Chapter 2

Voices of Subjugated and Marginalised Women:

The thematic concerns of Shashi Deshpande

What makes a fictional work attractive to the reader is primarily the thematic concern that determines the controlling idea or philosophical subject, which largely determines the selection and organization of various other elements of it. The thematic concerns of a novelist lie deep in his values and understanding of the human condition. A novel consists of a series of incidents evolved from various problems. The proper craftsmanship of the writer is assessed on the basis of the artistic treatment, by means of which, he tries to place before the reader, these problems and their solution. Novel as a popular art form finds its unity of artistic expression of the theme, and in building it into some sort of an insight. In the light of this phenomenon, the entire novel can be considered the expansion of the theme. In this sense, modern fiction cannot be considered a mere narration of events or depiction of a series of dramatic situations. The
events and situations in the novel may echo those in the lives of the reader. Likewise they echo the novelists’ vision of life.

The experiences which have exercised decisive influence in shaping the values of a writer may be the force that shapes the events in the novel in such a way as to manifest his/her meaning in them. The meaning is what the author determines. The meaning derived from the writers’ experience reflects to a great extent the value systems of the writer, which invariably involves a philosophical idea or something that illumines life.

Theme works as the controlling idea or the central insight of the whole novel. It is the unifying generalization of life, stated or implied. A probe into the theme of a novel requires an indepth understanding of the central purpose of it—what view of life it supports or what insight into life it reveals. G.S Amur writes in the preface to Deshpande’s, *The Legacy and Other Stories*, “Woman’s struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important novels” (Amur 15).
In the novels of Deshpande, the inner life of her characters is more important than the outer and the strife between the conflicting elements in the same person is more vivid than the strife between persons. The inner life of her characters is more important than the political and social background of the prevailing reality. Deshpande writes, “My stories came not out of the ideas and theories, but out of my emotions, my ability, to enter into one person, one woman, and write through her” (10). Deshpande aims at recreating her own philosophy of life through her characters and the delineation of incidents. According to her:

Each novel is a voyage of discovery for me, a discovery of myself, of other humans, of our universe. There has never been any huge enlightenment, only an understanding of the fact that as we go on living, we learn to cope, becoming each day, a little more understanding of human frailty, a little more compassionate. Knowing that if we can’t do this, we’re sunk, because humans have nothing else, no one else, but themselves. Writing is for me a part of the endeavour to understand this process, to articulate the human struggle, the human triumph (29).
A novelist cannot abstain himself from the contemporary realities. He is, in fact, one who perceives truth and the inner harmony on which things are strung together. The artist is one who seeks truth about human life. Like the great artist Jane Austen who has influenced her as a writer Deshpande believes that the author is the medium through which truth gleams. Thus every great novelist is a product of his social environment and writes primarily for his own age.

G.S. Amur while assessing the novels of Manohar Malgonkar writes, “Properly speaking, the theme of a work is not its subject, but rather its central idea which may be stated directly or indirectly” (22).

Almost all Indian novelists have essentially remained Indian in their themes and technique. The themes, notions and beliefs which form the driving force of Deshpande have their origin in Indian soil. The themes and subject matter of her stories owe their source to certain scenes, situations, incidents or character she had occasions to come across.

Deshpande seems to agree with the view of Christopher Isherwood, who wrote “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair.”
Someday, all this will have to be developed, carefully fixed, printed” (qtd. by Liddel 33). Critiques on Deshpande are largely concerned with the extent to which contemporary Indian women are mirrored in her works. Some have sought to see behind the fictional facade, the well-known and little known personal experiences of Deshpande; some others have undertaken an in depth study of her individual works. Women form the focal point of her writings. She projects, in her novels, her observations about the plight of women in the degrading social set up.

Deshpande was not interested in exploring the intricate psychological labyrinths that some of her contemporaries like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherji were so fond of. She was not a scholarly mystic with a passion for complexity of human mind. Deshpande’s psychological insight, as far as her characters are concerned, revolves round the emotions in the context of human relationships. She has realistically portrayed the experiences of her heroines.

Deshpande knows much more than any other woman writer in India what it is to be a woman in modern India. Each of her novels is an indepth portrayal of a woman she knows intimately. These characters evolve along with the creators’ understanding of them.
These characters are realistic. They are presented as they are engaged in the complex psychological problem of defining an authentic self. These characters are delineated with their variegated swings of mood, the ebb and flow of joy and despair. As we try to know more about them, we get an insight into their feelings and suppressed desires.

Life consists in achieving a pure relationship between man and the living universe about him. Thus modern fiction is one of search – a search to discover the relationship. Deshpande’s conviction is that our knowledge and awareness of human relationship is limited, though we know a lot about the material universe. She observes:

> We know a lot about the physical and organic world and the universe in general, but we still know every little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it. And still find it tremendously intriguing, fascinating (Pathak 252).

She is always conscious of the psychological makeup, the literary, socio-cultural and economic confluence largely instrumental in shaping the relationship. Down the ages various forms of fictional literature have demonstrated how complex and enormous these
relationships are. Each one of us is interested in people because people are the most important single factor in our individual lives – all for our good reasons. And so in stories: the reader is primarily interested in the individual concerns.

Fictional literature since 1970 has used more overt techniques than ever before for revealing how we can shift from one way of looking at things to another, thereby shifting entrenched power structures, whether economic, cultural or social. Scepticism about a status quo, with all its authority and prestige, its ability to silence and intimidate is a major step towards creating alternatives and making new realities that surpass the limited reality which passes itself off as nature or natural. Male as well as female practitioners of fictional literature began developing strategies for exposing the absurdity of present attitudes to both men and women, not to mention people of various ethnicities, with their ironic parodic, disruptive, metaphonic, irreverent, and distinctly political deconstructions of prevailing forms in literature, art, media and culture generally, which otherwise perpetuate prevailing attitudes in society. Recent studies on fiction establish beyond doubt that the modernist novel typically focuses far greater attention on to the states and processes inside the
consciousness of the main character(s) than to the public events in the outside world. Post modernism has a profound effect on the novelists’ conception of character.

An assessment of Deshpande’s works in their fullness will make it unfair to define her in the feminist perspective. Her works cannot be feminist. Rod Mengham’s comment on women’s writing is quite relevant to Deshpande’s works. He writes, “Our most central values and beliefs about life and about identity, from gender and class to nationality and race, are dependent on grasp of language, logic and other conceptual forms of order shaping our experience” (Mengham 25).

As an artist Deshpande was quite aware of the re-awakening in India of the restoration of the human dignity. This movement made writers and social reformers to give expression to the evils prevalent in the social order in India. They began writing about the long history of injustice and suppression meted out on women and lower classes. This awareness in India, while playing the role of a social reform assumed a natural response to the feminist movement that emerged at the global level. The urge for the freedom of women in India was a call for a release from centuries of male domination and rigid social
norms. The patriarchal social norms left women absolutely subservient to male domination. Novelists, especially women writers focused mainly on the realistic portrayal of women’s position.

During the colonial era the male writers presented women protagonists either as idealized images of womanhood or the dumb shadows of male desires. It was accepted that, “woman is innately weak, emotional, enjoys dependence, is limited in capacities for work” (Horney 231). The women characters of these novelists were stereotypes. During the last three decades of the last century, women novelists began accepting quite an unconventional representation of woman’s position in India. The writers were fully aware of women’s individuality, their aspirations, their inherent urge to break the resistance against all those inhibitions that were responsible for the inferior position of woman writers were, pained at this predicament.

Deshpande makes it clear in an interview with Geetha Gangadharan:

Women have been quite suppressed, quite oppressed. We, middle class people with education, are quite lucky. But a large section of Indian women are suffering even today. We have women going about with ghunhat on their
faces. And women who have no choice even to decide about having children. We have many people who still advocate sati, who consider dowry a necessity, who count it a loss when a girl is born and profit when a boy is born. It is this abysmal difference that I want to do away with, as a feminist. We all have a certain inherent potential within us, may be for different things, but we have a right to put it to use (Pathak 254).

Deshpande, who enjoys an undeniable significance in the contemporary Indian literary scene, is hailed as a writer who made novel a powerful instrument for drawing certain sociological and familial aspects of Indian life. By nature and temperament, she is highly sensitive to anything that affronts human dignity and denies natural justice. With an irrefutable sense of moral idealism and profound sympathy for women folk, she opposes all kinds of oppression, exploitation and marginalization.

Perhaps the most powerful influence which made her work on these themes was, as she herself has admitted, mainly the particular conditions of the post independent India that forced her to take up
contemporary problems concerned with women she knew well. Jasbir Jain comments on this, “The family is a place of relationships, hostilities, estrangements, refuge and rejection. It is, in itself, a puzzle, its pieces fall apart before our very eyes” (Jain 33). In another part of her interview with Geetha Gangadharan Deshpande states:

I have strong feeling that until very recently women in our society have been looked upon just as “breeding animals”. They had no other role in life. I have strong objection to tracing any human being in that manner. Women have been so dispensable in my mother’s family that one could see women dying and immediately the men getting married again. I could see that the female life had no value at all. The whole chronology of their life centres around childbirth. They would say, “this happened when my first child was born, this when I was pregnant… and so on. It used to mystify me. Does nothing happen in your life other than having children?” (252-253). Deshpande further observes:
The stress laid on the feminine functions, at the cost of all your potentials on individual, enraged me. I knew, I was a very intelligent person, but for a woman, intelligence is a handicap. If you are intelligent, you keep asking ‘why, why, why’ and it becomes a burden. I was quite uncomfortable with my own intellect and at the same time I was quite proud also. May be too much of thinking, has made me express a sort of dislike for the purely physical aspects of feminine life, making it seem as if I am totally against all feminine functions, which is not the truth at all (253).

Deshpande’s feminist concern lies in her interrogating the marginalization of women in the traditional Indian social system and in the representational status of women in history. She says, “I wrote because I had to write. I never thought beyond that” (Riti 239). She opens her mind with Vanamala Viswanatha, “I think Jane Austen had a more lasting influence. I still read her regularly. I don’t think there have been any conscious influences on my writing as such” (233). “I have read a lot of feminist novelists and understand what they are trying to say easily. However, I began reading feminist writing only
recently, while my writing has reflected feminist idea right from the start” (Riti 240).

Deshpande’s heroines assert their worth by their capacity of endurance. “Intelligent, sensitive and introspective, they try to find out their real beings by the recurrent use of silence which almost acts as their instruments against hostile social status across space and time (Mukhopadyay)

Deshpande further emphasises:

It’s necessary for women to live within relationships.

But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don’t agree with is the idealization of motherhood – the false and sentimental notes that accompany it” Literature Alive, 1/3/ P 13.

Almost all the literary works and interviews of Deshpande address several social issues of contemporary relevance in India. For a long time, woman has existed as a gap, an absence in literature…This is not only true of the fiction created by men, but also by women, who have mostly confined themselves to writing love stories dealing with
the experience of women in a superficial manner….. which repress the
truth about the majority of their sisters and their lives”. (Palkar 163).
Deshpande’s novels significantly fill the gap.

Deshpande seems to register strong protest against the way the
male writers have been presenting the world. She agrees with Sue
Dickman who writes, “All these years men have been telling the world
in their writing that women are mysterious, women are fascinating,
women are strange, women are whimsical, women are irrational…I
think we do find the other sex mysterious to some extent… there’s
always that element of the unknown” (Dickman 31).

Deshpande states in an interview:

You know, in our society, it is only a man and his
problems that are considered to be serious issues. You are
so much brain-washed into this kind of a vicious circle
that you start feeling inferior as a woman writer writing
about women’s problems. But now, I have outgrown that
state and I am quite positive about my work. I am quite
sure that my works deal with very serious issues that
deserve general human attention” (Pathak 253).
Consistent commitment to the valorization of the feminine identity is the most outstanding feature of novels of Deshpande. Her primary concern is the predicament of the Indian women, especially the educated middleclass woman, torn between an assertion of herself and submission to her various roles as daughter, wife and mother.

Deshpande distances herself from her writing. She deals with the average upper middle class Indian women with urban or semi urban background. Her women characters have no pretensions to any earth-shattering achievements. Her novels revolve round the preponderant desire of her female characters to realize themselves. She writes:

As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides, only a woman would write my books – they are written from inside, as it were. Just as a woman cannot get deeply under a man’s skin, so too a man cannot fully appreciate the feminine experience (Mathews 8).

The women characters of Deshpande form an integral part of the Indian Social Scene, to which she belongs and with which she has close acquaintance. Deshpande has created certain unforgettable
characters, with recognizable credentials. She has successfully handled their problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, failures and foibles in a convincing manner. “May be too much thinking has made me express a sort of dislike for the purely physical aspects of feminine life, making it seem as if I am totally against all feminine functions, which is not the truth at all” Indian Communicator (20 November 1994).

Deshpande’s fictional works reflect urban middle class lives which bear testimony to the pure Indianness. She has not been much influenced by Western frameworks in her thought or culture, though she is well aware of them.

_The Dark Holds No Terrors_ depicts an area of human relationship rarely handled by other Indian women writers in English. It projects a family different from those dealt with in other novels. “It is based on the problems faced by a career woman, a refreshingly new phenomenon in Indian English fiction” (Paul 30).

Deshpande, as a writer, seems preoccupied with a perpetual search for meanings, for values and for truth. To her, literary endeavour is an effort to discover and convey the true significance of things. She tries to explore the submerged truth, through the
exploration of the psyche of her characters, against her own vision of
life which to her appears dark. Meena Shirwadker writes, “writers
appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of
the educated, earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the
family” (11). *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is the story of Sarita who
attempts to face herself the terrifying complexes of guilt which
threaten to engulf her. The familial relations prove absurd, hardly able
to give any emotional or spiritual sustenance. Deshpande longs for
freedom and individuality in daily life which is denied in a male
dominated society. The ideal male-female relationship is considered
as a natural and inherent factor in a socio-economic, psychological
and biological framework. Deshpande feels that the world of a
middleclass Indian woman is darkened by violence, hatred and
destruction. Most of her novels deal with the class of Indian woman
struggling to make adjustments in life, in a traditional world rather
than get freedom from it.

The protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* Sarita, known in
family circles as Saru, born in an orthodox Brahmin family of a South
Indian town, represents those women always ignored and neglected in
the family. Her mother, throughout her life is a depraved woman, and
shows much fervour and enthusiasm than her husband in observing Brahminical rites and rituals. Saru and her brother Dhruva, who is three years younger, grow happily, despite the rigid Brahminical way of life. Saru is denied the opportunities enjoyed by Dhruva.

Sarita is often hated by her mother, just for being a she child.

The novel is:

…about mother-daughter relationships, about complete and warped families, about relationships that need to be reworked outside the conventional frameworks. Her mother had withdrawn her maternal blessings – instead of clinging to her, surviving child, she had spent a life time mourning a lost one. Her father, whom she describes in negative terms, as a feeble man, a negative person and a cipher has none of the male authority that she expects him to have (Jain 50).

No parental love is shown even on her birthdays. Her brother’s birthdays, however, are celebrated in full enthusiasm with all performance of the religious rituals. Sarita says herself “As a child my fantasies, my dreams, had no relevance to the fact that I was a girl.”

Kamala Markandaya’s novel *Nectar in the Sieve* presents a woman
who bears male children is respected more than the woman who has female children. Every woman dreams of a boy for her first issue. The birth of a male child, it is believed, brings happiness to the family. Later, the entire blame for the accidental death of Dhruva, by drowning in a puddle, is thrust on Saru. As Saru has higher intellectual and mental attainment than any others in the family she never tends to yield to the unreasonable attitude of her parents.

As she grows up the true nature of the orthodoxy of her mother unravels itself. After the death of Dhruva the mother asks, “Why don’t you die? Why are you alive and he dead”? The Dark Holds No Terrors (34-35). The following passage illustrates Dhruva’s dominance over her, “Just three years between them. But what immense advantages those three years gave her. She had ruled over him completely. No dictatorship could have been more absolute. And yet he had his revenges. Moments of triumph. Of cruel gloating. Of the knowledge that he could do anything he wanted with their mother. That even Baba would come out of his shell for him” (35). Even after years Saru is obsessed with the bitterness of the memories of the tortures inflicted on her by her mother after the death of her brother. Due to her mother’s accusation, Saru begins to wonder whether she
was really responsible for the death of her brother. It is only much later after rethinking and pondering over the event, after her mother’s death that she realizes the accidental nature of her brother’s death.

The very nature of Manu transferred Saru’s gender neuter dreams to gendered ones. She says:

I was all female and dreamt of being the adored and chosen of a superior, superhuman male. That was glory enough… to be chosen by that wonderful man. I saw myself humbly adoring, worshipping and being given the father-loves kind of love that was protective, condescending, yet all-encompassing and satisfying. There was no ‘I’ then, not as yet, craving for recognition, satisfaction. The craving, which when it came, was always to be accompanied by a feeling of guilt if the ‘I’ dared to overreach a male, as if I was doing something that took away shreds of my femininity. That came later.

After that day, he was the figure I fantasied about, the person round whom I wove my foolish dreams. No, not dreams; first one dream really. Always the age old feminine dream of a superior conquering male (53).
The cumulative effect of what is transacted in the family circle makes Saru, much ashamed of being a woman. Her very presence in the family was treated as a curse to the family. She considers womanhood a source of neglect and sorrow. The mother-daughter relationship in the novel is based on gender bias and lovelessness. She is considered by others in the family, throughout her life as a peripheral member of the family, both in her paternal home as well as in her husband’s.

The novel unravels the inner turmoil of Saru, fighting within herself, between her own knowledge and that thrust on her by the members of the family, especially her mother. The rift between Saru and her mother later assumes the nature of a rebellion. At one stage she remarks, “A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to rage, to scream against the fact that put me in same class as my mother” (55) The negligence of mother, indifference of father, and burden of guilt over the death of her brother enforce Saru to get away from her parental home to choose a space in professional life. During her medical education she meets Manohar who belongs to a lower caste. Saru’s free connection with Manu is expressed, “Sometimes I worked with him, for him, subordinating myself so completely to him
that I was nothing without him. And yet he could do nothing without me, either. At times he was imperious, at times, even, to my own shame, passionate, though my dreams did not go beyond a kiss”(53-54).

The novel which makes an interesting study on gender and culture reveals the socio-cultural and familial scenario of the region with which the author is familiar. Against her parental wishes she marries Manu, to secure the love she has not been able to get in her paternal home. Manu’s male ego asserts itself through sexual assaults on Saru. She silently bears the pangs of her domestic suffering.

The novel does not have a single theme or subject matter. When she wants to live with her father, she is not allowed to do so, because it will affect the family prestige. She is considered an unwelcome guest in her paternal abode where she feels like an abandoned and deserted child.

Saru confronts crisis in all roles of life as a mother, as a wife, as a sister, as a daughter and above all as an Indian woman. The novel begins by going back to the beginning which is already well past in the middle age of Saru. After attaining the status of a successful doctor, and after a considerable pause of time, Saru is informed of the
unexpected death of her mother. She decides to go back to her parental home and visit her old father, who is leading a lonely life. Once she reaches her parental home she is obsessed with the bitterness of the memories of the tortures inflicted on her by her mother, even from her childhood. Gender bias in which Saru is tortured is well revealed as her mother comments, “Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even when it’s only your father who’s around” (62). Saru’s stubborn retort on this is: “If you’re a woman, I don’t want to be one” (62). She is a victim of childhood insecurity. A more or less similar situation is presented by Kamala Markandaya in her novel *Nectar in the Sieve*. A girl at her puberty is not allowed to go freely out of home. They are allowed to go out only in the company of brothers or father.

Saru was held responsible for the untimely death of her brother Dhruva. Consequent on this, her very presence in the family was treated as a curse to the family. The negligence of mother, indifference of father, and the burden of the guilt of the accidental death of brother compelled her to leave home. Fortunately she could find a space in professional life and becomes a successful medical practitioner and her losses in the family is thus compensated. She intends to seek new
modes of relationship. She loses her affinity with family. Manohar enters her life as a consolation. Sarah Grimke observes in this connection:

Man has subjected woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind…(Pathak 86).

The whole novel is a picture of the arduous odyssey of the protagonist who seeks either an escape or a shelter from the nightmarish past she has experienced. She also feels now that she does not need to free from the terrors of life, but has only to turn inward for refuge. She decides to go back to Manu, for she realizes that man and woman make a complete whole. She sheds the darkness that had terrorized so long. “All right, so I’m alone. But so’s everyone else. Human beings – they’re going to fail you. But because there is just us, because there’s no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can’t believe in ourselves, we’re sunk (The Dark Holds No Terrors 200).
Deshpande highlights Saru’s decision making capacity with regard to her medical studies and her selection of inter-caste marriage with Manohar both of which her mother objected. Upon inter-caste marriage the mother commented as: “you won’t be happy with him. I know you won’t. A man of a different caste, different community…what will you two have in common?” (98)

Deshpande seems to have portrayed Saru one step above her husband who is only an English teacher of a second grade college while Saru earns much from her medical profession so that she could achieve an upper hand in social position with which Saru commented “My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (217).

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* “explodes the myth of man’s superiority and the myth of woman being a paragon of virtues”. (Mohan 100). It is the story of an upper class woman between two stages of her life, represented by her own person reflected in the mirror.

JasbirJain writes, “Saru views herself in the mirror on two different occasions: first as an adolescent girl labelled ugly by her mother and then as a grown woman, come home after the death of her mother”(100-101). She realizes that on both the occasions, the
objectification of the images has been made by others, not by her inner self. (70). She also realizes “…that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth”. (The Dark Holds No Terrors 42). “In both cases her relationship with her body is foregrounded – first as an ugly child, and, later as a victim of her husband’s sadistic impulses” (Jain 101). The two images are far removed from what has been conceived as the normal life, in real life situations or in literatures.

The novel has a striking beginning. Sarita (often called Saru) comes back home after a long absence of 15 long years soon after the death of her mother. She gives the impression that her coming is to look after her widower father; but there is another purpose behind her coming – to escape from the nightmarish brutality that her husband Manu meted out on her every night. This is not the experience of Sarita alone. Quite a large number of women, in one way or other have similar predicament. The novel begins with the nightmarish experience of Sarita “The dream, the nightmare, whatever it was, continued. Changing now, like some protean monster, into the horror of rape” (The Dark Holds No Terrors 11).

The theme of a husband’s sexual brutality to his wife night after night is very convincingly portrayed by Deshpande. Before
Deshpande only Kamala Das has depicted such scenes of “Hurting hands” and “the savage reality of the monstrous onslaught” so blatantly.

In her recollections she draws the image of her childhood experiences, her mother who never loved her, the other members of the family, her marriage with Manohar, the days of silent suffering she had, with her two children.

When she comes back to her paternal abode after 15 years her father welcomes her “like an unwilling host entertaining an unwelcome guest” (The Dark Holds No Terrors 18). Later Sarita understands that her mother’s attitude was prejudiced because her own childhood was an insecure one as her father had become a Sanyasi and deserted his wife and two children. Ultimately, as a wife, Sarita finds refuge in the doctor in herself. In the serene atmosphere of the house where she was born and brought up memories of the past brings enlightening in Saru. She recalls the words from ‘The Dhammapada’ used as the epigraph of the novel:

You are your own refuge;

there is no other refuge.

This refuge is hard to achieve.
These words echoed in the recesses of her mind and the new light provides a healing effect on her. She now experiences a realization – a realization of her true self. She bravely realizes what she was in her past life. “The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife” (*The Dark Holds No Terrors* 220). The doctor in her helps the wife in her to take care of her husband, with the power of the doctor. Now she secures enough courage to go back to her husband and cure him of his depression caused by inferiority complex and bring normal harmony in her family life. As a result of this she gains power and identity which render her comfort and happiness. Instead of being merely a daughter, sister, wife, or mother and leading compartmentalized lives to suit each role, she develops into an independent individual with her own limited expectations of life. This sort of identity is what she has sought in life. Saru derives her strength from within, without being dependent on any external assistance.

As the novel comes to an end we see the certainty how Saru will no longer be a victim of Manu’s frustrations. She feels proud of her professional success. She no longer feels guilty for someone else’s failures.
Deshpande’s concern has always been the complex state of man-woman relationship in which the rational control of social consciousness becomes meaningless. *If I Die Today* written in the early years of Deshpande’s literary career, illustrates that caste or religion is not a factor that marginalizes women. The novel voices forth Deshpande’s concerns for the problems and perils of the female. It presents man-woman relationship after marriage. As in the other novels, *If I Die Today* is concerned with the life of Indian middleclass women. Their married life is seemingly happy; but they face varied problems related to sex, martial life, maternal and paternal bonds. The sole cause of the agony of Manju, the protagonist of the story, is the peculiar disposition of her husband, who cannot agree with her making association with people around. Manju is in a rather miserable state and is unable to understand that she is not responsible for her feelings of misery. She seems to have become a victim of the peculiar mental makeup of her husband, Vijay. He is passive. He is never angry at her. However his actions and words, though not deliberate, make her feel guilt ridden and censured. These patterns of Vijay’s behaviour is responsible for the miserable feelings of thousands of
housewives like Manju. Manju’s married life is fraught with nothingness and barriers.

Vijay and Manju “had planned for a second child” (12). The realization of their plan should have brought them closer; instead she is silenced and distanced. Manju says:

Apart from the physical symptoms, there was in me a feeling of… no, not discontent, it’s too mild a word. This was something worse, far worse. A pregnancy not going right could account for the lassitude, the feeling of bearing a burden, of being heavy and graceless. But it couldn’t explain the forebodings, the premonitions that filled me at times. As though something unpleasant waited for me round the corner (12-13).

It appears that her motherhood is the source of all her anxieties and worries. Pregnancy makes her “feel like a breeding animal” (23). More than anything else, the real problem of the Indian middleclass woman is her under-privileged condition after marriage. Manju observes, “A marriage you start off expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dead leaves, the expectations fall off. But this…two people
who have shut themselves off in two separate glass jars? Who can see each other but can’t communicate? Is this a marriage?” (24).

Deshpande examines the plight of women from a different perspective by presenting different category of people. There are economically independent non-Hindu families, but their predicament is not different from the condition of women belonging to other castes and class. The cause of unhappiness in married life is “…the Indian male” irrespective of caste, class, or profession. The pattern of relationship remains more or less the same in various sets of relationships in the novel.

Better education, economic freedom, or material well-being are considered factors contributing to success in married life. The truth about it is known to Guru, the philosopher King and one of the prominent characters in the novel. He asks “I was just wondering how many secrets a face can hide”. Ashok replies, “Multitudes, I expect. We all wear masks, don’t we?”

The image of women in Indian fiction has undergone considerable change during the last four decades. The image of enduring, self- sacrificing women has been replaced by conflicted female characters searching for identity. Women can no longer be
characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. They do not succumb to patriarchal tortures, rather they have the capacity to analyse the nature of their pain to come to a decision about their lives. Writers like Deshpande, depict both the diversity of women and the diversity, within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. These novels furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition. The heroes or heroines of Deshpande are not the prototypes that we come across, in the novels written earlier.

Deshpande is indebted to a passage “He saw the face of little creatures looking down out of a glory of her long bright radiant hair, and musically repeating to him like a vision, *Come Up and Be Dead*, *Come Up and Be Dead*” in the well-known classic in fiction, *The Great Expectations* for the title of the novel *Come Up and Be Dead*. The novel is set in the background of a girls’ school with its female population. The central motif of the novel is evil and violence. The plot of the entire novel centres round the motives of four different murders. Another significant point that the novel illustrates is that people commit murder just because of fear. Deshpande precisely explores those evils existing within human mind that lead towards
further evils. She also projects the conditions that constitute the psyche of crime and violence.

The novel unlike other mainstream novels of Deshpande is concerned with death which is the narrative tool round which other events are arranged. Miss Kshama Rao, Principal of an educational institution has had a chance encounter in a train with a member of the Board of Directors of a girls’ school. This encounter makes her accept the position of the Headmistress of the school. She starts living in the school house with her cousin Devayani (Devi) and brother Pratap.

The whole novel is set in the background of the school building which atleast at first sight, is massive, imposing and forbidding. Terrifying events in the story begin with the suicide of Mridula, a student, the only child of her parents. Soon after the incident Devi learns that Mridula was pregnant. The incident leads to certain bickering and scandal mongering. Pratap was one of the boy friends of Mridula and he is intrigued with the matter. He has had a mental breakdown before and is now undergoing treatment under Dr.Girish. Pratap falls from a ladder in the garden and soon he meets with death in the nearby hospital. Devi cannot consider it an accident. She firmly believes it as a well planned murder. Devi gets a piece of paper
containing strange words from Pratap’s table, which later throws light on the macabre incidents. The third victim happens to be Mrs Raman, a teacher of the school and mother of Sona, a student of the same school. Inspector Prasad is appointed to investigate the murders and he gets some details of them from Devi. Sharmila, a friend of Sona, warns Devi that Sona is in danger and that night Sharmila gets seriously injured. The next day, when Devi goes to a film she notices that she had noticed the name of a movie in the paper found on Pratap’s table. Soon she hurries to the inspector.

The major themes of the novel, as in the other major works of Deshpande, are that the individual survives not in isolation and the shadows of the past persist to modify the pattern of human conditions. For example the relation between Kshama Rao and Pratap is not of a conventional type. Before making sure of the involvement of Pratap in the criminal act, she develops an unbounded contempt for him. She even wishes his death. “If only he hadn’t come here … in the accident” (87). Kshama Rao was prejudiced against him. The attempts of certain Board of Governors fail to convince her of Pratap’s innocence.
For Kshama Rao, the removal of Pratap from the hostel, was not a matter of upholding the prestige of the school, but an expression of her own contempt for her parents and their undeniable sexuality. She was sixteen when Pratap was born. His birth was a burden to her which assumes the nature of hostility towards her mother. Mother-daughter hostility existing in the novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors* can also be seen in this novel with all intensity. “She hadn’t … between her parents” (92).

Devi informed the inspector about the incident. Girish was also present. He offers a lift to Devayani in his car. She realizes that she has fallen in a trap and finds that Girish is the man behind the murders.

Sanjay was responsible for the pregnancy of Mridula. He killed Pratap with the help of Girish. Dr. Girish who attended the victims happens to be a part of the call-girl racket and the murders take place in an attempt to hide his involvement. Mrs Raman was murdered because she knew something about this. Sharmila intervened when he attempted to kill Sona too. At last, it was found that the real brain behind these incidents was Mr. Varma, a billionaire in the town, who
used virgin girls of the institution for prostitution. Inspector arrives just in time to save Devi and the criminals are all booked.

The novel tries to convey the message that weaknesses like fear, greed and lust are responsible for other evils like murder. In the novel, murder is committed to hide guilt and shame. Murder is an evil rooted in the consciousness of different individuals.

The girls in the hostel who allege that Pratap is responsible for the whole problem and wants him to be evicted from the hostel, puts Kshama in an embarrassing situation. Pratap himself may not be evil incarnate, but he cannot escape from the shadows of crime and horror due to the complications that arise. Kshama has to make a choice between her responsibility as the head of the school and her duty as a brother. She, an able administrator, can solve the problems; but she overcomes in her world of mental conflict. She also tries to examine the conditions by which she had fallen into such a state.

Another significant character in the novel Devayani, doesn’t enjoy a happy relationship with Pratap. She does not find it a brother sister relationship, but it is more like traditional man-woman relationship she admits. “He isn’t … on the lips” (57). She now recalls how desperately he was in need of the companionship with her.
Devayani and Pratap were not happy at the social order that exists. No character in the novel is free from its apathetic condition. The idea of apathy of society is projected in the wretched existence of Pratap. Deshpande shows that man has no criminal tendency innately; it is generated from disintegration between the individual desires and the social fabric.

Mridula- Pratap relationship has been falsely understood. He confesses that there was disagreement between his desires and Mridula’s. He found her as an only consolation against the odds of life, an outlet for his own childhood insecurity. He could get from Mridula what he could not get from his mother and sister Kshama.

*Roots and Shadows* is a little different from the other works of Deshpande, as it does not consider men the sole cause of women’s troubles. The novel tries to examine the dimensions of feminine sensibility and its human potential. In her most characteristic way, Deshpande, is concerned with the Indian middleclass women brought up in a traditional environment, struggling to liberate themselves and seeking their self-identity and freedom. Deshpande’s chief concern in the novel is “the human relations not the rationalized but felt, perceived and real, not the traditional but refined human relations,
especially the relationship between man and woman” (Raghupathi 125). The primary concern of the author is the inner world of women - her struggles in the context of modern Indian Society. In order to achieve this she gives graphic details about the girl child and her psychology. In Roots and Shadows Deshpande has displayed a series of girl-children, where each girl faces a different problem within the family circle” (Mohan 1) Childhood of three women characters presented are Mini, Akka and Indu. The women characters transcend their identity crisis by analyzing their childhood and the process of their upbringing.

Assessing the significance of the theme of Roots and Shadow Mani Meital writes:

Roots and Shadows is a symbolic representation of the dialectical nature of man and woman set against each other in material terms for power struggle. “Roots” stands for tradition and “Shadows” signifies the marginal culture. The dying tradition is soon to become shadows against a backdrop of apocalyptic change. Also it suggests that over the root is removed, life is bereft of the binding force given way to new possibilities(79).
Another important objective of the author is to define the status of women in contemporary Indian social order. The experimental reality she tries to unravel is the interior world of female space and female vision. The world outside depicts a public space looking for means of survival and new support structures. The women she presents have no pretensions to any earth sheltering achievements. Its plot revolves round the preponderant desire of her heroines to realize themselves.

In order to illustrate the thematic concern, what Deshpande has chosen is life in traditional middle class family household. The protagonist is Indu -- an educated and dynamic woman -- who faces a series of problems. As in the case of the other novels of Deshpande, this novel does not consider men as the cause of women’s troubles. Indu, a representative of Indian womanhood, is not devoid of the strength of will but social constraints suppress her, in such a way that the realization of her will comes too late.

Deshpande unambiguously asserts some of the feminist concerns that other writers tried to voice forth. Opposition to patriarchal authority forms an integral part of feminism. The novel is a critique on the authority of patriarchy. In representing her women
characters Deshpande is more realistic than many of her contemporaries. She has made it clear in her writings and interviews. Her women characters are not complete in themselves and are in need of someone to shelter them, be it the father, the brother or the husband. Indu says, “This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in itself” (*Roots and Shadows* 38).

Women of Deshpande are bogged down by existential insecurity and uncertainty, and so naturally, they are in search of a refuge. The image of this refuge in *Roots and Shadows* is the ancestral home. The protagonist Indu represents the new woman. She is educated and lives in close association with society brushing aside all its narrow conventions. She is different from her traditional counterparts that she takes the privilege of talking of anything that she feels appropriate. She talks about her own caged self, politics, corruption and many other things. She decides to speak the truth gradually. She emerges as a writer committed to uplift the status of women. In her strife to reform women folk, she plans to publish a story which has been sent to the editor of a journal. To her great shock the story is sent back with contemptuous comments. She responds to this, “I could have fought against anger, abuse, hostility. But I could
do nothing against ridicule” (26). She further observes “I looked at myself through his eyes and saw myself ‘not as brave, but as foolish and naive’” (26). When the story is published after having been rewritten, she feels ashamed of the whole system. Her husband Jayant tells her, “What can one person do against the whole system” (27). Deshpande suggests here that writing by women tends to be circumscribed by the existing social norms. Only at the end of the novel does she realize what kind of writing she dreamt of. Her silence is the silence of a multitude of women in India.

Indu, the protagonist of the novel *Roots and Shadows*, is a product of the modern socio-cultural scenario. As she herself narrates the story from her point of view, she shows how tradition exercises influence on the mind and intellect of women. She is not able to tolerate the debasing of women in all stages of her life.

The novel comes out with its feminist approach in Indu’s exploration into herself. S.P. Swain observes in this connection, “It also moves beyond feminist boundaries into a realization of the predicament of human existence” (92).
Intolerant of the custom governed life at home, she moves to live in a hostel in the nearby town at the age of 18. In spite of strong opposition from the elders in the family she marries Jayant belonging to a different caste. She has significant reasons to take such a decision, manifest in the following statement. “When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants. What he would like. What would please him. And I can’t blame him. It’s not he who has pressurized me into this. It’s the way I want it to be”(53). Indu’s decision to stay away from her joint family for 15 years shows the individual freedom that most of the women characters of Deshpande want to enjoy. Indu’s life is devoted for self-realisation. It is a quest for unravelling the mystery of the human life. Her struggles which are identical with the struggle of many a woman, in a sexist society, culminate in crisis and ends in a compromise.

This novel accords a clear divide that separates male and female domains. Indu is made fully aware of a woman’s role in life. The comment of the old uncle about woman also illustrates this, “For a woman intelligence is always a burden, Indu. We like our women not
to think” (*Roots and Shadows* 40). The position of women in the traditional Indian society is very well articulated by the uncle.

The novel draws the picture of a joint family in which all members are bound to abide by the superior member, Akka. It reveals the intricate relationships in a traditional joint family. Indu longs for freedom from the fetters of tradition which hinders women from enjoying opportunities and privileges open to men.

A considerable portion of the novel is set apart to present Indu’s reflections on the predicament of women whose life is confined to getting married, rear children and work hard to make the members of the family happy. Indu is always haunted by the strong feeling of alienation and loneliness. This experience tantamount to the level of a rebel, questioning the propriety of things which impose taboos.

The rejection of her story by the publisher is agonizing to Indu. She ruminates, “What can one person do against the whole system! (*Roots and Shadows* 27). To Indu it is a fatal blow to those women sidelined in all walks of life. In every walk of life women are marginalized. Nobody recognizes their genuine worth. She stands for equal opportunities for all, irrespective of caste, creed and sex. From
very early childhood she began experiencing the disadvantages of being a girl-child. She says:

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. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they had said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. And I (…) I had watched them and found to be true. There had to be if not substance, at least the shadow of submission. But, still, I had taught them, and sworn I would never pretend to be what I was not (Roots and Shadows 144 - 145).

Indu could not simply swallow the callousness of her father as he left the fifteen day old motherless child to the care of the family. She asks, “How else could he have parted leaving me, a fifteen day old motherless baby, with the family he hated and despised? He had not even come to see me until I was more than a year old. But that, perhaps, was because I was a girl. If I had been a son …” (148).
Later in life realization dawns on her that she is deeply in love with a young man – Jayant. Their marriage highlights the truth that a happy married life, to a large extent, depends on mutual help and cooperation of man and wife. The whole novel moves round this central point. In a talk on “The Indian Woman Stereotypes, Images and Realities,” Deshpande states “The good woman – whether she’s the wife, mother, sister or daughter-in-law doesn’t matter is always so selfless. That she negates herself to the point of extinction” (Mohan 9).

The various issues confronting modern women are dealt within the novel – dowry system, the essentiality of marriage as far as women are concerned, the marginalization of women at different levels, unhappiness within marriage.

Deshpande depicted Indu as an unusual woman according to the contemporary standards. She exercises much influence over the lives of other family members. Similar attitudes are revealed in characters such as Jaya in That Long Silence, Sarita in The Dark Holds No Terrors, and Urmila in The Binding Vine. These women introspect their lives as wives and mothers and seek to gain greater space for forming a strong and independent self within the given roles.
As a feminist, Deshpande has a deeper understanding of the condition of the Indian middleclass housewives living in joint families. Despite having enough education, they are bound to adhere to age old customs and conventions. As a novelist Deshpande has been deeply concerned with the evils of male dominance, male oriented ideology, and their impact on the conditions of women. Her awareness of the problems of middleclass women, especially, economic deprivation and the impact of gender discrimination on their psyche find expression in her novels.

*That Long Silence* which won its author the Kendriya Sahitya Academy Award in 1990, tells the story of the pattern of relationship in a typical Indian middleclass family. The heroine of the novel Jaya stoically maintains silence throughout her life to cope with the desires and expectations of her husband Mohan. The notion that Indian women are basically inferior to men is instilled into the heroines of Deshpande giving them a mindset which they cannot discard. So a woman has to be passive and docile. The protagonist of *That Long Silence* makes all efforts to fit herself into the traditional mould. Her life is a crusade against the defaming silence that has entrapped the likes of her generations. Jaya, “presents a condition of the Indian
Society, her role model and how different types of women act out the roles with their silence.” (Bhall 156).

Jaya’s silence depicts the conflict in her mind between her identity as a writer and her role as daughter, wife and mother. The novel unravels feminine psyche bit by bit, after having suppressed it for a long time. To make effective the revelation of Jaya’s agony, the author routes the narrative through her consciousness.

The nuclear family consisting of Mohan, an engineer by profession, his wife Jaya and their children Rati and Rahul, forms the pivot round which the whole story moves. Mohan, the husband of Jaya, aims at securing financial security, social status and material comforts. He manipulates his official position to get transferred to the purchase section, with the aim of amassing wealth. He is caught along with his boss taking commission. Mohan has to keep himself away from the office till the enquiry is complete. He becomes a pitiable shadow of his former self. He has to leave his luxurious churchgate bungalow to “stay in the Dadar flat that belongs to Jaya’s maternal uncle for some time” (11). Jaya accompanies him just as “Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband’s travails…” (11).
Jaya’s struggle to become more and more independent and strong, to fall back upon her own inner resources is her significant motif in the novel. It depicts the conflict in Jaya’s mind between her identity as a writer and her role as a daughter, wife and mother. Various stages in the life of Jaya are beautifully drawn by Deshpande in the novel. The limbo of waiting allows Jaya to reflect on her life and come to terms with various roles. These reflections can be considered a quest to discover her true self. Her reminiscences reveal her shattered dreams, the emotional trauma, the frustration and the sense of loneliness that she suffered all along. “And I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well. I can see her now, the Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped” (15-16).

The process of self discovery brings her to an exploration of childhood, youth and marriage, yet paradoxically her deepest betrayal caused by the domination of the role model of marriage. She says, “I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live.

May be this is enough to start off with. I can take of from her” (2).
Jaya makes use of an appropriate imagery to portray the plight of the Indian married couple, universalizing her own plight. Marriage to her is:

A pair of bullocks yoked together… A clever phrase, but can it substitute for reality? A man and a woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman. (8).

The imagery of ‘a pair of bullocks’ draws several connotations. It may signify two people sharing the burden of family life; or else it may relate a mechanical relationship between husband and wife who are like two silent animals performing the work given to them. The image also carries the symbol of compulsion to move in the same direction due to the yoke of marriage which implies the imposition of will on one partner alone. The roles between Jaya and Mohan were set, Jaya was supposedly confined to the house to look after the children.
At the instance of Mohan getting away for several days, without informing her, she reflects on her success and failures, as a mother and wife. Jaya comes to realise, “The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces” (1). This part of the novel makes clear that the heroine is a fragmented self with a tormented consciousness. She fails to realise her identity. She does not enjoy the individuality of her own. She knows that she is a daughter, wife and mother, without an existence of her own. The lack of communication between Mohan and Jaya has resulted in such a situation. The moment Jaya decides to do away with the false sense of pride in her and to communicate with Mohan, a considerable change occurs in their life. Jaya remembers the advice of Vanitamani that “a husband is like a sheltering tree” (32). The real experience of married life happens to be quiet contrary to what she dreamed of it before marriage, and found in the advertisements. She observes “Those cosy, smiling, happy families in their gleaming homes spelt sheer poetry to me”. (3). Later on she accepts Mohan’s version of a happy family, “… people in secure jobs, cushioned by insurance and provident funds, with two healthy, well fed children going to good schools” (5). She
becomes aware of “… the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony”. (4). Now the growing difference in their attitude to what they experience in life, leads Jaya to maintain a long silence. She does not give proper answer to the queries of Mohan. The whole being of Jaya, the entire narration of her story, is a mixture of what happened in their life in the past and what is to happen in future.

Now she longs for another thing; the result of the official inquiry into the suspected malpractice of Mohan. Their return to Churchgate house, and to normal life depends on the outcome of the enquiry. She feels that waiting is an integral part of her life. Jaya observes:

But for women the waiting game starts early in childhood. Wait until you get married. Wait until your husband comes. Wait until you go to your in-laws’ home. Wait until you have kids. Yes, ever since I got married, I have done nothing but wait. Waiting for Mohan to come home. Waiting for the children to be born for them to start school, waiting for them to come home… (30).

Jaya is impatient, but Mohan thinks that patience is the very hallmark of Indian woman. The attitudinal difference of Jaya and
Mohan is well exemplified in the passage “He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender” (36).

Jaya makes use of the occasion of the long silence to assess the life of women in Mohan’s family and his father. She broods over her sufferings, the impact of the callous behaviour of her own husband towards her. The thoughts, in silence, of a series of incidents in the life of Jaya makes her cultivate a tradition of silence; but she fails in the face of Mohan’s anger. She says “… I had flung accusations, wildly at him” (81). But she cannot go ahead with it; she relents. By nature she is tender. She cannot imagine a sheltered Mohan. When Mohan thrusts the entire blame of the crisis on his professional career on Jaya and the children she makes certain revelations. Despite having lived together for 17 years, she feels, “We were two persons. A man. A woman” (8).

On the basis of the evolution of the character of Jaya, there are three distinct phases discernible in the novel. The first phase is that of a traditional middle class Indian house wife, submissive and silent. All through her life she tries to make self-assessment in terms of every
development in the family. This in turn urges her to react. She says: “I was under attack. The questions rained on me. An adversary? Yes, that was what Mohan was; and an adversary more hostile than I had imagined” (116). Mohan has a strong feeling that Jaya least cares for him – his career, his status, his prospects. Mohan feels that she is absolutely selfish. On the other hand Jaya blames Mohan for having discouraged her faculty as a writer. These differences become strong and Jaya feels “we’d been silently weaving the threads of guilt, anger and resentment between us all these days” (118).

The entire narration leads on to breaking that long silence of Jaya, who asserts “I will have to erase the silence between us” (192). But her efforts find no success. She feels that, “A woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated” (147).

To Jaya familial life is an adjustment. There is no real love between the husband and wife. Romantic love is only a fantasy of adolescence. Jaya thinks, “Love? No, I knew nothing of it. I knew only my need of Mohan. And his need of me” (153).

Ultimately, when everything is set right – when they get back to normal life – she is determined to break her silence. What makes Deshpande, different from other Indian feminist writers is that the
problems of her women come from familial relations, their solutions are not found outside the family, but within. Her feminism has a firm footing in the Indian soil. Her heroines find ample occasion, in Indian culture itself to discover themselves and redefine their relations with others in the family and the larger world outside.

Deshpande has an indepth understanding of miseries and sufferings of the women she depicts in her novels. She is not often happy at how their spouses and elder members of the family behave to them.

The novel *The Binding Vine* has a complex structure, which focuses on the illusions of man-woman relationship. It tries to establish that the basis of family life is man-woman relationship, as this has to expand and embrace other ties to sustain it. Urmi, a young mother, is the narrator of the story. What makes her narrate the story is her obsession. She is a lecturer by profession in a neighbouring college. She goes through a period of emotional trauma when she loses, Anu, her daughter. The death of Anu brings about a sense of guilt in her life for a long time. She seeks relief, in course of time, from the trauma, by giving psychological succour to other women, going through a similar state of emotional upheaval. She also feels
that enjoying personal happiness without Anu will be a “betrayal” for her. When her mother Inni makes a suggestion to put a picture of Anu on the wall she bursts out, “I don’t need a picture to remember her, I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life. How can you imagine I need a picture…? To put my Anu on the wall, to place my child among the dead, no more part of my world – how dare Inni! How dare she think such a thing” (68). About the masochistic attitude of Urmi, S. Indira observes:

Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds on to it as she believes that to let go that pain, let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss (22).

The thought about Anu dominates the consciousness of Urmila. Urmi is a symbol of Indian psyche. The other characters in the novel share Urmi’s personal agony. The mother’s anguish is relieved by communal sharing and rises above the European concept of existential agony, which is isolative and individualistic and hence highly
depressing. Urmí’s reflections on various events are nothing other than the author’s. These reflections express the feelings of other women characters who lead their life in the shadows of shame and silence.

The novel reveals the predicament of women representing three generations and three different classes. “In each generation the daughter suffers the same plight as the mother for the male dominating attitude refuses to change. History repeats itself in each generation and it is the history of despair, sorrow and suffering” (Mukhopadhyay 153-154). Aju, the grandfather, Akka and Inni represent the old generation. Baijji presented as a woman belonging to the old generation and she representing traditional womanhood. Another woman, Mira, a representative of the past generation, is not courageous enough to protest against male domination. She tries to realize her own self through her literary creations. Mira’s tragic life is compared to Kalpana’s, a lower middleclass teenager, a rape victim. Young and beautiful Kalpana is sexually assaulted by her own uncle, and she goes into a coma, hanging between life and death. The subsequent incidents highlight the most deplorable attitude of society, which instead of sympathizing with the victim and punishing the
victimiser, blame the victim. Most realistically the attitude of the society is very well reflected in the following lines, “… there can be no rape, because it cannot be done unless the woman is willing …rape happens because women go about exposing themselves” *The Binding Vine* (182). But Urmi does not allow herself to be lost in her own sorrows, because she is much concerned with her duty towards Kartik, her son. Even on the occasion of severe attack of asthma, she assures him that, even death cannot separate her from him. She has a pertinacity to live. She comments, “No Kartik I won’t die, I promise I won’t die. I was working hard at not dying. Each breath I struggled to take was an affirmation of my will to live” (20).

It is always a great relief for a woman in grief, to get the support of her husband. Urmi longs to share her grief at the loss of Anu with her husband, Kishore, who is away most of the time. Deshpande has a rare skill in reading the mind of women, involved in crucial situations. She beautifully unravels the thoughts of Urmi about the absence of her husband. The marriage with Kishore was not one of her own choice. Soon her expectations prove futile. She asks, “… How can Vanaa, secure in the fortress of her marriage to Harish, understand what it is like – marriage with a man who flirts into my life
a few months in a year and flirts out again, leaving of nothing of himself behind ?”

Urmi finds Kishore a miserable failure in understanding her emotional security. He cannot understand the depth of her feelings and there arises a ‘gap’ between them. Consequent on this, she makes herself independent, both economically and socially, but fails to control her own erotic feelings. She remembers, “There was a time when I was frightened by the intensity of my bodily hungers for Kishore. It seemed to do nothing but complicate my life enormously” (164).

The problems of complexity related to sex have been highlighted by Deshpande in some of her novels, but in *The Binding Vine* it is analysed through Urmi and her mother-in-law Mira who dies after the birth of Kishore. Urmi, passing through the most difficult period in her life, happens to get hold of Mira’s diaries and poems. These documents make a revelation of a marriage in which a child bride is tethered to a man much older than herself. The man is quite insensitive to the trauma of the girl. Her married life is sandwiched between a harsh mother-in-law and a lascivious and insensitive husband. She also has to withstand several women who enters his life,
and has to nurse him during his illness. She has to live her life with a sense of rejection. Mira writes about his “love” towards her, “If this is love it is a terrible thing” (67). The diary shows that there is a basic difference between male and female vision of love. Man considers love as the physical act of sex whereas woman considers it to be an emotional phenomenon. Mira develops an abhorrence towards sex because her husband treats her as a toy to play with, without her consent.

Urmi comes across a poem of Mira, the theme of which is husband wife relationship. Man always imposes his own will upon his wife. Possessiveness, is the sole instinct of man. In a patriarchal order of society everything is against woman. Blind obedience to the husband is demanded of her. Women belonging to the past generation had no courage to protest this social system. Mira is unable to express her protest directly, finds consolation in her writing. In the silence and solitude of night, she stealthly gives vent to her emotions through her poems. Being a woman, she is not able to develop her talents as a poet; nobody encourages her. Mira, entrapped in the suffocating atmosphere of her husband’s home, survives through writing poems
and diaries. Eventhough she is able to bear the burden of life, she meets with an untimely and pathetic death.

The attitude of Urmi is different. She is more realistic. Death is not a proper solution. Long silence cannot solve her problems. So Urmi, much disturbed by the tragic tale of Mira, decides to publish her poems. The purpose of publishing them is to air the views of Mira. Urmi hopes that, the message of the poems may bring about a substantial, qualitative change in the lives of Indian women. It is in this context that Urmi recalls the story of the sexual assault on Kalpana.

What makes Deshpande different from other feminist writers is her handling of maternal instincts, which are always integrated in feminine sensibility. Urmi is all love and attachment for her lost daughter, Anu. However, she is not prepared to bear the sight of humiliation of humanity in the name of feminine virtues. The novel carries the message that love is the binding vine of life: “From the moment of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in only when we love do we find this anchor” (137).
The novel also revolves round the theme that human relationship is also the binding vine. “Each relation, always imperfect, survives on hope” (141). Relationships are of different kinds – between mother and child, father and child, husband and wife.

Binding vine is a cross section of Indian cultural ethos regarding the vision of life. It is “…. a powerful statement about a woman’s attempt to survive in a male dominated cruel world. The forte of Deshpande’s women characters is their untold patience, stoical courage coupled with the calm tenacity of passive resistance” (Mukhopadyay 154).

In *A Matter of Time* we meet the plight of women, abandoned not by accident, or nature, but through the deliberate act of man. Sumi who refuses to accept any help from her father, or husband’s nephew Ramesh, is a glaring example of self-respect. The vision of familial relationship in the novel has been sublimated to a wider consideration of human relationship that determines the nature of human existence.

These characters do not cherish any earth-shaking goals. Their attempt to realise and preserve their identity finds realistic expression in these novels. Deshpande, much more than any of her contemporaries, is concerned with the emerging social scene in which
women occupy a central position. She is fully aware of the changing perspectives of women and their search for bonding within family as a mode of strength.

The novel, *A Matter of Time* presents the inner life of women, emotionally isolated from their family. Family, acting like traps in more than one way, define gender roles through tradition. The main constituent of woman’s problems is their subjugation, manifest often, in the form of silent servitude. In another dimension the novel presents the story of marginalized and silent women. The novel unravells a world in which women strive to realize themselves within the accepted institutions of society.

This is Deshpande’s only novel in which a male protagonist occupies a central position. The plot of the story revolves round the absence of the principal character Gopal from the family. The entire plot of the novel dwells on the exposition of the thought unconscious betrayal of human relationship. The incident of Gopal’s “walkout on his wife” Sumi and three daughters is set against the backdrop of the miserable tale of Kalyani, and Shripati in the big ancestral home. The story of betrayal extends to three generations – grandparents (Kalyani
and Shripati) parents (Gopal and Sumi) and the grandchildren (Aru, Charu and Seema).

The tension created by the absence of Gopal in the family scene is realistically handled by the writer. The desertion has severe impact on the lives of Sumi’s daughters. They develop a feeling of resentment and withdrawal. Kalyani, the representative of the conventional woman, suffers utter loneliness and abandonment as a wife. Despite her unpleasant experiences with Shripati. She is opologetic for the shortcomings of Sumi as a wife, while meeting Gopal. Sumi who fails to play her role as a wife effectively, has always to assume an inferior role in her marital life. Kalyani promises Sumi her huge treasure of jewellery as an inheritance to make amends for her failure. This assurance shows how the patriarchal norms value a woman.

The novel *Small Remedies* published in 2000, indicates a mature vision of life about the complex nature of motherhood and man-woman relationship. It redefines the established social norms in the context of issues like man-woman relationship, the ideal motherhood, women’s quest for identity and the consistent lingering shadows of guilt and shame.
Several patterns of man-woman relationships are projected in the novel. Of these the Somu - Madhu, Joe - Leela and Savitri - Gulam Saab relationships are prominent. Each of these relationships is different from the other. A fourth example of man-woman relationship is that of Hari – Lata.

Madhu, the chief narrator of the story and the protagonist, is a normal young woman who loves life and marries Som on the basis of mutual, well-founded attraction. The novel opens with the sentence “This is Som’s story or rather, Joe’s story as related to us by Som” (1).

Madhu is a journalist. In an effort to unravel the life of Savitri Bai, Madhu unconsciously starts unfolding the layers of her own suppressed psyche. She comes to Bhavanipur to write the story of Savitribai’s life.

While reflecting on the life of Savitribai Madhu recalls her own life. The story is revealed through the inner consciousness of Madhu. Life around is reflected through her inner self. Her reflections on her father is a significant part of this. She says, “Brought up by a father, I never felt the strangeness, the otherness of men myself, nor did I feel the need to be part of a female group …” (137). Her father used to enjoy himself in the company of “other” women.
Madhu is married to Som and is blessed with a son Aditya. While the life of Madhu and Som flows smoothly she commits the greatest mistake of her life. She confides in Som about her sexual encounter with her father’s friend several years ago. The confession sounds the death knell of her marital bliss. Som cannot forgive her. Frequent quarrels makes the life of Aditya dark. He finds it difficult to live in his parental home. He leaves home never to return. He dies in a bomb blast.

It is in her frantic efforts to emerge out of this trauma that she turns to writing the biography of Savitribai. She also learns about the survival of her widowed aunt Leela. As she learns more about the stories of women around her, she gets liberated from her mental agony and tries to unravel the life of Savitribai. After having examined the success of Savitribai as a musician, she examines her role as a mother. The second part of the novel deals elaborately with the loneliness of Madhu. Her stay with nephew Lata and her husband Hari, gives her care and attention; but the memories of her lost child, Adit haunts her. She feels utter loneliness and alienation in the company of the people whom she likes. She involves herself often in introspection, and examines the role of herself in the death of Adit.
Savitri Bai had a passion for music from the early days of her life. She says, “sometimes I wished that I would naturally have become a singer. I those families, you’re born into the profession” (Small Remedies 221). The novel deals with the mystery of Savitribai Indorekar’s private life. She is born in an orthodox Brahmin family. It is also the story of Leela, the sister of Savitribai. Leela is a trade union leader and social activist. These two women have proven records of professional success. Savitribai strongly feels that individual talent is a divine gift, which cannot be controlled and directed, in accordance with social norms. An individual with hidden potential cannot compromise with social norms. If he does so, the condition would be worse than death.

The mental and intellectual conflict in the novel is intense and complex. Bai’s personality in the novel is a true symbol of the problems arising out of personal desires and social compulsions. She is condemned by everyone, for having left her husband and adopting a career that is not generally considered to be respectable. The narrator shares the anguish of Bai when she remarks:

… Bai has been in the music world, long enough to know that these women didn’t have it easy, either. They,
unlike the men in the same families, were outside the
circle of respectable society, their futures marked out for
them, the ordinary life of ordinary women, denied to
them because of their birth (221).

What the writer tries to expose through the life of Bai is that
every woman possesses a private world of her own longing, which is
unconsciously sought even making confrontation with the forces of
social order. Bai finds the sole meaning of her life in music. She
makes it clear, “Rubbish! What kind of a life do I have now? One day
is like another. The only thing that mattered to me, the only thing that
mattered about me, was my music. And that’s over for me now. I’ll
never sing again, not even a Sa”. (126). Reminiscences of the days,
she was acclaimed as a gifted musician makes her dejected. She longs
to exhibit the records of her own songs and the songs of Guruji, her
music teaches. She also longs to reveal the life of Guruji whom she
adores.

She remembers, “He’s (Guruji) still a great musician, the
greatest” (127). Further she says, “It’s like there’s a gramophone
inside me, I can play it anytime I want, I can hear him again if I want
to” (127). In fact, “Her relationship with her Guruji is already a legend
Deshpande, in her effort to reveal the life of Savitri Bai, goes to the minute details of her life, ever since her acquaintance with Kashinath Buwa. Later she goes to Bombay to get training in music. Quite regardless of her marital ties, she starts living with Ghulaam Saab, a tabla player. While seeking the reasons for Guruji’s refusal to accept Bai as his disciple, the author exposes certain social systems which make life miserable. Even Guruji is convinced that music is not the profession of a “respectable married woman”. Bai justifies Guruji’s action saying, “… he is a traditional man” (130). To make Guruji accept her as disciple she goes on a fast and is prepared to live away from Guruji’s residence. What Betty Friedan says about the autonomy of the self as an inevitable necessity of human condition is applicable to all, irrespective of sex. He observes, “For a woman as for man the need for self fulfillment, autonomy, self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realisation, independence, individuality, self-actualisation, is as important as sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted” (Friedman 282). About the life story of Savitribai, Madhu writes, “In this story, I see the artist, the woman in search of her genius, of her destiny. But the artist was born of the woman. First
there was the woman and then the artist. Is it possible to cut umbilical cord, to sever the connection between the two. (*Small Remedies* 133)

Another picture of Savitribai that Madhu tries to draw, is that of a mother. In her pursuit of success as a renowned musician, she fails to give due care to Munni, her only daughter, born of Gulam Saab. She admits: “This is something she did long back, when she turned to respectability. When she began her journey to success, she almost neglected her daughter; she in him had uncompromising contempt for her parents. To get explicated herself from the filth of the relationship between her mother and Ghulam Saab, she prefers to call herself “Shailaja Joshi”. While she was trying to become renowned in her profession, she loses her motherhood totally. She tries to create a life free from all taboos that the society inflicts on man. She even dares to discard all personal relationships. What she has got is a self beyond accepted social images. She asserts: “There’s no Munni in her life, no illegitimate child, no abandoned husband, no lover …She is presenting me with her own illusion of her life. A life of success and achievement. Nothing lacking, no uncoiled child, no dead daughter” (77-78).
Madhu makes an assessment of Savitribai’s professional success and her responsibility as a mother. She considers the role of a mother more important than that of a successful musician. She asserts that a mother cannot eliminate the memory of a child for ever. She wonders at the strange disposition of Bai, “… I wonder what kind of a woman are you denying your child? Only the lowest, the meanest kind of creature could do such thing (78). Madhu takes to journalism to escape from the memories of Adit. She fails in that attempt. As a feminine writer Deshpande captures those unique experiences of women, that can never be narrated or revealed by male writers. She says:

As a child’s birth is a rebirth for a woman, it is like becoming part of the world once again. The first time you emerge through someone else’s pain, this time, it’s your own. The pain of your body opening, on the point you think of splitting apart, as if a divine Krishna is standing somewhere nearby, giving Nature the signal by splitting a blade of grass. The stretching that goes on and on, the pain maddening you, until you think – I want to die, I want to be out of this. And then at the moment when it
seems impossible, when death, seems the only recourse, the miracle happens, the pinhole opening becomes a head sized aperture. And from death you return to life not just the new life you’ve produced, but your own life, renewed, given back to you (88-89).

Motherhood makes Madhu elated and contended. Recalling the occasion of Adit’s birth she observes, “Looking at the baby in his cradle, I am dazed by my own happiness. When he smiles at me, when he holds out his arms to me, or so I imagine, I feel burdened by my joy, my whole body, heavy and sluggish with it, gorged. Like my breasts are with milk” (89).

Quite distinct from the earlier novels of Deshpande, Moving On manifests the growth and development of the author in her personal vision and technical nuances. It is a mature work concerned more with the human condition than with the problems women face. The novel reveals the creative aspect that lies deeply in Deshpande’s ability to draw upon the sanctions of traditional morality. At the same time she is much precise and subtle in her realization of individuality and idiosyncracy.
The very beginning of the novel indicates the significance of all that has been contributed by the tradition to the present generation and the inevitable evolution of culture. The epigraph at the beginning “All the stories have been told are the stories of families – from Adam and Eve onward”, symbolize this. Adam and Eve show the world of parents and children. The guilt and sin of parents continue to be borne by children. Another significance of the reference to the Biblical tale shows the continuity of the world and the inevitability of death. Death is not the cessation of existence. Continuity of life involves the inevitability of sin and salvation. *Moving On* is a novel startlingly different from the earlier novels of Deshpande.

Distinct from other fictional works of Deshpande *Moving On* tries to analyse the human psyche and interpersonal relationships. At the backdrop of the novel is medical science and philosophy which enable her to air her views authentically. To make her explorations life like, Deshpande uses a method which has not been hitherto experimented in her literary career. It is in the form of information drawn from the diary of Badrinarayan, a Brahmin by birth. Though the observations on the genesis of the novel are dealt with through the consciousness of the female protagonist, Manjari, it cannot be
considered purely a post modern feminist text. The author, who has gained more insight and wisdom, tries to establish a view different from those of the other novels. The most significant point that is established is the importance of human body which is the base of all human ties, relationships, and even the healthy thought processes. Neglect of the body and its vibes leads to affect adversely the personality and even the existence of man. The novel objectively depicts the traditional concepts about the body and the mind and how a lack of proper understanding about them generate problems which question even the existence of man. “Everything the mind knows through the body. The mind has however, no possibility of casually affecting the body yet body and soul always co-operate. The well-being of the body heightens the thinking power of the mind and vice versa” (10).

Another revelation that Deshpande makes is that there can be no perfect union among couples without an understanding of the body’s requirements. Taboos, an integral part of tradition, instilled in women a fear to involve in sexual relations, even with the spouse. This has inevitably led to domestic disharmony.
The novel has as its central theme, the complexity of familial relationships – the conflict arising out of the maladjustments between parents and children. The personal life of the parents is reconstructed and re-interpreted by a daughter, Manjari, the chief narrator, who like Madhu, the protagonist of the novel, Small Remedies returns to parental home, after a lapse of many years. Her efforts to relate the life of parents, as entered in the diary of her father whom she calls Baba, manifests the ceaseless urge existing at the core of each individual human being. The diary is also an effort to unravel the mysteries involved in personal relationships. The flux of memories, the origin or end of which, cannot be determined, flash in consciousness, illuminating innumerable invisible objects. As in the earlier novel ‘Small Remedies’ in the present work Moving On one can notice a confluence, a confluence of the “personal” and ‘impersonal’, ‘past’ and ‘present’, ‘familial’ and ‘social’. These constituents make a cumulative whole, which take the readers to sublime psychological and philosophical and philosophical levels, by means of which the feminine sensibility is drawn authentically.

The narrator performs two vital roles in the novel – the responsibility to the parents as a daughter and to the children as a
mother. While playing the familial roles, women have to perform their
duty as members of the society. The reality that mothers are
daughters, and daughters become mothers, establish a ‘wholeness’ of
the social order which is instrumental in the continuity of the world.

Baba’s world, revealed in his diary serves as a focal point to
unite different relationships, and present the consciousness of different
characters. The diary which contains seemingly insignificant events,
carries a detailed account of the life and sensibility of various
characters who play a very significant role in their lives. Baba does
not have any deliberate purpose in penning the diary. Simply “…. It is
an urge to do something about the chaotic jumble of thoughts and
memories that have been troubling me so greatly. Such a vague
purpose – if it is a purpose at all. But a sense of limited time urges me
on. The unawareness that my life is coming to a close makes me want
to speak, to share my thoughts with someone” (1). At the very outset,
Baba justifies the concept of equality through the incident of his
father’s first marriage with a Harijan girl. Baba presents his father as a
true disciple of Gandhi.

In sharp contrast to the daughter mother/ brother/ sister
relationship in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Moving On* reveals the
intimacy of brother and sister, and the individual freedom the children were allowed at the early age. Baba writes, “Gayatri and I never felt the pressure of parental authority which most of our friends grumbled about”. The brother sister relationship shown in the novel was not based on fancy, but on sheer reason. As Gayatri grew up, Baba was very well conscious of her physical and emotional needs. About the brother-sister relationship Rashmi Gaur writes, “Moving On underlines the societal expectations from women while living through their various roles. Manjari’s understanding of Mai, before she goes through the diaries is symptomatic of a social/stereotypical understanding of the image of a mother” (Rashmi Gaur 34).

Gayatri’s marriage makes her withdraw from her desire for higher education. She finds her own space in the family. She hopes to get happiness in the company of R.K. Everyone feels that her decision is appropriate. Baba feels, “She was a pillar for so many of us; without her, our family life would have lost its centre, its source of light. But perhaps this is being selfish” (Moving On 11). Along with happiness, there is also ample causes for sorrow. Happiness provided by the marriage of Gayatri paves the way for sorrow caused by the death of Baba’s father. This makes Baba aware of the inevitability of
death; and that nothing is permanent in the world. Despite death and destruction man can modify the pattern of life in accordance with the requirements of the time.

The universe prepares everything for the unity in diversity that is seen around us. Baba wonders at the ignorance of those who consider men as the centre of the universe. He knows well that the universe is infinite and that in the scheme of the universe the position of man is less than that of a speck. Baba finds that the only appropriate aim of life on earth is the pursuit of knowledge:

It is through knowledge that we grasp creation, it is through knowledge that we really possess it, it is through our knowledge that we conquer our evanescence. To know, to understand, to comprehend, is to become the creator. Through your knowledge you create a thing; without your knowledge, it is not (16).

The second part of the novel tries to reconstruct the life of Baba. While each entry in the diary is examined with a childlike curiosity by Manjari, different levels of the sensibility of her father is brought forth. What is most striking in these revelations, made from two distinct points of time, denote certain very conspicuous evolution,
from one generation to another. The same incident, the same condition is examined from different perspectives at two different periods of history. Manjari’s own reactions to the memories of her father from direct experiences seem much different when they are examined through the entries in his diary after a lapse of time.

Manjari realises the significance of things, when she comes back to her parental home to assist her ailing father. Her knowledge of the impending death of Baba hangs in her memory as “a third presence in the house” (20). She recollects the role of Baba as a mentor. It is through the analysis of the insight of Baba, as a mentor that Manjari realizes the importance of maintaining the balance of body and mind. She is aware of the acceptable and unacceptable elements involved in the statement. Baba’s consciousness of the balance and perfection of human body is rooted in the problem of gender discrimination prevalent in the society. She states, “For him the beauty of human body had nothing to do with luscious curves of female form … his ideal was the body of athlete, the gymnast in action, the dancer when dancing, the swift, only just. Co-ordinated movements of a child’s body when playing” (23). Manjari rightly understands Baba, first as her father and then as a mentor. She also
looks into the happy married life of Baba and Mai. Though there are differences in their outlook and understanding of the world around they had a very happy married life.

Almost all the episodes depicted in the earlier novels re-appear in *Moving On*. Human relations, marital and extra-marital relation, parent-children relations, the problem of girl-child all are considered in a new perspective. Even marital relations based on pure physical needs are justified. Illegal sexual relations, if agreed upon by man and woman are not considered a crime. Justifying the behavior of the individuals who violate social norms, Deshpande asserts that social codes cannot stop the rhythm of the body. That is how Deshpande ratifies the sexual relation between Manjari and Raman, who is a tenant of Manjari.

The purpose of the novelist in staging the Manjari – Raman episode is the changing pattern of social order in which the sexual pattern has been considered in a different perspective. Manjari who represents the changed woman, takes the initiative in the affair with Raman and it is she who gets away from it. When she comes to know about the relation of Raman with another woman, she asks him to vacate the house.
Another constituent of the social picture that she draws is that of widows. From her own experiences she realizes how widows are looked down on by the society. She conveys how the ravenous eyes of the society ogles at healthy beautiful widows.

The novel, is not based on a single theme. Quite a number of human problems are incorporated into the scheme of the novel. Based on the life of the heroine, the novelist creates a world revealing complex, and intricate personal relationships.

Deshpande has ever been dealing with tales of human relationships, especially tales of love. *In The Country of Deceit* she explores an area of love – adult love – which has not been experimented with in other novels. The novel is a revelation of the truth that one cannot get away from the consequences of the choices one makes in life. The author takes up, the theme of love in the backdrop of feminine sensibility and shows the protagonist’s quest, in search of answers to some of the existential questions of life.

The present novel, *In the Country of Deceit* tells the love story of 26 year old Devayani who lives in the small town of Rajnur in Karnataka, in a new house designed by her architect sister, Savi. She is fast recovering from the loss of her mother and is starting life anew,
symbolised by the demolition of the ancestral home and the building of a new house. The modern house symbolises Devayani’s shedding the conservative outlook on life and the inhibitions which form part of it. The novel opens when she has just returned to Rajnur.

Devayani is contented with her single state in life at the beginning of the novel. Interestingly enough Devayani has been with the author since her previous novel *Come Up and Be Dead*. Nevertheless the novel cannot be considered a sequel to the previous one. While the narrative of the novel moves forward it assumes many forms of emotions like love, trust, pain, agony and betrayal. As Devayani moves away from the traditional norms of the society in search of satisfaction, it becomes her quest for an authentic selfhood. Towards the end of the novel she comes face to face with the existential problems of life.

How happy Devayani and Savi were in the new house is revealed in the following passage, “Savi and I clinked our glasses like veterans. It was more than a social gesture; we were promising ourselves we would make it a happy house, we would put a closure to the memories of sadness and pain” (6). Devayani found happiness in tutoring and gardening. Rajnur had been an “educational centre, the
place where students from all surrounding areas come for higher education” (16). She was happy to tutor the students who come to learn English. She was also much interested in spending time in her garden with its frogpond and flowering plants.

The peaceful and contented life of Devayani gets upset when Rani, a heroine of the yesteryears film comes to live in the neighbourhood. The glamour and vivacity of Rani’s life upset the peace and harmony of Devayani. In the company of Rani, Devayani happens to meet, Ashok Chinnappa, a Superintendent of Police who has arrived recently. The central theme of the novel is the consequences of the relationship between Devayani and the 39 year old police officer. Since their meeting she begins walking on the wild side and that is the pivot round which the story moves. The novel reveals the deeper understanding of man woman relationship in a dimension, hitherto unexplored by Deshpande. Indian middleclass women who pass through a transitional phase of their lives form the major characters of Deshpande. While they express their aspirations befitting the emerging socio-cultural milieu, they remain deeply entrenched in their traditional upbringing.
Ashok Chinnappa is a married man and his wife and child live in Mysore. The reader does not know whether the married life of Chinnappa is happy or not; but they seem happy as Devayani allows a glimpse of their family life. The very first sight of the police officer creates immense impression on her. She observes:

That night when I went to bed, the scene I’d watched on the football ground came to me. I saw again the man, his arms raised high, his face to the sky, energy surging through his body. A gesture I’d seen so often on TV. It was like the leap, the punch in the air, the high-five—even children did these things nowadays, aping what they saw on TV. Why was it haunting me? (24).

Chinnappa pursues Devayani who succumbs willingly. The persistence with which the DSP waits for the affirmation to his relationship becomes very intriguing. She is conscious of the pitfalls on entering in this bond. Her point of view reveals the complexities of the emotions involved and her dilemma. The clandestine affair between Ashok Chinnappa and Devayani is shortlived, because the secrecy involved in the affair make her feel cheap. He swears to abide by her demands. He makes it clear that he cannot live without her.
When Devayani expresses her unwillingness to pursue the relationship he becomes furious. Ashok enjoys her body as he no longer enjoys his wife’s. Devayani is not a passive partner in the adultery, but connives to meet Ashok secretly in her home, at resorts and elsewhere. Later Ashok finds that he cannot leave his daughter and so he puts an end to his affair with Devayani and helps her to distance herself from him. The affair comes to an end. The character of Devayani echoes other characters of Deshpande. Just like Madhu, the protagonist of *Small Remedies* Devayani finds memory as a source of comfort to which she can take resort in times of distress. In spite of her ending the relation with the police officer she dwells on the memory of the happy moments she spent with him.