents. After the death of Saru’s brother she was non-existent to her mother. Saru was discouraged by her because of her silence; this pushed her into getting her freedom from home.

At another level there is a huge gap of understanding and communication between the two generations – a kind of total absence of patience and social awareness beyond their limited adamant outlook. Though a similar problem is depicted beautifully by Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, the mother and the children are not estranged as in Shashi Deshpande’s novel. This estrangement is the direct outcome of the social and economical pressures and insecurities that an Indian housewife faced in the post-colonial Indian society. Saru after leaving home expresses:

> Freedom at last, she had exulted when she had left home and joined medical college. It had been not just relief but a kind of rebirth - to get away from home to the hostel, so different with its cheerful feminine jingle (78).

Saru’s choice of husband Manohar, a man who belonged to the lower caste, a charismatic man of poetry and theater, does not meet her mother’s approval. She was cursed by her mother for her act of defiance and in a way these words of Saru’s mother turn out to be a prediction of what was to become of her marriage: ‘You won’t
be happy with him. I know you won’t. A man of different caste, different community….What will you two have in common?’ (58).

Saru is successful in establishing herself through her career by procuring marginal gains, that interest her rather than merely rendering her services to the sick. She cares for her profession because it is beneficial to her. It helps her to attain a social position and also to establish a place, which is a home of her own set up on her own conditions and terms. Yet the former disappointment and dissatisfaction still haunts her and even after acquiring a status, a powerful status that she craved for right from her childhood.

Saru realises her dream of life time, i.e. recognition of herself as a person who grew to an elevated status both socially and financially through her career as a doctor. She is no more just the wife of Manohar; she is a doctor and gains the respect of her neighbours and also that of the society. To Saru, good career amounts not to the reputation as a good doctor but an opportunity and a means to get away from the shabby room, where she started her married life. To Saru ambition in career is not due to the dedication for her vocation but for the luxuries it can provide, for the life- style that it can afford her. Her notion of success with material gains and reputation is her way of striking back at her mother, who considered girls as useless and unfit except for marriage and family life and a status of a mother of many children and no more. The status in terms of the social and financial position that she attained symbolizes power and supremacy that she had gained. This she reached in order to make her mother feel in contrast for her poor show of power which was restrained to only to her father and Saru herself. She says: “I had worked hard, to be a success, to show them something” (67).
But Saru feels that all her hard work and determination is wasted when she hears of her mother’s death. Saru feels that she cheated her of her victory by dying before she had a chance to riposte her with the success she made for herself as a reputed doctor.

Her desire for self-evaluation is a manifestation of fulfilling only a psychic need but not a passionate and obsessive drive of the inner self. This aspect of Saru’s experience shows certain incompleteness.

Indu, the protagonist of *Roots and Shadows*, was brought up by her paternal aunts and uncles after the death of her mother during childbirth. Her father is for most of the time either absent or remained a visitor, who drifted once in a while to call on all the members in family. These visits were few and far between his explorations as bird watcher. Indu would have been an orphan except for the ancestral home and the large family that ran like a well-oiled machine under the eagle-eyed supervision of Akkamma, the widowed aunt of her father. Akka, the rich family tyrant set the law and ran the house in prim and proper order. She tried to inculcate the norms of a ‘good girl’s behavior’ into Indu. Indu was never told about her mother because the latter was of a different caste. Akka taught her how to walk, talk and serve food to everyone. She was taken to task by Akka whenever she was caught talking to the male students in the college. Indu would have been caught in the tangle or quagmire of rules, dos and don’ts in the name of old family values and traditions under the dictatorship of Akka if not for her father’s intervention and insistence on her education.

Indu would have ended up with the bare knowledge to read and write letters. It was her visiting father who asserted her English medium education unlike all her other cousins who attended the vernacular school. Even Naren whom she turned to for
open hearted discussion had his education in the vernacular. He called her “bad – tempered little Indu”. Though she defied and rebelled against the dictates of the so called tradition and culture she is so accustomed to the taboos and fetishes that in her own words. Indu says: ‘I hesitate to have a cup of tea before washing and brushing? Why do I dislike the thought of a meal before I’ve had by bath?’ (RS 27).

Indu’s departure to the hostel is her ticket to freedom from the confines of the ancestral home. It is her rebellious nature that makes her propose to Jayanth, a man of her choice, a man who does not belong to her father’s caste. Her proposal itself is an attempt to move away from the fenced pen allotted for women and also to exhibit her freedom to choose which is in sharp contrast to the docile nature of women.

Indu’s career as a journalist and her writings reflect her unconscious perception and presentation of the story through the eyes of the male. She finds the environment at the woman’s magazine narcissist and too preoccupied about the womanhood and everyone had an obsession which was woman-centered. This shade and nature of Indu’s character reflects Deshpande’s skill at characterization which ensures that her protagonists are not stereotyped. Indu is disturbed when her editor wants her to colour the reality, which is against the journalistic practice and ethics. He says that it is a must for the existence and survival for any journalist. Though she hated this demand she had no option but to concede: ‘that’s life! What can one person do against the whole system! No paint can stop from making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget, we have a long way to go’ (29).
Coming to Jayanti in *That Long Silence*, she is a child at heart, who has stopped growing after the death of her father. Jaya was encouraged a lot by her father, who supported her. He was ever present and taught her to dream of great heights and a desire to achieve things. He wanted her to win great praise and gain recognition in the whole wide world. Appa nurtured her as a little girl into an ambitious person and also helped in breaking her away from the tradition of silence. He encouraged her to express her feelings with both joy and energy. He took pleasure in her tantrums. Appa did not want her to pay heed to her grandmother. He was there, guiding her at every step.

Jaya’s childhood at this stage was totally different from that of Saru’s and Indu’s. It was after her father’s death that Jaya felt the impact of being smothered and having her dreams throttled. She felt cheated out on Appa’s death. Jaya was made to adjust with the circumstances, sacrifice her desires. She was left unprotected and could not digest the entity and the preaching for the good girl started with ajji tutoring her into the mould of the ideal woman. She could not escape it because the rest of the family reminded her quite cruelly the harsh reality. Especially her mother constantly reminds her: ‘I know what you want. You want Appa and Saptagiri that life back. But it won’t return. It’s all over, understand? Appa is dead, get that into your head, Appa is dead’ (TLS 29).

Jaya holds her father responsible for her unfulfilled dreams and inability to express emotion or involvement. It is fear of loss that makes her shun from any kind of relationship lest it may abandon her midway like her Appa and dada, who promised the world but left it empty for her.
Jaya’s career as a writer also is tainted with these fears and experiences. It is obvious from her writings that it lacked the support and encouragement from her father and brother. She is scared of expressing her true thoughts. She stifles them and measures what she reveals; hence her writings are no good. They lack life; they lack feeling and essentially lack truth. Her ‘Sita; column is no more than a report of the daily routine of a wife. Nothing of herself is evident in it and it remains that lifeless. It is because of these circumstances that she is unable to realise the dream that she had cherished, from her childhood, of becoming a renowned writer. Jaya expresses her frustration in these lines:

I hadn’t stopped writing because of Mohan; I could possibly not make Mohan the scapegoat for my failures, for I had written even after that confrontation with him- stories that had been rejected, stories that had come back to me, stories that I had hidden here in this house (TLS 48).

She was scared of failure and writing too. This is what even Kamat had expressed and made her realise the truth of her non-involvement and the resultant lifeless writing. For every Elizabeth Barrette Browning let us not forget there had been dozens of Bronte sisters and half-a-dozen of George Eliots whose struggle had been exemplary and heroic

The next most important stage in the lives of the three women is their marriage. To Saru, Indu and Jaya marriage is the license to freedom from the orthodox practices of their paternal homes. While the first two marry the man of their choice, Jaya’s is an arranged one. Yet all three hope to regain their lost ground, independence and identity through their marriages. To these women marriage is the escape route from the mould of a good woman but even here they are denied of their
craving for independence. In reality marriage, the hope of a romantic encounter remains unfulfilled. In fact it creates a dark petrifying fear in Saru, a scaring and alarming helplessness because of her over passiveness in Indu and a hollow emptiness in Jaya.

Saru marries Manohar, a romantic and charismatic poet, in defiance of her mother. Her choice of the man, who belongs to a caste not acceptable to her mother, is her statement of escape and independence from the throttling restrictions laid down by her mother. Very soon Saru sees the truth of the wrong selection she had made in her hurry to strike back at her mother. Manu is nothing but a shallow person whose poetry has earned him a teaching job in a third-grade college. The romance between the two continues only for a very brief period. Saru’s increasing popularity in her professional and social life generates the ever present ego problem. This develops the first of the many chinks in their romantic marriage. The changed social equations turn Manu into a forceful person, out of his inferiority complex and jealous attitude towards his wife who is way ahead of him socially and professionally. The charismatic, mercuric, Manu turns into a schizophrenic person who seems to be caring and considerate during the day time and lets out the animal in him at nights and ruthlessly violates Saru physically. This sexual sadism inflicted by Manu is unbearable and often terrifies her.

Saru’s suffering at the hands of Manu, though it might be severe, does not bring out of her a strong response – like that of a Heithcliff or that of Catherine Linton. That makes us assume that she is a mild, shy, but not weak individual who wishes to avenge herself at an opportune moment. Then she understands the quintessential truth about middle class Hindu family norms, of the masculine
hypocrisy or perfidy of their need to protect at any cost, be it financial or ethical or compromised or sacrificed in the process.

Saru’s bitter disappointment is – what she had perceived as a marital problem is actually a universal problem – a battle line eternally drawn between the genders with all advantages loaded in favour of a single party.

Once she realizes the difficulty of her existence, the absurdity of her futile fight against the demonic Manu of the dark is all in vain, she flees to her parent’s house seeking an escape from the impending disaster of her marital life. She dares to go there because her arch enemy, her mother, is no more and as it is the only place that can shelter her from the silent suffering afflicted by her beloved husband. Her return to her parent’s house is in the hope that her once silent Baba would now come to her rescue and protect her from the evil monster Manu, as he is now free to express his love towards his daughter with the death of his termagant wife.

In the calm and quiet of her father’s house she realises the truth that though a woman is intelligent she has to pretend to be ignorant and fall a step behind her husband or it would hurt his ego and this, may rupture the blissful marriage. It is in her imaginary speech that she’d love to deliver to the girl students of the college that she reveals her true feeling about the process or ways to establish or achieve the so called blissful marital life. As part of the hypothetical speech she strongly feels that she should comment on them in snide says:

Have you noticed that the wife always walks a few steps behind her husband? A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is a M.A. you should be B.A… And so you must pretend that you’re not as strong either… you can never be strong. That’s a wrong which will never be forgiven. No
partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal but take care that it’s unequal in favour of your husband (TDHNT 172).

When it comes to Indu, she is similar to Saru in her choice and decision related to marriage. She chooses Jayanth because it would exasperate Akka her surrogate mother. Marriage is an opportunity to explore the world outside her orthodox home where individuals and their ability to think and be independent is throttled by Akkamma. The opportunity to choose a person who Indu thinks is suitable is symbolic to attaining her true identity. Jayanth is a man who belongs to a lower caste and though city bred Indu looked at him as her ticket to freedom from the shackles imposed by the traditions and customs of the upper middle class. But the reality of Indu’s marriage turns into a total contradiction to what she expected it to be. Being a child deprived of parental love, Indu depends a lot on the stability and security of Jayanth’s love and fitting into the role of the good wife working to achieve the status that would help fit into the picture perfect marriage and picture perfect family like in the advertisement with a happy ever after smile and setting. She does this to please Jayanth. She wants to fit into the social trappings of parties, visits, talk of latest décor and exhibiting other material gains that represent one’s status in the society. In this process Indu loses her true self completely. Her excessive and over possessive love for her husband Jayanth kills her natural flair in doing things. Her love grows so out of bounds that she is worried about losing her true identify as a person and as a writer too. Her love turns into an obsession that chokes her with dissatisfaction and insecurity because it smothers her identity.
The fear of displeasing Jayanth smothers her real desires, needs and emotion. Though she wants to live in reality, it is only with Naren that Indu is able to express her true feelings and needs. Infact, it is with Naren that she is able to appease them. It appears that it is a situation created by Akkamma, who bestowed Indu the sole authority to decide the future of the ancestral family home. Indu was designated by late Akkamma, in her will to take all major decisions related to all the other members of the family. It is to get her bearings right that Indu goes back to the ancestral home in the countryside.

In the case of Jaya of That Long Silence the alliance was an arranged one unlike in the lives of Saru and Indu. In fact, Jaya is seen to be reluctant and wary about marriage and the life after that. She is in a way afraid of transferring and sharing her affection with another male member after the abrupt death of her father. She is very unsure and unwilling to let go of the shelter of her brother’s love because he is her only link to the glorious childhood she had. Her widowed ajji and ai scare her of a marriage that does not guarantee the lifelong security of another person through marriage. Unlike Saru and Indu she does not look upon marriage as an escape route. Jaya knows it to be a trap and a lifelong drudgery and captivity, where she has to smother herself in order to be the angel of the house. Her reluctance about marriage is brushed away by her beloved elder brother ‘dada’. He persuades her to accept Mohan as he is very correct for her. Jaya also realises that her brother wants to be rid of her responsibilities before even turning out to realise his dreams, hence the hurry to fix up everything.

Jaya has no other option and accepts the proposal. She knows that she has become a burdensome responsibility to her family. To Jaya, this marriage appears more of a burden than of an accomplishment. She is also angry at the fact that because
she belongs to the weaker sex she has to be huddled and handed over from one male patronage to another. Later Jaya assumes that maybe this marriage provide her a status of her own and help her reach new heights in life and make a place for herself in society. This she thinks would be helpful in realizing her identity.

Once she is married she knows that she is the silent sufferer. She cannot have a life beyond this so she strangles all her feelings and emotions, bottles them and with the veneer of cheerful, accommodating personality enacts the role of the wife and ‘bahu’. The one final time her heart screams at the injustice and helplessness of woman is when even her name is changed to Suhasini. She feels that Jaya symbolizes victory which should have been preceded by a battle or war. Maybe her husband or in-laws did not cherish the thought of her slaying out evils before emerging victorious, hence the choice of name like Suhasini which means one who has a sweet smile. She feels that it is precisely the point when her second permanent role had begun. She believes that to make her marriage a success and for it to last long she has to adapt herself to fit into the image of woman as a proud possession, one who is seen but never heard, one who is felt in what she transforms her house into. So the chasm of silence thick and dark opens for Jaya.

It is from here that she set out to establish and retain the picture postcard version of a happy family. Jaya tries very hard to achieve the picture perfect images of, ‘those easy, smiling, happy families in this Gleaning homes spelt sheer poetry for me. For me, they were the fairytales in which people live happily ‘ever after’ (TLS 30).

In spite of her efforts to freeze the picture of happiness there was the nagging feeling of impending disaster. Jaya tries to keep away these thoughts of disaster from their lives and strives hard to achieve this perfect version of family with no problem
area in any nook or corner even in the form of dirt or dust. She saw her marital relation with Mohan as one that is forced to fit into the popularly accepted image of a happy family. Referring to this status that is a falsehood in their lives, Jaya says:

‘Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits of ourselves to keep the scales on even keel. … A pair of bullock yoked together … that was how I saw the two of us. I was brainwashed into believing and accepting the fact that ‘a husband is like a shattering tree’ (31-2)

Inspite of the precautions Jaya took her picturesque world collapses with Mohan’s involvement in a fraud at his work place. Her perfect world shatters and hits rock bottom. These circumstances force her to return to her mother’s flat, which had been their home at the time of her marriage. All her efforts to mask her true self and emotions so as to please one and all in family and live up to what she assumes to be their expectations of her as daughter-in-law, wife and mother end in vain.

The three protagonists Saru, Indu and Jaya in Shashi Deshpande’s novels are women with contrasting or paradoxical thoughts and beliefs. In their own way all the three of them protested against the atrocities doled out to a girl in her childhood yet when married all three fall back into the same gruesome, traditional and very much ideal Indian woman’s routine of being a dutiful wife and the ever-loving mother. Though it is against their better nature they victimize themselves into the sociological oppressions and withstand the affliction through silent suffering. This long dark silence becomes the protective wall the iron curtain that shuts down their true identity. It protects them from expressing their true feelings and provides them the perfect mask to shield themselves behind. All the modernization and education
surprisingly make women think that they need to prove their strength and mettle by competing with their male counterparts. The American women vied for the position of the super woman who is self sufficient, independent, who is equal if not better than the men.

Interestingly, all the protagonists of Deshpande, fall victim to this theory of being the superwoman. She tries to bear the brunt of hard work to fulfill the dream role. This craving to beat the male counterpart and imitate or dominate to prove to be the best seems to be similar to the western women.

This silent suffering that all three put up is the result of their early childhood experience where, though they seem to be opposing have internalised all the dictum given to them by their mothers or mother figures. Saru was deprived of parental care as her mother was busy bestowing all her love and attention on her brother Dhruva. Her father was busy toeing her mother’s line. Her mother hated the very sight of Saru. She receives education with the support of her father. When Saru expresses her wish to stay with her mother forever, childishly, her mother immediately says: “you can’t but her brother can stay. He is different. He is a boy” (THNT 43)

The male child is superior because he can propagate the family lineage and he has the right to light the funeral pyre and perform all rites including ‘shrardha’ to placate the soul of the dead.

Girls on the other hand are treated as a burden that has to be groomed beautified and protected. They are carefully tended in order to increase the marriageability. The typical precaution given by every Indian mother and family member to their little daughter is:
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.
I don’t want to get married.
Will you live with us all your life?
Why not?
You can’t.
And Dhruva?
He’s different. He’s a boy (62).

Essentially the preaching is more or less the same in the case of Jaya too. In fact it is even more intense because the members of the big house felt it their responsibility to instill into the motherless Indu all that a woman should be. Indu is also deprived of parental care, like Saru. She lost her mother in child birth and her father remained a visitor. So the horde of Kakas, Kakis and cousins took on the responsibility of grooming her into a true marriageable lady.

Under the supervision of the autocratic Akka, Indu is taught to master the art of cooking and more importantly serving food to the men. The sole purpose of a woman’s existence is to please the men of the house. She can be seen but not heard. She has to learn to perform the ‘tulasi puja’ for the long life of her husband and pray for wifehood that would help her to prove her fertility by bringing in the male heirs for the in-Laws family. Only then does a woman’s life is complete and attains fulfillment.

Jayanthi enjoys a comparatively better childhood than Saru and Indu at least in the beginning. Jaya had the constant support of her father. He allowed her to dream and encouraged her to realise them. He wanted her to be ‘Jaya’ the victor and the conqueror. In fact, it is her father who instills into her the ambition to strive for great
things. But with the sudden demise of her father all that comes to an end. She is forced to be second to her brothers and curb her desires and ambitions that were nurtured by her father, ‘I, Appa had said…would get Chatfield prize or the Ellis Prize, go to Oxford after my graduation’ (TLS 38).

This is where things change and she has to pay heed to her ajji and ai who constantly drill into her that the sole desire of a woman should be to please her husband. Her satisfaction should be through the achievements made by the husband and her sons. She may desire for ornaments, clothes and other social trappings which would enhance her physical beauty. These clothes and ornaments symbolize the prosperity of the man of the house, her husband.

Unlike Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai concentrates more on the middle class women of contemporary India and their specific personal struggle. These women are anglicized and try to overcome the restrictions imposed by a conventional patriarchal society and culture. In almost all her novels the major themes revolve around women characters in spite of being preoccupied with the theme of irreconcilable marital couples. A good number of Anita Desai’s themes present the complexities of modern Indian culture in transition being away from feminine perspective suggestive of feministic perception and at the same time highlights the Indian female predicament of sustaining identity as an individual.

*Cry, the Peacock*, the first novel of Anita Desai, portrays the theme of disharmony in marital relationship between Maya and Gautama, who are husband and wife. It focuses on the psychological perception of the heroines and is appropriately projected in the midst of vivid images, monologues and flashbacks. The reader is totally engaged by Maya, the female protagonist of the novel, who displays the growth, advancement and climax of her neurosis. Even at a young age Maya was
fixated by the prophecy of disaster. This story reveals how Maya’s father married her off to his lawyer friend, Gautama, a middle aged lawyer without thinking much. This uneven marriage was unsuccessful and turns Maya into a psychopath slowly. Gautama, Maya's husband, who is extremely practical in his outlook, could not understand her emotional needs. Maya’s abnormal adoration and attachment to her father is nothing but the ‘Electra Complex’ that she has which ultimately becomes the catalyst that worsens her marital relationship with her husband Gautama. Maya who is extremely frustrated and emotionally strung reminisces her childhood days that she spent with her doting dad. This reminiscing of the unforgettable days of the past, serves as a solace. It frees her from her inner conflict and frustration. These murky conditions are not acceptable by her conscious mind. Maya tries to relax and divert from these persisting tensions by focusing on the behaviour and movement of the peacocks, their fight until the breaking of their bodies and death. This activity helps her gain relief from her pain. At this juncture one can notice the sense of violence, the feeling of killing or getting killed that engulfs Maya.

In *Cry, the Peacock* the author tries to vividly portray the fact that woman need more than mere material requirements like food, clothes, jewelry and shelter. The violent desire of Maya to kill her husband is the result of her own frustration and this paves way for her to take revenge on Gautama for his impersonal, cold, cynical treatment of Maya, his own wife. These differences in their nature and attitude towards each other are impressively interwoven in the story. Anita Desai skillfully narrates the hyper sensitive mind of the women subtly where the tension filled atmosphere is set aptly against the backdrop.
The novel *Clear Light of Day* which was published in 1980 is set in the backdrop of old Delhi. In this story there is an interesting parallel drawn between the Indo Pak partition and the separation that occurs in the Das family. It opens with the return of the 40 year old Tara from Washington. Tara is the younger daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Das. She arrives in Old Delhi with her diplomat husband, to visit her family before attending the marriage of her niece, Raja’s daughter. The family home remains the same with very few changes. Her elder sister Bim who is a History teacher lives the same way in the same place still taking the responsibility of taking care of Baba, their retarded brother and the alcoholic Aunt. The Das family home is in the same unkempt condition with the neglected garden, the old well, where a cow drowned long ago; all the old memories haunt Tara, lots of memories -- memories one sometimes learns through the floating isolated sequences, and sometimes through the characters’ struggles to find reality in the recollections from rose tinted vision that is still retained by Tara. For example, Tara says that she:

> could not believe the long- remembered, always remembered childhood had had a backdrop as drab as this, we used to like me playing here -- in the dust and mud. What could we have seen in that muddy little trickle? Why, it’s hardly a river -- it's nothing, just nothing (CLD 81).

The novel is divided into four parts. These divisions are based on chronology, that is: adulthood, the present, adolescence, the past, childhood, a further journey into past and finally the perspective of time that returns to adulthood. The story begins with the return of the well-to-do sister Tara, the wife of Bakul who is the Indian Ambassador to America, to her childhood home in old Delhi. She visits her elder sister Bim or Bimla who is a spinster. Though Bim and Tara are own sisters of Das
family their characters are a total contrast. Bim is simple and strong but Tara is proud and gives more importance to social status, wealth etc. Whenever and wherever possible, Tara is keen on exhibiting her social stature. Incidentally, Tara’s status is not based on her personal achievement but it is because of her husband and the post he holds. Bim, on the other hand is the silent winner. She is the much acclaimed History teacher who earned her reputation because of her hard work and determination. Bim was the only one in the Das family who was conscious and concerned about all the members of the family and even in the present she is still seen taking care of the responsibilities.

It is with the conversation between these two sisters that the story begins. The two meet after a long gap. Bim is struggling with life trying to make both ends meet and fulfilling the needs of the members of her family. She is amazed at the changed nature and status of her younger sister Tara who is haughty. It is during their interaction that the topic of their older brother Raja comes in. Tara wants to be considerate and expresses her wish to attend his daughter’s wedding. Bim on the other hand refuses out-rightly. On further probing by Tara, she vents out her anger and displeasure towards Raja for abandoning his responsibilities towards his own family. Bim despises him for leaving home to marry the daughter of their landlord, Hyder Ali and moving away to Hyderabad with them. She reveals the letter sent by Raja as the present landlord, permitting them to continue to stay in the same house even after the demise of Hyder Ali. All this comprises in one part of the novel.

The story that begins in the present moves to the past. In the second part the life and the conditions of these people during the time of partition are presented. All the main characters, Bim, Tara and Raja are in their adolescence living in the same house. Bim even then is seen being more responsible a role beyond her age. In those
days she was taking care of all the other siblings in the absence of their dead parents Mr. and Mrs. Das. Her elder brother Raja who was the only hope of the family fell seriously ill with typhoid. She sacrificed her own personal growth, gives up studies and tends to her sick brother until he recovers. There is then her aunt, Mira Masi, their guardian after the death of Mr. and Mrs. Das, who is an alcoholic. It is in this second part Raja as a character is more visible. Even before he falls ill he is the young guy fascinated by their landlord Hyder Ali, who is known for his love and preoccupation with Urdu poetry. Raja spends hours together in Hyder Ali’s place adoring him. On his recovery from the fatal illness he accompanies Hyder Ali to Hyderabad and settles there along with them after the partition. Raja leaves his own family and home without care or concern for his family. It is later that Bim comes to know that he married the daughter of Hyder Ali.

Tara remains the silent spectator throughout this. Having seen the plight of her sister Bim, burdened with the responsibilities of family and their livelihood, Tara is determined to avoid such pathetic conditions. Her marriage to Bakul is more an escape from the trap of problems and hardships than love or fascination for him. In the later part of the novel it is also evident how Raja who is very much loved by his sister Bim disillusioned her. Raj who is supposed to be intellectual and educated is also seen abandoning everyone and choosing his own happiness. Instead of working hard for a career and establishing a proper status and life that his intelligence deserves, he looks for the easy way out and marries the only daughter and heiress of their Muslim landlord Hyder Ali. Raja marries her not because of his undying love for her but knowing that this alliance would ensure not only his own financial security but also rid him of the horrendous responsibilities of his own siblings. However it appears that he does this out of his love for Urdu language and literature and his idol Hyder Ali.
Among all these characters it is Bim who emerges as the strongest of all. Despite being burdened with unending responsibilities and abandoned by her own siblings, first by her elder brother Raja and then her younger sister Tara, she succeeds in making a life for herself and fulfilling the requirements of the rest of the family members. Bim is bound to the responsibilities of her family and is all the more determined to overcome the ensuing problems. In the process she rejects marriage as a necessity for woman, a norm of the society, and decides to remain a spinster. The ambitions that rule her life are to be economically and emotionally strong and sound.

In the third part, all these characters are in their childhood with Mr. and Mrs. Das alive. The typical middle class Indian family scenario is presented here. The silent Mr. Das and the over conscious Mrs. Das remind the reader of the famous characters Mr. and Mrs. Bennett of Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Bim abhors the attitude of women like Mrs. Das. She is unable to accept their struggle to meet the requirements to be qualified and be accepted by the upper middle class society. The rush, the sacrifices made to attain the social ranking on par with the well-to-do families. More often than not Mr. and Mrs. Das are the absent members. They are always away from Delhi. It is always Bim who shouldered all the responsibilities. Bim decides at that very young age to never give into such frivolities.

The fourth part which is the perspective of ‘Time’ is an interesting technique used by Anita Desai. This ‘Time’ is made into a character that is interwoven and binds the whole plot. It is the pivot around which the story revolves. It presents the changing circumstances, viewpoints, attitudes, achievements and ambitions of the characters. Time showcases the strength and depth of these characters. The circumstances thrown by life and the prevalent conditions force the characters to make choices which later reflect their worthiness. It this invisible a time that plays an
integral part in helping characters like Bim to identify their self and also their worth. Though it appears that Bim suffers the most, she turns out to be the victor. She is seen to be the victim of time and circumstances that force her to sacrifice her own desires and toward providing stable life for her family. Being the eldest in the family she takes up these responsibilities after the death of her parents and also because of her love for her siblings. Bim hopes that with time her brother Raja would relieve her. But to her disappointment everyone prefers to be free of these burdens. Bim even as a young girl is left to tend to her younger brother, Baba who is retarded. On receiving Raja’s letter allowing them to use the house, a supposedly benevolent act, she is disillusioned with life, family and fate. She feels that she is worthless and lacking in everything. Bim assumes she is the victim of time whining at the lost opportunities, she is still taking care of her other brother Baba. Yet it is time that helps her regain her confidence and realise her achievements that helped her in providing her true identity. Though Bim starts life with a meager job she works determinedly and improves her own qualification and in time attains the job of a college lecturer. She is able to take care of all the responsibilities and retain her self-respect. She is admired and appreciated by many for her courage and dedication and loyalty to her family.

Tara, who never fails to flaunt her status as the ambassador’s wife is still a victim abused by her husband. Bakul, despite his learning and vocation is a chauvinist at heart who has no respect for women. Tara is only a personal maid to her husband Bakul, taking care of his clothes, food and all other needs. Her identity is purely dependent on that of her husband. Raja on the other hand has no identity as he lives on the wealth of his wife. He has neither a career nor recognition for himself. Bim realises this soon. It is this invisible and inescapable Time that helps her to realise her own self. All the sufferings and challenges that she faced helped her emerge a better
and stronger person. Bim is successful in establishing herself and her career. She is proud of her achievements and realises very own and in time that she is a victor. She is happy that she was able to succeed when everyone who could help her abandoned her. It is time that helps her overcome her disillusionment and be a happy self taking pride in her accomplishments. Bim finally realises her folly. Unlike the earlier protagonists of Anita Desai, that is Maya and Nanda Kaul, Bim ends happier and does not run away from the circumstances. Her inward journey from the present to the past recalling the conditions and relooking at the present helps her achieve her two-fold ambition, being emotionally and economically sound.

The whole novel revolves around ‘Time’ drawing different impressions from the characters and changing them too. Anita Desai herself says: ‘My novel is about time as a destroyer as a preserver and about what the bondage of time does to people. I have tried to tunnel under the mundane surface of domesticity” (Desai’s interview). Despite its exotic settings, Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* has the favourite Indian theme based on familial relationships. A noble elder sister capable of great patience and self-sacrifice, an irresponsible and unprincipled brother, who places cash over character and a proud, selfish sister, who presumes her own pleasures, this is a theme of quite a few impressive and passionate novels in Indian literatures. While most of them end in tragedy as *Tapasya* in Hindi, *Clear Light of Day* shows a new perspective, a triumph for the self-sacrificing, suffering soul which gains by virtue of persistence and fortitude. Also there is a great scope of characterization and though the theme is already dealt with by a few authors, Anita Desai still presents the theme impressively by making Bim the pivotal character of the story and her struggle with her disillusionments with life as main theme. The social and emotional construct that Bim arrives at gives the story a sense of maturity and depth.
Anita Desai portrayed the lives of women characters and their constant strife for their independent existence in patriarchal society. The use of flash back technique in the novel helps in depicting the memories of the female characters; even the past experiences of Bim and Tara. The narrative uniquely co-ordinates the female characters who are able to pass through this darkness or helplessness and emerge “out of the tunnel and see the clear light of day at the end”.

This phrase ‘out of the tunnel’ symbolizes the unaltering journey, despite the undesirable experiences and hurdles that life and time present, until one formulates the goal and strives to reach it. Here the word ‘tunnel’ metaphorically means the blind, dark, unknown spheres or spaces into which women are forced to restrict themselves by the predominantly patriarchal society. This marginalization of women to meager domestic roles is only to ensure and establish their own supremacy in the society. However strong, clever and intelligent women are, they are time and again pushed into the dark inner recess of the family and society. This is true in India and in the West too. The phrase ‘out of the tunnel’ indicates that more and more women are attempting to move away from these dark spaces, where they remain unknown to society, and reclaim their lost identities and spaces that are rightfully theirs. This forging into light of the mainstream society by women to establish their own identity or self is observed. There is a growing need among the women to prove their abilities and establish their strength to be on par if not better than their male counterparts. This by itself is not merely a physical strength but also significantly a psychological victory.

The very title, The Clear Light of Day, suggests and hints at the journey of the characters, especially the women, from the world’s dark oppression towards equality through determination. It is also indicating achievement of success which until that
time remains a distant and vague dream for the earlier protagonists of Anita Desai like Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* ends as a mad woman who moves backwards in to safe haven of childhood memories and Nanda Kaul of *Fire on the Mountain* becomes a recluse moving away into the obscurity of the wilderness of Kasauli.

Bimla’s tussle with circumstances and the continuous problems that she encounters leave her neither mad nor force her to disappear and become a recluse. She evolves a victor by overcoming the impediments and by prodding through troubled times with self determination despite lack of support. This novel is an up-hill journey of Bim overpowering the hardships and injustices that life and society heap on her and still valiantly reaching the peak by fulfilling her responsibilities. More importantly she realises her own strength and success and celebrates the same. Bim’s achievement is not mere compromise of conditions and accepting the present passively. It is in reality a form of psychological, sociological and spiritual enlightenment that she attains despite the dire conditions imposed by the unsympathetic patriarchal society. Thus Bimla demonstrates a stronger will and vigour for survival and Anita Desai has landed a new vision which is totally free from the traces of westernization which were found in some of her works.

In total contrast to Woolf’s vision of woman’s movement that incorporates a completely changed society, it is observed that in the novels of Desai some female characters like that of Tara move from one kind of oppression to another different one and others like Bim reject the conventions of being a wife who has to be submissive to men hence decides to remain single. Bim adjusts to the existing value system by accepting reality there by connecting herself to her family and thereby the community. During the period of freedom struggle from Britishers, most of the people including a few members of political leaders in India ensured that women remained in
the inner domains of homes and simultaneously the then political leaders encouraged them to participate in this independence struggle from British rule. Interestingly, it was Mahatma Gandhi who encouraged women to participate in the freedom struggle though he accepted that their major role is in their homes. They were part-time participants in the freedom struggle. They had to complete all their domestic chores before joining the public cause. (Bande 56).

Some critics ponder over whether Anita Desai depicts female characters in *Fire on the Mountain*, to be meek, submissive creatures who silently take care of all household responsibilities. They seem to fit into the role of the ‘Angel’ in the house fulfilling all the domestic responsibilities, protecting the children by nurturing them and providing the necessary sustenance, while tirelessly being considerate and gentle to everyone in the family. ‘Angel in the house’ is a term used by Virginia Woolf in her essay, ‘Professions for women’. According to Woolf, ‘Angel in the house’ signifies the constant obstacle to her work as a writer because it is a term which seeks to convince her that, ‘women should not deal freely and openly question human relations, morality or sex’ (Woolf 83). Ironically, the female characters in the novels of Anita Desai defy this image and are less gentle beings fully devoted to household chores. No doubt they appear to be submissive little creatures obeying the demands of men and satisfying them. Restricting themselves to the domestic space or the inner realms is not a choice that is imposed on them. Both Nanda Kaul and Ila Das, who try to fit are oppressed in the domestic spheres and suffer silently leading the lives like that of slaves to men. The experiences of suppression and oppression faced by Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and Raka willed them to attain that much more self-determination to overcome them both in the private and public spheres of their lives. It is this self-
determination that tides them through the bitterness and disappointments that they encounter.

Desai’s works represent a unique blend of the Indian culture and Western thought. They portray the self-determination of the individual psyche when confronted with overpowering socio-cultural conditions that are prevalent as opposed to the modern thought of the post-independent, post-colonial India, a promise of beckoning self-fulfillment and self-gratification. Under this dual onslaught, most of Anita Desai’s protagonists, both male and female, be it Maya, or Nanda Kaul or Raka, or Bim and Tara or Devan or Baumgartner, all are seen poised tantalizingly at different junctures of the philosophic spectrum. Anita Desai through her novels breaks the barriers that limit the space of women. She portrays the new woman who is reluctant to be caged into the dark domestic spaces of homes. This new woman of Desai challenges the accepted traditional roles imposed upon her. She refutes the patriarchal shackles and imposes her will. Maya kills her husband as he is insensitive to her needs and she does not want to lose her life. Nanda rejects her family and moves away to a far off place in the wilderness to lead a peaceful life. They are all radical in the sense that they break free from the societal impositions and retaliate yet they are not totally transformed. After causing the death of her husband, Maya is unable to accept the reality and runs away to the safe world of her childhood refusing to recognize anyone or anything related to her marital life. Nanda becomes so very adamant about her solitude that she abhors the responsibility of Raka, her own great granddaughter. She remains unresponsive and refuses to help or quell the fears of her friend Ila Das so much so that she is raped and murdered. In her own words Desai asserts that her protagonists are new and different and further says: “I am interested in
characters who are not average but have retreated or been driven into some extremity of despair and so turned against … the general current’.

Motherhood is another important aspect that is instrumental in elevating the status of women in the family and also in the society, not just in India but also in the West. In India on being a mother with sons, women get relieved from being oppressed and exploitation. No other task or achievement, paid or unpaid is as much revered as being a mother. In a way Indian women’s lives and psyches are dominated by motherhood and domesticity.

Many critics have observed that there is a marked improvement in the status of an Indian woman once she becomes a mother. The patriarchal societies like India look at woman as parayadhan and so, have to be married. Hence she is trained in the domesticities of a typical Indian household. This is a way of ensuring her subjugation by deciding her future path. At the parents home she spends all her time in grooming to be an ideal wife.

But after marriage she is taken seriously and is revered only if and when she becomes the mother. It seems the society assigns motherhood as the primary role of women’s existence. Of course here again a woman who bears sons is superior to those who bear daughters. There are plenty of instances where the husbands abandon their wives because they are unable to bear male children. This theme is oft repeated in Deshpande’s novels too. Even among the poor social class this is seen as a widespread occurrence.

Ashis Nandy points out that one of the main reasons for hurdles to gender equality in India is the relationship of mother and son. It is the fundamental nexus. Elaborating on this Nandy says:
To make the issues of emancipation of women and equality of the sexes primarily, one needs a culture in which conjugality is central to male-female relationships. One seeks emancipation from and equality with one’s husband and peers, not with one’s son. If the conjugal relationship itself remains relatively peripheral, the issues of emancipation and equality remain so too (Nandy 39).

This idealisation of women as mothers creates undue impositions on the real women; this cages them and limits them to the maternal role which in turn further confines their movement to the inner sanctity of homes propagating self-sacrifice and pride.

In her book, *Writing from the Margin and other Essays*, Deshpande says: ‘as far as women are concerned, the mother myth, an immensely powerful one, is a huge burden. We have made it almost impossible for us to get past the image of the ever-giving self-sacrificing mother’ (Deshpande 97).

Incidentally this burden of motherhood is the same even in the West. It is also argued by many that the over glorifying of motherhood is nothing but a myth designed to restrict and put women in their place, that of the subordinate. Despite all the conditions and arguments motherhood empowers women in India compared to their western counterparts.

In *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives* (1988), Miriam Johnson opines that the mother’s role in the patriarchal society has been subsumed under the very subordination of the wife. This ensures the suppressing of the possible strength of the role of mother. Many critics and feminists fail to recognize the fact that mothering is
an oppressive one and being childless is even more of a burden especially for the Indian woman.

Anita Desai for the first time explored the psyche of childless women and women with children in her novels, *Where Shall we go this Summer*, *Cry the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Fire on the Mountain* etc. She has depicted women of all age groups and types. Interestingly when discussing the novels of Anita Desai, we observe two contrasting facts; women or wives, who are childless and women, who are overburdened and hate nurturing and caring and feel mothering is a burden. The same is reflected in the novels, identified for study. Maya in *Cry the peacock* is childless. She is the wife of a well to do lawyer, Gautama and does not find the need to work outside her home. Her tasks are few and far between. Being the wife of a well-to-do lawyer she is free of domestic chores. Her tasks at home are simple as maintaining the servants of the house. Because of this Maya has plenty of free time with no work or responsibility. Maya despairs all domestic chores she is unable to react or participate in discussions related to domestic work.

The other aspect to be considered is Maya’s childless state. She is a wife but not a mother. In a way this adds to her boredom. She does not take any interest in Gautama’s work. On the other hand she perceives her husband’s work as that which keeps him away from her and also as something that engages his time. Maya is so very self absorbed that she feels her husband ignores her and is never concerned. This leads to her increased alienation and despair. We see Maya spending more time in the garden and developing attachment to pets etc. finally her despair and alienation lead her to madness.
While there is emptiness in the life of Maya who has no children, no responsibility and no domestic work, Nanda Kaul, the protagonist of *Fire on the Mountain* on the other hand has a hectic life managing her children, domestic demands and social activities. Nanda belongs to that generation where women were trained to have and perform domestic work and be the ‘Gruha Lakshmi’. Though she hates all the domestic work and social niceties she is forced to fulfill the demands of her role as wife and mother. Her disgust for the routine tasks of everyday is expressed in her own words in the following lines:

There had been too many guests coming and going… so that there was a shortage of privacy that vexed her. Too many trays of tea would have to be made and carried to her husbands’ study, to her mother-in-laws bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering place for all, at all times of the day. Too many meals too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after. They had had too many children, they had gone to so many different schools and colleges at different times of the day, and had so many tutors (FOM 29-30).

The above lines express the drudgery Nanda associates with being the loving and nurturing dutiful wife and daughter-in-law and a considerate social member, all of which remain unrewarding. Nanda feels that this made her suffer from ‘the nimiety, the disorder, the fluctuating and unpredictable excess’ (FOM).

The trope of reluctant or uncaring or negligent or absent mothers is a recurring image in most of Anita Desai’s novels. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock* is a motherless child as she lost her mother at a very young age. We see the void of having no one to advice her or share her thoughts. Nanda Kaul the wife of the ex-VC of a University, in
Fire on the Mountain glad to have escaped the role of caring nurturing mother. Mrs. Das, who is portrayed as most flustered and irresponsible mother, in Clear Light of Day is a non entity, preoccupied more with her husband than her children. She seems to be not aware of and bothered with the nitty gritty of being the nurturing and self-sacrificing motherhood.

The way Anita Desai deals with the concept of mother and motherhood, the much revered and coveted role promoted by religion, culture and tradition, seems to be going against norms and the image of maternity. The dislike and disinterest expressed by protagonists appears to be Anita Desai’s attempt to debunk the Indian myth of motherhood. It is as if she wants women to break away from the bounds of the powerful public image of motherhood that confine women to home and forces them to perform love and care the necessary domestic chores to live up to the image of the ever self-effacing and ever-caring mother.

This view and argument of Anita Desai seems to be highly influenced by that of the Western Feminists. For Example Evelyn Glenn in her book Mothering: ideology, Experience and Agency (1994) states that portraying motherhood as a natural role for women is in a way: ‘a patriarchal ideology of mothering locks women into biological reproduction, denies their identities and selfhood outside mothering… The process of identity formation, especially in girls, through continuous attachment and identification with their own mother’ (Glenn 4).

There by, girls are made to believe from a very young age that they are made efficient for nurturing and motherhood. A similar view is expressed by Sharon Abbey and Andrea O’ Reilly in their book, Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns. They clearly explain how the ability of women to bear children, which cannot be attained by men, should have given them a stronger and superior status. Yet
the men in the patriarchal societies across the world have turned this to their advantage and thrust upon women the role of the caring, considerate and sacrificing nurturer. Alobey and O’ Reilly, referring to this say: ‘the biological expertise of mothers is often used to justify a partner’s abdication of sharing fully in childcare responsibilities, in reality, this so-called expertise develops as a result of repetitive practice’ (Alobey 19-20).

Thus Desai’s works are an attempt towards abandoning the culture specific roles of women assigned by those influenced by patriarchal ideology that confine women to the four walls of the house.

Shashi Deshpande also focuses on motherhood and its idealization in India. She strongly believes that ‘motherhood does not limit everything else, infact it is an added advantage that only women are privileged to have’ (Deshpande 83). Deshpande’s novels are always about lives of women after marriage. Her protagonists are all married women. Except Indu in Roots and Shadows all of them have children. At the same time they are all engaged with occupations outside home. While Indu and Jaya are writers, Saru is a doctor.

Though Deshpande does not idealise motherhood, interestingly all her protagonists look at their mothers as cold hearted, harsh and unforgiving women who never care for their daughters and try to curb their freedom and groom them to fit into the molds of the patriarchal society. Thus Deshpande very subtly suggests the dubious roles played by mothers as protectors on the one hand and ruthlessly insensate custodians on the other who mutely watch the struggle of their daughters. The experiences of these protagonists with their respective mothers make them determined to be better ones for their own children. Deshpande in her own way tries to counteract the traditional Hindu stereotype of self-effacing and self-sacrificing mothers.
Nevertheless women like Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terror* or Jaya of *That Long Silence* are daunted by their own maternal experiences. With nobody to advise or guide them these protagonists live in fear and anxiety of doing something wrong in bringing up their children. This fear leads to their disillusionment. Sarita in *Dark Holds No Terror* who promised to give the best life to her children and inculcate equality among them is shocked at the first encounter with motherhood. Saru is outraged at the indignity of the process of childbirth. With the absence of guidance and the helping hand that can tide through this new experience of childbirth and childcare Saru lives in fear and anxiety of doing things the wrong way. We see a similar anxiety in Jaya of *That Long Silence* also. According to her the whole exercise of bringing up children in the best possible way providing all that she missed as child. With the desire to be the best parent, neglects or does not pay attention to the child’s requirements or desires. When her teenage son runs away to his Uncle’s house without intimating her after a holiday, Jaya realises her negligence and wonders if she actually knew her children or if she was busy trying to be the super mother who would attend to every need of her children. She wonders how all that understanding and wisdom that is supposed to dawn on mothers naturally after childbirth missed her. The high expectations from mother in India make women conscious and anxious about their inadequacies which results in inevitable disillusionment. Jaya assumes that she is a miserable failure despite her best intentions. This is reflected in the following lines:

> it seemed amazing to me that I knew so little, almost nothing, about my son. Whatever had given me the dawn fool idea that once I become a mother I would know my children through and through, instinctively? Yes, this is what they have told
me: you become a mother, and everything follows naturally and inevitably – love, wisdom, understanding and nobility. But now I felt as helpless to deal with this despairing boy as I had with the floppy-headed, vulnerable infant I had brought back from hospital. I had the same fearful sense of being unable to cope, the same certainty of being a failure (TLS 173).

The above passage gives an insight into the point of view of mothers and their responsibility, their anxieties etc. interestingly there is a binary present here by this same Jaya was impatient and hated her mother for forcing her to do things that would ensure that she fits into the role of a good woman and grooming her to be the role model wife. Similar feelings are expressed by Indu of *Roots And Shadows* also and Indu admits that it is this fear of failing that made her postpone motherhood.

Atrey and Kripal in the book Shashi Deshpande: *A Feminist Study of Her Fiction* best explains this fraught mother daughter relationship that all her novels portray. They present the role of mother and her influence on the children especially the girl child. The following lines reflect how even this over glorified motherhood is used by the patriarchal society to ensure the obedience of women. They state vehemently:

The daughter in a traditional family is considered the responsibility of the mother who imposes restrictions on her to prepare her for a harsh future as part of the process of socialization. Fathers are perceived as lenient by the daughters who feel oppressed by their mothers’ strictures. The patriarchy of the fathers remains hidden as women act on their
behalf to condition the daughter becomes direct. This is reflected in almost all the mother-daughter relationships in her work. In the course of their self-exploration, however, the protagonists analyze the relationships with their mothers with introspective maturity and realize that their mothers too have been victims of patriarchal socialization and gender based oppression (Atrey and Kripal 78).

As humans it is very difficult to gauge the forces that act upon people whose decisions and behaviour affect others, especially the mother over her daughter. Until the task fell upon her Saru hated her mother. She considers her mother to be a villain.

Both Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai are the first of the women writers to focus on this very important Indian ideology of motherhood. Almost all their works are a critique on image of ideal mother practiced and promoted especially in India. Even the wisest of these women are seen falling into the trap of being the mother and voluntarily are into the self sacrifice mode. The anxiety of failing in the role of mother is a preoccupation of most of the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande. Anita Desai on the other hand presents the reluctant mothers like Nanda Kaul of Fire on the Mountain. Childless women like Maya and Mira Masi in The Clear Light of Day. The pressure and trauma these women face from the family and the society is considerable. Another interesting fact is thinking ahead of time and Anita Desai is the first of the Indian women novelists who attempted to portray that nurturing need not necessarily be a born trait among women alone. She does this so well by contrasting the reluctant housewife and great grandmother, Nanda Kaul and her man servant Ram Lal, who is caring and considerate towards the disturbed and petrified child Raka.
Thus the battle for identify and place of their own that had started in their own childhood on the social plane takes them on a backward journey into the past where their actual struggles and wars began that is their childhood homes. It is here they are exposed to the crux of the real problem of their own psychological status brought to light. They also realize it is closing of their own mind those women who started as fighters end up as quitters. More than the social circumstance it is their own mind set that traps them into a silence of shameful self-surrender.

The struggle that starts in the childhood and changes with times - only in form and shape- continues into the adult life of woman as wife and mother. We see yet another form of it in workplace or professional life. Hence it implants into the mind. It needs the exorcising the ghosts that created demons in their minds.

Thus begins the journey within – to understand the mind, the heart and soul. The next chapter, Psychological Influences is an attempt to understand the churning of the mind and the difficulty to break away the shackles of the heart.