CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Woman-centred themes in literature is an age-old phenomenon. Sensitive people although felt concerned deeply about her position when it started deteriorating at the hands of the rich and powerful which grew as a consequence of production process at a particular stage under patriarchy. Woman as a victim of oppression and exploitation thus attracted social reformers, sociologists and literateures in their quest for a harmonious outlook on her status and role. Problems relating to incompatible marriages, child marriage, divorce, rapes and abortion laws or questions relating to inheritance or widowhood were some of the issues which were agitated in literature or discourses. These are still the issues which need satisfactory solution. Previously, however, the relationship between man and woman under patriarchy was not challenged; movement was reformatory in nature, basically.

The situation changed with the advent of socialist thought which challenged the very basis of socio-economic relationship in the society. The woman’s question was seen as a part of the larger concern for humanity and emphasis was laid on the necessary inter-dependence of woman’s question and the socialist movement. In the first quarter of nineteenth century small groups of men and women in Britain and France began to question the economic basis of that society which denied the possibility of truly human social relations. They emphasised
the connection between the personal and the public life of individuals and if these are to be changed, the political, social institutions had to be changed as well. Henri Saint - Simon (1760-1825), Charles Fourier (1772-1837), Robert Owen (1771-1858) among others were full of ideas how could societies be free, happy and live in fraternal equality with a more harmonious and cooperative society as an alternative where greed, exploitation and cut-throat competition will not be the rule. The thought concerning woman’s plight formed an important, but integral part of their thinking because they saw the hypocrisy of bourgeois monogamous marriage as an extension of the ideology of private property with an urge to earn and accumulate more and more money. They saw this as the root cause of woman’s subordination and oppression in society. This outlook gave a new dimension to the woman’s question in the society. The influence of this early socialist thought on literature of the time, brought it closure to life.

The first strand of socialist thought, though imperfect in reasoning and utopian in thrust, helped literature to enter the phase of realism when it started championing the cause of social justice and an equitous world. Previously, the literature was part of an ‘art for art’s sake’. It now started giving expression to aspirations of the people and a due place for woman ‘in the sun’. The stand to fantasize woman as an object of ‘beauty and love’ was left behind. Literature, including fiction, henceforth gave place to woman as a human being with a right of dignified existence of her own. Liberation came up as the buzz word in
the role and status of woman in society was stressed and a strong voice against her oppression and exploitation raised with powerful reasoning. Gender equality became a running theme. As a consequence, aspirations for a liberated man-woman relationship rose high. Problem, however, accentuates when aspirations so worked up by the liberating concepts, find ground realities at variance; sometimes diametrically opposite to what is professed. It is more true to the concept of equality in a society where inequity is bred hourly and securely, as a system. In such a frustrating situation the question of gender equality, free from oppression and exploitation of woman turns place and a distant dream to attain. In consequence, feminism emerged on the scene with a slogan of 'assertion for self' as an achievable alternative method without disturbing the status quo.

In sequence, the stress came on 'self' later on, in the outlook. Encyclopedia America and Encyclopedia Britannica substitute 'identity' for 'self' and equate it with sameness as distinguished from change or difference. It is "what the same from year to year"¹. "It must preserve the same denotations in all its occurrences at least through any one context."² To put it simply, H.J. Paton maintains that 'self' is "simply that which knows and wills and feels".³ Heinz Lichtenstein goes beyond Paton and thinks of self in terms of "Primary identity; a 'Zero point' which must precede all other mental developments."⁴ Norman N, Holland defines identity by "an operation or procedure for examining the style in which particular
individuals function"⁵, while Allen Wheelis explains identity in terms of the experienced quality of life. In *The Quest for Identity* he maintains:

Identity is a coherent sense of self. It depends upon the awareness that one’s endeavour and one’s life make sense that they are meaningful in the context in which life is lived. It depends also upon stable values and upon the conviction that one’s actions and values are harmoniously related. It is a sense of wholeness, of integration, of knowing what is right and what is wrong and of being able to choose.⁶

The concept of ‘self’ is generally taken as analogous with the idea of ‘individuation’ which involves the growing process in the emergence of the individual from his original ‘ties’. These ties keep the individual tagged to the outside world for seeking security and a feeling of belonging somewhere. Once the process of breaking these ties for the sake of gaining individual freedom sets in, the individual treads the path of individuation. So goes the theory. And once the stage of individuation is reached and the individual is free from these primary ties, he or she is confronted with a new task of orienting oneself to find security in the ways other than those which were characteristics of one’s individualist existence. The theory leads the quest for freedom, independence and self. This process requires of the individual to grow stronger physically, mentally and emotionally, of course in a society which thrives in enslaving the individual more and more mentally, emotionally and enfeebling one physically, to keep the system of exploitation
going on smoothly. One can say that individuation presupposes self-strength. The limits of growth of individuation and the self are set, partly by individual conditions but essentially by prevalent social, juridical and economic conditions. At the same time, the process of individuation entails ever-growing isolation, and alienation hampering one's harmonious growth. Erick H. Erickson summarises the whole process of individuation in his concept of 'identity'. “A sense of identity means a sense of being at one with oneself as one grows and develops; and it means, at the same time, a sense of affinity with a community’s sense of being at one with its future as well as its history - or mythology.”

The post-second world war resurgence of women’s intellectual history dealt the questions of womanhood and gender relations afresh in the light of the experiences they have gained over a century of struggle. Women have made considerable gains in the possibility for an independent existence, but scepticism to that independence has persisted. Feminists testify to women’s own growing awareness to an ideal of ‘personal liberation’, though they differ over whether women’s liberation will mean freedom to be like men or freedom to be more like women. They also differ over what constitutes the authentic female voice, what is meant by women’s culture and consciousness. Notwithstanding such variance, feminism, as an ideology emerged to give voice to woman’s aspirations, but in interaction with the growth of
individualism at a particular stage of social development, it cannot be understood apart from it.

In this regard it is imperative to delineate the basics of feminism. One may begin to say what feminism is not. Anything and every thing concerning woman or feminine is not feminism. Any one who espouses the cause of woman against injustice or gender discrimination does not qualify to be an exponent of feminism. Feminism is a definite philosophical category emerged at a definite historical stage of development in social relations rooted in the existential mode of individualism which took shape in the context of industrialization and finance capital seeking to make an individual anonymous and alienated in order to bring anything and everything in its reach for commodifying. Though there are varying opinions among its exponents on various aspects, the ingredients which feminism propounds essentially include: quest for self, search for and assertion of identity, unhindered freedom of choice with its immediate expression in uninhibited free-sex, abrogation of institutions like family, community injunctions and marriage, independent economic entity and fight against discrimination.

It is noteworthy that feminism has to contend concrete Indian situation, to influence its social mores and patterns of relationships in its march towards 'women's liberation' as it perceives. It is recognised that feminism cannot replicate its carbon copy from the West in India, though its ideological thrust seeks to do it all the same. By now, it is well conceded
that the march of Indian social history has certain distinct features of its own, having a different bearing on issues concerning women; specially family and the community, with a different context from the West.

The community ownership over material resources, including landed property before the advent of British colonialists and a long practice of participative democracy in its autonomous 'Little Republics' with hardly any worthwhile interference from monarchy in its hey-day, had been a distinct feature of Asiatic Mode which places India at an advantageous position in social relationships then the West. For long, the country experienced a 'co-operative sharing' in agriculture production for consumption where the labour power of woman played a significant role alongwith other members of the household in unison. This assured her a status which hardly any rude 'patriarch' could ignore at peril. Further, addition to numbers in population gave her an added importance in social hierarchy. It had a bearing an institution like marriage. In social cognizance, marriage has not been looked upon as a subordination of one to the other but a common pursuit of on elevating dharma. The Taittriya Upanishads enjoins:

*The mother is the first form, the father is the latter form. Progeny is the linking. The act of procreation is the joint or the linking thus far concerning progeny....* (Sri Aurobindo, Eight Upanishads pp.172-73)

The idea of marriage is a sacrament marked in civilized societies and in India’s culture to a large extent it still retains
its sanctity. It is a sacrament based on equality of the partners, the woman becoming the queen (samgragni) of the house -- working towards a common ideal, moral and spiritual. Inspite of the degeneration set in of late, the sanctity of the institution of marriage still holds sway in large part of the population. There was no 'Turkish contempt of females' in the Indian tradition and to some extent the isolation of women is the legacy of Sematic culture on ancient Indian society, specially gaining strength after the series of invasions upto middle ages. Subjugation of woman is a notion alien to country's traditions." The change in the scene however, during the colonial period and post independence era is dramatic. Education crafted to serve alien interests has wrought its impact to a considerable extent with a hybrid culture to adopt. Yet Indian women are, by and large unwilling to assimilate wholesale Western feminist ideologies. Of late, family is put to pressure due to current economic situation and financial stringencies that are forcing certain ideas to percolate and corrupt the earlier moves.

Admittedly, every specific period throws its own philosophy or the outlook to sustain it while laying the foundation for a next period to emerge out of its ashes, to give place to the new. True to the form, industrial revolution brought its own outlook forward in its wake. In consequence, the whole socio-cultural, educational and ethical value-system is designed now to serve this core of industrial mode in thought and action. The literature is also desired to prepare the
requisite intellectual receptability accordingly till the core itself starts giving place to new forces for replacement. To fit in, individualism is the expression of the present socio-economic system to keep it running and prepare the people intellectually to serve this end. With this basic outlook in command, feminism took shape as a concept as also a movement in a phase where labour power of male, female and the child constitutes commodities for hire and sale in the market. Rightly then, Eva Bell in her essay on *Man Woman Friendship* remarks: "Feminist movements are determined to unshackle women from traditional family structures."9

In social outlook, unshackling is good. And if women are unshackled, it is doubly good because women help shape to generations. The decisive point, however, is that of the direction which the liberation of woman is seeking to take. In the realm of emancipatory thought, feminism seeks to re-fashion social relations between males and females to bring these in consonance with the realities of present-day production relations at the base in an atomised society. Individual is the first and the last truth of this dispensation where everything is sought to be commodified in its universal application. It seeks the individual who remains without a fixation of heart and hearth as his or her first truth in a world where population growth has devalued every addition to its numbers, where procreation has receded back in importance as a fact of life. With the decline in importance of addition to numbers in population, woman has lost that esteem. She is now viewed
more and more as an object to produce other commodities for the market. This is a sea-change in her place which feminism seeks to consolidate, fine tuning in vocabulary notwithstanding. It roused women to their 'absolute right to their bodies.' Feminist literature in most cases dutifully prepares this society to accept the logic of individual freedom and freedom of choice which helps to facilitate the receptability of 'new' ideas of the market; in the case of woman, her body and sexuality.

In this context, the study of novels by Shashi Deshpande is a fascinating exercise. Woman is the prime concern of Shashi Deshpande as a writer of fiction in English. Her focus is on the middle class women of the post-independence era. Shashi Deshpande is not a detached writer. She has a similar concrete definite outlook to evaluate her surroundings and leaves a message for the readers concerning her cultivated views on feminism. Deshpande is a well read person and knows her material well. She delves deep into the psyche of a character she is handling to bring out her best for weaving the story with that message to deliver.

Apart from short stories, Shashi Deshpande has seven novels by now to her credit. These are: The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Come Up and Be Dead (1983), Roots and Shadows (1983), That Long Silence (1988), The Binding Vine (1993) and A Matter of Time (1996). Her major concern is characterisation. In fact, she starts with characters and proceeds to weave the stories. She says: "The point is, I always begin with characters... even the
themes emerge from characters who belong to the class I know best.”

As we find, Deshpande depicts the pulls and counter-pulls of a middle-class family and gives vent to aspirations and frustrations of women in the settings of this class. Her understanding about the experiences, frustrations, aspirations and ‘compromises’ of women are essentially noteworthy about these middle class women of post-independence India when the country passed into a situation dictated by world finance of post second world war era with aspirations of a rapid growth. The situation did not promise easy affluence to smoothen its colonial wounds. The earlier atmosphere of high ideals and superb expectations of an egalitarian future roused by the independence struggle against foreign rule and inhuman exploitation soon lost its sheen. The countrymen found themselves in the whirlpool of self-centred competition for a respectable existence amidst widespread deprivation, where old family bonds have not died down and new values were still on shaky ground to take roots. At this stage the situation was not ripe for institutions like family and marriage to dispense with as was the case in industrialised West. Yet the demands of rapid industrial growth in the country increasingly put the new values on the agenda. The emerging aspirations found the earlier mores incompatible to adjust. The major novels of Shashi Deshpande are products of this double-bound situation, specially with the middle class of Indian society in transition and its women. This remains her concern. The overwhelming
majority of women belonging to the deprived and dispossessed sections in the country remain beyond her canvass.

Another notable feature of the situation is that the Indian middle class represents a section of society which is the product of a particular socio-economic, political-cultural and educational system crafted to serve the colonial masters and is now called upon to serve the new ruling elite after independence. The conditioning effect of this education for long is now overwhelmingly visible among the intellectuals when they seek to propagate the mores of this industrial mode of life as it took shape in the West with no mind to look at their own roots. Freedom of choice is one such tenet which is extolled to extremes as the sine qua non for women’s emancipation. Shashi Deshpande as a writer is not free from this limitation. In fact, she has churned out these novels out of this common grind. These novels do not depart substantially from the reference frame laid down by the value-system from the industrialised West of which feminism is an essential part relating to women. She is the product of the type of education she has received and values so inculcated. In such a situation, she is hardly a free agent of a vision she decides to sell through her novels.

Philip Stevick in his theory of Novel states that the novel records "the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience. The character follows a pattern of disillusionment - from potential fulfilment to actual accomplishment, from a hopeful naivette to a resigned wisdom." In Shashi
Deshpande's novels a similar pattern of progress emerges in the life of protagonists. All her major characters like Indu, Saru, Jaya, Kaswina, Manju, Urmi and Aru are depicted to be in a state of confusion or self-righteous in the beginning. Slowly, on gaining experience and knowledge they go through a process of introspection, self-analysis and self-realisation. At the end they emerge much more confident, sober, more in control of themselves and hopeful. Jaya for example in That Long Silence concludes: "There is always hope" (p. 204)

It is universally conceded that art-in-literature has a social bearing which is more effective than any other tool to shape the thought process of society leaving its mark on both head and heart. The ability rests with the writer as to how far he or she remains fiddle to one's projection. The creation in the form of literature cannot afford to be sterile with mere depiction of perceived 'reality'. It is to carry some social ethical values to touch the sensibilities of readers and remain true to realism. On the contribution of Shashi Deshpande one writer, R.K. Gupta writing in Indian Literature on Feminism and Modern Indian Literature comments:

At times one feels that Shashi Deshpande overdoes the theme of women suffering, so that the novel is in some danger of turning into sociological tract.12

The question of fidelity between husband and wife is one such issue receiving treatment in a cavalier style. The question of free sex is another subject which needs to be dealt with care. Indu, Saru and Jaya - the three protagonists of her
representative novels, *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence*, enjoy similarity in their frank admission of pleasure in the sex experience beyond marital ambit as if it is a matter merely like exchanging potatoes between two individuals where emotions and sensibilities to certain values have no place to bother about. The same writer, Gupta starts his treatise with an apt quote:

Sulaksha, the young heroine of Chanderkant Keni’s Konkani story ‘Na Khant, Na khed’ (No guilt, No regret), who holds radical views on marriage, tells her father: ‘Daddy, the relation between husband and wife is their concern, why should society bother about it? As long as there is affection, they will stay together... why should one get trapped in marriage, if there is no mutual trust? True to her creed, she leaves Sunil after staying with him for a few days, to live with the married artist Shekhar. Her father is driven to expostulate with her: ‘You change your man as one changes sarees.’

To paint such bizarre behaviour as ‘radical’ and view the question of marriage confined to mere ‘affection’ is another tragedy of being partial on such vital social question by feminists all around. Shashi Deshpande is not free from this malady. Saru is not hesitant in having an affair with her professor of easy virtue forgetting about her ‘loved man’ just to advance her career. Jaya has tremendous physical appeal in Mohan - her husband of choice. The same Jaya’s infactuation with her immediate neighbour, Kamat, is presented as nothing abnormal. The case of Indu - a married woman going for physical relation with such ease of mind and facility with her cousin, Naren finding the act very relaxing is like presenting a
case for free sex for enjoyment. The way she finds Naren at the
dead of night to enjoy and present next morning with no feeling
of abnormality amounts to negation of marriage as an institution
with no viable substitute for the society to adopt. In this case
Deshpande presents an example of one enjoying the fruits of
both the worlds - marriage and no marriage. The writer does not
go to explain this ambiguity in social behaviour of Indu while
none forced her to marry. She, by choice could have remained
single to enjoy sex with Narens of her liking, neither Indu came
out of the marriage to break this 'bondage'. If a writer plays
with the future of society on such issues in a partial manner, the
effort cannot but be dubbed as subtle activism to propound a
faith.

Going through the novels by Shashi Deshpande, one
comes across with various kinds of relationships - man's
relations with woman, woman's relations with another woman,
but the most important relationship which figures prominently
in her novels is man - woman relationship in its various modes -
relation between husband and wife, between father and
daughter, mother - daughter relations and mother -son
relationship, as also relation between brother and sister.

The term 'relationship' is as old as social life itself.
Relationship expresses kinship or the state of being related or
mutual linkage between two persons or groups who have
dealings with one another. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as
"a state of being related" and relation implies 'the particular
way in which one thing or one person for that matter is thought of in connection with one another”¹⁴.

A person gets into life as an integral part of society in relation to others. The social interaction is the pre-condition of one’s social existence and physical, intellectual and emotional growth, as also fulfilment. These relationships in between persons can be based on natural ties of blood or there can be some particular modes in which persons are mutually connected by marriage, employment or some common pursuits, etc. Among these inter-personal relations man-woman relation is perhaps the most significantly creative. It may fulfil certain biological, emotional or, ethical and psychological needs in addition to social needs of men and women maintained in legal or sacramental social framework. It is true that quite often the needs are not realised because of mutual incompatibility, lack of respect, love and understanding, temperamental difference or pursuit of individual and sectarian personal agendas, and egotist approach to problems. For example, if Indu finds, in her changed mood, incompatibility with Jayant - her husband of choice how long that compatibility would remain with Naren - her new object of love, is a moot question in the novel, Roots and Shadows by Shashi Deshpande.

Man-woman relationship is a favourite theme with most of the writers in English, Indian or otherwise. Lately, this is the growing theme in other native languages too. In English R.K.Narayana takes up the incompatible man-woman relationship in The Dark Room and The Guide. Raja Rao in
The Serpent and the Rope, Mulak Raj Anand in Gauri, Bhabani Bhattacharya in Music for Mohini, Manohar Malgonkar in A Bend in the Ganges, Arun Joshi in The Foreigner, to cite a few. Anita Desai has tried to depict it in greater depths. Shashi Deshpande is another notable figure who dealt these relationships masterly in her fictions.

Sixties and seventies of this century saw a spurt of changes in the pattern of human relations in India. A new spurt in economic activities have replaced 'man' as the focal point in relations by 'money' as the motivation of these social relationships. Man and woman desirous of maintaining good relations with their partners had to seek new adjustments with the consequent awakening among women of their rights, obligations and privileges in a new perspective. Women were gathering new concepts about equality and freedom. They aspired to remain no mute dolls any longer. They were also in search of paying careers and cried aloud to break the walls for free movement outside on a horizon of wide expectations. Woman sought her existence 'on her own' as the battle cry and for 'a room of her own'. A new awakening to her 'sexuality' as an additional attribute to her strength added fresh dimension to her contest with established institutions and norms in the society. Increasing self-centred approach to life is leading to estranged relations between male-female partners and alienation has come to stay as a disturbing factor in harmonious relationship.
Intimately aware of middle class feminine sensibility, Shashi Deshpande depicts the female side of the marital discord in such families. Since, disharmony disturbs the rhythm of marital life and puts the two partners to strains, Saru, Indu and Jaya are portrayed as symbols of this malady, in the three major novels of Deshpande.

The novel, *That Long Silence* begins with description of gender differentiation valorising the male categories. Jaya finds her interests in conflict with those of her father. Her taste is rivetted to listening Radio Ceylon while her father finds her taste low in comparison to classical music. Jaya nurtured this feeling of 'shame' throughout her life. She found her interest in watching advertisements preceding the movies in conflict with the taste of her husband who dismissed these advertisements as worthless. Another potent example of differentiation often cited, is provided in the novel on the question of family tree where Jaya finds to her dismay that she has no place. She would not find that place even in her husband's family tree. This gender differentiation becomes instrumental for different roles that are to be played by boys and girls in the families. Jaya's mother (Ai) gifted the flat in Dadar to her son even though he was not very much interested in it. Ai could not think of giving it to her daughter, though it hurts Jaya and made her resentful. There is another instance when the 'tyrant lady' in the family left her property through a will unexpectedly to Indu - the family rebel girl of the family in the novel *Roots and Shadows* It is true that certain male members of the family feel...
jealous and resentful over this discrimination in favour of rebellious girl, it is a favour by a female to another female. Property here is inherited not by a 'son' but by a 'daughter' in this case.

Another instance is of, giving a new name to the girl at the time of marriage. This is a practice in some quarters of middle class communities, to affix husband's surname for a common of identity between both. It is much wider a practice in middle class families. But Jaya made it a big issue with herself perhaps because of her western education to smell gender discrimination even when it is not there. It is true, a girl goes to the house of husband after marriage, except in case of a negligible minority in North-East where the practice is otherwise. It is the newly married woman who needs a distinct identity in her new place where she is recognised as a member of a particular family. Yet, it is an issue with exponents of feminism in the West as also with their followers in India. Shashi Deshpande gave exquisite expressions to this sample of gender discrimination through Jaya.

The novel highlights the patriarchal power structure in several man - woman relationships. An example is provided by the episode Mohan relates to Jaya about his parents. Mohan's reaction to the episode, "God... she was tough. Women in those days were tough.", (p.36) is found strange by Jaya. She discerns the deep-rooted despair in the episode, despair so deep that it could not get articulated. It is a struggle so bitter that, according to Jaya, "silence and surrender"(p.35) become the
only weapons. And it is against this that Jaya occasionally chafes and feels at the end of her tether. Jija, Jaya's maid-servant is presented another living epitome of the oppressed Indian woman in the novel. She has to earn; she has to cater to her husband's needs and caprices which includes drinking liquor. And she has to live on. She does all these reticently, competently. After the death of her husband, Jija has to bear the role from her step-son. He beats Tara, his wife, extorts money from her and drinks liquor. Same silence is observed by Vimla, Mohan's sister after she gets married. She does not tell her in-laws about her malady and bleeds herself to death. In comparison to the narrator, Jaya, the writer, desires to focus attention on these silent oppressions which follow the old conditioned responses of a patriarchal system. Mohan, steeped in the norms he had learnt in his own family, says to Jaya who had once raised her voice after marriage, "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however, badly he behaved to her." (p.83) Should this be potent enough reason or argument for Jaya to follow the suit, yet Jaya does follow the line. Silence is her weapon too. (p.120-121) When silence fails as a protective cover, hysteria becomes the only shield. "I must not laugh, I must not laugh"(p.122), she keeps telling herself, considering the gravity of the situation but she does not laugh and lands herself in a more hopeless situation.

Mohan expects his wife, Jaya to share his anxiety in his moment of crisis under threat of losing his job. He says that whatever he has done he had done for her and children, while
she is absorbed in her own self. The novel has echoes of Ibsen’s Doll’s House when Jaya feels Mohan to be a stranger. Though she likes her solitude, she does not wish to do away her relationship. She journeys a full circle, from searching her identity in loneliness to her relationship with Mohan and her children. Though it is a full circle, yet it is not the same point to which she returns with a new confidence. She proclaims: “I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone... Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible” (p.191) The assertion, though, is for self. There is no realisation of the whole. Now she has belief in herself, she can choose. For her, it is not ‘women are victims’ theory but women must assert and change themselves. The message is: “one must change and hope that men shall change also”. (p.193) Jaya’s resolution is like Arjun’s: “Fight back, with full knowledge”. (p.193) Deshpande’s use of the myths of Sita, Gandhari and Maitreyes sharply focuses the plight of Indian wife, at the same time revealing her awareness of this existence and her acceptance not of Sita’s role but of Arjun’s way of facing the life.

Jaya is symptomatic of the emerging new woman. She is very much conscious of her status and is prepared to listen to no one’s advice but her own. She has already developed a theory that the daughter must fight the mother if she wants to graduate in the world. In keeping with this thinking she marries Mohan when she finds that her mother is opposed to this match. Jaya develops sympathy for Kusum because no one likes her. She
resents the stance of her brother, Ravi with regard to his wife, Asha.

Shashi Deshpande has made Jaya's real nature the very core of the novel. Jaya is in pursuit of self-knowledge. She is a model of patience, endurance, defiance and disobedience at the same time. She is pursuing the idea of a separate female identity. Young bride Subhasini, is at quarrel with the mature Jaya who is both restrictive and destructive. The tradition-bound Jaya is irreconcilable with her modernist individuality-seeking, Jaya. The devoted wife in Jaya is irreconcilable with Jaya relishing a momentary embrace with Kamat. The novelist is able to impart in its way a complex identity to her heroine focusing at the same time on the egoistic aspects of womanhood. In Jaya's view the "poor idiotic Suhasini"(p.17) believes in security, while advanced Jaya sees security nowhere. "Jaya, the mature woman has to play the role of a loyal wife while also keeping her mind off the office-life, like Gandhari bandaging her eyes",(p.61) and the other one of a modernist wife, befriending the superior officer of her husband for his protection. It is the second role, though, that goes against her temperament. Mohan's disappearance left Jaya free as a writer with wifely burdens gone; but it made her emotionally broken. She is not free to act at will; she is slave of her emotional affiliations and under limited conditions only she can follow the doctrine of *Yathe Chehhasi Tatha Kuru*(p.192). Jaya in the narrative technique presents her position as faithfully as she can
while she is least concerned with the presentation of the feelings of Mohan.

The novelist presents some 'modernist' elements in the novel. The first is the pre-marital love of Jaya and Mohan before they are under the yoke of marriage. With a new feminist frankness, Jaya talks of interdependence of love and sex. "First there's love, then there's sex -- that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I had realised that it could so easily be the other way round."(p.95) Deshpande gives an optimistic message when Jaya proclaims: "... we have to go on trying."(p.158) She feels a compulsive sense of embracing life's obligations as "life has always to be made possible". (p.193) This is the wisdom Jaya has learnt in the turbulations of her life. Jaya observes, "She had been the means through which I had shut the door, firmly on all those women who had invaded my being, screaming for attention: "women I had known. I could not write about, because they might - it was just possible - resemble Mohan's mother or aunt or my mother or aunt."(p.149) Thus, the novelist makes it clear that not only patriarchy, women have also recoiled from telling the truth about their sex. That Long Silence puts in nutshell the history and evolution of women. As Toril Moi remarks, "The principal objective of feminist criticism has always been political: it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices." This is what Shashi Deshpande does through her text in That Long Silence. "The important insight Deshpande imparts to us through Jaya is that women should accept their
responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their own victimisation, instead of putting the blame on everybody except themselves," comments Sarla Palkar reviewing the novel.

In *Roots and Shadows*, Shashi Deshpande's theme is identity-crisis faced by Indu, the sensitive protagonist. Like Jaya in *That Long Silence*, Indu too searches for freedom through marriage in quest of autonomous self, but realises again like Jaya that 'this refuge is hard to achieve.' The realisation of the need to confirm for the sake of survival is a truth. Both learn, though, this confirmity is perceived as the destroyer of selfhood. The only self that can be achieved is the self which sprouts in inter-personal relationship that made Indu cry out in agony: "This is my real sorrow, that I can never be complete in myself."(p.34)

In her quest for fulfilment and selfhood, Indu had sought escape from family relationships. Later, she discovered how relationships are roots of one's being. She follows so many shadows that make life no more substantial than a shadow - a life without identity. Indu's flight from family relationships had only landed her in another trap of shadow existence waiting for her in the person of Jayant. "I have got away. But to what?... to what have I got away? Is that any better than this?"(p.176) She asks Naren referring to her relationship with Jayant. She wonders' "Are we doomed to living meaningless, futile lives? Is there no escape?"(p.176)
In marrying Jayant, Indu had thought that she had found her alter ego and had gained in him a spiritual and psychological level of closeness. "I had become complete...And in Jayant I had thought I had found the other part of my whole self." (p.126) But marriage with Jayant had forced her to realise that self is an elusive centre, that one could never exchange roots with another - that this was illusion "a chimera" and Indu felt "cheated".(p.114)

Shashi Deshpande has very artistically juxtaposed two sets of women in Indian society. One set is represented by Akka, Narmada, Atya, Sumitra Kaki, Kamala Kaki, Sunania Atya and Padmini. To them life is "to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren"(p.128) as per description of the writer. To them, a female could "neither assert, demand nor complain".(p.146) and "an ideal woman is one who 'sheds her' 'I', who loses her identity in her husband's" (p.54) as the writer again sarcastically chooses to ascribe these qualities in them. According to them a woman has to "adapt herself to her circumstances and environment and be greedy, devious and unscrupulous"(p.146) Against this set of women's life is placed the 'new' one represented by Indu, an educated young woman strutting herself as 'modern'. She views and reviews the concepts of self, sin, faith, love etc. She harbours her own concepts of freedom in search of achieving them. She revolts and revels in her faith. But, in all her efforts she fails miserably either due to the impact of her own sanskaras or fear and timidity or all these put together.
Indu of *Roots and Shadows* aspires to become independent and complete in herself. She leaves one house and enters another to have independence, joy and completeness. But soon she realises the futility of her search. She admits “she cannot fantasize” (p.14). About achieving completeness in herself Indu admits that after meeting Jayant she has “lost the ability to be alone” (p.34) Once she finds Akka and even the family to be an hindrance in achieving her goal of attaining indepenedence. Indu leaves the house and later marries Jayant of her choice. Soon she realises that Indu is not different from other women. She also wishes that “Jayant should be with her. Always all the time, for ever.”(p.36) After her marriage she does everything what Jayant would wish her to do. This bitter fact of shedding her ‘I’, her identity in her husband’s self starts frightening her; she perhaps values her self more than anything else in life. Understandably Indu has picked this notion of self from her education which coincided with her temperament. Result : she starts distancing from her husband and feels unhappy with him. Then, she picks up tricks and deception ascribing these to the institution of marriage. “Her desire to assert herself had drove her from affection to hypocrisy.”(p.197) But the trait of affection and hypocrisy is decidedly different from affection and hatred. Indu learns the art of deception and hypocrisy in marriage for which reason has to be sought somewhere else than lack of affection. Indu herself has to explain : “I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to see... I hid my response as if they were
bits of garbage.”(p.41) She is not happy with Jayant yet at the same time she cannot live without him. Problem with her is that she does not want any such completeness with her husband since her soul is wandering in search of some other place.

At one point in the novel when her cousin, Naren tries to make love with her she pompously declares:

I 'm essentially monogamous, For me it's one man and one man alone (p.89)

But Indu searches out Naren twice later in the novel to lie with him and enjoy bliss which she admits she had never done before. That much for her ‘essential’ fidelity to monogamous marriage with one man, Jayant. Later, she triesto rationalise her behaviour that “I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me. For that was not important. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our lives together.(p.187) This is self-deception par excellence, if one believes that sexual relations in adultery have nothing to do between husband and wife. She muses over her own reasons for giving her body to Naren. This can be covered only with a theory of ‘body of my own’ as a jewel from feminism as it took shape in the West. Indu does not believe in ‘love’as it exists in books and movies. According to her “it is a big fraud”(p.157), yet she equated all the time sexual act of her with love making. This is her tragedy. At another she calls herself as an ‘anchronism; After experiencing some of her married life, Indu looks down at marriage as a trap “A trap? Or a cage? A cage with two trapped animals glorying hatred at each
other..”(p.67) That seems to be her philosophy of married life. She forgets to compare how this philosophy tallies with reality.

Indu’s love-marriage degenerates into a mere affair that makes her feel as if “there was something shameful in total commitment.”(p.143) as if she has abused her body’s sanctity. The tragedy of Indu’s situation is that both meaning and meaninglessness are because of Jayant.

Indus struggle for selfhood, her struggle towards liberation of the mind, her struggle for an emotional and intellectual definition is in a sense the fight against her womanhood: Indu tells Naren, “As a woman I felt hedged in, limited by my sex. I resented by womanhood because it closed so many doors to me.” (p.87) She hopes and despairs at the same time. She tries to come to terms with her own self in context of her love for Jayant. She returns ‘home’, the one she lived in with Jayant: “That was my only home... I would put all this behind me and go back to Jayant.”(p.205) Indu returns equipped with ‘quality of courage’ necessary to face the challenge of identity crisis and challenge of conviction. She proclaims: “Defeat is relief: and freedom only relative. For human beings there is no escape from relationships; no less for women. “New bonds replace the old, that’s all”(p.16).

Till late, Indu had looked upon Akka as an inconsiderate and interfering old-woman only. But after listening to her stories after her demise, Indu came to realise her better. She knew Aka had been a pillar of strength which had enabled her to act according to her beliefs. Then Indu realised that she had to
come up to Akka's expectations. Akka had believed in Indu's strength, her indomitable strength and courage. Through, her will Akka said all this about Indu. Now Indu feels she must show that faith was right. Indu has to fulfil that obligation and responsibility to the family. Any freedom she had devised she must be sought within the bounds of her obligations and responsibilities. She could, in the last, understand and appreciate what old Uncle had meant when he had told her long back that rules add grace and dignity to life. Within them, one is free to do what one wants. In the end, Indu did achieve her freedom. She had not let anyone, neither Akka, nor Atya, nor even Jayant, come in the way of doing what she believed was right thing to do. She had conquered her fears and achieved harmony in life. The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideals and conflicting selves. The remarkable thing is that she learnt her new wisdom after inheriting the wealth from Akka. The moot point here is about this latent strength of wealth.

Indu's predicament is representative of the larger predicament of middle class women in contemporary India where new socio-economic forces have shaken previous cultural modes to serve the emerging forces in the society which are domianting. The break up of the joint family, the nucleous of Indian cultural life which so far provides sustenance to its social existence, is facing a threat for change to these emerging
forces. It is affecting relationships at every level especially relationship at husband-wife level.

**The Dark Holds No Terrors** (1980) is the story of Saru in the novel and her convulsions and conflicts. Saru is a neglected and ignored child in favour of her brother. No importance or parental love is shown to her even on notable days like birth days. Her brother's birthdays, however, are celebrated with fanfare including the performance of rituals. When her brother is drowned, she is blamed for it by her mother. Saru thinks the mother hates her. She grows up with this grouse. She acquires education against her mother's wish, and later exercises her freedom of choice to marry Manu for love. She expresses her feelings:

*I was hungry for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted.* (p.55)

The real story, however, unfolds as she emerges as a successful, known and reputed doctor. Her marriage begins to crumble under the burden of success in her profession with more attention and respect than her husband, while she could not grapple the emerging situation. Till now, "he had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband." (p.37) Her husband expresses his disgust, "I am sick of this place." (p.37) But he does nothing to harmonise the relations. Saru, on her part, starts hating man-woman relationship while realising nothing on her part. At a personal
level, she feels a gradual disappearance of love and attachment which she had once developed. Only a psychological conflict remains between her and her husband. Saru laments "When I came home I found him sitting with a brooding expression on his face that my heart gives painful, quivering little jumps."(p.71)

A turn was reached when Manu asserted his masculinity through sexual assault and rape at night, though he is cheerfully normal and being a loving husband in the day. It terrified Saru to the point that, "each time it happened and I don't speak. I put another brick on the wall of silence between us."(p.88) while she feels tired of both the indoor and outdoor duties she is engaged in. This burden of double duties is not only a feeling in itself but gradually takes on a force imbalancing the marital parity that normally sustains conjugal relations. This growing imbalance threw both of them apart. Saru goes back to her parents' home at the news of her mother's death. At her parental home too Saru feels as an "unwelcome guest" (p.14). She remorses "My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood. At the same time she imagines that her father too has not forgiven her. Acute confusion with under guilt-consciousness prevails upon her. She feels, she has done injustice to her mother, husband, children and everybody else".(p.198)

The writer has painted the gap in the mother-daughter relationship with Saru, as a rebellious girl, having a strong grouse against her own mother. The position of woman as
underscored by the author, presents a picture of acceptance and rejection; flexibility and rigidity; fantasy and reality; revolt and compromise or adjustment. These characteristics are there inextricably blended in Saru who represents a section of society popularly known as middle class in the modern current industrial social structure. Here is a trauma that is the product of a bitter conflict between the imposed and the willed. She is brought up in an atmosphere available customarily in an Indian family with its mores and values. But the education she receives turns her a changed person with a rebellious attitude towards these family mores. As an educated young woman, Saru does not accept anything contrary to her borrowed values through education. She expresses her anger to her mother, "I'm not talking to you..You don't want me to have anything. You don't even want me to live." (p.128) The generation gap bursts into an agonising trial, where daughter is sandwiched between family trappings and borrowed aspirations. The education invokes in her a consciousness which does not square with the family consciousness.

The novelist, through deft manipulation of the narrative, reveals the origins of Saru's identity crisis. Whatever opportunities her middle class background provided for happiness and personal expansion, were spiked, she feels by the oppressive dominance of her mother. The mother took no interest in Saru's education and personal advancement. Instead she constantly snubbed Saru for one thing or the other denied her the love and affection which Dhruva, her younger brother,
was given. Saru grew up feeling herself unwanted, unloved and insecure child. True to the teaching, Saru wanted to be free from the “dependence syndrome” \(^{17}\) “To get married and end up doing just what your mother did, seemed to me not only terrible but damnable.”(p.127) Saru thought what she experienced, could perhaps be resolved by acquiring a personal identity. She hoped that a professional career would be “the key that would unlock the door out of this life.”(p.126) and that “I had to make myself secure so that no one could ever say to me again... why are you alive?”(p.44) repeating what her mother in agony had said to her on her brother’s untimely death. The bubbles of this ‘independence syndrome’ however, took little time to burst and confront Saru when in desperation she herself proposed to her husband that she should leave the clinic.

At her parental home, Saru quickly adjusts to the rhythm of the house. She reminisces, gathers details of the lingering illness of her mother and secretly envies the inner strength of the woman who suffered and suffered alone. Her anger on her mother, after this realisation, melts away. A moment comes when she confesses to her father, “My brother died because I turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood.”(p.198) The novel ends with the hope that Saru might be able to achieve the wholeness and to overcome her identity crisis. Saru, who had earlier tried to run away from her self, leaves the house to attend to the ill-child and asking her father to receive Manu on arrival and tell him to wait.
The novel is an attempt at illustrating the truth of the epigraph taken from *Dhammapada* and placed at the beginning of the story that one is one's own refuge, a state which is quite hard to achieve. There is a woman in Saru whose predicament is not to be able to accept her husband for what he is. She does not receive the kind of love and understanding she craves from her parents, particularly the mother. The fact, however, emerges that if things go wrong for her, it is because of her own 'myriad complexes and child-like monstrous ego' as Kamat comments on her. This complex is bred largely by her feminist outlook.

The portrayal of Saru's mother who adored the son and neglected the daughter seems to be a weak point in the story. One could accept a mother's preferences amongst her children, it is apparently incredible that she should live and die with curses on her lips for her female child, at least in Indian context. The mother's monstrosity seems to serve or designed to serve as a rallying point for the novelist to bring her feminist views together. The point arises whether the book has an axe to grind.

Similarly, too much glamourising the sexuality of woman and berating the man-woman relationship threaten to destroy the sanctity attached to marriage and the respect of womanhood.

The apparently impossible problem of the career woman - the conflicting claims of the family and the career are delineated in all the three novels but in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* it holds centre-stage. The same theme had been treated
by the novelist in her story, ‘**A Liberated Woman**.’ The problem is more acute when the wife is at a higher pedestal than the husband. Financial independence here does not really bring happiness or emancipation to the woman. Saru raises the question herself, “If Draupadi had been economically independent if Sita had an independent identity, you think their stories would have been different?” (p.45)

The feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, nonetheless enumerates the principal contradiction and states, “We open factories, the offices, the faculties to women, but we continue to hold that marriage is for her a most honourable career freeing her from the need of any other participation in the collective life.”

The lacuna, however, is that women had been a necessary part of the collective labour throughout the period when agriculture mode predominated, before the advent of industrial revolution where marriage never came in conflict with their role. The clarion call to dispense with the institution of marriage eminating from the protagonists of feminism in the face of their role outside family- in the factories, in the offices and the faculties, finds favour with them due to the difference in the conditions of this labour rather than the labour-power itself.

The second novel, in chronological order, **If I Die Today** (1982) by Shashi Deshpande as also her first novel, **The Dark Holds No Terrors** are artistic pieces where the writer shows her potential as an analysist of human psyche. Alongwith **Come Up and Be Dead** (1983), her third novel, Deshpande seems to be
in search of meaning and purpose of life in relation to the individual’s existence. *If I Die Today* highlights man’s obsession with a happy life, even though illusory. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* deals with darkness in man’s mind on account of which he or she suffers from coloured visions. *Come Up and Be Dead* apparently is the extension of the theme of the first novel. It deals with the ambition of a happy life that takes man on the path of glamour and crime.

In *If I Die Today* the novelist shows that one is a victim of his or her own obnoxious imaginations. One lives under pressure and tension so much so that one creates an illusion around oneself, that one lives because one has the capacity to live. This binds one’s vision and leads to unending disharmony between thought and action and there is no escape from this. The writer declinates characters who are individuals and who are pitted against social absurdities. She is thus closer to the existential view of life and the world around. *If I Die Today* tells a limitless reality that if one dies today, others follow tomorrow. One may understand this and stop maddening rush for possessing the whole world. One’s need be content with one’s life and its potentialities. Guru, the ideal character of this novel keeps emphasising that most of the people suffer from want of self-assessment and cherish an illusion more than one fears the reality. This leads to crisis.

Guru and Meera seem to have realised identity. They live upto themselves with an objective approach to an attitude towards tension-free life. Manju, the narrator of the story,
Vijay and all others pursue a quest of identity. Guru knows that he will die soon and so he is happy although the doctor keeps on saying, "you are all right"(p.8) until he dies. He knows, he cannot control life, so why he should fear to lose anything and be sorrowful. He does not retain the past as a treasure, nor does he wish to possess the future. If one is undependable, the other is unbelievable. Other characters represent the reverse side of this story. Fear of loss is the keynote of their personality. They possess only a crisis of identity. They resort to force and contempt to defend this crisis. In consequence, their lives and individuality sink deeper. Guru has "risen above all humaan weaknesses and crossed that dreadful barrier... the eternal fear of death."(p.9) As he has realised this identity, he has become more fearless, more objective than others. While other characters leave everything to future, Guru "cannot leave anything to vague future."(p.9) Guru believes that "Tomorrow is not a fact but a continuous present."(9) When Tony is murdered, all are chilled with fear but Guru is unperturbed. In this novel too Deshpande takes into account the individual in an existential notion within her range.

Shashi Deshpande's novel, The Binding Vine (1993) forces one to consider the need for a sense of self for Indian women in their struggle for survival. The stories of Urmio, Mira and Kalpana bring alive the underworld of Indian Women's lives. Mira's poem becomes the structuring gesture of the novel. Essentially, the story revolves around the death in the family. Urmio, the narrator, is grieving over the loss of her
babu daughter, Anu. She does not want to give up her grief because ‘to forget is to betray’.

Urmi’s mother, Inni and childhood friend, Vanaa are by her side to help her growth grope towards normality. Interesting relationships unfold among the three, exposing at times the complexities of female bonding under patriarchy.

Urmi, while reflecting on her friendship with Vanaa after marriage to Kishore says; “She as Kishore’s sister and I, as Kishore’s wife moved away from each other. Kishore coming between us.” (p.79) Inni and Urmi have never bonded as mother and daughter because literally the Law-of-the-Father (Urmi’s father) broke this bond by making Inni give up her child to be brought up by his parents - Aju and Baiajji . This problematic relationship between mother and daughter is brought out most effectively in Shakutai’s and Kalpana’s relationship. While speaking about her daughter Shakutai says that she is secretive. “She never tells me anything... She gives her father money more easily than she gives me.. she knows he will use it for gambling... it makes me furious. I don’t understand her. What has he ever done for her? When he left me for that woman, she was angry with me. Can you believe that..” (p.148)

Gradually getting involved in the discovery of her dead mother-in-law, Urmi gets to know Mira’s poetry written, when she was young and victim of conjugal rape. Urmi gets deeply involved in Kaplana’s situation. She is struggling for life in a hospital ward after being brutally raped by her foster-father.
The most consistent move in the novel is one of unravelling in order to restate *The Binding Vine* of patriarchy. Mira’s situation is told through her poems and Kaplana’s story is told by her mother, Shakutai pointing to the problem of self-expression in women. Both these women are literally silenced: one is dead and the other is in a comatose condition.

Deshpande constructs an argument in which the underlying move is the alternation between the personal and the social in creating a woman’s vision. This is evident in Priti’s answer to a question from Urmi. She retorts “Do you have to bogged down in the personal?” (p.40) Remembering Priti’s words, Urmi says, women’s vision.. it was Priti who used the words to me “I want your vision, a women’s vision’ she said and I laughed at her. I thought it ridiculous that two persons should share a vision only because they belong to the same sex.. now I realise (p.125) The novel ends with Urmi, racing through her household chores hiding under the daily routine of living. “The main urge is always to survive. Urmi says: “Mira realised that re-defining the spring of life.”(p.203)

The novel, *A Matter of Time* (1996) is a story about Sumi who returns to her parental house with her three daughters after her husband Gopal walks out on her for reasons even he cannot articulate.

Sumi’s parents, Kalyani and Shripati, live in their big house in an oppressive silence. They have not spoken to each other for the past 35 years. As this is the story of a horrifying loss and agony which seems repeating itself in Sumi’s life. The
central point in the novel is Aru, struggling to understand her father’s desertion’ and her mother’s indifference. In the course of a few turbulent months Aru forges entirely unexpected relationships that change the course of her life. The pains, the disorientation of being uprooted from their family life affect all the five women differently in the novel.

Deshpande explores the intricate relationship between these women. The author probes the question of what makes a man in this age of acquisition an possession walk out on his family and all that he owns. This is how one individual in this age, part of a so called normal middle class family, turns his back on everything in his life. This is when everything is going fine with him with a lovely wie, three intelligent daughters and a good job. These women in the novel are sensitive and thinking ones, be it Kalyani, the grandmother, or Sumi or her three young daughters. But these five women are fine different individuals, all of them going their different ways. Five souls that don’t add up to make the whole, but they tell themselves that we have only one life. There are no lasting relationships in this novel.

Deshpande explores the female sexuality in her novel, *A Matter of Time* through her characters but the women in the novel are not ashamed of owning it. Sumi writes a play on Sarpanakha, the sister of Ravana who fell in love with Rama and Laxamana. Surpanakha was not frightened of her sexuality, neither of displaying it. It is this woman, Sumi writes about.
This is a novel deeply unsettling with changing women, with norms of relationships having no meaning in time.

The novel, *Come Up and Be Dead*, written in 1983 took up 'glamour and crime' as its theme which is reflective of the latest trend in the social status of woman dictated by rapacious finance capital as a universal phenomena, world wide. Woman is increasinlgy pushed today, in addition to the labour-market, for fulfilling the requirements of 'pleasure market'. At a time when the theory of 'over-population' is in command, the role of woman in procreation stands devalued, and her sexuality for pleasure over-played. This evidently is serving the financial interests of those who invest in ventures of 'glamour and crime' with woman as a symbol of pleasure and entertainment. They do not bother if such easy money is playing at the 'poverty' of their victims and pushing woman to the brink of disaster. Freedom, in their interests, is a valuation catch. It is not surprising that woman now stands invested with this pleasure attribute. When feminism fought the biological function of woman as one to her insubordination to man, her sexuality, with the slogan 'body of my own', turned easily to pleasure attribute, which earlier had a social retribute.

The novel opens in a girls school of upper-middle class as highly receptive to western mores. It is the scene of glamour and crime with a flourishing hotel as the centre of saleable sex and the adolescent girls of the school as its recruiting ground, as also a place of intrigues, treachery and murders. Woman is
at the centre of this trade and tottering family values provide a congenial atmosphere for assertion of self by the victims.

When asked to define, a teacher of modern views, Chaman Nahal propounds: “I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free from the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materialises.”

Further, Chaman Nahal illustrates: “The only man writer I can think of in addition to myself who talked of women’s role, is Bhabani Bhattacharya.” Nahal commends Bhabain’s novel as a good feminist piece. “It is the character, Kajoli ‘shows great courage’ in the face of odds, and is really not dependent on anyone neither on her grandfather, nor on her husband. She is dependent in the way we are connected to people... She goes to Calcutta where she is sold into prostitution and she saves herself by selling newspapers.”

In this model of Kajoli, the woman is considered free from dependence syndrome to uphold feminist tenets if she is not dependent on parents and near ones, no matter if one has to enter brothels in search of liberation; dependence of outside is worthwhile in this case. Girl students, charmed with such teachings of their ‘teachers’ on this score, are the victims which Come Up and Be Dead by Deshpande portrays, in graphic details. Symbolically, the restaurant cum hotel is named, ‘Open
Sesame’, Mridula, Sanjay and Sharmila make a trio in the hands of the Big Chief duly served by Girish - the doctor. These characters in the novel symbolise the forces released by such logic of woman’s freedom from dependence syndrome in the world of finance capital. (p.251)

A careful study of Shashi Deshpande reflected through her novels and short stories reveals that she uses her art-in-literature with ability to convey her side of reality and how she has perceived it concerning middle class women of her times with sympathy and deep sensibility to convey the message dear to her. Indeed, her chief thematic concern is with ‘women’s struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society. To find and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and above all as a human being and ‘the operative sensibility in her stories is distinctly female and modern.’

Following Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and other current writers in English who documented the female resistance against ‘patriarchy -maintained Indian ethos, Shashi Deshpande has re-incarnated the new Indian woman and has reinforced the female dilemma in her novels. She is attuned to ordinary experience. “Since her fiction is woman-centred, the feminine consciousness becomes the protagonist of her novels.”, agrees R. Mala. She is well read and conversant with feminist theorists like Virginia Woolf. Principal tenets of feminism are dear to her though she presents her case in Indian settings.

As we find, Shashi Deshpande depicts the pulls and counter-pulls of a middle class family and gives vent to
aspirations and frustrations of women in middle-class settings. The overwhelming majority of women belonging to the deprived and dispossessed sections in Indian society remain beyond her convass.

Shashi Deshpande uses her art with ability to convey her side of reality concerning middle class women of her times. Yet the treatment of issues on some account in their universal application is partial, imbalanced and incoherent. The question of fidelity between husband and wife is one such issue receiving treatment in a cavalier style. The question of free sex is another subject which needs to be dealt with care. Indu, Saru and Jaya - the three protagonists of her representative novels, Roots and Shadows, The Dark Holds No Terrors, That Long Silence enjoy similarity in their frank admission of pleasure in the sex experience as if it is a matter merely like exchanging potatoes between two individuals where emotions have no place, to bother about. Saru is not hesitant in having an affair with her professor of easy virtue forgetting about her 'loved man' just to please the man to advance her professional cause. Jaya has tremendous physical appeal in Mohan - her husband of choice. The same Jaya's relation with Kamat is presented as nothing abnormal. The quote from Saru that "the code word of our age is ... but sex" (p.110) is a leaf from a highly contested proposition from Sigmund Freud on libido. The case of Indu - a married woman going for physical relation with such ease and facility with her cousin, Naren finding the act very relaxing is like presenting a case for free sex for enjoyment. The way she
finds Naren at the dead of night and the next morning with no feeling of infidelity, is the negation of marriage as an institution with no viable substitute for the society to adopt. Shashi Deshpande, while projecting such notions as manifestations of woman’s liberation through her main protagonists left the subject one-sided and incomplete for treatment in her novels. The other proposition is that she herself propagates this concept of feminism through her novels.

The unmistakable message of her novels is that the institutions of family and marriage are definite ‘circles of bondage’ for the development of a woman’s personality and hurdles in her fulfilment. It is another matter that her ‘fulfilment’ is purely personal and selfish many times while her assertion for self to achieve such fulfilment is reflective of crass individualism. Saru asserts her right as a daughter to get medical education while her obligation to her mother or father is no concern for her. Assertion for self seems to be a one-way affair, which exactly is the approach of feminism in such matters. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, for instance, Saru declares decisively, “For me, they (parents) were already the past and meant nothing.” (p.34)

Another important facet of feminism is the assertion for self in establishing ones’ identity, but in an unequal world where identities are enmeshed in crisis. Assertion for self to serve a purpose beyond ‘self’ is distinct from assertion for self in one’s own interest. The unrelenting assertion of self by Devi, a character in the novel, *Come Up and Be Dead* by
Deshpande is a bold relief when she pursues the leads to unravel 'truth' about the murder of Partap while all major protagonists of her novels are presented as something of a model in assertion for self to serve their individualities, without any sense of obligation to others. In this respect too Shashi Deshpande stands by the side of feminist approach on this important facet.

The feminist trends of the three heroines in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence*, Saru, Indu and Jaya respectively are explicit in their rebellion against family relationships. These relationships allow woman to be a daughter or a sister in her parental family and to be a wife or mother in her husband's family. These characters want freedom from families and liberation from womanhood; the two primary concerns of feminism. It is not a case of mere freedom here, the stress is on freedom from one's family. While they complain of manifest problems, in fact, their problem is latent and rooted in sexual freedom. Their predicament is patently domestic or professional but latently sexual to which Shashi Deshpande gives quite explicit expression in these novels, sometimes amounting to licentiousness bordering promiscuity. This is sought to be justified in terms of "my life is my own" (p.201) and freedom of choice as concepts propounded by feminism.

The discord between Saru and Manu leading to sexual paralysis in the *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is reasonably explained in Saru's words: "He had been the young and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my..."
husband.” (p.37) In **Roots and Shadows** Indu describes herself as an anchronism especially on the sexual plane: “A woman who loves her husband too much... and is ashamed of it.” (p.92) Sexual alienation sets in. This sexual paralysis deepens when she pretends to be passive and unresponsive. Unlike Saru and Indu, Jaya’s marriage in **That Long Silence** is arranged by her elders. And she experiences sex before love. Her relationship with her husband undergoes change. These characters perceive and define matters of sex, love and marriage from quite a different outlook. Shashi Deshpande herself calls her creations as ‘thinking characters” whose new definitions of categories like love, marriage, sex are the feed-back from the author’s reading of the Western feminists. These definitions give typical female point of view to marital difficulties in relations. In all the three novels, there is an identical strand of thought. Their way of looking at questions of love sex and marriage from a sexual perspective aligns them with feminist movement, for they define these categories only with just their own perspectives and give no importance to familial relationship.

The question of marriage too is viewed from the same sectarian feminist outlook in the novels as “circle of bondage, by the protagonists of Deshpande on borrowed arguments and without giving any critical appreciation to the Indian ethos on this institution. Marriage is considered as “nothing but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generation might continue.” (p.3) In the novel, **Roots and Shadows** Indu also envisages it as a
tragi-comic picture of a "cage with two animals glaring hatred at each other" (p. 37). In That Long Silence marriage is likened to a children's game of playing "linker, tailor, soldier, sailor"(p.91). This kind of questioning and disparaging of the social institutions like love, family and marriage vindicate a strong affiliation with the concepts of feminism. Sex aloneness seems to sustain the man-woman relationship in the novels of Deshpande. This is quite akin to feminist outlook on this question. The heroines of Shashi Deshpande resort to freedom not only intellectually but sexually too. Their sexual craze forces them to seek recourse to extra-marital sex. Indu represents the 'new woman who is on her way to an erotic utopia, where informed, mutually consenting individuals could fully be free sexually without pubic opprobrium or sense of guilt. She is sexually satisfied with her affair with her cousin, Naren. The novelist credo in this regard is "take refuge in the self."24 By this assertion Deshpande certainly takes her heroines to the point of feminism, though she may not have liked to openly associate with the credo 'ism' personally.

Coming to her statement on feminism through her novels Adele King remarks in the article on 'Feminist Criticism of Indian Women Writer' that "The work of Shashi Deshpande lends itself particularly well to feminist themes. Her characters are not exemplary feminist heroes, but women struggling to find their own voice."25 This is certainly a partial assessment, ignoring the evaluation on the basis of principal tenets. On
Shashi Deshpande herself has strong convictions about feminism. Apart from her belief in the equality of the sexes and in the right of both to live the way they want, she also believes that "until women get over handicaps imposed by society, outside and inner conditioning, the human race will not have realised its full potential." According to the novelist, the statement of emancipation is the freedom and responsibility of choice. She is certainly an exponent of feminism in Indian context and not less on basics, though it may not be that strident feminism which views the male as the cause of all troubles for women. About her understanding on the role of males, Deshpande has to say: "Feminists may scoff at me, but my husband has changed me. Only because of him I have learnt to relate to people, to live and to see the world in a better way." On a more practical ground, she declares "In this sense it is good to be a woman. My husband supports me. I do not have to compromise in any way for selling my books. Same is the story about the father who is also a male."

There is no one universal prescription about feminism nor can there be; it has its variants in different regions and continents with a sort of national colour. So is an Indian version of which Shashi Deshpande is one definite exponent. In essential ingredients what feminism constitutes Deshpande upholds it fully through her novels under this study. She may not be an activist of the liberation movement in the country
which a writer/novelist may not necessarily be. As a crafts-person excelling in fiction she propounds all those virtues of feminism which the movement in the West has raised as its trademark and pleads its case in an artistic manner.

With her subtlety and skill in characterization the authenticity of her descriptions of the Indian social life her ability to fathom the psyche of the contemporary middle class woman and her feminine aspirations Shashi Deshpande has certainly created a niche for herself in the current Indian fiction. And if she is acclaimed as a feminist writer with 'modern' views she has rightly earned it.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


13. Ibid. P.179.


20. Ibid. 19.

21. Ibid.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.