Chapter - V

FEMININE SENSIBILITIES IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE AND MANJU KAPUR

“I do not wish them (women) to have power over men, but over themselves”.

- Mary Wollstonecraft

A tremendous change has taken place in the cliché of portraying women in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the rich Indian custom and the traditional values of the Indian family and the society. Of late, many Indian women writers including Manju Kapur and Shashi Deshpande have described woman as an individual rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering, trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting her individual self. The woman they portray tries to be herself and yet does not wish to break up the family ties. She fights for self-respect and she longs for self-reliance within the space of the family bondage. Gandhiji’s outcry for women’s liberation has helped women to cross the threshold of family life and move out into the outer world of freedom struggle and social reforms. Since then women have been willingly taking up various roles of their choice right from the freedom movement.

In all their novels, Kapur and Deshpande try to probe the emotional roots of their protagonists. The common qualities which can be traced in the heroines
of both these writers are the capability to analyze their own role in their subjugation, rebelliousness and the quest for an identity. Both novelists examine the complexities of man-woman relationships and the change they undergo. However the focus of the two writers differs, for Deshpande rises above feminist concerns to tackle the existentialist question itself. Saru, Jaya, Indu and Sumi gradually undergo a process of introspection and self-analysis to realize their place and role in the family. Shibani Banerjee replicates:

Deshpande’s women wish to be the architects of their own fate. She has focused on middle class educated women and has depicted vividly, a disturbed yet a brave feminine psyche in the new ethos. What is heartening is the fact that her protagonists are determined to face the world. Similarly, in the novels of Manju Kapur one finds the women characters getting across the odds, struggling, compromising and defying the laws in order to prove their worth.(Banerjee 61)

Deshpande is one of the most prominent feminist writers in India today and her writings have gained popularity for their inclination towards the gender issues and the graphic depiction of their pursuits and attitudes. She raises a protest against the male dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom to act according to their will and continue to suffer. Women are treated
as subalterns and mere man's shadows. Yet the role of women in the society has been changing with each decade of the last century. This is due to the social conflicts woman faces in the day to day life and also her ideological struggle. Deshpande does not believe in describing her women characters as inferior to men or mere maidens at home. She strives to unwrap the twisted and distorted image of woman who cries for freedom and equality which still goes unheard in patriarchal society.

From this stance, the women in the works of Deshpande are more powerful than men are essentially epitomized to revolt against the customs and traditional views of the patriarchal society. Her female characters come to their actual self only after they have gone through their own bitter experiences and these women are stronger physically and more athletic than their mothers. This statement is found in *Harper's Magazine* in 1927 in an article entitled “Feminist – New Style” by Dorothy Dunbar Bromley. (Bromley 5) Bhaskara also endorses the same about Deshpande’s women:

> the newly evolved modern women to be a composite figure, a boyish girl who combines the flappers' physical freedom, sexuality, and stamina with feminist self-assertiveness and traditional domestic femininity, a woman who can happily combine pleasure, career and marriage. (Bhaskara 116)
To the modern young man of this time, the woman seems the perfect companion who is courageous, brilliant and enthusiastic to participate in work, in play and in conjugal sex. This illustration might be easily admired but will not be accepted by the Indian male.

The settings for the novels of Deshpande are purely Indian. She has exactly portrayed the subordinate position of women in the orthodox Indian society. These existing norms cut even the basic rights of women and sideline their existence as human beings. She has taken up the issues of gender prejudice and common adjustment of the girl child, husband and wife relationship as the aggressor and the suppressed. She highlights the sexual exploitation of women within and outside the nuptial frame. Deshpande has vociferously presented the plight of the girl child who has to withstand the ordeal of gender discrimination and social conditioning which has made her feel inferior to the male child since her childhood. Social habituation restricts the blossoming of a girl’s personality. This conditioning also emphasizes on the inclusion of the predefined feminine traits like humility, drudgery, perseverance and compassion. The ultimate goal set for the girl child is marriage. Women have to mold and transform themselves to match the interests of their male counterparts and in this process they are forced to shut in their self-identity. Alladi Uma aptly articulates:

Karyeshu Mantri, Karaneshu Daasi,
Rupeeoha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitii

Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayanetu Rambha,

Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni.’

(Like a slave while serving; a minister when counseling; Goddess Lakshmi in her looks; the earth in forbearance; a mother while feeding; Rambha, the celestial prostitute in bed; these six are the true characteristic of an ideal wife)

(qtd. in Uma 2-3)

Both Deshpande and Kapur present women who try to establish their own identity. The women of India have indeed achieved their success in half a century of Independence, but if there is to be a true female independence, much remains to be done as the fight for autonomy remains an unfinished combat. The female protagonists of Deshpande and Kapur are mostly educated, aspiring individuals confined within the confines of a conservative society. Their education leads them to independent thinking for which their family and society become intolerant of them. Both novelists have portrayed their protagonists as women caught in the conflict between the passions of the flesh and a yearning to be a part of the political and intellectual movements of the day.

Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time,* represents through Gopal the turmoil of a man afraid of commitment and finally finding himself in anguish. Gopal leaves his
family and home as he is driven by some fear which he failed to utterly comprehend. Happiness eludes him and he is full of memories of Sumi and the children. Later, when Sumi dies in an accident, Gopal realizes that it is not easy to escape grief and suffering. He understands that it is indeed true that all are bound to their destinies, that there is no point struggling against those destinies and also realizes that no one should submit to fate, even if it exists, passively and cravenly but face the reality with dignity and strength.

Similarly in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, the stories of Saru, Jaya and Madhu’s lives are not about their discord and relationships alone. Through their depiction, Deshpande presents the fact that one must understand the meaning of life and how to face the inexorable suffering and death. Most of her novels end on a note of hope, for though destinies cannot be changed one always has a choice. There are crossroads and choices. Like Indu in the *Roots and Shadows*, one can change priorities and accept that one must first be true to oneself.

Deshpande marks about the situation of women and their dilemma in the fast changing socio-economic milieu of India. She writes about the conflict between tradition and modernity in relation to women who represent the middle class society. Deshpande’s forte is her ability to explore the psyche of women. It is often cited that three factors combined to make her one of the most powerful women writers of our times. First, she is the daughter of a famous Kannada
dramatist and her education was exclusively in English which exposed her to writers like Doris Lessing, Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, the Bronte sisters and Jane Austen. The second factor is her childhood and adolescence, which passed in an atmosphere redolent with discussions on books and ideas, reading and rehearsals and lastly she grew up surrounded by books and literary personalities who visited her father. However her novels are firmly set in the world with which she is familiar and all the protagonists of Deshpande are hypersensitive, introspective, intelligent women who embark on a search for identity and the meaning of life.

Deshpande has strived to show how her women characters reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system and how they fervently deny the supposed superiority of male chauvinism and power. The women characters in her novels are ultimately confined to a certain niche and the society denies sanctioning them an identity like all other colonial women. So her women characters crave for uniqueness in order to establish their own space. V.S. Mini, her article pronounces that The Dark Holds No Terrors discusses “the attributes of the heroines, where they have no supra-human power and identifiable as women next door, which prove the quality of the novelist’s technique. It also presents the relationship of the male-dominated society and feminism in the same society”. (Mini 100)
Through Saru, Deshpande presents the inimitable sensibilities of womenfolk, their self-imposed guilt, malleability, adjustability and their struggle against the patriarchal hegemony and she is the representative of Deshpande’s voice in support of the womenfolk. She is a woman who is castigated and tarnished by male prejudice enunciated by both men like her husband as well as by women, like her mother, who fall in line with the menfolk in implementing the customs of the male chauvinistic society.

For Kapur, the fight for autonomy remains an unfinished struggle. Kapur has presented the problems of the Indian women in a joint family in a male dominated society. All her novels highlight the issue of patriarchy which denies woman’s voice and freedom set at the time of partition and thereafter. Problem of men-woman relationship, women sexuality, love, infatuation, jealousy, marriage and gender roles have been presented at a time when women had no voice to assert their rights.

While Deshpande presents her character as a very confident and self-esteem woman, Kapur shows Virmati to be a brand new woman with her own unique sensibility. Ida, is the narrator of Difficult Daughters and Virmati is the difficult daughter of Kasturi, who is a ten year old girl and the eldest daughter of a traditional Punjabi household. Though she takes care of the young ones and
does all the domestic duties, she never gets any affection. With the awakening of the country in nationalistic fervor and partition politics, the ‘mighty empire’ is fighting for survival. While the entire country is politically active, Virmati’s impression of the bloody riot has made her depressed as she considers it as the death of the civilization and the beginning of the ‘Dark age’ as she is happy only with the slogan ‘India belongs to Indian’. But she is dissatisfied with the Hindu Code Bill and she aspires to “remove the inequality between two wives” (DD 252) and assert a woman’s right to achieve her dues from her husband who has a co-wife and her child will get a share from her step mother.

Unlike Deshpande’s Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Virmati’s character develops according to the social conditions and changes that take place around her. Yet she proves to be self-assured and independent and confronts most of the norms of her age. Kapur succeeds in re-creating the troubled times and sketching a realistic picture of a country in transition. But after being socially not accepted for so many years, Virmati succumbs to the enticement of marrying the Professor. This time she feels trapped, particularly since she must adjust to the Professor’s first family, who naturally hates her. Subsequently, she tries to impose the same kind of restrictions on her daughter which her parents had inflicted upon her. Kapur seems to suggest that, even with education and
economic independence, what is essential is to face the fact that there is more in life than dependence on marriage, parents and other such institutions.

It is not easy to find a concrete answer to the questions posed by these women. In the novels of both Deshpande and Kapur, one has pictures of women who are defiant, intelligent, educated and assertive. Eventually they defeat the external forces which try to suppress their self and identity. The restoration of their lives seems to take place because of their inner strength, determination and, ultimately, their ability to rely on themselves.

Through the life of Virmati, Kapur proves that breaking the walls of old prisons is not easy. Virmati unfetters the shackles of an arranged marriage, only to fall into a troubled and fugitive relationship which holds her a slave for almost all her life. Yet one cannot undermine the role of the two main factors which can give a woman some semblance of freedom and the ability to assert herself, education and economic independence. But to be able to strike independent roots and grow requires much more and what is necessary is to destroy the patriarchal mold, and for Virmati to have tried to do that in the forties was a great achievement.

Both Virmati in *Difficult Daughters* and Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* come up with bold decisions when they are in solitude. Their ideas and actions are not influenced by the persisting norms of the patriarchal society and their
decisions are clear and without any confusion. Education and economic independence have given them courage to come up with such decisions that have made their life so meaningful.

Sudha Sri observes that the turning point in the life of Virmati in Difficult Daughters comes with the birth of a daughter who is named ‘Ida’ meaning “a new state and a blank beginning”. During her life time, her relationship with Ida is one of misapprehensions, of accusations of “Living only for oneself, disappointing the father of Ida”. (Sri 150) The narrator of the novel is very conscious right from the beginning that the one thing she has wanted is not to be like her mother. In contrast, in the end, after having traced her mother’s legacy, she changes her mind for she too has faced disasters in life. She is husbandless because of a divorce and she is childless too. The family is sorry for this difficult daughter, Ida, too for she is the offspring of Virmati, who herself has been a very different woman. Difficult Daughters is a perfect representation of the commotion of a woman who tries to overcome her social barriers and cultural identity to build a self-identity. This attempt however leaves the woman rigid and desolate. Virmati’s tragedy is the tragedy of desire, her thirst for independence and the quest for identity.
Deshpande gives *The Dark Holds No Terrors* an open ending in that Saru is now ready to speak to Manu. Having won over her fears she is prepared to meet him and whether she goes back to him or not will depend upon whether Manu is ready to accept her as she is now a defiant, self-contained and confident woman. Through the character of Saru, Deshpande shatters the myth that financial independence brings freedom and a sense of identity. It is evident that a working woman may quite often find herself in a more horrifying situation than a non-working one.

Indu in *Roots and Shadows* like Saru is also radical and takes the bold step of marrying a man of her own choice against the wishes of her family. Similar to Saru, she also undergoes the process of disillusionment as she has thought that marriage will give her happiness and an identity of her own, but this does not happen. She realizes that marriage, the terrain of hope for every girl, is nothing but another trap. It is an enclosure which hinders the movement towards autonomy and self-realization.

The life of Indu is a paradox for she loves Jayant, yet she feels that in loving and marrying him she has lost a part of her real self. Her married life seems hypocritical as she does not divulge her real feelings before Jayant. She fears that this act may disappoint him as Indu wants to be a writer and she is a journalist.
But even Jayant expects her to do the typecast, insincere work the editor wants her to do. He substantiates that by often quoting their need for money and ultimately Indu feels that she has sacrificed her individuality to please Jayant. She has no satisfaction even professionally because she must follow whatever her editor dictates and she could not work according to her conscience. A disheartened Indu returns to her maternal home in a state of confusion. She is hurt when her old Uncle tells her that for a woman, intelligence is always a burden.

At home Indu is able to analyze her relationship with Jayant dispassionately. She meets her childhood friend, Naren and in Naren’s company Indu can disclose her real self. In fact, her sexual encounter with Naren helps her to recognize what was wrong with her sexual relationship with Jayant. But Indu does not see what she has done with Naren as adulterous or erroneous. She remarks:

Wronging Jayant? But had I not wronged Jayant even before this.
By pretending, by giving him a spurious coin instead of the genuine kind. I had cheated him of my true self. That I thought dishonorable, dishonest much more than this, what I have done with Naren. (R&S 188)
Deshpande has represented the new woman who is aware of her situation, her quest, her identity, her place and role in the family and in society through the character of Indu. In Indu, the feminine sensibilities of the new women are expressed with precision and especially she illustrates the new attitude towards sex.

Like Indu in Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*, Kapur, through Astha in *A Married Woman*, has taken writing as a protest which she has made as her way to present the plot from the point of a woman's experience. Kapur discusses diverse issues emerging out of a socio-political turmoil in the country. She has described the Indian male sensitivity of women as a holy cow even though women are not very interested in history. Adding to the woe, those in power are trying to twist and turn historical facts to serve their own purposes, in a very realistic way.

A斯塔’s parents are simple and God fearing, very protective and expect her to conform to the customs and she is their only child. Her father wishes her to have a successful career and so be independent. In complete contradiction to his views, Astha’s mother only thinks of her successful marriage. Astha’s “diet of mushy novels and thoughts of marriage” (MW 8) makes her think that she should
search for a boyfriend. Bunty and Rohan are the ones who come in her sphere of friends but their relationship leaves a sad yearning in Astha’s heart.

As per the wishes of her parents, Astha enters into an arranged marriage. She is always submissive and wishes to be devoted to her family who had seen how her mother had been dedicated to the family and husband and she deems that this is what her role is in future. Complying with her husband’s wishes, Astha becomes a school teacher. She looks after her husband and agrees to whatever he says. Her husband does not give any importance to her job as it is just a time pass. Astha’s husband is “MBA foreign returned” (MW 33) and he craves for a male offspring. But when she says that the onus of bearing a male child rests on the man and not the woman, her husband looks annoyed of having an educated woman for a wife. He is seen busy in crafting a successful business and future of his family and is less concerned for the wife. “Somewhere along the way Hemant’s attitude to Astha changed. She told herself it was only slightly but is oppressed”. (MW 66)

The conflict grows in Astha and she suffers from recurring migraines. Astha has to fulfill the demands of the growing children, cope with the pressure at home, and withstand the silent disapproval of the in-law. She also has to tolerate the attitude of an unresponsive husband who remains barely insensitive. Astha
finds an escape through her writings and sketching and she also attempted to write poems, but her poetic ventures were not appreciated by the husband. The conventions of the patriarchal society demand that Astha is not treated as an equal by him. Even in money matters he does not consult her but whenever Astha inquires him he simply crushes Astha’s rights to speak.

Asth a questions the established norms in her search for her identity. She has led a life of sacrifice and adjustment but it has failed. She has longed to have her husband appreciate her peaceful family but now she is a matured woman. As she continues with her paintings that exhibits her quest for identity and the sensibilities of a confident woman, she feels more convinced she has ever been before. “She thought of her name. Faith, Faith in herself, it was all she had” (R&S 299). Though the novel has been presented in a feminine perspective, Kapur has always given fair treatment to her male characters. She has showed Hemant in a very positive way. Her depiction of Hemant as a totally real and believable character and a typical, insensitive, business oriented man who also loves his family deeply is a perfect demonstration of her attitude towards the male characters. Astha’s conflict between the domineering patriarchal customs and her creative acumen and awareness brings out the feminine receptivity’s that are exhibited in this novel.
Both Indu, and Astha too dwell on deep thoughts when they move alone. They transform into new women and think that they are responsible for the misdeeds in this family. Equally the women are quite adventurous and both the writers have presented their respective novels from the perspectives of women.

Similarly, Jaya in *That Long Silence* has organized her entire life around her husband Mohan and this superficial contentment is shattered by a crisis. Mohan is accused of some financial mismanagement and his friend advises him to live low till the problem is resolved.

Women are set to perform multifarious roles like being an obedient wife, courteous daughter and a caring mother. Jaya is also a writer, like Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, but social and family pressures never allow her talent to thrive or let her identity surface. Through the characters of Jaya and Indu, Deshpande brilliantly portrays the loneliness of a woman living silently in a cage called marriage. Bhawana Dwivedi remarks:

Deshpande brings out the problem of marriage as an evil social practice because right from the beginning to the end it is the history of a woman’s suppression, a long-drawn-out drama of negotiation in which she feels uncertain of her position. This is a deal in which the poor woman is literally bracketed with an animal, for she
cannot exercise her reasoning or intelligence and express her
genuine individual concerns. (Dwivedi 117)

Deshpande makes the reader realize the dilemma of married women through her character Jaya for That Long Silence ends on an ambiguous note. Though Jaya is presented as a courageous woman who tries to enter the norms of a new woman through her bold actions and writings, her married life completely depends on the decision on Mohan. The way Deshpande has wrapped up the novel seems to be a setback to her voice for women’s liberation, but through this conclusion she has provided the precise depiction of the existing scenario of womenfolk in India even now.

Likewise, Kapur’s novel Home discusses the problems faced by the ordinary middle class family. If Deshpande’s That Long Silence is set in Mumbai, Kapur’s novel Home has its setting in Delhi. Banwarilal, the main character is the patriarch of a textile business, owns a fabric business in Karol Bagh in New Delhi. He believes in conforming to the values of traditional patriarchal norms which dictates that men would work out of home and women within. The duty of the men is to carry forward the family line, while women facilitate their mission.

Both brothers conduct their lives and their business according to the wishes of their father. When Banwarilal dies, the burden of the family falls on
Yashpal who happens to be the elder son. He has a widowed sister who lost her husband at a very early age and she with her son Vicky join them in their house at Karol Bagh. It begins with the story of Sona and Rupa, two childless sisters. Sona is fairer and is married to the Banwarilal family and the unlucky Rupa is married to a junior government officer. In the beginning, the story traces the lives of two sisters and moves further to concentrate on the activities of the Banwarilal family. The novel also draws more episodes of exploitations in the joint family. It moves to the second generation after the birth of Sona’s children after a long wait for ten years. The sister Rupa stays childless forever but is found to be happier than the other.

_Home_ is a depiction of the strangely appealing journey of three generations. Nisha is a representative of their generation. In this novel, Nisha, is a new woman, a more assertive, self-assured; and confident one. As a young college girl, she desires to apply her mind and soul to work as a business woman. She wants to be the embodiment of the woman of the new millennium in its actual sense and in her earlier age, she is declared as Mangli. To make matters worse, Nisha in her infancy falls prey to the incestuous desires of Vicky, a fifteen year old cousin which affects her psychologically. Kapur brings out the gender based violence in the family and shows how the woman’s body is the target.
The physical assault, Elizabeth Stanko articulates, “endures an invasion of the self, the intrusion of the inner space, a violation of her sexual and physical autonomy”. (Stanko 69) No one could understand the reason behind her psychological disturbance and she is sent to Rupa's home for a change. Rupa and her husband understand that Vicky is responsible for Nisha's wretched condition. They could not do anything but sympathize with her and Nisha is admitted to a college where she meets Pratibha a very ambitious girl and Nisha wants to emulate her. In the college she falls in love with Suresh, a student of an engineering college and Nisha daringly roams with him and she is not afraid of anybody. She has a good academic performance and she takes that lightly with lots of over confidence and gives attention to her clothing and appearance.

Her brother calls her, enquires about her relationship and doubts her trustworthiness. She retorts saying “Who you are to decide whether I am trustworthy”? (Home 199) and this rebellious remark reflects her modernity. Suresh, on the other hand, tries to convey her family that his intentions are pure and he only wants Nisha. He clearly states that he does not need dowry or does not call for fancy wedding. He goes on further by saying that he is not bothered even if she is a Mangli. On account of this, she is moved by his nobility. She says to her mother, “Who cares about castes these days? What you really want is to sell me
in the market”, she sobbed with indignant emotion. “Sell me and be done with it. What are you waiting for”? (Home 200)

Nisha refuses to follow the customary marriage. She refuses to be a doll to be sold in the market and her quest for identity and freedom as a human being extensively articulates Kapur’s feminine sensibility. Nisha aspires for establishing her identity with much struggle and with her obstinate approach, they marry and after ten months of marriage she gives birth to twins. Being an educated and spirited new woman, can refuse to be treated as an object and establishes her own identity. It is necessary to note that she belongs to middle class family in the metropolis, is born and brought up in India, where social and cultural scenario is different than that of western countries. At the end of the novel, Nisha is forced to give up her ambition of running a business. She thinks that she needs to take care of her home more than that of her own business and she has established that she is a new woman in every sense, but in her entrepreneurship. Kapur deliberately does this to bring to limelight the gender bias that makes even the new woman succumb to its cruel claws. Clara Nubile also observes, “Being a woman in modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of, ‘being a woman-wife-mother”’. (Nubile 99)

Nisha’s quest for self-identity, struggle for economic, independent existence, and her equality with men depend upon Indian social ethos. In this
regard Laxmi Sharma ruminates: “The emergence of new women in the realm of social, economic, cultural and racial aspects will also be probed. The concept of new woman in Indian society varies from the one in the west”. (Sharma 169)

Nisha resembles Urmi in Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine*. Distressed by the loss of her daughter, Urmi rejects the consolation offered by her mother or her childhood friend, Vanaa. At this moment, in her grief stricken state, Urmi is drawn towards the lives of three very different women. The novel moves around these three women which brings courage and strength to the characters, especially Urmi.

The first woman who influences Urmi is Mira, her dead mother-in-law. This happens by chance when she comes across an old trunk in the attic of the house where she finds the poems written by Mira. These poems depict the loneliness of the unhappy marriage of her mother-in-law who died after giving birth to her son at an early age of twenty two. The poems perturb her emotions as they display the absolute hatred of her sexual dislike with her husband. Like Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, through Mira, Deshpande presents the psychological violence of compulsion within personal relationships. Mira’s journals and poetry reveal the pain of a vibrant young woman trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage. As a gifted writer Mira was not given much exposure or acknowledgement. In Mira’s diaries she could hear the cry against rape and the
torment of a flair that was trampled before it could flourish. As she was a woman, her talent was curtailed from achieving limelight and her voice is muted and silenced.

Deshpande gives many instance of extra-marital love in her novels, though this does not provide a true solution to the problem s of incompatibility. It shows the urge of the woman to assert herself whether it is inside marriage or outside it. The married life of this kind of women, whether working or not, ends in discontent. At times Urmila finds it hard to control herself and wishes that “I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out intact and whole, when he returned”. (TBV 164-65) The apprehension of this demand of sex by women has been effectively suggested by Deshpande. As Urmi develops friendship with Dr.Bhaskar, the conflict between her mind and heart becomes obvious. Her mother objects and Vanaa attempts to check her and she quietly replies to them, “I’m safe”. (TBV 165) The dilemma of the woman is evident when she rejects her husband Kishore just to show that she can live without him. She replies:

And yet it seems to me that this responding to Bhaskar is the only way of revealing the mushy adolescent with dreams of living happily ever after with Kishore, who is trapped inside me, of finding out what is left when she is gone. (TBV 166)
These feelings of having sex as adventure have started intimidating the age-old establishment of marriage which is based on fidelity and mutual love. Deshpande takes a daring step forward in projecting a woman’s biological needs and also raises the question of the woman’s right over her body which cannot be violated even in marriage. The novel can best be summed in the words of Subhash K. Jhathus:

The Binding Vine is one of the few contemporary Indian novels to discuss its heroine’s sexuality, her ‘passion,’ with a measure of unrepentant concern. In this novel Deshpande travels much further down the road in exploring the working women’s needs of the head, heart and further down the anatomy than her earlier novel.

(Jhathus 34)

Urmila does not reveal any radical attitude towards the institution of marriage. Though she is educated and very bold, she argues with Dr. Bhaskar that marriage is a necessity for women just like the innocent and ignorant Shakutai, because it means security. Deshpande suggests that there is incompatibility between Kishore and Urmila because of Kishore’s restrained and introvert nature. The confession of Urmila is that she is conquered by a longing for physical fulfillment during the absence of her husband. Her desire is almost fulfilled when Dr. Bhaskar declares that he is in love with Urmila. This provides her with an
opportunity for satisfying this urge. Urmi, though she comes extremely close to infidelity, refuses this offer because she is virtuous. She opines that it is easier and simpler to be a good wife. Thus she is not the kind to overstep her limitations and tarnish the establishment of marriage.

The anxiety of the mother in the patriarchal society is the true sense of the appeal of Shakutai. Like all mothers of her class in the society, she hopes that someone would marry her daughter and give her a happy life. This makes her to keep the rape a secret. Though she understands the reality, she pretends that what happened to her daughter is just an accident and wants others too to believe that. S. Indira in her article rightly perceives, “The Binding Vine touches a chord in every woman as she responds to it with recognition of doubts, complexes, fears, desires and suffering being mirrored in the narration of Urmila, the protagonist”. (Indira 20)

Throughout the novel, Shakutai blames Kalpana for dressing well and for trying to create her a new life. Shakutai feels that Kalpana’s serious blunder is that she fears no one and she says that she suffered only because of that. According to Shakutai, “Women must know fear”. (TBV 148) Urmi’s argument that the man who injured and wronged her is to blame, does not register. For
Shakutai the roles are clearly delineated and it is women’s place to be afraid of everything.

By the end of the novel, Urmī’s faith in love is confirmed and she hopes that one day she will be able to break Kishore’s introvert shield and reach his intimate being. At the same time she decides to get Kalpana’s story and Mira’s poems published, though she was called a traitor by Vanaa and Sakutai. Finally in this web of loss and despair Urmī sees the radiance of optimism, sympathy and love. Like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Urmī realizes that one has to get on with one’s life. With a sense of disillusionment also comes resolution and she must break the silence. For her, to break the silence, the stories of Kalpana and Mira must come out.

Deshpande has depicted her protagonist as the true manifestation of a woman, revolting and finally capitulating with herself. In this context Rushmeet Kaur Arneja observes,

Shashi Deshpande has portrayed Urmila as a chaste woman whose sympathy for the less fortunate women is sparked off by the death of her daughter Anu. Despite her frustrations, longing for the compassion and love of her husband Urmila is not a radical feminist, but one who comes to
term with her own sufferings and anxieties when she sees the harsh realities of life. (Arneja 442)

*The Binding Vine* is Deshpande’s strongest statement regarding sexual violence against women. The novel touches on the delicate issue of marital rape and a woman’s helplessness after marriage to a man she does not love. It is a tremendously powerful portrayal of women’s fight to survive in a terrible, violent world where there is no easy way out.

If Deshpande presents Urmi as a woman with more sense of fidelity, Kapur presents her Nina in *The Immigrant* as a woman with a different perspective. The novel begins with the depiction of the boring life of Nina nearing the age of thirty who has lost all opportunities of married life, The age old thinking that marriage is the ultimate goal of a girl fills her thought and she feels that her life has been meaningless so far. She says, “We are conditioned to think a woman’s fulfillment lies in birth and motherhood, just as we are conditioned to feel failures if we don’t marry”. (*The Immigrant* 230) She has sexual relationship with Rahul, her boyfriend, before marriage. At this time, she meets Ananda, a Canada based dentist who ignites a desire to look beyond her life in Delhi and proposes to marry her. Their regular meeting leads to a gradual liking for each other and they decide to get married. As per her mother’s wish she marries him and thereby she
wishes to make their marriage confined to the traditional Indian values. Lydia Gomes in her dissertation pronounces:

> It is obvious at this time in the story that marriage and family are quite important to Nina, and that despite her independence and education, her unconventional status of being an unmarried, thirty year old woman in India drives her willingly into accepting a proposal for an arranged marriage. Thus she has succumbed to the demands of a traditional culture. (Gomes 27)

Nina gets introduced to a life that she once thought was out of her reach for in marrying Ananda, she gets a brand new identity as an expatriate. Her old life is left behind along with her earlier individuality and her identity as a lecturer in a prestigious college in Delhi has vanished. When she reaches Canada as Mrs. Ananda, she faces an onslaught on her self-respect when she is ruthlessly detained at the airport.

The entry into Canada begins with a sense of displacement in the name of color, costume, jewelry and makes her feel out of place. The behavior of Ananda also changes in Canada for his repeated statement of the superior Canadian life in contradicting his faith in the rich tradition of India confuses Nina. Her perspective is different from that of Ananda and the difficulty in identifying
herself with the new environment and idle long hours at home without friends leads to loneliness. The vastness of Canada with little population makes her long for human interaction. The narrator reflects:

The immigrant who comes as a wife has a more difficult time. If work exists for her it is in the future, and after much finding feet. At present all she is, is a wife, and a wife is alone for many hours. There will come a day when even books are powerless to distract. When the house and its conveniences can no longer completely charm or compensate. Then she realizes she is an immigrant for life.

(The Immigrant 124)

Nina is desperate and she joins a mother’s club to fill her solitude which eventually depresses her more as it reminds her of her childless state and dissatisfactory sexual life with Ananda. When Ananda could not satisfy her in sex, she is reminded of her past sex with Rahul. She even goes on to compare both of them. Even though, she was a lecturer in a prestigious college in Delhi, she takes up a menial job in the library, and becomes a member of a feminist group. This provides her a brief haven but her displaced status and solitude completely isolate her. Nina strays from her own virtue of morality and finds an extra marital affair with Anton, who was a fellow student in her library science class. Her inclination towards Anton makes her say, “I am married too. But it’s stupid to
confine yourself to one person for your whole life. What about adventure, what about experiencing differences? Nobody owns anybody, you know”. (*The Immigrant* 261) In this process she faces a number of setbacks but is undeterred in her resolve.

Toward the end of the novel when Nina feels ruined by her own unfaithfulness with Anton, she starts eating fish, and eventually meat. “After she had sex with Anton, it seemed especially hypocritical to hang on to vegetables”. (*The Immigrant* 267) She thus parallels her fidelity and vegetarianism to all that is unadulterated and Indian, and her infidelity and eating of meat to that which is contaminated and Canadian. This also indicates a shift in her transnational habits, which throughout the story is constantly changing. The change in her perspective may be due to the reason that she wants to get rid of the age old habit of being patient on the husband’s infidelity. Kapur, through Nina, presents the new idea of retaliation for Ananda’s discreet relationship with Amanda which is matched by her extra-marital relationship with Anton. She leaves Canada all alone for the cremation of her mother for which Ananda does not provide any support. Her life becomes more miserable and this makes her to fly to the University of New Brunswick for an interview.

Susila Singh parallels the ending of *Sons and Lovers* to the ending of *The Immigrant* as Paul Morel at the end of the novel is wandering as a lonely cloud. She reveals:
Paul Morel’s one part of the life has ended and next is yet to begin. In *The Immigrant* Nisha’s dream of a happy married life ends with a sour note and she is surging ahead with the hope of establishing herself independently on her own foot in an alien country. (Singh 284)

Lydia repeats that Nina’s thoughts have continuously changed all through the novel. These changes were influenced by something meaningful that had occurred as a result of her marriage and as a result of Amanda’s patriarchal actions. And every change altered her own identity for the woman who left India was not the same woman who returned to India. Canadian values and society had an important impact on this change. In this context, Lydia Gomes reflects “As portrayed by the author, the freedoms of western society sometimes superseded certain constraints of Indian cultural demands and universal patriarchy by allowing Nina the choice to make certain decisions in her own life”. (Gomes 39)

Kapur suggests that her journey of self-discovery into the woman she becomes in the end is one of independence and her preference. Kapur does not hint on what happened in the life of Nina after she left Ananda to start a life of her own. It was just a matter of time for Kapur’s Nina to change herself into a
revolutionary woman, free from the husband’s clutches. But Deshpande presents her women characters in *A Matter of Time* as women of great virtue and purity. Especially she has carved the character of Kalyani who lives with her husband for almost three decades without even speaking to him as per his wish. The novel discusses the lives of Manorama, Kalyani, Sumi and Aru women from four different generations. Aru is the youngest of all and her tumultuous adolescence and the agonizing process by which she attains maturity are sketched by Deshpande.

Gopal walks out of the life of his wife Sumi and his three daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. They return to the shelter of the Big House where Sumi’s parents Kalyani and Sripathi live. The novel talks with strength and daring about the desertion of Sumi’s husband. Sumi takes up the challenge by picking up a job and boldly faces the task of educating the girls and helps them give a firm footing in their life. The scene of Gopal’s desertion is described by Keerthi Ramachandra in these words:

One evening, while Sumi is watching a film on T.V. about circus, “without the dirt, the smells, the fear and despair of the real thing, but sanitized bacteria free” Gopal tells her he wants to talk to her. And without any preamble says what he has to. He waits for Sumi’s reaction, but within moments both realize that there’s nothing
more to be said he leaves as quietly as he had entered.

(Ramachandra 21)

Aru is the most affected by the events that happen around her. She is unable to understand her father’s abandonment, her mother’s clear apathy or the unfair silence between her grandparents. She could not comprehend how Kalyani accepted a much feared uncle as a husband. For Manorama, who is the eldest of the four, Kalyani has become a visible symbol of failure to produce a son. This is her view on her daughter who sacrifices her life to fulfill the wish of her mother.

Aru could not understand how her grandmother could withstand this cruelty and never stood up to defend herself. Kalyani survives her mother’s “myriad acts of cruelty” (AMT 151) and her husband’s rejection without much ado. She loves her daughter and granddaughters as she never ill-treats them for being of female gender. In fact, Manorama is a loser and her diffidence did not allow her to enjoy anything and she dies as a resentful woman, whereas Kalyani being suppressed by the oppressors enjoys her life with her daughter Sumi and granddaughters. Gur Pyari Jandial imitates “It is Kalyani who carries within her a sense of history – the Big House is more than just a house to her despite the fact she has had a traumatic past”. (Jandial 53)
The novel is largely about Aru’s quest for an identity and hers is the voice of feminism. She fills the blank left in their lives by Gopal. Aru is rebellious and wants to punish her father and she even questions her father “Why did you get married at all, why did you have children?” (AMT 47) As Aru is totally annoyed to see the sufferings of her mother and grandmother, she declares that she is not interested in marriage at all. Saluja pronounces. “Aru represents the feminist voice in the novel as she is very critical of her father and wants to see him pay for what he did to her mother. It is Aru who questions the injustice against women. The older generation is silent on the oppressing forces of patriarchy whereas the younger generation is revolutionary” (Saluja 71) Aru enrolls in a women’s activist group and befriends Sarekha, a lawyer, to take revenge on her father. Aru believes that she has to fight it out till the end to see that justice is granted to her, but Aru overcomes her bitterness gradually. She realizes that she must let her father go as her mother has done. She has a fascination for law and that makes her pursue a career in law.

Slowly Aru gains maturity and understands the point of view of others too. Like a child she wants to enjoy a cheerful existence which she had when things were normal in her family. When she hears of the death of her mother Sumi, she rushes to Kalyani’s feet and kneeling by her hunched body says, “Amma, I’m here, I’m your daughter, I’m your son, I’m here with you”. (AMT 233) Thus Aru tries to take over the responsibilities of the family like a son and...
uncertainty clear soon. She patiently listens to her grandmother’s story and develops a very special bond with her. The novel ends, not on a note of despair but of hope for it ends not with Sumi’s death, but with Aru’s life.

The novel *A Matter of Time* brings out the victimization of women like Manorama whose minds are warped by their fears and insecurities. In Aru and Sumi, one can see a glimpse of Deshpande’s vociferous feminism wherein she emphasizes the importance of a woman’s ability to be self-dependent. Sumi, Aru, Charu and Seema survive because their education, self-assurance and audacity give them power. Kalyani survives because she never permits herself to become better and she always works for the welfare of their daughters and granddaughters. In the love she shares with them, her life finds fulfillment, in spite of the terrible loss and agony she endures at the hands of Sripathi and Manorama. The New Woman with all her sensibilities may be Aru, but the change starts from Kalyani. She endures the suffering and never passes the same venom to the next generations who absorbs the bad and emits the good to her daughter and granddaughters. Therefore she becomes the pioneer to show the path of love and affection to the women.

Deshpande’s *A Matter of Time*, and Kapur’s latest novel *Custody* are an exemplification of the New Woman of this contemporary world. While Deshpande speaks about the virtues and values of the Indian women and
carefully advocates the need for the exhibition of feminine sensibilities, Kapur has presented an entirely contradictory feminine personality in Shagun who oversteps the marital boundaries to have sexual relationship with a man whom she thinks is a perfect match for her physically and applies for divorce from her husband to get married to the new lover.

Raman and Shagun are married and live happily and comfortably with their two children. Raman works in a company that invests largely in the manufacture of soft drinks. The trouble starts when Raman’s boss Ashok Khanna comes into the picture. Shagun is a very beautiful lady who got married at an early age and Ashok is attracted by her beauty. “In her color, her greenish eyes and her demeanor, she was a perfect blend of east and west”. (Custody 4) Shagun is also captivated by his adoring expressions and enchanting grace which makes her leave behind the essential limitations of marriage and defy its holiness. She begins to struggle herself to define her roles as wife, mother and lover. When she asks Raman for a divorce, he descends into anger and self-gratification as his life is shattered by the action. She is in a dilemma on whether she should uphold the traditional values or to strike out as a rebel. Her mother intervenes by pointing the subtleties of patriarchal views of an erring wife and tries to chastise her and bring her back into the orbit of conventional social morality. She advises her, “The house rests upon a woman. In your children
happiness, your husband happiness lies your own. Anything else is just temporary". *(Custody 80)*

Shagun’s mother begs her not to bring shame to the family and she brings to limelight the plight of most Indian women when she says, “You think all wives love their husbands? But they stay married. You are so idealistic. You don’t think about the long term. What about the society? What about your children”? *(Custody 79)* Though Shagun does not lend her ears to her words, she believes in the words of Ashok who compares her state with that of Princess Diana. He says, “Diana followed her heart and you must follow yours. We have only one life and everybody wants to live it the best way they can”. *(Custody 85)*

Shagun pulls out of her dilemma by following her heart and seeks a divorce from Raman and starts a new life with Ashok Khanna. The sacredness of marriage which gives much more importance to children and family is lost by her action of obtaining divorce. Asha Sharan enunciates:

Shagun as a ‘new woman’ realizes the potential of her ‘being’ through a process of becoming by launching herself on private battle with society on the premise of the priority of natural inclinations over social proprieties. She, as a woman, in this new relationship of her choice is a significant and new literary construct, aware of the choices open to her and awakened to the complex and
personalized patterns of living and loving against the hostile and undermining dominant view. (Sharan 68)

Shagun uses her sexuality as an instrument to gain independence over her body after marriage. Her action confronts the age old patriarchal mechanisms of surveillance and control. Shagun’s sexuality is a source of empowerment for her but Kapur brings in another character in the novel, Ishita to just portray how body restrains a woman. Generally, women are defined by their bodily functions in contrast to men who are in total control and apparently unblemished. Ishita is married to Suryakanta to propagate the heredity of the family. Unfortunately she is unable to conceive and she is discarded by the family members and the society that instigates numerous psychosomatic harassments by cataloging her as ‘incomplete’ and ‘insignificant’. Reber comments, “child bearing has been viewed as a valuable gender-specific role to women. Therefore, women who are unable to bear children, experience a pervasive sense of personal failure”. (Reber 74)

For Ishita, the relationship between herself and her body is marked by a sense of alienation. She feels that her body has let her down. Germaine Greer agrees to this statement:

Body is the battlefield where woman fights for liberation. It is through her body that oppression works, reifying her. Her physicality is a medium for others to work on; her job is to act as
their viceroy, presenting her body for their ministrations, and applying to her body the treatment that have been ordained. (Greer 106)

Ishita is doubly exiled from her body once as a woman, an outsider to patriarchal power, and next as a barren woman who cannot accomplish her biological providence. Ishita, unlike Shagun is a prey to the tyrannical male-controlled society as she overcomes her disability to experience liberation for she gets divorce from her husband. Ishita is attracted towards the divorced Raman and the temptation of familial fulfilment, which has so far evaded her is overcome in her second attempt, when Ishita marries Raman. This marriage helps her reclaim her social status and she returns “to the status so rudely snatched from her”. (Custody 303) Ishita’s union to Raman empowers her and gives her strength to fight for the household’s common target: the custody of his children. Thus it paves way for the dispute as suggested by the title “Custody”, for the crude battle for guardianship of their children begins.

The innocent children are torn between their divorced parents. Each character has a attitude that reflects the modern virtues this world has been adapting. Kapur creates a sublime environment that reveals the various catastrophes the family undergoes when the marriage is at stake. The main victims are the children whose mental and physical disturbances are ignored by the ego of their parents. Here Kapur takes on a journey into the mindsets of the children
who turn out to be the ultimate sufferers. Ishita could not dominate over the teenage boy whereas she takes control of the little girl as she changes her name from ‘Roohi’ to ‘Roopi’. As Ishita is constantly under the watchful eyes of the society, she is forced to demonstrate to herself and to the others that she is a ‘good’ loving mother for Roohi. Being entrapped in such a suffocating family, her egoistic love compels her to break all the democratic ethical agreements set.

Though Ishita is a victim of the patriarchal norms, she turns into an oppressor. She never speaks to Shagun and is never willing to understand her as a woman who wants to be happy and she hates her from the bottom of her heart as she says, “there are two kinds of mothers. The ones who give birth to babies, and then forget about them, and the other ones who look after the babies for the rest of their lives”. (Custody 329) Ishita envies Shagun’s strong will and individual success which is the reason for her intense rage and hatred who spits fire when she says, “How could New York tolerate the presence of such a woman? How come its forces hadn’t combined to kill her”? (Custody 379) Roohi’s custody is her last chance to heal her past frustrations and be accepted as ‘a good mother’ and commendable wife by all those who abide by patriarchal socio-cultural norms. According to Adrienne Rich, “Motherhood is not only a core human relationship but a political institution, a keystone to the domination in every sphere of women by men”. (Rich 216)

Similar to Deshpande, Kapur in Custody presents two opposing aspects of the female person i.e unfaithfulness and childlessness. Here, Kapur examines
how a woman begins to grow as an individual and the primary center of collision for her is her marriage, which had limited her space and freedom. The woman now has moved to the center and has become an important entity in the social set up. Kapur presents extramarital love and uses sexual freedom as an instrument of resistance to outwit patriarchal myths and social standards. She depicts Shagun who rejoices her sexuality and reclaims its generative principles through a purposeful transposition of male-controlled principles. Her sexuality is a province of enjoyment and agency in which she is authorized to use her body for herself. She is dead against the male subjugated and masculine ideas of surveillance and control. In contrast, Kapur presents Ishita who is thrown out of her home for her plight of being unable to conceive. She voices for Raman who stands vulnerable before the might of Shagun.

* Custody* has to be studied in comparison with Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* where Deshpande presents another kind of attitude, that raises the delicate issue of sexual fidelity, through the life of Madhu. While Shagun in *Custody* is a rebellious woman, Madhu suffers for the fault that is not exactly hers. She marries Som and gives birth to her son, Aditya. Deshpande gives importance to motherhood in this novel as stressed by Kapur through the character of Ishita. Madhu says, “A Child’s birth is a rebirth of a woman, its like becoming part of the world once again”. (SR 88) She suffers for being so frank to
her husband by telling her premarital sex activity which she was forced to accept. When she reveals the incident to Som, she thinks that Som would take this as an accident in her life but ends up as a total misjudgment. Som thinks otherwise as he snatches the single fact of her lost chastity. They have a son, Aditya, and Madhu completely loses herself in her love for her son. But the irritation of Som leads to quarrels with Madhu all day and night. One day Adit sees his father bang his mother on a wall. Agonized he moves away and never returns and he was killed in a bomb blast during a riot which makes Madhu lose her heart.

Madhu’s mind is diverted from her pain when Chandru convinces her into taking the job of writing the biography of Savitri Bai. Madhu hopes to forget her sorrow and anguish in her new venture. She has known Savitribai Indonekar, from her childhood. The classical dancer was a New Woman even when Madhu was a child and she moves to the next door of Madhu with her lover, a Muslim Gulam Saab, a tabla accompanist. Earlier she was the daughter-in-law of a traditional and conservative Brahmin family. She had given up that life for the sake of learning music and devotes herself to that art. Initially she takes the help of Ghulam Saab, the tabla player, but later on she gives up her lover too and devotes completely herself to music. Savitribai meets the challenges that life throws her way, one by one and deals with them successfully. With a single mindedness of purpose, she asserts her own self and is self-reliant and self-
sufficient. This quality is visible even to the publisher who asks Madhu to take interviews and remarks: “Her life is like a novel”. (SR 19) P.G. Joshi has commented:

In marrying her accompanist and Tabla player Ghulam Saab, she decolonizes the patriarchy in more ways than one. Firstly, she is already a married woman from a respectable Brahmin family of Pune. Secondly, the man she married is a Muslim. Leela too marries out of her caste and her religion and decolonizes the patriarchy. (Joshi 112)

The reader can see that Leela is found to be busy in her party politics, Savitribai in her music and Madhu in her writings. All belong to an educated class, making efforts to rise professionally and in this race ignore their traditional female roles. Deshpande has concentrated only in the professional advancement of her protagonists, and has made her protagonist come a long way from the traditional environment. Her women are rebellious because that is the only way they can achieve what they desire and Savitribai is exemplary of this quality.

Savitribai’s revolt against the longstanding customs and the way she discards her family and society in order to reach her goal are remarkable. She is courageous enough to elope with Ghulam Saab and has a daughter Munni with him. Later, Munni rejects the name given by her parents, and calls herself
Meenakshi. This is just indicative of her denunciation of the life led by her parents, and her longing for respect and Madhu and Munni get closer together.

Munni later moves to her grandparents breaking the bond from her parents and gets a new identity as Shailaja Joshi. After a long period of time, Madhu meets Munni in a bus in Mumbai but Munni pretends that she does not recognize her. Munni has actually wanted to forget the past. Madhu wonders how one can refuse the mother and how a mother can reject one’s own child. But here one finds in Bai the emergence of the new woman who takes decisions on her own, no matter what price she pays for them. Savitribai’s assertion of identity and individuality does not come without a price:

Munni’s rejection was the price Bai paid. Munni who yearned for the commonplace, the ordinary, and stifled everything that connected to her parents... Bai lost her daughter, but her life moved on. Even today, sick, old, dying, childless, when everything seems to have ended for her, she's not wholly bereft. (SR 285)

Madhu’s silence becomes the answer to the squabbles of her husband. She does not set a trend like Savitribai or her aunt Leela, but she is the epitome of all the middle class Indian women who employ silence as the most lethal weapon to defy the patriarchal system. Her anguish and her pain is the pain of all
the women of her age and her status in this male chauvinistic society. Almost all the women portrayed in the novel proclaim the emergence of the New Woman. *Small Remedies* is a story that cuts across timelines and according to Chandra Holm:

> *Small Remedies* is a complex novel. It is a novel about myriad feelings—love, courage, honesty, truth, trust, death, the pain associated with death, about music, about the power exerted by time and by words. It is a novel in which past and present are intermingled, in which the word chronology has no meaning. (Holm 59)

Deshpande makes an honest attempt in projecting Savitribai and Munni as failures due to their denial of a certain part of their lives. The ability of both Madhu and Leela to accept the facts of their life contributes to their success in their quest. Madhu may learn from the experiences of Bai, Munni and Leela but she alone has to find her identity by understanding her life. Urvashi Sinha points out, “Shashi Deshpande through her novel *Small Remedies* projects the quest for self-realization of Indian women in a hostile patriarchal society”. (Sinha 129)

Deshpande and Kapur showcase the prowess of women and also make the two contrasting characters confront each other. Both women, Ishita because
of her mother and Shagun her workaholic husband, struggle in their early stages and when they start to become powerful, men become meek spectators. Kapur thus has voiced her concerns against the male-controlled oppressions and feminine success over the mighty world of men. Ashok Kumar speaks “Shashi Deshpande in her novels has revealed vividly disturbed but a brave feminine psyche in the new ethos. What is heartening is the fact that her protagonists are determined to encounter the world”. (Kumar 21) Deshpande’s heroines travel from subordination to autonomy and from silence to eloquence. Ashok subscribes to the opinion of critics who consider women’s plight to be the result of their inability to realize themselves.

The women protagonists of Deshpande have a lifelong suffering as victims of gender discrimination, starting as daughters and ending up as wives. They are pretty aware of the injustice that the menfolk impose upon them and they are also conscious of the social inequality and their struggle to fight against the oppressive but they strive so hard to overcome the burden of the social norms and rules that limit their endurance and existence as wives.

Indu, in *Roots and Shadows* experiences great psychological trauma in her childhood and in marriage due to her husband Jayant’s double standards. Superficially he is educated and broadminded yet he is intolerant about any
digression on her part from the traditional role of a wife. Although Indu is educated and has a liberal outlook, she acknowledges resentfully that her lot is no different from her abundant uneducated and village aunts. She also knows that she too is a victim like them due to the patriarchal social norms.

Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a telling example of men who are intolerant when they have second-fiddle role to their wives. It shows how their manhood gets hurt when their wives gain a superior status in the society. Manu feels embarrassed and insecure with the rising status of his wife Saru and with it all the troubles start. But, in this novel, Deshpande has made society equally responsible for their deteriorating relations.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya’s dilemma in marriage create from her husband’s hatred of any deviation from her role of a subservient wife. When threatened with charges of corruption, he expects her to go into hiding with him, which she refuses to comply with. He is greatly enraged and walks out of the house and Jaya is very confused and miserable as she has all along followed her Vanita Mami’s advice that a husband is like a ‘sheltering tree’ which must be kept alive at any cost, for without it the family becomes unsheltered and vulnerable. Jaya in her quest for identity reaches a situation of compromise as she agrees to change herself and hopes for a change in Mohan. The entire novel
is groundwork for that communication which will break her long silence after the realization of this fact. Having realized her position, Jaya would not accept the earlier image of a pair of bullocks yoked together, signaling a loveless couple. Prasad quotes Shashi Deshpande’s clarification about *That Long Silence* “…..and then I wrote *That Long Silence* almost entirely a woman’s novel nevertheless, a book about the silencing of the one half of the humanity”. (qtd in Prasad 58)

In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande raises the issue of the hitherto untouched issue of marital rape. Women like Mira, Urmi’s mother-in-law, have to bear the nightly sexual assault by their husbands silently. Other women like Shakutai, her sister Sulu, Kalpana and her sister have their own sorry tales. Shakutai’s husband is a drunkard and a good-for-nothing fellow, who leaves his wife and children for another woman. Kalpana is brutally raped by Prabhakar, Sulu’s husband. Urmi takes up cudgels on Kalpana’s behalf and the culprit is caught. Her husband is in navy and during his long absence she craves for some physical gratification. Her friendship with Dr.Bhaskar gives her ample opportunity, but she never oversteps the boundaries chalked out in marriage. However the painful irony of this virtue of hers will remain unacknowledged by her husband. Urmi is a woman who never violates the restrictions in marriage because she is accustomed to the traditions of society. Urmi tries to work for others within the boundaries and she is the real modern Indian woman who
exploited her opportunities. Thus Deshpande has portrayed Urmi as a chaste wife whose sympathy for the underprivileged or the less fortunate is ignited by her daughter’s death. Basavaraj Naicker writes, “Having entered a chakravyuha from which there is no escape, they want to make the best of their given life by hardening themselves to face the harsh realities of life”. (Naicker 126)

_A Matter of Time_, reveals how the husband walks out on his family comprising the wife and three daughters. Sumi, the protagonist, is so shocked that she slips into complete silence but, actually tries hard to keep things normal for her daughters. Her husband Gopal abandons her which is a cause for her great mortification and psychological ordeal. It is only a matter of great embarrassment and dishonor but a bitter realization of being unwanted and words of sympathy from her relatives fail to comfort and console her. Her self-respecting attitude drives her to take up a job for herself and her daughters. Though Gopal returns later she is a new Sumi now and she has coped with the tragedy with remarkable stoicism. (AMT 109) She has decided to live with a new-born understanding to move ahead in life with a man who had been the reason for her suffering. Siddhartha Sharma points out, “Now She is a new woman with a new understanding and consciousness all set to begin her life anew and confidently as a teacher and creative writer”. (Sharma 63)
Unlike Deshpande, Kapur showcases her female characters as more authoritative. Virmati, the protagonist in her first novel, is a rebel as she refuses her marriage proposal with a canal engineer and marries an already married man. She is lured by the Professor and she has the courage to marry him. Therefore one can see the budding of a ‘New Woman’ in Virmati who does not want “to be a rubber doll for others to move as they willed”. (DD 85) She defies patriarchal notions that enforce a woman towards domesticity and she also proclaims her self-respect and individuality. She achieves self-reliance through education and she is a silent rebel but bold, outspoken, determined and action-oriented. She shuns the relationship with the Professor when she comes to know that she cannot live with him. Even when he begs for her love, she shuts the door and rules her life on her own.

Kapur presents her as a woman who displays tremendous strength of mind and overcomes her rejection. Kapur highlights the predicament of women characters through her writings and reiterates the atrocities against women through the words of Shakuntala, “Here we are, fighting for the freedom of the nation, but women are still supposed to marry, and nothing else”. (DD 15)

Another character through which Kapur emphasizes her concept of the modern woman is Ida, the daughter of Virmati. She is very impatient towards her
mother’s weaknesses. When her Parvati Masi says that Virmati was a simple girl at heart, Ida says, “I hate the word ‘Simple’. Nobody has any business to live in the world and know nothing about its ways”. (DD 207) No woman, who dares to spurn patriarchal protection can afford to be ignorant, simple or naive. Shivani observes: “this novel explores the contrast between the non-acceptance of women’s freedom when the whole nation was united together to fight for independence. The novelist hints at the attitude, a moral fiber of the Indian society that attaches women’s role only for family purposes”. (Shivani 3)

Kapur’s A Married Woman is the depicts of an artist whose desires for her career and extra marital relations every now and then challenges the constraints of middle class existence. Although Astha, a married woman of a middle class family does not face so many challenges as Virmati has faced, her life becomes a black cave when she desires to write poetry, make sketches and participate in Ayodhya Movement and gets involved in socio-political activities. Her husband’s condition is worse than that of a rubber stamp because whether he permits or not, if she decides to go, she goes irrespective of her husband, children or mother-in-law’s bothering about her. Kapur has made an in-depth study in the relationship between Astha, Aijaz and Pipeelika. Astha and Pipeelika are impressed with the community as they are good friends, and partners. Astha enjoys lesbian relationship with Pipee and she finds her life adventurous.
Dr. Ashok Kumar talks about the plight of Indian women as he points out, “they struggle between tradition and modernity and develop the awareness of the New Woman, who has a voice of her own”. (Kumar 200) Through the lesbian relationship Kapur says that Astha, “canonizes and commemorates her insulted feminine sensibility raising the male tantrum to socially transform a society”. (qtd in Kumar 198)

Kapur voices concern for her female characters who essentially long for family ties but do not lose hold of their individuality also. Nisha, in *Home* is in contrast with Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*, for she does not fall victim to the stereotyped values of a middleclass joint family. Nisha acts as a rebel and takes up the path of economic independence which she is sure will lead to her liberation and assertion of her individuality. Nisha the female protagonist is in search of a real ‘home’. A home in the true sense is a place that provides comfort, relaxation and a sense of security to its inhabitants. The problem starts with Nisha falling in love with a boy during her college life. But Kapur again brings forth the hot restrictions of conventional joint families. Nisha is forbidden to marry the boy as he belongs to a lower caste and is considered unsuitable for her.

Nisha’s inner troubles are expressed through her skin. Her skin gets discolored and tarnished as she cannot control her life according to her wish.
“Nisha’s nights were now ones of restlessness. As she tosses and turned on her bed, her hands absently crept around the itchy patches on her skin......Rub, rub, but the skin refused to be satisfied”. (Home 217) Nisha snaps off all familial relations after her love ends with Suresh and strives to establish her individuality and becomes an entrepreneur. She starts her own business of garment stitching and Kapur exemplifies a brave woman who fights on her own as an entrepreneur. Hence Nisha is definitely a New Woman with her own feminine sensibilities.

Nisha never crosses the boundaries of morality and values. Considerable amount of her life has passed under the shadow of her aunt Rupa who is also so conscious of her freedom and identity. The power struggle among minor women characters like Suneeta, Sona and Puja is insignificant. Nisha who opposes her mother to get confined in the kitchen ends up as one. She is married and after ten months, she gives birth to twins accomplishing the purpose behind marriage. But contrary to it, she loses both her status as a decision maker and also her economic freedom along with her own Nisha’s Creations. A.N. Dwivedi records his statement on marriage as, “Nisha has to sacrifice her genuine, pure love for the false family honours”. (Dwivedi 68)

Kapur’s Immigrant is the discusses the life of Nina. She is a thirty years old lecturer in English who struggles to settle somewhere but like Virmati, Astha and Nisha, the question of Nina’s marriage is a hurdle in the peaceful living of her mother. She marries Ananda who is a Canadian immigrant and she has a happy
marriage. But tragedy strikes when she comes to know that Ananda is impotent. As she is far away from her home, she cannot share her grief with others. She goes to a college where she meets Anton and has illicit affair with him. But she does not feel guilty of what she does and this is how she renounces both the Indian institution of family and marriage. Ashok Kumar rightly says “In The Immigrant Nisha’s dream of a happy married life ends with a sour note and she is surging ahead with the hope of establishing herself independently on her own foot in an alien country”. (Kumar 68)

Within a very short period of time, she is seduced by Anton. She leaves Canada for the cremation of her mother in which she finds no assistance from Ananda. Her life becomes more intolerable and she flies to the University of New Brunswick. Manju Kapur puts the whole difference between the two briefly,

Life was what you made of it. You could look at a glass and call it half full or half empty. You could look out of the window and see the sky or stare at the mud. How often had he heard his parents make these distinctions between types of people. Well, he knew what manner of person he was. And Nina was definitely his opposite. (The Immigrant 330)

In Kapur’s Custody, Shagun, the protagonist, leaves her husband, Raman, after a small dispute and in due course she divorces him. She abandons her
family, marries her lover and moves to New York. Then Raman marries Ishita, another divorcee and overcomes the difficult situation in his life. Thus all these marriages are in a way different from each other. The novel presents the devastating effects of divorce on different stakeholders of a family – the wife, husband, children and in-laws. There is another marriage in *Custody* between Ishita and Suryakanta, which fails because of Ishita’s infertility. Shagun has got all she wanted, yet she divorces due to her physical passion, whereas Ishita is divorced for her infertility. Shagun and Ishita both suffer for biological reasons, one for obsession with sex and the other for barrenness.

Kapur has undoubtedly affirmed all possible reasons for marriage and the failure through her protagonists. In *Difficult Daughters*, for Kasturi it is the accountability, for Virmati it is to love and attachment, and for Ida it is to carry the lineage. In *A Married Woman*, Astha’s parents want her to marry because they consider it as their responsibility. In *Home*, Nisha is married with Arvind only to assist his family. In *The Immigrant*, Nina’s mother wants to marry her daughter so that she can get protection and stability. And in *Custody*, for Shagun and Raman it is the standard line of splendor and intelligence, for Ishita and Suryakanta to be joyful, for Shagun and Ashok to follow the excitement, lastly to Raman and Ishita it is the adjustment. Jadhav reflects:
The entire scenario in her novels is feminine. Virmati in *Difficult Daughters*; Astha in *A Married Woman*; Nisha in *Home*; Nina in *The Immigrant*; and Shagun and Ishita in *Custody* are all middle-class educated urban Indian women struggling to establish themselves with their own independent identities in the patriarchal setup of which they are part and parcel. (Jadhav 186)

The chapter evaluates the feminine sensibilities as exhibited in the works of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur. Both the writers converge in marriage, family life, freedom and individual identity and diverge in reaction and revolt. Deshpande’s women are submissive at the end of the novel, while Kapur’s protagonists revolt till the end of the novel. Kapur’s women select their own life style but as Deshpande’s women belong to the orthodox family they surrender themselves to the family bond. Kapur depicts her female characters in a more authoritative tone though Deshpande presents her female characters in a docile manner. Kapur and Deshpande give foremost importance for extra-marital love in their novels, however this does not provide a true solution to the problems of incompatibility. The succeeding chapter deals with the Techniques of the two creative writers, in order to evaluate an effective and proper expression of their artistic intentions.

**Chapter - VI**