Kanwar Dinesh Singh explains feminism, feminine sensibility and femininity through this quotation. The subsequent chapter discusses the feminine receptivity in the novels of Deshpande and it is followed by the discussion on the feminine accessibility in the novels of Kapur.

**Chapter - III**

**FEMININE RECEPTIVITY IN THE NOVELS OF SHASHI DESHPANDE**

“When she stopped conforming to the conventional picture of femininity she finally began to enjoy being a woman”.

- Betty Friedan

Deshpande’s novels portray the life of Indian middle class women who are brought up in traditional environment. They are found to strive hard to get emancipated and seek their self-identity and autonomy. Most of her women characters are able to overcome their predicament. She shows her protagonists in a realistic manner and records the state of affairs of women and their failures in the fast transforming socio-economic conditions in India and she highlights the conflict between tradition and modernity and its effect on the lives of the women in the middle class society. Their desires, pains, accomplishments and their efforts to liberate from the patriarchal norms of the society form the focus of her novels.

Deshpande makes it clear that hers is not the stringent and militant kind of feminism which sees menfolk as the root cause of all the troubles. Her women
belong to the authentic, realistic and credible world. Ramesh Kumar Gupta remarks: “Shashi Deshpande’s novels are concerned with a woman’s quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist’s place in it”. (Gupta 42) Her novels, featuring women playing significant role, reconstruct the varied aspects of their experience and attempt to give voice to ‘muted’ ideologies, registering resistance. Deshpande’s female protagonists are truly in search of inner strength and her attempt to give an honest picture of their frustration, hopes and disappointments makes her novels susceptible to treatment from the feminist angle. Deshpande, however, resents being called a feminist and maintains that her novels are not intended to be read as feminist texts. This is evident from what she says in *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*:

> Is writing by women only for women? when I sit down to write, I am just a writer – my gender ceases to matter to me. We are different, yes, but once again the factors which unite us are far more important than the gender differences which divide us. I’m a novelist, I write novels, not feminist tracts. Read my novel as a novel, not as a piece of work that intends to propagate feminism. (Deshpande 143).

Deshpande reinforces her view when she comments: “My writing has been categorized as ‘writing about women’ or ‘feminist’ writing. In this process, much in it has been missed. I have been denied the place and dignity of a writer
who is dealing with issues that are human issues, of interest to all humanity”. (qtd. in Jain 37)

Deshpande’s novels, however, reveal her acute sensitivity to the issues involving women and her tremendous sympathy for women. She presents both the strengths and the weaknesses of the women. In her own words, she depicts, “the vulnerability of women. The power of women. The deviousness of women. The helplessness of women. The courage of women”. (Dhawan 34) She seeks to expose the ideology by which a woman is trained to play a subservient role in society. In the words of Atrey and Kirpal, “Shashi Deshpande's novels eclectically employ the postmodern technique of deconstructing patriarchal culture and customs, and revealing these to be man-made constructs.” (Atrey and Kirpal 15)

The chapter focuses on the predicament of women and the sensibilities in the novels of Deshpande that enable them to transform themselves as “New Woman”. *Roots and Shadows* is the first novel of Deshpande, though it was published after *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) often regarded as a feminist novel. In *Roots and Shadows*, her concern with the social and cultural construction of gender, her open protest against the treatment of women as sexual object, her defiance of the stereotyped roles assigned to women and her bold effort to project the prejudiced attitude of the society towards women obviously take the centre stage. She not only articulates a thematic and technical maturity but also effectively communicates an intensely apprehended feminine sensibility. It is about the struggle of the protagonist Indu who represents the educated, middle-
class women and this novel showcases how her assertion of her individuality to attain liberty draws to her altercation with her family and the patriarchal society. She makes an attempt to explore her inner self in order to underscore her individuality as she feels crushed in this domineering male chauvinistic society.

Indu returns to her inherited home after a long break of eleven years to attend her cousin Mini’s marriage which is performed in the customary style in their ancestral house. She had earlier left the home at the age of eighteen to marry the man she loves and returns on being summoned by Akka, the bossy matriarch who is on her death bed. Akka has made her the sole heiress to her property, and the household atmosphere becomes charged with anger by the other family members for being excluded from the will. Deshpande presents with vivid details a large Maharashtrian Brahmin household, with the numerous women characters, their greediness, envy, hope, fear, frustration, and their anguish.

The rich and childless Akka decides to stay in her brother’s house after her husband’s death. She exercises complete control over her brother’s household, and her toxic tongue relegates Indu’s grandfather Kaka to a silent and subservient place. Akka is obsessed with untouchability and she even refuses to move into a hospital for fear of getting polluted by the touch of nurses belonging to other castes. She is also very particular about how a girl should behave herself in society, and criticizes Indu for talking to a boy in the library and is also completely against Naren’s mother’s desire to learn music. Akka ruminates:

What learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like THOSE women? Are we that kind of family? Isn’t
it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a decent family need to know? (R&S 55)

Indu knows about Akka’s miserable life from Narmada Atya, only after her death. Akka was married at twelve and her husband was tall and bulky and was well past thirty. But, Akka was small, graceful, and pretty with a beautiful face, fair skin, straight nose and curly hair. She went to her husband’s house after six months and by the time she was about thirteen, she was aborted twice. Her mother-in-law whipped her and kept her starved by locking her up in a room for three days. When she was sent to her husband’s room, she cried and clung to her mother-in-law saying, “Lock me up again, lock me up”. (R&S 70) Akka told Narmada that there was no escape from the consummation of her marriage: “Now your punishment begins Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels”. (R&S 70)

In those days, sex was a kind of punishment for child brides against which they could not do anything and continued to suffer in silence. This kind of patriarchy is established by the traditionalist women who have successfully established man’s ascendancy over women in the society. Therefore, unlike a militant feminist, Deshpande, does not put the culpability directly on man’s shoulders but she also exposes the contradictions in a woman’s character. This assertion of herself has sparked off contradictory remarks from the reviewers. O.P. Bhatnagar laments:
Indu’s casual and matter-of-fact attitude to what she has done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of modern Indian women? (Bhatnagar 129)

When Akka’s husband suffers from total paralysis, she takes complete control of her husband. Though she gives her heart out to nurse her paralyzed husband, she takes revenge by not allowing his mistress, who is adored by him, to visit him for two years. She sadistically abuses and drives out his mistress when she comes to meet him and she confesses to Narmada that she had a great pleasure in doing that. Narmada tells Indu that later that night she finds Akka in tears who tells her that after marriage no night passed without tears. This is a patriarchal society where genuine emotions, aspirations, feelings and conflicts of women are ignored outright and pushed to the background. Hence, Deshpande makes a strong statement on the arranged marriages, which are outrightly discriminatory towards women. A husband can have a mistress for his physical and mental needs and he gets exempted from moral constrains. A wife cannot take another man, because her act is considered dishonorable adultery. Deshpande estimates this as men folk treating women as properties rather than as humans. Neena Arora substantiates this statement when she says, “This condemnation is dictated by man’s interest in preserving his property rather than by any moral consideration”. (Arora 61)

Akka returns to her father’s home after the death of her husband. There she enforces a stringent code of conduct for the women in the household. She insists
that women should never utter their husband’s name and says that it not only brings disrepute but also shortens his life span. Indu, being an educated upper middle-class woman, resents questioning the connection, “between a man’s longevity and his wife’s calling him by name? It’s as bad as praying to the tulsi to increase his life span”. (R&S 35) Though she questions the age old customs, she is actually caught in the web of the customary superstitions and traditions. Like other Deshpande’s women characters she does not break herself free from the clutches of tradition. In the end, to her annoyance, she realizes that with all that education and exposure to support her, she is not different from the traditional submissive women, who encompass the tulsi plant in order to increase their husband’s life span. Even her educated husband with modern outlook is only an archetypal Indian husband for whom she has to remain passive and submissive.

Indu keeps her husband Jayant happy on all occasions. There are plenty of examples in this novel that show her efforts to keep him happy. She does not wish to write to magazines, but frustratingly she is forced to do that in order to satisfy Manoj. She is against working for the magazine as she gets disheartened by her experience with a self-styled social worker, who had acquired an award for social services and she was much impressed by that “soft spoken,… seemingly sincere and dedicated” (R&S 18) woman that she wrote an article on her. But then she is taken aback after reading an article she received on that woman. She realizes that it was “a story of shameless exploitation of ignorance, poverty and need. A story of ruthlessness and unscrupulousness in the pursuit of fame, power and money, all
of which had come now”. (R&S 18) When she discusses the issue with the much experienced editor, he rejects the other story even though he knows that it is true.

Being shocked by the double standards of the woman and also the editor’s attitude, she tells Jayant who could not hold back his middle-class values and meekly says, “That’s life! What can one person do against the whole system! No point making yourself ridiculous with futile gestures. We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget we have a long way to go”. (R&S 19) Therefore, she writes what suits the magazine and not her own conscience. Later on, gradually she realizes the uselessness of the concept of existence, because she has to compromise against her conscience with the standards of the deceitful society. She understands that in this society, success is the only thing that matters. But all this was not to go for long as she is compelled to introspect herself as circumstances make her do so. She confesses to Naren in a private conversation that had Akka not called her, she would not have had time to contemplate about her identity that she had eradicated just to prove that her marriage was a success. It brings out the height of pretense she had observed just in order to exhibit that she and Jayant belonged to the smart younger generation. Indu confesses:

We are rational, unprejudiced, broad-minded. We discuss. We discuss intelligently, even solemnly, the problems of unemployment, poverty, corruption and family planning. We scorn the corrupt. We despise the ignorant, we hate the wicked—and our hearts bleed, Naren for Vietnam, for the blacks, for the Harijans—but frankly we
Till then Indu had believed herself as a smart, educated, clever and independent woman. At this juncture she comes to understand that she is no better than her Kakis and Atyas.

Indu is poignantly aware of the inequality Indian women have to endure under compulsion. There are several incidents in the novel that prove this condition. Indian women toil to perform innumerable household chores that make their life miserable and when these efforts go unrecognized they feel that their condition is further desolate. Indu is annoyed to see scattered plates and littered leftovers lying on the table after the meal. She wonders on the patience and courage women have shown to clean up the mess after every meal. “And women like Kaki even ate off the same dirty plate their husbands had eaten in earlier, Martyrs, heroines, or just stupid fools”. (R&S 73). Indu calls the household duties tedious, monotonous and exasperating like the job of Sisyphus, the King of Ephyra, in Greek mythology who was punished for chronic untrustworthiness by being intimidated to roll a mammoth boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, and to repeat this action eternally. She is aware of the prevailing injustice in the society since her childhood. All efforts were made since her childhood to inculcate in her the necessity to play the role of a meek and submissive daughter, wife, and mother. She tells Naren: “As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl they had told me I must be meek and
submissive, because you are a female. It is the only way for a female to live and survive”. (R&S 174) Even her womanhood is thrust upon her viciously and gracelessly, when she is told, “You’re a woman now You can have babies yourself”. (R&S 87) She begins to hate herself as “for four days now you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything”. (R&S 87) That is the way she is introduced into the exquisite world of womanhood.

Simone de Beauvoir refers to this dramatic struggle that every girl at puberty has to undergo as “she cannot become ‘grown up’ without accepting her femininity; and she knows already that her sex condemns her to a mutilated and fixed existence, which she faces at this time under the form of impure sickness and a vague sense of guilt”. (Beauvoir 351) Indu is conscious of the secondary position women have been condemned to. She asks her Kaka in a prank, “Can you imagine them sending up a cup of tea for me? Women and children should know their places”. (R&S 53) The tonsure of a widowed housemaid reminds her how a widow had to remain tonsured all life after her husband’s death for fear of getting banished from the society. Indu’s Kaka was dead against this idea and the widowed Atya “was now a second class citizen in the kingdom of widows. The orthodox would not eat food cooked by her”. (R&S 130)

Slowly Indu realizes the fact that she is incomplete and definitely not different from the breed of women she had forgotten after she left her home. She longs to be with Jayant and she wants to be along with him always as she feels miserable and incomplete in Jayant’s absence as she feels incomplete in yet
another sense as her own academic and economic success does not make any special impact on the other household women: “To get married to bear children to have sons and then grandchildren they were still for them the only success a woman could have”. (R&S 128) She has come far enough in life when compared to her Kakis and Atyas but back home she becomes agonizingly conscious of her appalling plight, as her marriage has not put her in a class apart. In the process she has lost her own self, her identity and needs as Jayant who hates any display of passion and Indu’s, spurns her advances, even the most fundamental sexual need in marriage. Even in the privacy of their bedrooms, she is not let to get rid of her inhibitions. She tells Naren: “Jayant, so passionate, so ready, sitting up suddenly and say, ‘no, not now’, when I had taken the initiative”. (R&S 91) Being so insulted by Jayant she feels dishonored and disheartened. In a choked voice, she tells Naren: “When I’m like that he turns away from me. I’ve learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I’m passive. And unresponsive. I am still and dead”. (R&S 92) So her fate is not much different from the other domestic women for she too has become still and dead like them.

Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows* raises critical controversies about the author’s motives regarding the incestuous relation between Indu and Naren her cousin. Indu confesses each and every detail of her married life to Naren as Naren is so natural to her and the easy compatibility between them makes her take the most daring step of yielding herself to him twice in the novel. She indulges in the act with much wild abandon and relishes it later without any guilt. Indu thinks:
I can go back and lie on my bed. I thought, and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately I went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don’t need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado. (R&S 168)

Indu resolves not to disclose this to Jayant as she thinks it had nothing to do with him and this affirmation has flickered off conflicting observations from the reviewers. In this regard, P. Ramamoorthy has a different perspective. He does not view Indu’s infidelity in a negative sense but observes her act as something rising from the dilemma of the compelling circumstance woman like Indu finds them in. To Indu it is an exercise of autonomy within marriage and Ramamoorthy observes:

This sheds a brilliant light on Indu’s awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu’s exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of the human existence.

(Ramamoorthy 124)

This is a society where men take impunity in their sexual liberties. But when a woman indulges in the same, she is branded an adulteress. Deshpande probably is trying to shake the readers out of their complacency by thrusting in their mind the double standards that is practiced in the patriarchal social system.
Deshpande also emphasizes the tribulations that middle-class families come across in their search for suitable grooms for their daughters. In the case of Padmini, the parents get her married off in desperation, and the patient acknowledgement with which the girl accepts her lot is commendable and admirable. Padmini’s acceptance of a groom with “heavy, coarse features and crude mannerism”, (R&S 13) makes her wonder whether a woman has any other choice but to allow and submit unconditionally. Padmini thinks:

The woman had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered… have they been born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a lifetime of disuse? And yet Mini, who had no choice either, had accepted the reality, the finality, with a grace and compose that spoke eloquently of that inner strength. (R&S 6)

The other Indian girls also, like Padmini, are worried about marriage and not the man they are about to marry. The search for a man is so complicated that parents become apprehensive and desperate. Immediately when the man nods, the marriage is settled. Indu wonders what the reasons could have been behind Padmini’s acceptance of a man who was no match for her. Padmini’s reply to Indu’s question is insightful of the psychological ordeal most Indian girls of marriageable age undergo. Padmini voices:

You don’t know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav-Kaka running around after eligible men. And then sending the horoscope and having it come back with a message, it
doesn’t match? And if the horoscope matched there was the meeting to be arranged. And mother and Atya slogging in the kitchen the whole day. And all those people coming and staring and asking all kinds of questions. And if we heard they were old fashioned people, I would dress up in an old fashioned manner and they would say, ‘She’s not modern enough.’ And if I dressed up well, they would say, “She’s too fashionable for us. Or too short. Or too tall. Or too something.” And Kaka trying to laugh and talk to those people, while his eyes looked so anxious. And I, feeling like as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl. So we would have to go through with it all over again. And finally if everything was fine, there was the dowry. (R&S 135)

Arranged marriages are not a union between two souls. Hence, Deshpande raises the basic issue whether arranged marriage is worth of its struggle. Indu reflects Deshpande’s views that an arranged marriage was nothing “but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue”? (R&S 3)

Here, Deshpande exposes the hypocrisy prevalent in society. The easily available Naren is not considered a suitable match for their daughter. Instead, they pay a handsome dowry for one who has nothing but his family’s social status. Deshpande does not make any sweeping statements against dowry system, but raises the question delicately to be contemplated over.
Indu’s experiences teach her that one should listen to the voice of one’s conscience and be faithful to it. Freedom within marriage is possible if one dares to do what one believes is right and tenaciously follow it which alone can bring harmony and fulfillment in life. Indu decides to go back to Jayant with the hope that she would do what she thinks correct and not be dishonest to her inner self. She reflects: “Now I would go back and see that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty. Nevertheless I knew I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me”. (R&S 205)

Deshpande suggests that the modern Indian women should learn to conquer their fears and assert themselves. The novel ends on a note of compromise which is quite representative of the basic Indian attitude. With the conviction of rationale and accountability she holds steadfast to her decisions in a tradition-bound household, which is proof enough of her individuality. In a book-review of *Roots and Shadows*, C.W.Watson opines:

This novel which was published in 1983 succeeds magnificently in its haunting description of the decline of a once prosperous middle-class family in south India. Much of the material of modern Indian writing, especially Indian writing in English, is drawn from this social milieu— one has only to think of recent novels by Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh and Amit Chandhuri, but where the strength of this novel lies is in the marvelous evocation of character and mood. (Watson 75)
In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande speaks about Saru, who is an educated, economically independent, middle-class wife. She is made conscious of her gender as a child and her loveless relationship with her parents and strained relations with her husband lead to her painful search for herself. The novel opens with Saru’s return to her parents’ house fifteen years after she left home with a vow never to return. Her relations with her husband become agonizingly strained and she returns for some consolation where she gets a chance to think over her relationships with her husband, her children, her parents and Dhruva her dead brother.

Saru’s relationship with her brother has been given special prominence as she is ignored and Dhruva is given more importance. No parental affection is shown to her and she is not given any support. Her brother’s birthdays are celebrated with much gaiety and performance of religious rites, whereas her birthdays are not even recognized. She feels that her birth was an appalling experience for her mother who later recalls her mother telling her that it had rained heavily the day she was born and it was terrible for her mother. It seemed to Saru that it was her birth that was dreadful for her and not the rains.

Saru remembers the cheerful excitement in the house on the event of his naming ritual. The idea that she is a burden to her parents is deeply implanted in her mind as a child. Her mother’s love of her son at her daughter’s cost is the rallying point for Deshpande to bring her feminist ideas together. The preference for boys to girls can be openly witnessed in most Indian homes, and is inextricably
linked to the psyche for the one reason could be that sons bring in dowry but the Indian society steeped in tradition and superstition considers the birth of a son as auspicious as he carries on the family lineage. The first thought that rose in Saru’s mind on hearing about her mother’s death is: “Who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died”. (DHNT 17) The mother is attached to her son and her attitude is typically Indian. For her, he is a male child and therefore one who will propagate the family lineage. In another sense, also, the male child is considered more important than a girl, because he is qualified to give “agni” at the cremation of the parents for otherwise the soul of the dead person would wander in agitation.

Saru’s mother constantly reminds her that she should not go out in the sun as it would worsen her already dark complexion and recalls her conversation with her mother:

“Don’t go out in the sun, you’ll get darker,”

“Who cares?”

“We have to care of you don’t. We have to get you married.”

“I don’t want to get married.”

“Will you live with us all your life?”

“Why not?”

“You can’t.”

“And Dhruva?”

“He’s different. He’s a boy”. (DHNT 40)
The deliberate discrimination practised by their parents between Saru and her brother leads to a sense of insecurity and hatred towards her parents. She dislikes her mother and consequently becomes rebellious and Y.S. Sunita Reddy observes: “In this connection, Saru’s mother’s attitude is typical of most Indian mothers and a common enough phenomenon in the Indian context”. (Reddy 51)

The critical moment in her life is the accidental death of her brother by drowning. All her life she is worried by the memories of her mother condemning her of deliberately witnessing Dhurva die by drowning: “You did it, you did this, you killed him”. (DHNT 173) She too on her part has a guilty conscience as she considers herself responsible for having remained a mute spectator to her brother’s death by drowning. Saru never refutes the charge leveled against her by her mother that Dhruva’s demise had always been her subliminal yearning and there is a very thin delineation between her wish and its fulfillment. Deshpande thus divulges the social aspect of an intense jealousy between siblings caused by a mother’s excessive affection for the son.

The discriminatory behavior of Saru’s mother makes Saru feel unloved and unwanted, leading to a sense of isolation and separation and she suffers in the seizure of insecurity. After her brother’s death, her condition degenerated from bad to worse for any Indian girl is a victim of gender bigotry in the Indian social setup, irrespective of geographical or chronological space. The birth of a son
gives a woman a status and she invests herself in her son’s feature, creating a profound symbolic attachment.

Saru’s mother could be of no exception to this and she loses interest in life after her son’s death. She squarely blames Saru for her own wretched lot and her mother grabs every opportunity to censure her and takes no interest in Saru’s education, career or future. Her feeling of being unwanted is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence as a girl or woman. On attaining puberty she says scornfully, “If you are a woman, I don’t want to be one”. (DHNT 62) The treatment that is meted out to her during her monthly ordeals is inhuman. She is treated like an untouchable, segregated from the other members of the family and made to sleep on a straw mat with a cup and plate exclusively meant for her to be served in from a distance. She is engulfed with a sense of shame and prays in desperation for a miracle to put an end to it.

Therefore, she develops hatred towards the traditional practices during her impressionable years. Her disgust for her mother is so acute that she becomes rebellious just to hurt her, “I hated her, I wanted to hurt her, wound her, make her suffer”. (DHNT 142) This hatred drives her to leave home for Bombay to seek medicine as a career. In the medical college she falls in love with a college mate and marries him against her parents’ wishes. Her conformist mother was squarely against her daughter marrying a man from a lower caste:

“What caste is he?”

“I don’t know.”
“A Brahmin?”

“Of course, not.”

“Then cruelly… “His father keeps a cycle shop.”

“Oh, so they are low-caste people, are they?”

The word her mother had used, with the disgust, hatred and prejudice of centuries had so enraged her that she had replied… “I hope so”. (DHNT 96)

Had her mother not been so against him, she would probably not have married him and brought herself to such a miserable condition. She later recollects:

If you hadn’t fought me so bitterly, if you hadn’t been so against him, perhaps, I would never have married him. And I would not have been here, cringing from the sight of his hand-writing, hating him and yet pitying him too. (DHNT 96)

With no love and security from her childhood, she has wanted to be loved. When she gets attention from Manu, she wonders, “How could I be anyone’s beloved? I was the redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without”. (DHNT 66)

The need of the moment is a relation with someone who can give her love and security. She thinks: “The fisherman’s daughter couldn’t have been more surprised when the king asked her to marry him than I was by Manu’s love for me”. (DHNT 67) Later when her relations become strained with Manu she regrets having rushed into marriage unconditionally:
The fisherman’s daughter was wiser. She sent the king to her father and it was the father who bargained with him, while I … I gave myself up unconditionally. Unreservedly to him, to love him and to be loved. (DHNT 67)

The conditions that guide to her to take such a step are due to the attitude of their parents. If her mother had aggravated her by her blatant hostility, her father had contributed to her present condition by remaining a silent spectator in the family drama.

In the initial stages of her married life, Saru considers herself as the luckiest woman on earth, as her marriage is an absolute bliss as Manu is her saviour and the romantic hero who rescues Saru, a damsel in distress. She marries to secure the lost love in her parental home and her identity as an individual. Although Saru abstains from any physical indulgence with Manu, after marriage, she revels in it with wild abandon:

I became in an instant a physically aroused woman with an infinite capacity for loving and giving, with a passionate desire to be absorbed by the man I loved. All the clichés, I discovered were true, kisses were soft and unbearably sweet, embraces hard and passionate, hands caressing and tender, and loving, as well as being loved was an intense joy. It was as if little nerve ends of pleasure had sprung up all over my body. (DHNT 40)
Saru’s dingy one-room apartment with “the corridors smelling of urine, the rooms with their dark sealed in odours” (DHNT 40) is “a heaven on earth” for her. But soon all this proves to be mere mirage for her because she realizes that happiness is illusory. Saru remembers how a particular incident becomes a turning point in their blissful marital relationship. One night she returns home late in her bloodstained coat after she has helped out the victims in a fire accident in a factory nearby. The neighborhood thus comes to know about her real self and she gains recognition. People would come to her for medical help and other related matters. In the beginning Saru could not realize the change that had come in Manu. Her success as a well-known and reputed doctor becomes the cause of her strained marital relations with Manu. In a retrospective mood she says much later: “He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband”. (DHNT 42) G.S. Amur Deshpande rightly observes “Women’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and pressure her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being, is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer”. (Deshpande 71)

Saru’s steady rise in status makes Manu very uncomfortable, as he feels ignored when people greet and respect Saru. Moreover, she is unable to spare time enough for Manu and children. Manu and Saru want to move out to some other place for their own reasons. While Manu feels humiliated and embarrassed, Saru finds it inconvenient in that congested and stinky apartment and wants to move into something more decent. Earlier she was happy and contented to live on
Manu’s salary but in her new role as career woman, she becomes discontented for she resents:

For me, things now began to hurt. … a frayed sari I could not replace, a movie I could not see, an outing I could not join in. I knew now that without money life became petty and dreary. The thought of going on this way became unbearable. (DHNT 92)

Manu feels that he cannot love her as intensely as he has done earlier. Saru begins to hate this man-woman relationship, which is based on need and attraction and not love. She ridicules the word “love” now as she realizes there could be no such thing between man and woman. With the change of conditions she feels a gradual vanishing of love and affection towards her husband and children. Even the most formal duties towards them remain unattended to and the children are deprived of proper care and love as she returns late in the evenings. While her social and financial status rises gradually, there is an inverse decline in her marital relationship. Her relations with Manu would have somehow moved on smoothly had she remained contented with treating people in the neighborhood. But her ambition is to reach greater heights in her life through her association with Boozie, who is a handsome and efficient doctor. He is flirtatious in nature and Saru has no hatred towards flirts. Their relation reaches a stage when Boozie helps her financially to set up her own practice in a posh area.
Saru is completely blind in her ambition. She is unscrupulous in her relationship with Boozie and consoles herself by treating it as a mere teacher-student relation. She tells herself, “It was just a teacher-student relationship. If he put his hand on my shoulder, slapped me on my back, held my hand or hugged me … that was just his mannerism and meant nothing. It had nothing to do with me and Manu”. (DHNT 91) Both have their own vested interests in sustaining such a relation as Boozie openly flaunts his relationship with Saru to hide his homosexual nature and Saru wants to exploit him through her feminine wiles to achieve her much coveted goal of becoming of reputed doctor. Although there is nothing physical about Saru-Boozie relationship, it gives rise to a misconception in Manu’s mind. But she had such a loathing towards Manu that she does nothing to placate him, rather lets him believe the obvious.

Even at the inauguration of her consulting room, when Boozie exhibits her by his side openly before the invitees to the programme, Saru feels resentful towards her husband:

I could feel the stares. Everyone’s except Manu’s who would not look at us. And I should have hated him then…. not Manu, for he had done nothing then for which I could hate him, but this attractive, ravishly masculine man who was doing this deliberately. Attracting attention to the two of us. But funnily enough, it was not him I hated, it was Manu for doing nothing. (DHNT 94)
As Saru rises in social and economical status, Manu is still an underpaid lecturer and this leads to great discomfort in their conjugal relationship. Saru’s gratification in her career is no match to her discontentment at home and contrary to the claims of most feminists, she does not achieve fulfillment in life. In a reminiscent mood she recalls one particular incident which leads to her loathing towards Manu. It was on the day when they had been watching a TV programme as she recalls:

Manu had been sitting with his feet up on a stool, soft, white, unmarked and flabby. Like his hands. And his laugh it was rather silly. A kind of bray almost. Why had she never noticed that before? And had he always picked at his ears that way, deftly, rather stealthily? It was like seeing a man she had never seen, never seen, never known now that she knew him, she rather despised. (DHNT 135)

Incidents like this aggravate the already damaged relationship between the two to the extent that in the privacy of their room, he does not behave like a husband, but a rapist. When the interviewing girl, in an interview with Saru happens to ask Manu innocently: “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (DHNT 200) the three, Saru, Manu, and the girl, merely laughed it off as if it were nothing. This particular incident is very humiliating to him and he feels weak as one who has lost his masculinity. To gain
his manliness he gives vent to his feelings through his beastly sexual assault on Saru. Although he is a cheerful normal human being and a loving husband during day, he turns into a rapist to assert his manhood. In yet another incident she undergoes this nightmarish experience. While shopping, Manu and Saru meet Manu’s college mate and his wife prior to going on a vacation to Ooty. During the talk Manu tells his colleague that they were going to Ooty. When his colleague expresses his inability and bad luck in affording such a vacation, the colleague’s wife replies that he also could have afforded if he had married a doctor.

A humiliated Manu once again victimizes Saru as she expresses her helplessness to her father, “I couldn’t fight back. I couldn’t shout or cry, I was so afraid the children in the next room would hear. I could do nothing. I can never do anything. I just endure.” (DHNT 201) Though she has achieved economic independence, her plight is miserable for she has to perform double duties besides practicing medicine she has to fulfill the assigned job of a housewife. She expresses her desire to leave her medical practice but Manu dissuades her as their high standard of living wouldn’t be possible on Manu’s income.

Although Saru returns to the house of her parents in an isolated frame of mind, she feels odd despite the fact that nothing had changed in the house. She thinks not even the seven pair of large stone slabs leading to the front door on which she had played hopscotch as a child had changed over the years. Her father also sounds strange as he talks like an unwilling host to her as if she were an unsolicited guest. She is in serious need of compassion but he does nothing to
console her which reminds her of the fate of her friend’s sister who had come home after her disastrous marriage. She remembers how she received care and sympathy from her parents, as her marriage was an arranged one and the parents too were party to her misfortune. Since Saru’s was not an arranged one, she makes herself solely responsible for her disastrous marriage and is packed with guilty conscience. She is entirely confused and feels that she has done immense injustice towards her brother, mother, husband, and children.

When asked by her friend Nalu to talk on Medicine as a profession for women, to a group of college students, Saru presents an ideal recipe for a successful marriage.

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an MA, you should be a BA. If he is 5’4” tall you shouldn’t be more than 5’3” tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety, if you want a happy marriage. Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And I assure you, it is not worth it. He’ll suffer. You’ll suffer and so will the children. Women’s magazines will tell you that a marriage must be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense, rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal but take care that it’s unequal in favour of your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, god help you, both of you. (DHNT 137)
Saru also thinks about her relationship with Padmakar, her classmate in medical college whom she happens to meet years later. After a few meetings Saru discourages him from attempting to form a closer relationship with her. She does so after realizing that such a relationship is no comfort. Now she has no illusions about romances or love for these two had lost relevance in her life: “Love? Romance? Both, I know too well, were illusions and for me, sex was now a dirty word”. (DHNT 133) She achieves no happiness and fulfillment through her relations with Boozie and Padmakar. These extra-marital relations are no solace and compensation for her tense married life. Deshpande feels that there cannot be an escape route, from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has, finally to fall back on herself.

Deshpande finds the lives of Sunita and Nalu, Saru’s school friends as extremely contrasting with Saru. Sunita leaves no effort to pose as a happily married woman for always she talks about her intimacy with her husband as if she were insignificant without him, which only invokes the pity and hatred of her two friends. Nalu also questions her as to why she let her husband change her name from Sunita to Anju, “Do you have to surrender so easily”? (DHNT 117) Nalu is contemptuous of Sunita’s constant references to her husband and hates her for her submissive attitude of satisfying every whim of his. She tells her, “Well, I refuse to call you Anju or Gitanjali or whatever. To me you are Sunita and will always to Sunita”. (DHNT 118)
Nalu, a spinster is a teacher and lives with her brother and his family. Saru differences Nalu with the Nalu of her college days who was full of spirit and enthusiasm. But now bitterness has crept into her, and Saru does not blame her resentment on her spinsterhood. Saru feels that it would be wrong to say that Nalu “is bitter because she never married, never bore a child. But that would be as stupid as calling me fulfilled because I got married and I have borne two children” (DHNT 121) Deshpande contrasts the lives of Saru, Sunita and Nalu and shows that a wife, a mother and a spinster had their own share of joys and sorrows and it is almost difficult to conclude as to who is the happier or the more fulfilled. While the married women are reported to be dissatisfied with their marriage, the unmarried ones are reported to have their own sufferings and anxieties. As Betty Friedan observes: “Strangely a number of psychiatrists stated that, in their experience unmarried women patients were happier than married ones.” (Friedan 23)

According to the words of Friedan a mature Saru is not pragmatic and shuns extremes as she is neither the typical western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the Western Feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In the quest for the completeness of identity, she does not encourage separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage.
Deshpande’s *That Long Silence* expresses the silent suffering of the modern housewife. Although many women writers attempted to express this long silence that had turned women into nonentities, they could only provide psychological depths to their characters. They either created illusory sentimental romances or finally yielded to the temptation of expressing feminist ideology. But Deshpande’s success lies in her representation of real life experiences through her protagonists and she sensibly depicts the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for the self or identity. The silence of woman symbolizes helplessness whereas men take it as a symbol of woman’s contentment. Rashmi Gaur observes:

Jaya’s journey towards a well-defined self-hood is mired in the labyrinthine mazes of societal pressures, feminine conditioning to fashion oneself according to the accepted norms of behaviour, suppressive and egotistic male chauvinism and the continued dilemma of attaching a purpose to her life, culminating in a long silence. Her silence is symptomatic of alienation and apprehension rioted in every woman’s soul in different forms – a silence which is often misunderstood by men as a symbol of woman’s contentment.

(Gaur 179)

The novel sustains its credibility from the fact that Jaya is a convent-educated English-speaking lady with a literary taste and portrays the conflict raging between the narrator’s split self—the writer and the housewife. The novel opens with Jaya and her husband Mohan returning into the old Dadar flat in
Bombay from their cozy and palatial house. Her husband is involved in a financial malpractice and an inquiry against him is set up and is consoled to find that the children, Rahul and Rati are away on a long tour with their family friends and expects Jaya to go into hiding with him, which she refuses to comply with.

It is in this small old Dadar flat that shuns of the usual domestic routine that she becomes an introvert and goes into deep introspection of her past and her childhood. Had there been no such crisis in their life, she would never have given a thought on herself or her individuality. Jaya finds her routine work disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.

For almost seventeen years of her marriage, Jaya successfully manages to hold back her feelings as she considers it more important to be a good wife than being a good writer. In her zeal to play out the role of a loyal wife and a compassionate mother, she has suppressed her desires that lead to self-actualization and contentment. She not only suppresses her writing career but also her relationship with her Kamat her neighbour. Her career as a successful writer is jeopardized right in the early years of her marriage and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan argues, “Deshpande’s protagonist breaks her silence at one level through the act of writing itself at another level through renegotiating interpersonal relations within the family”. (Sunder Rajan 879) A short story of her bags the first prize and also gets published in a magazine. She is on the threshold of getting recognition as a creative writer of some merit, when Mohan expresses his
displeasure at a particular story written by her. The story is about a man who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body. Mohan suspects if the man portrayed in the story is he himself, and is apprehensive lest people should take him for the man in the story. She thinks, “Looking at his stricken face, I had been convinced I had done him wrong. And I had stopped writing after that”. (TLS 144) But the writer in her provokes her to keep writing she begins to write under a pen name, which doesn’t help and her stories are rejected one after another.

Kamat, analyses the reasons behind the successive rejections and tells her that her stories lack strong emotions as she has suppressed her anger and frustration. But she cannot express her anger or feelings for it would damage her relation with Mohan for she has learnt to control her anger, as Mohan considers this trait in a woman as “unwomanly”. (TLS 83) She tells Kamat, “Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman”? (TLS 147) At this juncture, Kamat warns her against indulging in hedonism as it would only destroy her. He admonishes her, “Beware of this ‘women are the victims’ theory of yours. It will drag you down into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. Take yourself seriously, women. Don’t skulk behind a false name”. (TLS 148) Later she begins to write light comical pieces on the drudgeries of a middle-class housewife in a column entitled ‘Seeta’. She not only gets cheering feedback from the readers but also concurrence from Mohan. Jaya reflects,

Seeta had been the means through which I had shut the door firmly on all these 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. (TLS 149)

Therefore Jaya has merely been glossing over the reality or truth, and smothering her inner conscience to avoid endangering her marriage. She denies that her writings are the reflections of her individuality or self to play the role model of a typical Indian middle-class woman. Kamat understands her literary capability and criticizes her for writing such stuff: “I can never imagine you writing this”. (TLS 149) Adele King aptly observes: “In Jaya’s stories they lived happily ever after although she knows the falsity of the view of life”. (King 166)

Jaya’s association with Kamat lends yet another dimension to her personality. She is drawn towards him as he treats her as his equal and offers constructive criticism to Jaya on her writings. He even receives her mail at his address to help her avoid any confrontation with her husband as he disapproves of her writings. He showers all his attention on her as he is lonely. Unlike other men he does not have aversion to cooking and such other domestic chores meant to be performed by women exclusively. She feels so much at ease in his company that her womanly inhibitions wither and she opens up her problems to him. He warns her against wallowing in self-pity and asks her to pursue her literary career by giving expression to her real inner self.

Jaya becomes aggressive in the sense that her relationship with Kamat leads to physical attraction. His behavior is like paternal affection but on occasions turns into the passion of a man. The two are so much at ease in each other’s company
that he even makes personal observations about her physical appearance. He says: “I prefer clean, spare lines in a human being. You, for example—your name is like your face”. (TLS 152) On one occasion she even comes close to yielding herself when she finds herself in his arms as he tries to console her at her recollection of her father’s death. In the seclusion of his apartment she had sufficient opportunity for physical pleasure but she dare not do so for fear of jeopardizing her marriage. It is yet again for this very reason that she pretends aloofness on his death when she finds him lying dead on the floor in his flat, as she does not want to endanger her marriage. The incident is proof enough of the chained nature of the so-called educated middle-class housewives.

Besides these, there are many more reasons that deny the fulfillment of her individuality. In her zeal to play out the role of a loyal wife and a caring mother, she smothers her real self for like other women she has been indoctrinated right from her childhood. Just to keep Mohan happy she does not protest the change of her name from Jaya to Suhasini at her marriage. Her dress and her appearance are proof of her submission to Mohan’s liking, replicating an absorbed family-woman and she has systematically suppressed her free will as she has been taught the importance and necessity of stable marriage and family as security and as a source of emotional strength. But the same is denied to her when the crisis at Mohan’s office begins to affect the affairs at home and she realizes that Mohan has lost interest in her. At the Dadar flat she has time to think over her relations with Mohan, and also to scrutinize and identify her suppressed ‘self.’ Her emotional
crisis comes to such a pass that she is afraid lest something should happen to Mohan. She cannot imagine a life without Mohan or his support:

The thought of living without him had twisted my insides, his death had seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down my cheeks. If he had been a little late coming home, I had been sure he was dead. By the time he returned, I had, in my imagination shaped my life to a desolate widowhood. (TLS 96-97)

Jaya’s predicament is born of her split psyche. She represents the urban, middle-class woman who is educated and has had exposure to liberal Western ideas. Her upbringing demands the suppression of the self for the marriage to survive. Unable to free herself from the traditional code of conduct, her inner voice remains inarticulate even in her writings and her pent-up feelings make her neurotic. The counsels of her aunts keep ringing in her ears, and this becomes the cause of her undoing. For instance, Vanita Mami counsels her just before her marriage: “Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree. Keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies”. (TLS 32) She further says: “If your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it. Take up a hobby instead, cats, may be, or your sister’s children”. (TLS 32) Jaya does not take Vanita Mami’s counsel seriously, but on her part she does not prove herself different from her. When the occasion to choose between her family and husband arises, she chooses the former.
When the times are smooth, the relationship between the two moves on smoothly. But the crisis unmasks both Jaya and Mohan. Before the crisis, like her mythological counterpart Seeta and Gandhari, she remains stuck to her husband and children whereas after the crisis, she is not willing to go into hiding with her husband. She is ashamed of the incident, and Mohan defends himself by saying, “It was for you and the children that I did this”. (TLS 9) Mohan’s trouble is his own making and he expects her to share this crisis unconditionally. Indira Bhatt observes that Mohan wants to “use his wife as buffer, an opiate to soften the impact of the forces he has set into motion against himself”. (Bhatt 157)

Jaya feels herself totally lost as she is taken for granted by Mohan. She realizes that her own feelings and emotions do not mean anything to him. Her realization that she is a non-entity in his eyes hurts her for in an earlier incident her paternal uncle Ramu Kaka shows her the family tree wherein even boys of the family find mention but her name is missing. She questions this patriarchal family tree at which he says: “How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family. You have no place here”. (TLS 142-43) Jaya is also shocked to find no mention of her mother, her aunts and even Ajji who kept the family together and she is full of anger and desperation over such gross gender discrimination.

Deshpande is very realistic when she suggests that marriages are not based on love but convenience. Jaya is content to play the role of a caring wife as long as the economic and social conditions are fine and she happily plays out the role model of Gandhari,
If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn’t want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay; that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have the things we needed—decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, travelling I class. (TLS 61-62)

Jaya fails to accompany her husband into exile unlike Sita. Mohan’s heydays are over, and their marriage runs into rough weather. But she cannot be said to be solely responsible, as Mohan too has his own share of responsibility. He wants to use Jaya as a cushion in this crisis. Jaya has changed much after her marriage. Her aunt’s counsel and her father’s advice, never to hurt Mohan, have made her bear things without opposition. Soon after marriage, a quarrel between the two had led to Mohan’s slip into silence altogether. She has a guilty conscience and begins to use silence strategy to avoid any confrontation. The bubble of this long silence gets so bloated that this unexpected crisis bursts it as she had been lulled into silence till Mohan was a ‘sheltering tree’. With his secure job and career, her home and children were safe. But the sudden inquiry against him makes her feel insecure and is a tragedy that she herself needs somebody to console her that at last everything will be all right.

Mohan accuses Jaya and ruminates “Do you think I haven’t seen how changed you are since we came here, since I told about my situation”. (TLS 12)
Jaya begins to laugh uncontrollably, and cannot help it as she herself doesn’t know the cause. Mohan is so furious that he leaves the house in a huff as if he would never return and she is left all alone and at this moment she gets the news that Rahul has disappeared while holidaying. She feels utterly devastated and lost, as there is nobody to help her. She is in a harrowing state for many days, but finally everything is all right. Rahul is back and she also gets a telegram from Mohan that ‘All is well’. Now she has come to terms with herself.

During this period she articulates her long silence, her innermost thoughts, her fears, her doubts and everything she had suppressed during her seventeen years of marriage. While jotting down her experiences, she experiences a sort of catharsis and she has decided not to be passive and silent. Jaya speaks:

The panic has gone, I am Mohan’s wife. I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible. (TLS 191)

Deshpande’s canvas abounds in women characters as victims of the uncivilized gender inequality. Mohan’s mother and his sister Vimla too are victims of gender bias. His mother made a living by cooking for wedding feasts and his father was a drunkard who would frequently beat her up. Mohan narrates to Jaya a moving incident when his father returned home late one night and found that chutney had not been served with rice to him. He tossed the plate away and walked off and Mohan reflects: “God, she was tough, women in those days were tough.” (TLS 36) But Jaya the protagonist has a different point of view and
writes: “I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender.” (TLS 36) Jaya also comes to know about the tragic death of Mohan’s mother through Vimla. Vimla’s death is also tragic as she had developed ovarian tumour and bleeds herself to death in silence. She does not talk about her problem even to her mother-in-law as she knew very well that it would be in vain.

Deshpande does not present men as wholly bad and women as completely good, in her novels. She is pragmatic in the sense that her stories are very close to life and she is not writing about Jaya only but also about Mohan, as Jaya says: “I am writing of us”. (TLS 1) In That Long Silence, Deshpande does not put the culpability of their marital crisis directly on Mohan’s shoulders but also on Jaya’s. Deshpande suggests that the women should accept their own responsibility for their victimization, instead of blaming others. Jaya mostly guilts herself for her suffering. Nambiar rightly observes: “That Long Silence is a serious effort towards maintaining a credible balance between the sexes.” (Nambiar 4)

Though Deshpande is against the labelling of her novels as feminist That Long Silence is a feminist novel for, in a conversation with Malini, Deshpande declares:

Any woman who writes fiction shows the world as it looks to her protagonist, if the protagonist is a woman, she shows the world as it looks to a woman—to apply the tag of feminist is one way, I have
realized, of dismissing the serious concerns of the novel by labeling them, by calling the work propagandist. (12)

Jaya raises her voice against the straitjacketed role models of wife and mother, and rebels against the suppression of the age-old patriarchal setup.

Deshpande’s *The Binding Vine* highlights the plight of Urmi, an educated middle-class wife who is grieving over the death of her one-year-old daughter Anu and in the process becomes very sensitive towards the sufferings and distress of other people as well. If she had not undergone such a personal loss, she would not have had any concern with the others. *The Binding Vine* has three different tales; the first one is about her, the next is about Shakuntala, mother of a rape victim and the third tale is about Urmi, is the mother-in-law of Mira, who is suffering from marital rape.

The novel opens with Urmi’s sorrow over her daughter. Nancy Chodorow writes: “the experience of mothering for a woman involves a double identification. A woman identifies with her own mother and, through identification with her child, she (re)experiences herself as a cared-for child….Given that she was a female child, and that identification with her mother and mothering are so bound up with her being a woman, we might expect that a woman’s identification with a girl child might be stronger.” (Chodorow 67)

Seen in psychoanalytic terms, Urmi’s grief over her lost daughter is also her childhood grief for the loss of her mother with whom a psychological association had been renewed through her mothering a daughter. She finds it
difficult to let go of her memories for Urmi the loss is terrible and despite the efforts of her friends and family members, she clings on to her grief. Although she tries to battle the defeat, she feels that forgetting this loss would be identical to betrayal: “I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. This is one battle. I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray”. (TBV 21) It is her intense attachment to her daughter that becomes the cause of her suffering. Her father’s death does not shock her much, as she says that it is only “a gentle memory”. (TBV 27) She rejects the idea of having a framed photograph of Anu on the wall, “I don’t need a picture to remember her, I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life”. (TBV 68)

When her friend Lalita asks how many children she has, she replies, “Only one a son”. (TBV 106) But she also gets filled with a sense of guilt as if she was betraying Anu: “How could I, oh God, how could I? That was betrayal, treachery, how could I deny my Anu? … only one son… how could I?” (TBV 106) In such an aggrieved state she happens to meet Shakuntala, mother of Kalpana a rape-victim, in the hospital where Vanaa her sister-in-law, works. Kalpana is lying unconscious and her mother thinks that she has met with a car accident. Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge, after careful examination, reports that Kalpana has been brutally raped. Shakuntala’s reaction is that of a typical Indian mother brought up in an oppressive male-dominated society. She tells Vanaa: “It’s not
true, you people are trying to blackmail my daughter’s name.” (TBV 58)

Gathering from Vanaa and Dr Bhaskar’s conversation, she cries in agony and fear:

No, no, no. Tell him, Tai, it’s not true, don’t tell anyone. I’ll never be able to hold up my head again, who’ll marry the girl, we’re decent people, doctor”, she turns to him, “don’t tell the police. (TBV 58)

Most Indian mothers would react in a similar way as they are concerned about the marriage of their daughters. Deshpande has eloquently expressed Shakuntala’s anguish, rage, vulnerability and fright. The character has been presented so realistically that it leaves a sense of familiarity. Shakutai (Shakuntala) is in a traumatic state and is sobbing. Urmi escorts her home and from there starts her association with her as she pays regular visits to Shakutai’s place to make inquiries about Kalpana’s state. It is during these regular visits that Urmi comes to know about Kalpana from Shakutai for she swings between two extremes: sometimes she is all praise for Kalpana and sometimes puts all the blame on her for Kalpana’s character is full of paradoxes. Shakutai comments:

She is very smart, that’s how she got the job in the shop. Kalpana even learnt how to speak English. People in our chawl used to laugh at her but she didn’t care. When she wants something she goes after it, nothing can stop her. She’s stubborn, you can’t imagine how stubborn she is. (TBV 92)
She also tells later that Kalpana is secretive in nature as she did not even
tell her mother about her salary. Shakutai also expresses her wonder at having
given birth to a pretty child like Kalpana, and is full of admiration when she talks
about her daughter’s physical appearance and praises “She’s very pretty, my
Kalpana. She’s not like me at all. When she was born, she was so delicate and fair,
just like a doll. I wondered how a woman like me could have a daughter like
that”. (TBV 93) Jyoti Singh aptly defines female bonding as, “An important
expansion of nurturing and care-giving is the woman-woman dyad, also called
female bonding, which helps in female identity formation. It challenges the male-
centered interpretation of female psychological development and offers new
paradigms to contextualize female friendship”. (Singh 54)

Though she loves her daughter very much she puts all the blame openly on
her, as she bursts out: “Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like
animals. But she went her way. You should have seen her walking out, head in
the air caring for nobody. It’s all her fault, Urmila, all her fault”. (TBV 14) While
Shakutai finds faults with Kalpana, Urmi finds it difficult to reason out with her
that Kalpana is not accountable in any way for the cruel rape. She says “It’s not
her fault, no, not her fault at all”. (TBV 147)

She fails to persuade Shakutai and is furious that this would lead to the
rapist getting away guiltless. Here one could find her reactions born of the values
embedded in her by the customary patriarchal society. She was not born with
these values. The fact is that they were embedded into her by the patriarchal decree. Restrictions have been imposed for a girl’s speech and conduct so that she doesn’t invite men’s attention. A girl has to strictly adhere to the social norms of how she should speak, wear and be honorable in the society. She should speak less and if possible the least as her words might send wrong signals to men. Similarly she should wear respectable clothing, in which the contours of her body should remain suppressed or hidden. A lassie is always asked to behave herself in society and she is not allowed to interact much with men. Any digression from these norms invites the wrath of the family members as it attracts danger of her modesty getting outraged. Shakutai does not want to report the matter to the police, as she is well aware that if she does, a greater injustice awaits her and her daughter. A victim of rape is a loser on two counts. First, she has been raped and secondly the society looks down upon such a victim as a *Kulta*, a characterless woman, which makes the victim’s plight miserable.

Deshpande further reveals how the police conduct such cases. It is the duty of the police to encourage such victims to lodge complaints with them so that they can punish the culprit. But the police officer registers the case as a mere accident to the great shock of Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge who bursts out in anger, and tells Urmi,

You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her thighs—he
must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips bitten and chewed. (TBV 8)

The police officer knows very well that it is a rape case, but he has his own logic. He tells Dr Bhaskar “She’s going to die anyway, so what difference does it make whether on paper, she dies the victim of an accident or a rape.” (TBV 88) He further adds “her name would be smeared.” (TBV 88) This is what concerns Shakutai as she knows that it will not only ruin her family’s name but also undermine the marriage prospects not only of Kalpana but also of Sandhya, her second daughter. Neena Arora comments: “In a society governed by Manu’s laws which depict a woman as a being full of “carnal passions, love for ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct” (Arora 11) it is Kalpana who is blamed for as atrocious a crime as rape.

Shakutai has a very disastrous past. She is abandoned by her husband for another woman, and she is left all alone to fend for herself and her children. Soon after her marriage her husband leaves her in her father’s home and goes to Bombay on the pretext of earning a livelihood. Six months are past but he does not return and Shakutai becomes impatient and joins her husband in Bombay. She realizes that he is lazy and worthless and she gives birth to three children and decides to work for the sake for her children. Despite this, her husband deserts her and the children for another woman. She tells Urmila, “That’s been the greatest misfortune of my life, Urmila, marrying that man.” (TBV 110) Since her husband
has isolated her, she is to blame not only for her husband’s disappearance of her but also for anything that goes wrong in the family, for example Kalpana’s rape.

The society is such that Shakutai’s stoic patience of her personal tragedy in marriage and the privations she undergoes in the aftermath are thrown to the winds. She bitterly tells Urmi: “What can you expect, they say, of a girl whose mother has left her husband”? (TBV 147) Tolerating such a husband and fending for herself and her children have not transformed her in any way in an oppressive patriarchal social setup. Dr. Bhaskar wonders how women like her who themselves have had no peace and happiness in marriage could think of marrying away their daughters. Urmi tells Dr. Bhaskar that marriage provides security to a woman. She makes an apt remark as in a patriarchal social setup an unmarried woman is socially vulnerable. Y.S. Sunita Reddy observes: “It is indeed, an irony that to avoid brutalization of one kind, women willingly submit themselves to a brutality of another kind in the institution of marriage”. (Reddy 95)

Hence, Deshpande suggests here that forced violation of a woman’s body even in marriage can be as disastrous as rape, even though it is not placed in the same bracket. The protagonist feels her body has been invaded by her insensitive husband. Here the writer suggests that such incidents are common in the Indian social system where it is incumbent upon a wife to serve the husband in bed like a prostitute. So Mira’s diary is a glaring revelation of her “intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion for the man she married”. (TBV 63)
With the loss of such selfhood and identity, women have to undergo yet another kind of brutalization. Mira’s diary reveals how Venu, a poet, who later rises to become a great figure in Indian literature, subtly snubs her for attempting to write poetry. When Mira gives him some of her poems to read, he says, “Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men”. (TBV 127) It is reflective of the handicaps that women writers often face in a male-dominated society.

Consequently, Mira symbolizes the miserable and hopeless lot of innumerable Indian women who suffer silently and their voice remains smothered. The message Deshpande gives is that the invasion of woman’s body even in marriage can sometimes be as traumatic as rape. A parallel can be drawn between this novel and “Intrusion” a short story by Deshpande. It’s a story about a honeymooning couple wherein the husband forces his yet unprepared wife into the sexual act, which was tantamount to rape. The story is sensitive in the sense that the insensitive husband takes no cognizance of his wife’s sense of humiliation.

Deshpande attempts at ridiculing the pseudo-feminists like Priti, who are over-enthusiastic about fighting for equal rights for women, but harbor displaced notions about women’s freedom. In a case filed by a husband against his wife for revival of conjugal rights, the court had ruled that the husband couldn’t force the wife into physical relationship against her will. Priti is extremely excited whereas Urmi remains sober for Priti remarks: “Isn’t it radical, absolutely earthshaking in this country I mean? Can you imagine the consequences?” (TBV 37) But Urmi
thinks that one ruling by a single judge, which can be appealed against will make no difference to the entire womankind. She has a pragmatic approach towards their problems and she knows that all such victims cannot go to court. So, by making a dig at pseudo-feminists like Priti, she puts forth her own brand of feminism. Though the novel *The Binding Vine* chiefly revolves around the individual tragedies of Urmii, Mira, Kalpana and Shakutai, Deshpande subtly hints at the suffering of numerous other women in a sexist society. In a traditional society women are groomed and educated for dependence, for wifehood and for motherhood. In the words of Colette Dowling:

> because of a profound, deep-seated doubt in their own competence, which begins in early childhood, girls become convinced that they must have protection if they are going to survive. This belief is bred into women by misguided social expectations and by the fears of parents. It leads them to feel intimidated by the men they marry and to defer to them in the hope of being protected. It even leads . . . to the crippling of the women’s intellectual abilities. (Dowling 94-95)

Deshpande has been successful in carving a sufficient niche for herself as a feminist writer by articulating the anguish, agony and conflict of the modern, educated Indian women who, caught between tradition and modernity, struggle for self-expression and individuality. This is well executed in her next novel, *A Matter of Time* which deals with the predicament of three women representing three different generations of the same family. For the first time, Deshpande makes a
man the protagonist of the novel, but this hasn’t led her to focusing entirely on the man. As usual she has given expression to their pain, suffering and endurance in marriage.

The novel focuses on an urban, middle-class family of Gopal and Sumi with their three daughters Aru, Charu and Seema. It begins with Gopal entering the house and telling Sumi that he is leaving the house for good. Sumi is unable to react verbally for the next morning she tells about it to her daughter, repeating Gopal’s words. She is so shocked with Gopal’s action that she lapses into complete silence, trying simultaneously to keep things normal for her daughters. But they feel restless as “Sumi, despite her façade of normality, has a quality about her—a kind of blankness—that makes them uneasy”. (AMT 10-11) The crisis not only leads to an intense introspection by the women protagonists in the first person narrative but also by Gopal the male protagonist. Being self-confident Sumi takes control of her life and reaches a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. S. Prasanna Sree states, “Modern and liberal in outlook, Sumi defies the outdated social opinion and orthodox treatment of a woman subjected to desertion by her husband. She has the courage to rise above the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliations and frustrations”. (Prasanna Sree 118)

After Gopal’s desertion, Shripati, Sumi’s father brings them to ‘Big House’ which is their parental home. Kalyani, Sumi’s mother, considers it not only as a great tragedy, but also a matter of shame and disgrace. She gives an emotional cry:
“No, no, my God, not again.’ She begins to cry, sounding so much like an animal.” (AMT 12) For Sumi, her grief, anger and humiliation are so deep that although she remains calm and composed outwardly but deep within she is very restless. She becomes an enigma for her parents, sister and cousins: “She accepts Gopal’s dumb sympathy, Devaki’s fierce loyalty, and Ramesh’s stupefied bewilderment, as if they are all the same to her”. (AMT 20) They fail to deal with her apparent endurance as Sumi’s daughters seem to have taken up the threads of their life in the Big House, but she remains totally lost and confused even in her childhood home. She confesses that Gopal’s walking out has left such a void that she cannot find her bearings and there are no markers to show her which way she should go.

The incident had made a telling effect on her body and soul, “with Gopal’s going, it was as if the swift-flowing stream of her being had grown thick and viscous—her movement, her thoughts, her very pulse and heartbeats seemed to have slowed down.” (AMT 28) Her daughters feel hurt by her apparent stoicism, as they want to share their mother’s loss and sorrow. Devaki or Devi even cries and tells her, “may be I’m crying because you don’t”. (107) At this Sumi expresses her sense of great humiliation and loss, “What do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don’t know why and may be he doesn’t really know, either. And that I’m angry and humiliated and confused.” (AMT 107)

In the absence of any valid reasons, Kalyani, decides to beseech with Gopal to return home and Gopal assures her that Sumi is not at all responsible for his
decision, but does not offer any other reason for that act. But Sumi feels upset when her daughters blame her for Gopal’s act of desertion, “Do my daughters blame me for what Gopal has done? Do they think it is my fault? Why can’t I open my heart to them”? (AMT 23) Sumi, in fact, tries to come to terms with the hard, sad reality and expects her daughters too to do the same. Sumi’s daughters are also worried if their father is dead or alive, but Sumi is sure about his being alive and pursuing his own goal. Premi, Sumi’s sister, tries to elicit a tenable reason from Gopal, which proves futile and later Premi comes to know from Aru and Charu that his students at the college had disgraced their father, which could have been the believable reason for his resignation from his job. But it seems to be so superficial an answer that the same seems to be unacceptable. Deshpande gives no tangible reasons for the act and that is why Gopal himself is not sure about the reasons behind his decisive act.

Gopal’s sense of alienation seems to be one possible reason for his decision and his sense of estrangement and loneliness has been there right from his abnormal childhood. He is unable to come to terms with the fact that he was born of the union of his father and the wife of his father’s brother. A conflict rages in his adolescent mind about the reasons that led to this marriage. Later in life, he happens to read Hamlet and draws a parallel between his own and Hamlet’s fix,

It was when I read Hamlet, fortunately much later, that the most terrible version of my parent’s story entered my mind …. In this story my father became a man succumbing to his passion for his
brother’s wife, the woman compliant, a pregnancy and a child to come and then after the husband’s convenient death (no, I couldn’t I just couldn’t make my father poison his brother) a marriage of convenience. (AMT 43)

At the time when his father was alive, he was unable to relate himself to his father as he considered him as his mother’s culpable partner. Shortly, their death leaves a sense of emptiness in his life as he gets completely devastated at the apprehension that his sister Sudha did not share the same father with him and he reflects, “that was a betrayal that cut away at the foundations of my life”. (AMT 52) Therefore, one could see that Gopal has been nurturing a sense of alienation and loneliness since his childhood. Gopal reflects, “All human ties are only a masquerade. Some day and some time, the pretense fails us and we have to face the truth.” (AMT 52) It is perhaps this realization that has led to his walking out on his family. Though Deshpande does not suggest any reason for his abandonment.

The marriage between Kalyani and Shripati is at the centre of this novel. Kalyani’s predicament in marriage is in no way less heartbreaking than that of Sumi’s. Deshpande depicts her as an intelligent girl with a promising future, if only she had been allowed to pursue her studies, but the circumstances led her marry Shripati. Manorama, Kalyani’s mother, had failed to give birth to a male inheritor to their property and feared that her husband would marry a second time. She is opposed to Kalyani marrying into a new family, as the property would then
go to them. It is under such unyielding circumstances that she gets Kalyani married to her brother Shripati just to keep the property within the family. Three children are born of this marriage and they are Sumi, Premi, and Madhav who is a mentally challenged child.

Kalyani’s real tragedy begins when her four-year-old son, Madhav, is lost at the railway station while she is to board the train to Bangalore. A son even though retarded, holds so great an importance in the Indian social setup that Shripati does not talk to Kalyani for the next thirty years. Soon after the incident, Shripati sends her back to her parents’ home with their two daughters. Shripati returns home only after Manorama, her mother-in-law, urges him on her deathbed to return. Although he obliges not a word is exchanged between them and his return makes no difference to her life. Sumi reflects, “But for many others this may well be a sound arrangement where husband and wife are living together under the same roof even if there is only silence between them.” (AMT 167) Here Deshpande exposes the social compulsion and the vulnerability of such women in a male chauvinistic society. Even if nothing is left of married life between the husband and the wife, women suffer in silence just to keep their marriage going. As Sumi reflects, “But her Kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife”. (AMT 167)

Deshpande also reveals the uncultured injustice administered to women in the matters of property ownership. Sumi is shocked to know that her maternal grandfather’s property, which should have been inherited by Kalyani, is
bequeathed to her father, “Why did they not give it to her? She finds herself looking into the conundrum of justice, a well so deep, dark and unfathomable, that she draws back”. (AMT 196) Kalyani has every right to the ownership of the property, but it is denied to her. It is surprising to Aru to know that women find no mention in the family tree, although they go through thick and thin while discharging their respective duties to the family. Aru is again astonished when her lawyer-friend, Surekha, whom she meets and asks her to sue her father for maintenance, tells her: “Do you know that Manu doesn’t mention any duty to maintain a daughter? The duty is towards a wife, parents and sons.” (AMT 204)

The dominant desire for a son, is to be witnessed in the relationship between Kalyani and Manorama. For Manorama, Kalyani is a great regret as she gives birth to two baby girls. She wins the favour of her mother when she gives birth to a baby boy though he is a mentally challenged one. But that little happiness too proves momentary as she loses her only son in confusion at a railway station. Deshpande’s quote from the Brahad-Aranyaka Upanishad sums up the Indian psyche:

> Whatever wrong has been done by him,
> 
> His son frees him from it all;
> 
> Therefore he is called a son. By his son

> A father stands firm in this world. (4.4-5.6)

In *A Matter of Time* also, she does not leave out the issue of female sexuality. Surpanakha, the mythical Ravana’s sister, becomes a symbol of female
sexuality. Sumi recalls her mother once comment that she was as ugly as Surpanakha. Since then she has been thinking of Surpanakha and the unpleasant incident in which her nose is cut off when she exhibits her love to Rama and Lakshmana and she thinks:

Female sexuality. We’re ashamed of owning it, we can’t speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And, therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it. (AMT 191)

Unlike in the earlier novels, Deshpande gives voice to the perception of the men folk in *A Matter of Time* for Gopal’s thoughts and feelings are exposed before the reader. Motherhood has always been given so prominent a place in literature and society that a father’s feelings go unnoticed. Gopal’s sense of alienation since his father’s heinous wedding has persisted even after his marriage. Earlier also he felt himself like an outsider and even after marriage the feeling does not leave him:

I saw it when Sumi put the baby to her breast. When I looked at them, that they belonged together as I never did. They were together in that magic circle. Woman and child. And I was outside. A man is always an outsider. (AMT 68)
The bond between the mother and the son is so deep-rooted in a man’s psyche that it is nearly impossible for the son to extricate himself from it. When Shankar expresses his inability to protect his wife from his mother’s sharp tongue saying, “She gave me birth, she brought me up, she looked after me”, (AMT 216) Gopal reflects, “That’s a debt we can never repay, it’s a burden we can never lay down.” (AMT 216) But Deshpande ends the novel on a tragic note. The reunion of Gopal and Sumi is an unusual one. When he returns she neither cries to him nor abuses him nor does she ask him for any explanations. Everything is usual as Sumi enters the room and finds him having lunch and reading poems.

After lunch also she finds him in a cheerful mood, laughing and talking to the children. His presence makes a difference to the others and her daughters, but for herself she realizes that they can “never be together again”. (AMT 88) She replicates:

All those days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged, they now move separately. (AMT 85)

Accordingly she has come to terms with her present with a new-born understanding to move to the forefront in life without any resentment for the man who had been the cause of her humiliation and suffering. 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. But this is not to be, as Sumi and her father, Shripati, meet their tragic end in a road accident which gives a philosophical dimension to the novel.

Consequently, Deshpande has ventured out of the box she has confined herself to and expresses the anguish, pain, suspicions and fears of her protagonists, both, male and female alike. She does not fight for justice to women at men’s cost, but presents their respective limitations as spouses. But as Deshpande’s novel is about three women from three generations of the same family and the way they cope with the tragedies in their lives, she is conspicuously a feminist writer.

Deshpande’s *Small Remedies* was published in the year 2000. For this novel she adopts the structure of a biography within a biography. Madhu Saptarishi, the protagonist, has been commissioned by a publisher to write a biography of Savithribai Indorekar, a famous classical singer, an expert and a legend of the Gwalior Gharana. Writing a novel encompassing such a biography necessitates acquisition of the register and idiom of music and a deep understanding and appreciation of the Hindustani classical music. But Deshpande renders the discourse of Hindustani music with great ease in her unfaltering impeccable English. Like Indu, Sarita, Jaya, Urmi, and Sumi, Madhu also is urban, middle-aged and educated. All these protagonists undergo great suffering in marriage, and when they stand up for themselves, they spark off upheaval in the family and society and undergo great embarrassment and humiliation.
Compared to the earlier novels *Small Remedies* has been created on a wider canvas. Taking into account the Indian composite culture, the structure of the novel encompasses the plurality and variety of this culture. In this particular novel her characters, both, male and female, are drawn from different communities and professions. She gives an honest and realistic portrayal of a Maharashtrian Brahmin family. Here, an Anthony Gonsalves, a Hamidabai and Joe are all, in a sense, part of Madhu’s extended family.

Deshpande wrote *Small Remedies* at a time when similar attempts could be witnessed in Salman Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Vikram Seth’s *An Equal Music* and Bani Babu’s *Gandharvi*. But Deshpande’s main concern is not the Hindustani classical music but the gender prejudice prevailing not only in the society but the field of classical music as well. Madhu has been asked to write Savitribai’s biography in which she has to be portrayed as a heroine. But she refuses to present her as such since the latter had been a victim of gender discrimination prevailing in our patriarchal society. Instead she presents her as a young woman who had led a sheltered life not only as a child in her parental home but also as a daughter-in-law in an affluent Brahmin family. It is her daring independent nature that makes her seek her own identity and elope with a Muslim tableau player to live in a strange town. Although born in a tradition-bound conformist Brahmin family, she makes a name for herself as a great classical singer. Madhu records how Savitribai felt hurt when her grandmother asked her to stop singing immediately during her performance at a family gathering. Madhu
recalls: “In Neemgaon she was ‘the singer woman’ and there was something derogatory about the words, yes, I can see that now, about the way they said them.” (SR 29)

Madhu recalls her as a frail woman and brings her to life by portraying vividly the minute details of her physique. She reminisces her as:

   a small sized woman. Even from my child’s perspective she had seemed petite. Age and illness have so shrunk her that she’s a doll-sized woman now. The skin is fine and delicate, even if it is crinkled like tissue paper. Her arms are slim and firm, but the hands, with their branching of veins, seem incongruously large for those delicate arms. (SR 14)

Right from her childhood she has sensed the unrefined discrimination women have to undergo in a society that has one law for men and another for women. She remembers how men could lead a life of their choice with impunity, while women were laughed at and looked down upon if they showed any deviation from the assigned roles set by the society for them. In a society where each family “had its place marked out for it according to religion, caste, money, family background, etc”. (SR 138) Savitribai’s father with his rational ways stood out from society. He was a widower, bringing up a daughter on his own with a male servant at home and he was unconventional in the sense that he would observe no rituals or religious rites and would openly indulge in a drink or two every evening. Nevertheless all his unorthodox behavior never invited any censure or disapproval
from society. But when it came to Savitribai, it was a different story, “being a man he could get away with much. He could live the way he wanted to without open censure or disapproval”. (SR 139) People are shocked and disapprove of Savitribai’s action as she elopes with a tabla player to some other town and also begets a child from him. Savitribai rebels as a daughter-in-law and as a woman. Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out:

Savitribai-a great ‘rebel who defies the contentious of her time. The feminist who lived her life on her own terms. The great artists who sacrificed everything for the cause of her art or the impetuous loves who abandoned a secure married life in a Brahmin household to live with her Muslim accompanist. (Mukherjee 40)

Even Savitribai’s father-in-law is no different and too could get away with his way of life without any reprimand or disapproval from society. He had a mistress who was a well-known Thumri singer and he visited her frequently and the people around knew this. It was not much of a secret affair and the women gossiped about it as it was widespread knowledge and was ever raised by society there. His choice of a wife from one’s own class and mistress from another was quite acceptable, but for a daughter-in-law pursuing a career in classical music was shameful. Although her father-in-law never discouraged her, Savitribai had to undergo great mental torture as she was treated like an untouchable among women. The little freedom she enjoyed was a great cause for disdain and envy to the other women, and they would throw scathing comments on her way back from
her music classes. Only a little deviation from the social norms lays her open to much contempt and ridicule, and also to be treated like an outcast by her own kind. The tortuous experience she undergoes is revealed in the following lines:

But the subtle cruelty of persistent hostility leaves deeper wounds.
There’s always the temptation to succumb, to be back to the normal path and be accepted. To resist the temptation speaks of great courage. (SR 221)

Deshpande does not delineate Savitribai’s character from a feminist point of view though she has led the most unconventional of lives. She is ashamed of her youthful indiscretions as while relating her life-story to Madhu, she conceals her intimate association with Ghulam Saab and also the fact that she had a daughter from him. This shows Savitribai’s anxiety over her past’s reckless action which she considers a stain on her character and decorum. She keeps herself aloof from her illegal daughter Munni, lest it should tarnish her image. But this dissociation of hers from her daughter is too much for Madhu as she herself is a devoted and loving mother, grieving over her son’s death.

Madhu wonders why a woman who had the daring to walk out on her marriage and family, feared to make public the fact that she had borne a child out of wedlock. All this brings her utter selfishness but one cannot put the blame for all this squarely on her shoulders alone. In a patriarchal society such things are easily said than done and it takes extraordinary valor to make public such facts, and this couldn’t have helped Munni in any way. In the West such things have
progressively gained acceptance, though not respectability, but in the Indian society, such suitability was practically impossible and Madhu feels that she could make Savitribai immortal if she made public her most closely guarded secret. Hers would be a story of exemplary courage and sacrifice as it is the story of a woman sacrificing for the sake of another woman and a mother sacrificing her interests for her daughter and it would be a rare example, for this would immortalize her.

Savitribai erases the memory of the existence of her daughter from her life to keep her good name and identity intact. She is guilt-ridden and is now ashamed of her past imprudence and wants to wipe off the memory of such acts from her mind. Meenakshi Indorekar, her daughter, is no exception for she leads the life of a disowned child and is unhappy and ashamed of her existence, as she is a child born of her mother’s association with another man. Like her mother, she too wishes her past were dead she dissociates herself from Ghulam Saab, rejecting him as her father and later disown to her mother too. Madhu recalls how as a child Munni had invented stories of a lawyer-father living in Pune, and also underwent great psychological torment when the neighborhood girls teased her by asking her about the identity of her real father, whether it was Ghulam Saab, the Station Director or the man “Who lives with your [Munni’s] mother?” (SR 77)

Madhu meets Munni in a bus and she refuses to recognize her as her childhood friend. Munni tells Madhu that she was mistaken, and she was not Munni but “Shailaja Joshi.” In her frantic quest for a new identity cut off from her
past, she has not only given up her mother’s identity but refuses to acknowledge any familiarity with her past connections or acquaintances. Unlike her mother, she is a traditionalist seeking the approval of society. As a child, she has already had a very painful experience as to how society makes life difficult for one who tries to be different or unconventional.

Deshpande, through the marriage and later estrangement between Som and Madhu, gives a vivid picture of the patriarchal mindset of men. Madhu’s separation from Som occurs prior to her son’s death. Once, Madhu, waking up after a nightmare, reveals to him a secret that she had slept with a man when she was fifteen. Although the man had later committed suicide, Som is unable to accept her act. The relationship between the two begins to fall apart. Madhu fails to understand Som as she is ignorant of the typical male psychology. In our society where a woman is treated like yet another commodity to be possessed and exclusively consumed for the owner’s satisfaction, a woman becomes the husband’s private property. A woman is not to indulge in such acts with others before or after marriage, and is required to serve her husband with single-minded devotion and loyalty. Even if the husband is lecherous, she should not question him and accept his infidelity as the society has a sex-centered morality. As Ruby Milhotra writes, “Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behavior”. (Milhotra 84)
Such a deviation makes Madhu as a victim not only of the double standards of society but of her own innocence for she had slept with Chandru one night in a hotel room in her innocence, and again, in her innocence, she discloses this to Som. Had she spared him the knowledge of her indiscrete act, the relation between the two would have remained normal. But Som with his typical male standard holds on to this lone act of sex forgetting the fact that he himself has had a full-fledged relation with a married woman before marriage. She reflects, “Purity, chastity and intact hymen—these are the things Som is thinking of, these are the truths that matter”. (SR 262) Through the character of Madhu, Deshpande suggests that in Indian society pre-marital sex could lead to disintegration of marriage. In this regard, Anand Kumar rightly observes: “Novels of Shashi Deshpande are critically appreciated as a resistant reading of the gendered materials involved in constructing the ideals of mainstream, orthodox practices”. (Kumar 8)

The study of the novels selected shows how Deshpande makes an effective presentation of the feminine sensibility of the Indian women, who silently suffer and bear the agony at the loss of freedom and identity in an orthodox, male chauvinistic Indian society. Meanwhile, Manju Kapur’s her contemporary reaction to accessibility of Indian women and her portrayal of their sufferings in the male-controlled society are identified and discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter - IV

FEMININE ACCESSIBILITY IN THE NOVELS OF