CHAPTER III

A BIOLOGICAL - LINGUISTIC STUDY OF SHASHI DESHPANDE’S NOVELS
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This chapter represents how Shashi Deshpande’s writings echo the voice of a woman writer which proves that her writing offers good pieces to be studied from a gynocentric point of view. Shashi Deshpande’s novels will be evaluated here from two pillars of gynocentric theory – biological and linguistic.

By applying these two models of Gynocentricism, it will be reflected how women have been harassed in the patriarchal culture both biologically and linguistically and how their body and language are immense source of inspiration to them. The assertion of rights over the female body will be assessed within the broader existential framework of freedom, choice and responsibility.

Shashi Deshpande’s themes and motifs are based on the lives and problems of women. Her works passionately concentrate on the predicament of women, and men are pushed towards the periphery. Her plots and sub plots provide a pointer to the catatonic status of women in the tradition bound, male – dominated middle class society of contemporary India, in which they are struggling to overcome the constructing dilemmas of pre – fixed definitions and pre – set norms and thus attempting to redefine their status.

Her novels are women oriented. She minutely analyzes the unwholesome situation in which a sensitive woman has to live and move
about, caught between the powerful currents of tradition and patriarchy, of terror and suppression. Such a woman is subjected to physical tortures and sexual assaults in society. Consequently, her personality is crushed, her voice is hushed up and her instinct of self – assertion gets catapulted. The loss of personality, voice of self – assertion leads her to confusion and tormentation to loss of self – identity and even prestige. She understands it very well and makes her female protagonists search for ‘self’ to discover her identity.

3.1 Biological study

In order to live a fully human life we [women] require not only control of our bodies, we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporeal ground of our intelligence ( Rich : 1976, 21 ).

The opinion of the gynocritics is that women are different from men biologically and so they have a different set of biological experiences. Therefore it is important and useful to study the biological imagery in women’s writing. Female body is under patriarchal domination. Beyond the male gaze, a woman’s body is considered as a possession, to be used, abused or traded. The gynocritics believe that woman’s body and its associated experiences are the source of immense energy and power for women writers.

Violence against women is a world wide social phenomenon which is not new. It has been inflicted in one form or another. One of the leading psychologists Rehana Ghadially rightly observes:

[Though] violence against women is often seen as an assault against her body…more importantly it is a
negation of her integrity and personhood (Ghadially: 1988, 149).

Shashi Deshpande has realistically described the violence against women in various forms. Because of her body, a woman has to suffer a lot and Shashi Deshpande has clearly mentioned various types of physical harassment and how her female protagonists come out as an individual from this harassment.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), Shashi Deshpande’s first published novel, is the story of Sarita and Manu who have had love marriage. They had met in college where Sarita had been attracted to Manu’s confident manner and he had represented to her the Prince charming who would catapult her into a world that was very different from the limited one she had inhabited with her parents. However, after their marriage, the situation has changed. Manu has remained only a college lecturer earning an unspectacular salary, while the ambitious Sarita becomes a successful doctor with a highly lucrative practice and so Manu begins to suffer from feelings of inferiority and cannot prevent her from surging ahead in her profession.

In the prologue to her novel, a nightmarish experience is described where the female body is forcibly taken possession of by a man. As the protagonist notices:

> The hands become a body. Thrusting upon me…Blank, set and rigid, it was a face I had never seen. A man I did not know (Deshpande: 1980, 11).

The man’s body upon a female body with his strong hands taking possession and plucking the innocence has to be a stranger, as this male
body does not need a name. The very act is disastrous as the woman has been silenced. Thus, from the very beginning, Shashi deshpande has underlined the fact that the female body is a site of forced occupation in which the master has the will and freedom to use and abuse it. The title itself is ironic. Although the dark holds all the terror, it is called *The Dark Holds No Terrors* as at the last the protagonist comes out of this darkness.

*The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) seeks to discuss the male ego which refuses to accept a secondary position in marriage. In fact, it is the story of Sarita who becomes the victim of her husband Manohar’s sadistic torture through physical and sexual violence. Her harassed situation is expressed in a very touching, realistic and heart piercing manner:

…it was a monstrous invasion of my body. I tried to move, twisting my body, wriggling under the weight that pinned it down. It was impossible. It was pinioned to a position of an abject surrender of myself. I began, in sheer helplessness, to make small whimpering sounds, piteous cries. The small pains merged all at once into one large one. And still the body above mine, hard and tense, went on with its rhythmic movements. The hands continued their quest for new areas of pain. Now the horror of what was happening to me was lost in a fierce desire to end it. I could not, would not, beat it. I began to fight back helplessly, savagely (Deshpande: 1980, 11-12).

The very beginning of the novel describes the terrifying nightly ordeal of Sarita which focuses upon her humiliation also on the sexual power politics between man and woman. Every night Manu seduces Sarita to the position of a slave, supine and defenseless before a mighty
conqueror. It also reflects the master-slave relationship that the husband may inflict upon her during intercourse. The relationship between Sarita and Manu exemplifies the result of a social role-reversal. In the character of Manu, Shashi Deshpande depicts how power and success are inextricably linked with male sexuality in patriarchy. Manu is a typical patriarchal character, so it is not surprising that the role reversal affects him deeply.

Conventionally, the husband is the breadwinner of the house, but here according to one journalist, Saru is the winner of the bread and butter both which challenges Manu’s male ego. Manu feels himself inferior to her and so being weak natured, he adopts the most violent way of asserting his superiority over Sarita. By raping her every night, he tries to reclaim his masculine power over her body.

It is really painful that though she is a popular lady doctor by profession she has to bear such pain and unendurable agony. The physical assaults that Saru receives from her husband can be said to be the height of her tragic life. As she says that she is a woman who has burnt her boats. She is sailing alone in the abyss. She cannot turn back to her parents. She cannot even think of it. Her husband has been assaulting her. She has no one to turn to. The reactions against her dirty physical experiences are that she even hates the word ‘love’. For her, all that is physical is filthy. Her femininity being brutally crushed, she loses forever the dreams of sentiment and passion. As she utters “Love? Romance? Both I knew too well, were illusions and not relevant to my life” (Deshpande: 1980, 133).
For her, “sex was a dirty word” (120). It is really disgusting for her that the person who provided a paradise of sex and love, now turns a monstrous sadist inflicting human torture on his wife. Manu’s purpose, though expressed in the subconscious, is to ‘punish’ her for taking the ‘male role’ and to assert his superiority and power through physical violence. In the views of M. Jaggor “Rape is typically an act performed by men and its social meaning is to degrade and ‘feminize the victim’ (Jaggor: 1983, 263). After each such terrified incident, Sarita remains helpless against Manu’s greater strength. She always feels terrorized into submission when she utters:

[A]t home, sitting in the same room with him, watching the familiar gaze come over his eyes, the mask like rigidity come over her face; at night, waiting for the terror to strike, she becomes just a terrified animal. Thinking of how she could do nothing against his maniac strength (Deshpande: 1980, 99).

The regular violation of her body by the man whom she once loved and the hypocrisy maintained by him makes Saru dislike everything about him. In fact, Saru’s sexuality is killed with marital rape. The horrendous and suffocating act of violence – a violence that is played out night after night in the marital bed – is a source to an imbalanced power between husband and wife. Through this [Saru – Manu] relationship, Shashi Deshpande raises the question of marital rape which the Indian tradition does not recognize. She shows that rape within the marriage becomes the ultimate means by which the husband subjugates his wife.

Unable to face the reality that he is a failure in life, Manu lets his wounded male pride manifest itself in the form of sexual sadism “the hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly
familiar body” (102). Bed is the only place where he can assert his animal power over her body. Manu becomes a mean, loathsome fellow when he basks in her glory by day.

When a woman is more intelligent, enterprising, attractive and successful in her career, her husband is most likely to develop an inferiority complex. As a man, he finds it painful to live with it. To suppress it, he pretends to be superior and tries to demonstrate his physical strength by beating or abusing his wife. Husbands cannot accept their wives earning more than themselves. Though these prejudices are changing, the rate of change is so slow that women under these circumstances are mentally and economically suffering great deal.

Generally, sex is supposed to be a pleasurable activity. But when the same act of sexual encounter becomes aggressive, sadistic and enforced, it reverses to wordless language of grief and silent suffering. For the Indian woman, it is often a common experience. Even the taboos surrounding any discussion of sex also make it impossible for her to speak about the sexual act even with her husband. Sarita, in spite of being an educated woman, finds such a dilemma.

In the Indian family set up, the man is the dominant factor. She may be a reputed person in the society, she may earn more money than he does, yet, within the four walls of the house, he makes it very clear as to who the real master is. And if she tries to establish her own identity, we can see that there arises a crisis in woman’s life which culminates in her self realization. The woman seems to be bearing the yoke more with resignation and not with dedication and love. This may be so because
there is no expression of true love and affection from her counterpart, the husband. The give and take of familial life is almost absent in Saru’s life.

Saru’s humiliated married life leads her to extra – marital relationship with Boozie and Padmakar Rao. She wants to fulfill her unsatisfied desires through extra – marital relations. Boozie, her teacher, has given her so much money for opening a new consulting room. Although, Saru’s social and financial status grows, there is no peace for her at her home. Generally, economic independence brings fulfillment to a woman but in the case of Saru, her economic independence brings no fulfillment to her.

Another extra – marital relation is with Padmakar Rao who is her class mate in the medical college whom she meets years later as a medical practitioner. But this relationship is neither soothing nor comforting to her. Commenting on Saru’s relationship with the two men, Kamini Dinesh remarks:

In The Dark Holds No Terrors also there are other men but the relationship gives no solace. On the other hand, the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padma bring to Saru the disillusioning realization that there can be no happiness or fulfillment in this relationship. There cannot be an escape route from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has finally to fall ache on herself (Dinesh : 1995, 200).

Within the Indian context, Saru is a representative of those innumerable faceless, nameless Indian women for whom sexual joy is a distinctly masculine preserve. In the urban Indian context, through her protagonist, Deshpande makes larger statements about the fundamental
constituents of sexual attraction. Sarita gets fed up with her humiliated life and runs away to her parental home for relief. But her stay at her Baba’s house gives her chance to rethink about her married life and when she returns, she returns as a new woman.

*If I Die Today* (1982), the second published novel of Shashi Deshpande, presents the predicament of women in such a way as would voice her concerns for problems and perils of those of her sex. In this novel, she depicts what happens to women after marriage. On the surface, all is well with the middle class women. They have a relatively happy married life with their not so bad husbands and are blessed with children in most cases. Yet, there is something lacking, something wanting and rotten in the state of their domestic and married life, for which to a considerable extent their spouses are somehow responsible. Education, economic independence and motherhood are to some extent responsible to disturb the existing equation.

Manju, the narrator of the story, is a lecturer in a Bombay college. Whatever she says is either supported or reanimated by Guru who is the pivotal character in the novel. Manju has been a loving, affectionate understanding wife before she turned into an emotional pretzel. Now she is neither content nor confident. She is in a rather miserable state and unable to see that her feelings of misery are not due to her faults.

Vijay, her husband is a pathologist in the hospital. Their first child Sonu was born after three years of their marriage. After three years, they have planned for a second child. But there is a twist in their life. The entry of Guru brings change in their life. There is a gap in their
relationship so much so that she does not know when and where her husband is going to leave:

Vijay leaving? And why had he never told me? 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? (Deshpande: 1982, 24).

This is the situation of Manju. Though she lives with her husband who is leaving her, she does not know anything about it. Though she is pregnant, she is deprived of proper love and care of her husband. Generally, pregnancy is pleasurable for a woman, but in the case of Manju, it becomes painful. As she utters with pain:

I’d heard of a pregnancy bringing a husband and wife together. With Vijay and me, it seemed to have the opposite effect. We had drifted even further apart…We had even, I realized one day, stopped quarrelling as if we had not even any areas of disagreement between us (Deshpande: 1982, 43).

Manju’s pregnancy also becomes an obstacle in the path of her freedom. As she said:

Motherhood, I thought it’s a trap. Keeping you in a cage until you lose the desire for freedom; until you forget what the word “freedom” means (Deshpande: 1982, 47).

But at last, she turns into a woman with full determination. After that dreadful night, the morning comes as a ray of hope for her. From that morning, she has become determined and wants to live life as an individual. By quoting this:
I wake up the next morning full of determination; a determination to do something that invariably succeeds a night of misery. It made me feel more cheerful (Deshpande: 1982, 47).

Now, she is determined to face every problem of her life bravely without any support of Vijay.

Another female character is Rani, the wife of the Dean of the hospital Dr. Agarwal. Rani has an adulterous relationship with Dr. Kulkarni whose wife Shanta seems to be dull, drab woman patiently tolerant of her husband’s escapades like a traditional Indian wife. Their relationship is described through the lusty glance of Dr. Kulkarni in the party:

Dr. Kulkarni still stood there, staring at Rani. My God, what a look that was! I felt as if I had blundered into a room in which a couple was making love. It was a blatantly sexual look (Deshpande: 1982, 30).

Mriga, an elegant and urbane, is the third important female character. She is Dr. Kulkarni’s fifteen years old hyper sensitive daughter who is suffering from father fixation. She is an adolescent who disapproves the family tensions. Cynthia, though she is a pediatrician who loves kids, the irony of her life is that she has no kids and desperately longs for kids. Vimala is the “earnest social worker utterly domesticated and wrapped up in her home and kids (38). She used to be a nurse but now is working as a school teacher of the mentally retarded and does not want to talk about her past.
Thus, most of the women in this novel live like skeletons in men’s cupboards. But Manju, after suffering a lot receives her individuality and starts to live a dignified role of a woman. Rani also lives the life the way she wants.

*Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), the third published novel of Shashi Deshpande, was first conceived as a serialized publication for a magazine. A girl’s school somewhere in India in the post–independence era is the background of this novel where a string of murders take place and the victims being the teachers and students.

Miss Kshama Rao, the leading female character of this novel, comes to this school in order to take charge as the “Head Mistress of this large exclusive girl’s school” (4). It is said about Kshama Rao:

There was no doubt at all that the woman who stood on the dais was fully in command, both of the situations and herself … looking at the steady eyes which watched [her] … one would have thought … hers a woman who knows what she wants. And gets it (Deshpande: 1983, 6–7).

She is young, efficient, phlegmatic, prim and even somewhat prissy. Her unruffled manner and her professional integrity have won her praise.

But the crisis she faces is not an ordinary crisis. It is the murder of a school girl, Mridula. The problem is that whether she has committed suicide or it is a case of murder? The common knowledge regarding this girl was that at the time of her death, she was pregnant; and the fingers are pointed towards Kshama’s own slightly mysterious psychologically disturbed and brooding brother Pratap as he had close relationship with
Mridula. But before anyone can find out about his mysterious behavior, he is murdered. One more tragic death adds mystery in the atmosphere.

Kshama’s cousin Devayani is the housekeeper and a full fledged character in this novel. She is a house maker, homebound and likely to live her life as her wish. However, the death of her parents forced her to find some shelter at her sister’s place to work as Kshama’s housekeeper. Through her character, one also comes to know the frustrations that she faces. Both the school principal Kshama and her housekeeper cousin Devayani are spinsters.

Other minor female characters are Mrs. Jyoti Raman and her daughter Sonali. They play secondary role, but their presence and movements gravitate around Kshama. Even Devayani serves as a foil to her cousin supplying a kind of domestic identity to her.

There is one more murder of the school teacher Mrs. Raman while she was dressed as a Gypsy fortune teller at the annual festival on the school campus. The deaths are related to a racket of call girls run by those inside and those on the outer fringes of the school. They recruit the girls and lead them to the hotel “Open Sesame” where the hateful rendezvous takes place.

And for this, very well known men of the town are responsible for it. The town’s famous doctor Girish and Mr. Varma, a member of the school’s Board of Governors, are also responsible for luring young and unsuspecting girls into selling their bodies. The doctor is involved in it because he wanted to impress his wife as his family cuts him off. Mr. Varma carries a canker of hatred for young women within him because
his own wife deserted him soon after his marriage. He is humiliated with his wife and so he tries to take revenge of the whole female sex and treats the whole female sex as his enemy.

Devayani is also trapped by the wicked doctor and she may have to be eliminated because she knows too much. Devayani asks a question:

But I was neither daughter nor wife nor mother now. What was I then? Nothing? In a sense, I was restful to be nothing. And yet there was this feeling too...Come up and Be dead... who had said that? (Deshpande: 1983, 119).

Girish attempts to kill Devayani as he has a fear that she may leak out the information of the racket of girls to the authorities and he may have to undergo punishment. She is in a very dangerous situation, as she is on the verge of being murdered. Devayani puts her bits and pieces of information together and senses that Pratap has been killed because he had dared to find out the truth regarding Mridula’s death.

Thus, both Mr. Varma and Dr. Girish are responsible for the seduction as well as murders of many innocent school girls. Besides Mr. Varma and Girish, many men are lascivious and involved in it. Sanjay has made Sharmila his mistress who has been one “since she was fourteen” (261). Mridula becomes pregnant though she is unmarried (9) and a stranger, whose name is not mentioned in the novel, comes to the hotel “Open Sesame” to have a call girl (251).

Sanjay’s relations with Sharmila is incestuous according to Hindu rules because Sharmila is a cousin of Sanjay and according to Hindu
laws, a cousin has to be treated as a brother – sister relationship. Sanjay’s affair also destroys the life of Mridula as he is responsible for Mridula’s pregnancy. But he marries neither Sharmila nor Mridula. He also tries to trap Bunny and if she had not left the town.

The deteriorating situation of women comes at that stage when a strange man used Mridula as a call girl in the hotel “Open Sesame”. He was degenerated to the extent that he used Mridula’s body to satisfy his lust when she had been made to drink heavily and had not consciousness of what was happening to her body. As Girish remarks:

They must have got the girl drunk, I suppose, for the next thing she remembered was that she was alone in that room with the strange man (Deshpande: 1983, 251).

Mridula, the girl who committed suicide is another victim of rape. The young, innocent, beautiful and trusting school girl was lured and tempted by the murderers to become a part of the call girl racket. They got the girl drunk and she was raped by a ‘customer’. She was even unaware of what she was being forced to do and ended up of losing her virginity. Unable to cope with the situation, unable to get out of it, she committed suicide or rather was included into doing so by the murderers who gave her whatever she took.

Many women become the victim of murder by men. From them, Mridula and Mrs. Raman are murdered while Sonali, Sharmila and Devayani are lucky enough who save themselves from the trap of murder. Sanjay is a participant in all the attempts of murder either as the doer or as an accomplice. He tries to kill Sonali only because he suspects that she
also knows something about his involvement in the trade of call girls. He makes an attempt to kill even his mistress Sharmila because she hinders him from killing Sonali. As she says:

… I knew he was going to kill Sona. And when I tried to stop him, he tried to kill me … (Deshpande: 1983, 260).

In this way, Sanjay once a lover of Sharmila turns into a murderer and tries to kill his own beloved.

One theme that reoccurs in many of Shashi Deshpande’s novels is rape – both as a random violent act and one within marriage. In *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), there are several instances of rape within marriage as in the case of Sonali’s mother, Mrs. Jyoti Raman who having has a terrible experience on her wedding night. She can not accept such sexual act as a part of marriage. The experience she has that night leaves her mentally scarred for the rest of her life. She feels violated when her husband touches her:

And yet, she had borne it silently. Something had told her it was just between the two of them. She knew you could not scream ‘rape’…not when it was your husband. And even if she did, who would hear? (Deshpande: 1983, 141).

When her husband realizes that it is the end of their marriage, they decide in favour of a divorce. It alienates Jyoti Raman from her family as they blame Jyoti for everything as always happens to a woman in the patriarchal society. But she is determined and confident and completes her education, gets a job and moves away from her disapproving family
along with her daughter to start a new life but unfortunately she is murdered. After suffering a lot, at last, Mrs. Raman comes out as a determined individual which is remarkable. Mrs. Raman is somehow able to free herself from the clutches of her husband by threatening to commit suicide but there are thousands of unlucky women in the society who are not able to free themselves.

Sexism is most often expressed in the form of male domination which leads to women’s subjugation, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. According to patriarchal views, male supremacist ideology projects women as valueless who obtain value only by relating to men. But Shashi Deshpande exhorts women to learn “to live and work in solidarity” to bond with one another and counter male supremacy. Thus throughout the novel, Shashi Deshpande has described how women have become victim of men’s lust and physical strength whether in the form of rape or marital rape.

*Roots and Shadows* (1983), the fourth published novel of Shashi Deshpande is about the struggle of the protagonist Indu who is the representative of the educated, middle – class women. It is an attempt to explore the protagonist’s inner self to assert her individuality.

Indu, like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) experiences disillusionment in sex and becomes a victim of “sexual paralysis”. She faces the crisis in her marital life and so her sexual relationship with Jayant, her husband is a source of tension for her. In fact, she is the perfect example to focus on how Indian women are forced by a bigoted society to repress their sexuality. As she begins to suppress her real feelings, she begins to experience a corresponding loss of self esteem.
Gradually, Indu submits herself to Jayant not for love but to avoid conflict. She speaks:

The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this... That I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage, that I was a success ... And so I went on lying, even to myself ... which meant that I, who had despised Devdas for being a coward, was the same thing myself. I had killed myself as surely as he had done (Deshpande: 1983, 159).

She fears that she is turning into an ideal Indian wife only obeying her husband’s wishes. Finding her sexual personality repressed with her marital relationship, Indu strives for expression and acceptance through her extra – marital affairs with Naren. Initially she feels: “I’m essentially monogamous. For me, its one man and one man alone” (8) but later she offers herself to Naren twice. She thinks it to be no crime or sin to make love with another person besides her husband. She suffers no guilt in her extra – marital relationship with Naren.

Indu’s relationship with Naren has to be viewed in the light of her problems with Jayant. Indu describes her sexual experience with Naren in her own words “the orgasmic overflowing of female pleasures” (167) that she has suppressed after marriage. She surrenders her body to that man whom she loves. Naren not only provides Indu with sexual outlet but also with an opportunity to recover her self – worth as a vibrant, emotionally alive human being. Mary Eagleton’s statement helps us to understand the significance of this incident. She has explained:
Because female desire … is so repressed or so misrepresented in a phallocentric society, its expression becomes a key location for deconstructing that control (Eagleton: 1992, 205).

Her sexual relationship with Naren is an answer to such an orthodox society. As Y.S. Sunita Reddy remarks:

Perhaps this is Deshpande’s answer to the double standards practiced by our society where only men are allowed to take sexual liberties (Reddy: 2001, 43).

Moreover, Indu’s relationship with Naren also represents her assertion of her sexuality that was so rudely ignored and crushed by her husband. In fact, her suppressed feelings that are suffocating her has created uneasiness in their marital relationship. She realizes that her submission to Jayant’s will is to avoid conflict and prove to her family that her revolt against traditions actually brings her happiness. For Indu, this relationship has made her recover her lost sense of worth as a woman. Soon after she decides to leave the job and writes the way she wants.

Indu’s humiliated married life forces her to ridicule the very word ‘love’ by saying “I love a book, a word or a sari, a curry, a dog, a child, a man” (97). The realization that love has no place in her world drives her to the extreme stance of seeing only deceit, treachery and betrayal all around. For her, marriage proves to be another trap and woman feels like a caged bird. For her, marriage is only a dark room where terror haunts her.
Through Indu, Shashi Deshpande has exposed the double standards prevailing in our society. Only men can take liberty of seeking sexual pleasure and a wife cannot. A vicious husband must be worshipped but bad wife may at any time be superseded by another wife. Though the widow is enjoined to remain faithful to her husband’s memories, a husband having lost his wife may marry again and again. In such a society, the sexual emancipation on the part of Indu is evidently an assertion of her individuality, the newly emerged identity. In this way, she rejects the idea of woman’s inferiority to man and gives a new interpretation of ‘love’.

This incident focuses on Indu’s awareness that she is not dependent on Jayant. She exists as an individual human being. At last, Indu has learnt to see not only her life as full of possibilities for growth and grace but the very meaning of life in itself. As she says:

I felt as if I was watching life itself ... endless, limitless, formless and full of grace (Deshpande: 1983,184).

Another important female character is Akka who becomes the victim of child marriage and the oppression of her husband. Her character exposes what kind of childhood a young girl of thirteen could have had when she is married off to a fully grown, uncaring man double her age. At a tender age, she has to submit to his often violent sexual advances. At an age, where she barely understands the meaning of sex, she is subjected to such brutality that she begins to regard sex as ‘punishment’. Child marriage stifles her childhood which expounds to her the real trauma of being a girl. Her soul of a child withers when she has to tolerate the scathing and bestial sexual advances of her husband. Through the
character of Akka, Shashi Deshpande has highlighted the dual standards prevailing in Indian society where the woman is used to provide sexual pleasure to the man without her own needs being fulfilled.

She has tried to escape from her husband’s house twice but is sent forcefully to her husband by her mother – in – law. In spite of being locked for days without food, Akka begs her mother – in – law in vain not to send her back to her husband’s room.

Starved her as well. And then, sent her back to her husband’s room. The child, they say, cried and clung to her mother – in – law saying, “Lock me up again. Lock me up”. But there was no escape from a husband then. I remember her telling me [Narmada Atya] before my own marriage was consummated, “Now your punishment begins, Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels ( Deshpande : 1983, 70 ).

The result is she becomes pregnant at an immature age. Her immature and undeveloped body cannot give birth to a living child. This adds to her misfortunes as she is regarded as inauspicious and evil because of her childlessness. Her mother – in – law makes her life more miserable for her inability to give birth to a living child.

Through the example of Akka, Shashi Deshpande brings out the brutish treatment of women especially young girls in the name of tradition, which compels a wife to please her husband, no matter how brutal he is to her. She highlights the Indian tradition which has denied a woman any right over her own body and made her a victim of marital rape. The mournful tears of Akka at night tell the tale of a loveless mortifying marriage. In the words of Y. S. Sunita Reddy:
Sex as a punishment was perhaps, how it was viewed by such child brides who nevertheless did not raise any banner of revolt but on the other hand continued to suffer and helped to perpetuate such oppression (Reddy: 2001, 35).

According to rituals, one should not forget that revolt against marriage is not acceptable and woman who chooses to do so is often treated as outcastes. Thus, girls like Akka have no choice but to endure.

A change in Akka’s personality appears after the death of her mother-in-law and her husband’s paralytic stroke. Then she grabs freedom. As she is trained from childhood to be an ideal and faithful wife, she cannot desert her paralyzed husband, though he has abused her a lot. She looks after him with great care like a traditional Indian woman but neither permits the woman with whom her husband has extra-marital relationship to see him nor submits before her husband’s desire to meet her. The situation has brought a change in her position. With this act, she tries to regain her dignity and self respect after long years of mute submission. By asserting herself, Akka regains her lost self-esteem and confidence. Earlier Akka was feeble, fragile, and timid but now her husband becomes dependent on the mercy of Akka. She declares boldly:

Listen to me. It’s my turn now. I’ve listened to you long enough. She [her husband’s mistress] came here twice. She wanted to see you. She cried and begged to be allowed to see you just for a short while. I threw her out. You’ll never see her again (Deshpande: 1983, 71).

Since then Akka learns the technique of domination. She becomes aware of the principle of survival and grasps full control of the family in her own hands. She learns that the world is made up of two types of
people - powerful and weak. The powerful always rules over the weak. Thus, Akka, in order to establish her supremacy over her family hides weaknesses and emerges as dominating woman. Thus, through the character of Akka, Shashi Deshpande makes a strong statement on the arranged marriages which are outright discriminatory towards women. She has age, experience and the most important of all, money which give her supreme power and authority in the natal’s house. Penelope Brown observes that oppression of women occurs:

… if they don’t have control over their lives, decision – making ability, freedom of choice … If they are vulnerable to physical attack by men … If there are valued cultural activities from which they are excluded … (Brown: 1985, 244).

Akka’s mother – in – law is also a product of patriarchy. Instead of providing warmth and security to Akka, she ill treats and humiliates her. Like other traditional women, she believes that it is the duty of a wife to serve the sexual needs of the husband and bear him children. She is the perfect example of a woman who exists only for the purpose of satisfying a man’s needs. She is seen as a commodity useful for sex and for bearing children to be discarded once her utility comes to an end. In Alison M. Jaggor’s words:

With the partial exception of mothers, the male culture defines women as sexual objects for male pleasure (Jaggor: 1983, 260).

That Long Silence (1988) is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian housewife. Jaya, the female protagonist of the novel is a modern woman, middle aged housewife living in Bombay who suffers
from inner conflict which leads her to the quest for the self or identity. In short, *That Long Silence* (1988) is a journey of Jaya from silence to the self – worth. As Adele King opines:

Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is (King: 1988, 97).

Jaya’s husband Mohan involved in a case of corruption at work is hiding out with Jaya in a small suburban flat in Bombay. This limbo of waiting and anxiety gives Jaya the time and opportunity to reflect on her life and particularly upon her roles as a woman – a daughter, sister, wife, mother, and daughter – in – law, friend, mistress and writer of genteel ‘feminine’ newspaper article.

Jaya is a ‘conservative, educated middle class smiling placid, motherly woman’ (15 -16) who learns to suppress her own wishes and acts according to her husband’s wishes. She cannot dare to protest. As she says, “I had learnt it at last no questions, no retorts, only silence” (143). But finally, she has learnt to refuse to be led by nose and affirms with confidence “I’m not afraid any more” (199).

There is neither a natural nor harmonious relationship between Jaya and Mohan. Their physical relationship always ends up with Mohan’s question whether he has hurt her. It obviously shows a forced relationship between them. Mohan, an engineer, only cares for money, status and material comforts and does not bother about the feelings of Jaya. For Mohan, sex seems to exist in isolation. He fails to understand that woman’s sexuality is a complex phenomenon made up of physical as well as emotional factors. Jaya hints at this when she says –
First there is love, then there’s sex – that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan, I had realized that it could so easily be the other way round (Deshpande; 1988, 95).

For Mohan, it mostly is “a silent wordless love making” (85) “feeling his heavy, damp body” (95) on her. In fact, she begins to distance herself more and more from the mere act of sex.

Jaya succumbs and surrenders to Mohan without revolting. Silently she wills to his will. She never says ‘yes’ when her husband asks her whether he has hurt her. She endures everything, tolerates all kinds of masculine oppression silently. A dominating husband and a suffering wife – that is her tie with Mohan. Jaya’s sexual life gives her no satisfaction. She is not able to endure ‘a silent, wordless love making’. Sex with Mohan has become very mechanical. As she says – “I could stay apart from him without a twinge, I could sleep with him, too, without desire” (Deshpande: 1988, 97). To Jaya, sex becomes extraneous. She also realizes the fact that it is the act of sex that really affirms her loneliness. Mohan’s indifference in and after sex often fills her with a sense of loneliness and illusion:

The contact, the coming together had been not only momentary, but wholly illusory as well. We had never come together, only our bodies had done that I had begun to cry then, despairingly silently scared that I would wake Mohan up, trying desperately to calm myself (Deshpande: 1988, 98).

One can notice here the dissolution of a feminine sensibility under the stress of marriage that finally destroys woman’s being. But she is now prepared to re-evaluate her life.
It is remarkable that Jaya’s marriage is arranged by her elders and she experiences ‘sex’ before ‘love’. She is expected to play a passive role. This also changes her relationship with Mohan. Her feelings for him move away beyond sex. Sexual act appears illusory for her. There is a sexual degradation between Jaya and Mohan. Like other heroines of Shashi Deshpande, Jaya keeps terrified silence over it which intensifies the sexual stalemate. Her silence against her sexual predicament reveals the modern woman’s dilemma – of knowing the psychological nature of the problem but hesitant to talk it out. For endurance is still the way of life of an Indian woman and the discussion about sex in public is prohibited. For the females like Jaya, the definition of married life is neither love nor romance but sex. Fulfillment and happiness come in their lives not through love and romance, but through sex only.

Marriage is regarded as an instrument to fulfill the lust. In That Long Silence (1988), marriage is like children’s game of playing ‘tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor’ (91) which have now been substituted by labels like “doctor, engineer, government official, college lecturer” (91). Jaya also sees stagnation and helplessness in marital life as she thinks marriage makes a woman “circumspect” and also that “marriage never end, they cannot – they are a state of being” (127). The result is that the marriage becomes meaningless and loses its status. Sex alone seems to sustain the man – woman relationship as observed earlier. It is quite a shocking idea but it is traced and highlighted throughout Shashi Deshpande’s novels.

This shift from the ‘pativrata’ image of an ideal house wife to that of the sexually emancipated woman marks the emergence of a new class of Indian women who are coming out of their conservative shells and are
ready to accept the sexual / psychological realities of human life. It is really a sign of radical change occurring in the Indian sexual landscape.

Kamat, Jaya’s friend, had been her neighbour in the dingy flat at Dadar where she and Mohan had lived in their early married life. Her relationship with Kamat makes her aware that a woman is not a sex object only. His friendly relationship has intrigued the discovery:

At first it had seemed strange to have a man talk so freely to me. All the men I’d known till then had put on a different face, a different tone, a false smile when they spoke to me. It was always made clear that we were not on the same level. But this man … it had been a revelation to me that two people, a man and a woman could talk this way. With this man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself – Jaya (Deshpande: 1988, 152-153).

Kamat is deeply interested in Jaya’s development as a human being and encourages her to express herself. Jaya’s association with Kamat develops into a deep friendship based on communication. She shares her thoughts and memories of her father with Kamat. Kamat also advises her and helps her to discover her talent as a writer but in this process, she is attracted towards him. Kamat’s physical contacts revive desires in Jaya and remind her of suppressed sexuality. Regarding this R.K. Sharma writes:

Sex had always seemed such a momentous thing to her, but he made her feel it as just another part of the overall scheme of life and certainly nothing to feel guilty about. And while they did have sex occasionally, and while something she did feel an ‘overwhelming’ urge to respond to him bodily (Sharma: 1998, 114).
In this way, she does not view marriage as the only option for sexual satisfaction. She seeks emotional anchoring with Kamat.

Jaya has taken one bolder step of the abortion of their third child without the knowledge of Mohan which was imposed on her against her will after seventeen years of her marriage. In this way, she breaks the concept of an ideal housewife and receives individuality. Here, Shashi Deshpande allows her to exercise her reproductive right by aborting an unwanted fetus. It indicates a conscious choice on Jaya’s part to proclaim control over her body.

Like Jaya, her maid servant Jeeja also suffers from the experiences of a turbulent marriage to a drunkard only to be abandoned for another woman. Like other traditional women, she also blindly believes that it is the duty of a woman to give birth to children. Since she has failed to do so, she accepts that she is useless for her husband and so he has every right to abandon her. Therefore, she accepts his second wife and even looks after their son after their death.

Jeeja is the living example of the oppressed woman and bears all the cruel beatings of her drunkard husband without any hint of complaint. By earning, she has to support herself and her family, particularly to her drunkard husband. She remains faithful to her husband even after his death. Jeeja’s story gets repeated in the acts of Rajaram, Jeeja’s step son. He also beats his wife Tara brutally to extract money for his liquor. There are two other terrible instances of ill-treatment meted out to married women. The cruel beating of a wife by her husband in Dadar flat where Jaya had lived in exile with Mohan is one. The woman continued to bear
all the beatings in her pathetic silence, uttering in intervals “mother, mother, mother” (32). The man also repeated “Open your mouth you bitch. Tell me where you went, speak” (32). She remained silent though she tolerated more and more blows.

Even Mohan’s sister Vimala is no exception to the cruel treatment of her in-laws. Concealing her malady, she lies on bed for a long period and bleeds to death. Her mother-in-law’s response throws light on the apathy of her husband’s family to Vimala when she says:

God knows what’s wrong with her. She’s been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her if you want to. I never heard of women going to hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don’t have heavy periods! What a fuss! But these women who’ve never had children are like that (Dehspande: 1988, 39).

Vimala’s mother also becomes a victim of the oppression of patriarchy. Vimala speaks of her mother’s unwanted pregnancies. She says “almost all my childhood, I remember her as being pregnant” (37). Because of the lack of information about safe methods of sex and facilities for safe abortion, Vimala’s mother, like the other ignorant women of India, continues to bear without uttering a word, a series of unwanted pregnancies. She already has six living children and has lost four or five babies. Unsafe conditions of abortion carries out by untrained quacks unleash a whole range of problems to the woman.

Thus, except Jaya, for most of the female characters in this novel, sexism is still a threat in various forms. Jaya is the only character who fights for self. As a conscious woman, Jaya comes out with a crusade
against injustice meted out to women for centuries. Her character reminds us that women do have right to live and not under the shadow of essentialism and biologism.

_The Binding Vine_ (1993), a story of the victims of man’s lust and woman’s helplessness, is Shashi Deshpande’s boldest statement of a woman’s sexuality. As Shashi Deshpande herself said, “one of the themes of the novel was about controlling women’s minds and bodies” (Deshpande: 1993, 26). The novelist has made a bold attempt to portray the agony of a wife who is the victim of marital rape.

In this novel, the author again handles the juxtaposition of two situations – rape committed within the precincts of marriage and outside it. Shashi Deshpande highlights the plight of women raped outside marriage who would rather suffer in silence that be exposed to the humiliation involving in publishing the incident and that of married women whose bodies are violated by their legally wedded husbands but who would never dare reveal this to anyone. As Sunder Rajan writes:

> Therefore, rape as a phenomenon in contemporary India is more properly understood as the expression of male violence – sanctioned by various modes of social power – rather than of sexual desire (Rajan: 2004, 78).

The novel begins with the life of Urmila who is intelligent, independent, outspoken woman. She is trying to cope with the grief of her daughter’s death. The life of Mira and Kalpana are also linked with the life of Urmila and through these characters, Shashi Deshpande has shown the sexual wrongs done to women in the patriarchal Indian society.
Mira, the dead mother – in – law of Urmila is one of the examples of a traditional Indian woman who becomes a victim of the patriarchal society. She is an example of use and abuse of woman by patriarchy. Mira’s parents decide to marry her to a man much older to her age, instead of letting her discover her poetic talents or pursue studies.

Because of her marriage at an immature age and sensitive nature, she cannot accept her husband’s love and obsession that is limited to sex only. She fails to accept him as his master. His forced love making makes her nurture a dislike for him. She realizes that in the patriarchal society, a woman’s feelings are of no importance. Thus, submitting to the traditional role of a wife, she writes:

I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings. He knows what I’m doing and he gets angry, it makes him leave me to myself, it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, so it begins. ‘Please’ he says, ‘please, I love you ! Love ! How I hate the word’. If this is love, it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say ‘no’ at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all ( Deshpande : 1993, 67 ).

Marriage with such a man ceases to be a union of hearts. Love and understanding – the essential qualities of a happy married life – are missing from her life. Mira rather fears than loves her husband. In a way, her husband does not shower any warmth on Mira, but expects her always dependent and obedient. Y.S. Sunita Reddy observes:

It is indeed, irony that to avoid brutalization of one kind, women willingly submit themselves to a brutality of another kind in the institution of marriage ( Reddy : 2001, 95 ).
It is socially accepted that in marriage, a husband has a right over his wife’s body and it is the duty of the wife to satisfy the physical needs of her husband. This traditional negation of a woman’s right over her body and her own sexuality also forms an important issue of Shashi Deshpande’s novels. She has criticized the tradition which decides that the husband has a right to satisfy his biological needs irrespective of the wife’s willingness, thus allowing crimes like marital rape.

Mira, too, becomes a victim and endures the violation of her body in silence. Frustrated with the physicality of marital life, Mira tries to attain her true identity and self fulfillment by writing beautiful lyrical poems. That is the only way to escape from the sense of isolation and emptiness of her alienated and humdrum life. Even Urmila while reading Mira’s poems remarks:

> It runs through all her writing a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married (Deshpande: 1993, 63).

Pain, joy and fear are inextricably intertwined in the case of Mira. The pain of child birth results in the joy of seeing one’s own child and no one, not even Mira is spared of this joy of giving birth to a child – her creation. Even in the midst of vulnerable pain and fear of being trapped forever, Mira is aware of the new found love of her unborn child. But she is unfortunate enough that she dies in child birth.

Mira’s untimely death in child birth ends her cloistered existence with a man she could not love. Every day and night that she spent there
was a cry of rape and anguish. Mira symbolizes the plight of countless women who face the same situation, but are unable to voice their suffering. Her situation reflects the mute suffering of many such unfortunate women. The invasion of one’s body even though sanctified by marriage, can be as traumatic as rape. These experiences bring out the humiliation experienced by women like Mira who feels her body has been violated by her insensitive husband. In this way, Shashi Deshpande goes against the tradition bound taboos which teaches that it is a wife’s duty to please her husband in bed.

Through diary, Urmila also understands that even as a child Mira has hated the way her mother has been surrendering herself to her husband. She opposes every inch of her mother’s advise who says, “Never utter a no; submit and your life will be a paradise” (83). It has always been taken for granted that marriage provides a means for man to satisfy his sexual urge and to help in the task of procreation and that woman is only a tool to be used towards the end. Like Mira, countless generations of women have been victims of loveless marriages and several generations will continue to be so in future if society chooses to ignore the feelings of women. About rape and marital rape, Shashi Deshpande herself in “In First Person” writes:

The words marital rape was not so common then, or, at least, not so openly spoken. But such things happened; I knew that, even if no one had told me so. Whispers, incomplete sentences, fleeting expression on faces, spoken and unspoken hints – all these had taken me to this submerged fact (Deshpande : 2003, 8).

Kalpana, a lower middle class girl becomes a victim of a violent rape by her uncle Prabhakar. Urmila comes to contact with her and her
mother Shakutai in the hospital ward where Kalpana is moving between life and death. As described by Dr. Bhaskar to Urmila:

You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her thighs – he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips bitten and chewed (Deshpande: 1993, 8).

Rape has always been a horrible indignity heaped on women – folk by the male, merely on the strength of brute force. In the words of Adrienne Rich, “It is not rape of the body alone but, rape of the mind as well” (Rich: 1976, 61). Urmila fights in favour of a young rape victim Kalpana. It comes as a shocking revelation to Urmila that everyone wants to hush up the rape case and the general reaction to it is –

Okay, she was raped. But publicizing it isn’t going to do anyone good. It’s going to mean trouble for everyone, the girl, her family (Deshpande: 1993, 88-89).

Even the police officer dealing with the case is of the same opinion. According to him, what difference would it make whether the victim died of an accident or rape. In fact, he represents the male ideology for a woman. Shashi Deshpande reveals how the police conduct in such cases. It is the duty of a police to encourage such victims to lodge complaints with them, so they can punish the culprit. But the police register the case as a mere accident.

Even the mother of Kalpana, born and brought up in a traditional culture, does not want the case to be registered for she feels that it will be blacken her daughter’s name and the fear as to who will marry her second
daughter Sandhya? She does not want the rapist to be punished; instead she blames the girl for the beastly act. In the views of Mulk Raj Anand:

No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy which deny sex before marriage and make male into animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust (Anand: 1994, 33).

But Urmila, unlike other women does not want to leave that person who has wronged Kalpana easily. In spite of the fact that Kalpana’s mother wishes for the death of her daughter, Urmila decides to fight her case as in the patriarchal culture; a victim of rape is a loser on two counts. First, she has been raped; secondly, the society looks down upon such a victim as a characterless woman which leaves the victim in a much miserable plight. Rape is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation used against all women by all men.

Through the example of Shakutai, Kalpana’s mother, Shashi Deshpande makes us aware of the suppression and ill treatment of women in the lower strata of society. She also becomes the victim of the sexuality of her husband. Her husband’s insistence on sexual intercourse even when they have to sleep in the corridor, with men walking up and down, has been most humiliating for her. In spite of her submission to a hopeless marriage, Shakutai receives a shock when her husband leaves her for a younger woman.

In India, however, woman is still suffering from this enforced act of man upon woman. Even Shakutai does not find her painful experiences acceptable. She says to Urmi:
I, a woman, had to sleep there in public with strange men walking up and down. And my husband … the voice drops low, “You know what men are, he wanted to …” We are not animals I told him. As if he cared. And I got pregnant. It was the worst thing that could happen to us then (Deshpande : 1993, 110-111).

For men, there is nothing wrong or shameful in beating and abusing their wives. It is considered to be their privilege since husbands for them are a symbol of social prestige. Still their wives like Shakutai take pride in the fact that their husbands are alive. Here Shashi Deshpande realistically presents the decline of spiritual element in sex and a growing confusion regarding sex in marriage.

Urmila, the female protagonist of the novel is different from earlier female protagonists. The other protagonists fight for themselves while Urmila tries to help other women and fights for them. She is an upper middle class career woman and highly sensitive to the suffering of other women. It is this sensitivity which leads her to help Shakutai and her raped daughter Kalpana.

Urmila is not satisfied with her husband as he always stays far away from her on account of his job. During the long absence of her husband, Urmi confesses that there are moments when she is overcome with a longing for some physical gratification. Her friendship with Dr. Bhaskar provides ample opportunity to satisfy this urge as he declares that he has fallen in love with her. But Urmi holds back instead and thinks “it is so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife”(166). In this way, she never oversteps the boundaries chalked out in marriage. In fact, she never surrenders her
body to anybody whom she does not desire. She does not become a sex object for any man. She has full control over her body. For *The Binding Vine* (1993), Subhash K. Jha writes:

*The Binding Vine* is one of the few contemporary Indian novels to discuss its heroine’s sexuality, her ‘passion’ with a measure of unrepentant concern. In this novel, Deshpande travels much further down the road in exploring the working women’s need of the head, heart and further down the anatomy, than her earlier novels (Jha : 1994, 30).

Urmi is the only person in the novel who wants justice in Kalpana’s case. Despite opposition from everyone, she takes the whole matter to the press. She gets the case reopened and with this the identity of the rapist is revealed; who is no other than Prabhakar, Shakutai’s sister Sulu’s husband. Sulu is of guilty conscious that she immolates herself leaving behind a grief – stricken Shakuntala. In this way, Sulu becomes the victim of patriarchal ideology and loses her life.

*A Matter of Time* (1996) focuses on the issue of the Indian woman as a silent sufferer in the patriarchal society. In the prevalent society, a woman is expected to subordinate every wish and desire. This novel revolves round four generations of women. Manorama, a dead one who is a grandmother of Sumitra, Kalyani – the mother of Sumitra, Sumitra herself and her three daughters – Aru, Charu and Seema. Women of these generations face exploitation in life. They articulate the anguish, agony and conflict of the modern, educated Indian women who are caught between tradition and modernity and struggle for self – expression and individuality. Among them Sumitra emerges as a powerful individual.
It is a story of predicament of women belonging to a middle class family. Manorama, the woman of the first generation, marries to the rich Vithalrao. But she grows insecure when she is not able to bear a male heir to the family as she has the fear that she might be discarded from the family. This insecurity affects her life and as a result she fails to forge a meaningful relationship even with her only daughter Kalyani who is an intelligent girl with a promising future. Her disappointment leads her to the loveless marriage of Kalyani with her unwilling maternal uncle and Manorama’s brother Shripati as the property would go to them.

Kalyani – Shripati marriage is at the centre of this novel. Her plight in marriage is in no way less poignant than that of Sumi’s. Three children are born of this marriage – Sumi, Premi, and Madhav. But Madhav, the only son of them, is a mentally retarded child who is lost at the railway station. This incident leads her married life in isolation. Thus the desire for son becomes the centre of both Manorama and Kalyani’s pathetic life.

For nearly thirty five years, Kalyani, Sumi’s mother remains a second sex, a passive silent sufferer. Her body becomes a ‘site of colonizing power’. Kalyani’s mother in her childhood blamed Kalyani for not being a son and it is injustice not only towards Kalyani but also towards the whole female fraternity. Sumi is a victim of patriarchy. The novel revolves round an urban middle class family of Sumi with her three daughters. It begins with Gopal’s leaving the house. Sumitra is unable to react verbally; but remains totally lost and confused. She is so shocked with Gopal’s action that she lapses into complete silence, trying simultaneously to keep things normal for her daughters. But they all feel restless. This incident has made a telling effect on her body and soul:
With Gopal’s going, it was as if the swift – flowing stream of her being had grown thick and vicious – her movement, her thoughts, her very pulse and heartbeats seemed to have slowed down (Deshpande: 1996, 28).

Her daughters also feel hurt by her apparent stoicism.

Sumi suffers a lot as her husband Gopal leaves her without any reason. A lonely girl without her family or a lonely woman without her husband is always criticized, commented upon and taken for one or other type of sexual harassment by society. Here, as usual, Shashi Deshpande has given expression to Sumi’s pain, suffering and endurance in marriage. Sumi’s fascination with the mythical story of Surpanakha, Ravana’s sister, makes her question the negation of female sexuality in the patriarchal Indian society. As she says:

Female sexuality. We’re ashamed of owing it, we can’t speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not. She spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it – it is this Surpanakha I’m going to write about (Deshpande: 1996, 191).

Sumi understands the physical needs of a woman as she herself longs for the assuring presence of Gopal. Being alone with him again, when she visits his room, she is overcome by a desire to re – establish their old relationship again. But their separation has already brought a distance between them. At last, she comes out with a new understanding to move ahead in life without any bitterness for the man who has been the cause of her humiliation and suffering. She starts her new life as a teacher.
and a creative writer. But unluckily, she dies in a road accident. Shashi Deshpande insists a woman’s sexuality as a normal aspect of a human being’s life. She focuses on the duality in the social system that recognizes a man’s biological needs but denies such needs in a woman.

*Small Remedies* (2000) is the story of love, marriage and betrayal in the lives of three strong women - Madhu Saptarishi, Savitribai Indorekar and Leela. Like other protagonists, the female characters of this novel also undergo great suffering in marriage and when they stand up for themselves, they undergo great humiliation and embarrassment.

*Small Remedies* (2000) exposes a woman’s journey towards self realization. After the death of her mother, her knowledge of another woman in her father’s life alienates Madhu. In her grief and shock, Madhu is guided by an uncontrollable impulse that makes her body respond to the comforting embrace of a friend of her father. His efforts to console her lead them to the sexual encounter between the two. But immediately after this incident, Madhu goes to Bombay to see her dying father and the sorrow that engulfs her after his death blanks the incident from her memory.

After the death of her father, Madhu feels alienated and passes through a phase of complete loss of identity. After graduation, her friendship with Som blossoms into love and at last marriage. However, the peace and happiness that she has been enjoying are interrupted by Madhu’s revelation of a past incident – her sexual encounter with her father’s friend. The knowledge that that man has committed suicide suddenly fills her with guilt and in a state of grief and shock she tells everything to her husband Som; which she has consciously or
unconsciously blanked out. The revelation of this secret which she had locked in the innermost recesses of her mind shatters Som. Unable to accept his wife’s chastity; Som hopes that she was an unwilling partner. But Madhu’s honesty and innocence in declaring that it was not a rape, kills som’s faith in her wife. He begins to doubt Madhu’s character. Som holds on to the only fact of her lost chastity.

Since that day, Madhu’s peaceful married life turns into turmoil. Som changes from a generous and affectionate husband to “a sad and angry man, distraught, possessed by a madness that seemed to have no end” (Deshpande : 2000, 257 ). His disappointment in loving and marrying a girl who has lost her chastity is the result of his traditional belief. According to N. K. Jain:

… sexual purity both pre-marital virginal and marital fidelity … are cherished Indian values sanctified by tradition and particularly enjoined upon women (Jain : 1998, 12 ).

Som’s disgust over Madhu’s past makes him savage in his love making and gradually he ceases to touch her. The physical gratification that they sought in each other also disappears and soon their relationship is marred by distrust.

Som is haunted by her past and becomes suspicious and loathsome towards her. Love, security and happiness she found with Som and her son Aditya for seventeen years is destroyed by her honest confession of an incident of premarital sex. Their days and nights are spent in fights, which exhibit nothing but hateful insinuations for each other. Troubled by her parents’ hateful behaviour, their son Aditya comes to interrupt their fight during which he finds her father banging his mother’s head against
the wall. In which, one of them shouts to go away and Aditya in the state of shock walks out of the house and never returns. His death in a bomb blast shatters Madhu’s world.

The relationship between Madhu and Som begins to disintegrate with this incident. Madhu fails to comprehend Som as she is unaware of the typical male psychology. In our society where a woman is treated like another commodity to be possessed and exclusively consumed for the owner’s gratification, a woman becomes the husband’s private property. A woman is not to indulge in such acts with others before or after marriage, and is required to serve her husband with single minded devotion and loyalty. Even if the husband is lecherous, she is not to question him. The society has a sex–centered morality. As Y. S. Sunita Reddy writes:

Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behaviour (Reddy: 2001,132).

Thus, Madhu is a victim not only of the double standards of society but of her own innocence. She had slept with Chandru one night in the hotel room in her innocence, and again, in her innocence, she discloses this to Som. But Som with his typical male psychology holds on to this lone act of sex forgetting the fact that he himself had a full–fledged relation with a married woman before marriage.

It is really surprising that a man may have any number of affairs but expects his wife to be a virgin. Our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral course of behavior. Here, Shashi
Deshpande suggests that in our society pre-marital sex could lead to disintegration of marriage. Woman is forced to be sexually passive and submissive even towards her spouse and as a searcher for sexual satisfaction, woman is not ethically accepted. Through the example of Madhu, Shashi Deshpande exposes the double standards adopted in our society, where men alone take liberties seeking sexual pleasure.

Almost all of Shashi Deshpande’s novels begin with disappointment in marital relationship. The suppression in a patriarchal marriage disillusion them. Shashi Deshpande has explored the Indian middle class woman’s unhappiness in the institution of marriage. The traditional male fails to see that the woman also needs the space in the home and society. She strongly believes the views of Lakshmi Holmstrom that “men do use their sexual power, in order to subjugate women” (Holmstrom: 1998, 244).

Men accept the body and bodily response ‘as natural, as part of our human identity’ because they have been socially conditioned and sanctioned to do so. Are women’s bodies and bodily response any less natural, any less part of our human identity? The body is the room of the self. Female emancipation will only be fully realized when the rights to that room are given to women. In the words of Madhu:

My body’s almost pavlovian response to his touch I try to be responsible, to tell myself that it was merely that body reminding me of its existence, like it does when I draw back from touching the copper boiler. I ask myself, am I not making the same mistake as Som did ? I know I should put this response away where it belongs, among all those other spurts of desire for anonymous male bodies. Men do this better, they’re better at dealing with the needs of their bodies, they
accept it as natural as part of our human identity
(Deshpande: 2000, 307).

Thus, Madhu at the end of the novel achieves self – fulfillment though she suffers a lot. Though she passes through many obstacles, she achieves her individuality.

Savitribai Indorekar, another leading female character of this novel, also becomes a victim of gender discrimination prevalent in our patriarchal social set up. She breaks the taboo. It is her daring independent nature that makes her seek her own identity and elopes with a Muslim tabla player to live in an unknown town, though she is a married woman. With that Muslim tabla player, she begets a daughter named Munny from him though she refuses the tabla player as her father. Savitribai’s father – in – law has also extra marital relationship with a well known Thumri singer. He visits her regularly and the people around him know about it; but the family members draw blank eyes towards it. It shows how men can lead a life of their choice with impunity while women are jeered at and looked down upon if they show any deviation from the assigned roles set by society for them. Thus, laws are different for man and woman. And woman becomes a victim of this duality. For a father – in – law, his choosing a wife from one’s own class and mistress from another is quite acceptable, while for a daughter – in – law it is a matter of humiliation and considered immoral.

The third important female character is Leela, Madhu’s aunt who is equally remarkable and commendable. She is not only ahead of her own generation but also the next generation as well. Although she believes in the communist ideology and man – woman equality, she finds that the
party is a victim to male chauvinism which ignores merit in favour of gender. After the death of her first husband, she marries again and in a way comes out of the traditional way of life. Thus, all the three female characters struggle for identity and at last they achieve it.

In *Moving On* (2004) Shashi Deshpande highlights that the neglect of the body may lead to disastrous consequences and affects the entire human personality. It is the story of the connection and the opposing pulls of the body and the soul. It meanders round the female body which is generally considered a barrier to the sublime waves of the soul. Manjari, the reader of her father’s diary and the female protagonist of the novel, suffers from bodily desires and her father Badri Narayan strongly feels the nuances of the body having an undeniable truth and existence.

According to Shashi Deshpande, there can be no perfect union among couples without proper understanding and the bodily requirements of each other. Some natural instincts and societal pressure ensure in women certain type of fear even against their own husbands. This type of relationship leads to disharmony and chaos in their life and soon there ensues a cleavage between them.

Manjari is highly obsessed with the body and its impulses. As she is the student of medical science, she is unable to control the uproar of her body. She often longs for a man’s arm around her. Once she stamps a kiss on Shyam’s forehead brazenly and announces her defiance and declares her love for Shyam. This announcement becomes a cause of much annoyance to everyone in the family and later a cause of perpetual grief to herself.
Though Manjari is infatuated with Shyam, he is a person much below the social and economic status of Badri Narayan’s family. In fact, her infatuation is the outcome of her physical longing. Her married life with Shyam begins on a dismal note and she finds herself ill at ease living in Shyam’s house in a very disgusting and inseparable ambience. Her parents’ home provides her some solace. But after the birth of her son, her bodily requirements increase but Shyam’s prospects in film making dwindle and abandon some of the proposals. All these affect badly to the married life of Manjari and Shyam. At last, she falls from the seventh sky. As she utters:

Closeted in one small room though we were, we seeded to be living on two different continents. In bed, we lay close, but without touching. It was like the game of pebbles, I’d played as a girl. A game in which, if two pebbles touched, you were out (Deshpande : 2004, 290).

Throughout her life, Manjari’s bodily desires stand as the first hurdle. It is because of her bodily desires; she is attracted towards Shyam and goes away from the family links and parental home. But though she acquires relief and solace in the arms of Shyam, she starts wriggling once the sexual spells are over. She becomes a burden to herself. Determined and self willed though, she decides to discard all her bodily movements and rhythm but at times she feels that her body fails her.

The rigid restrictions of social codes cannot stop the rhythms of the body. In the case of Manjari, we witness such a situation when she fulfils her bodily hunger with a person of dubious identity. It all starts, when one day she comes to touch the hands of Raman, a tenant living on the top floor of her house. She is badly disturbed with the touch of Raman
and suffers from inner turmoil. Her mental conflict and agony is properly described when she utters:

I want to pummel my body, to punish it with savage blows until it turns black and blue. I hate it. I want to disown it. I want to touch it, to let my hand move gently along accustomed routes, to feel its softness, its curves… ( Deshapnde: 2004, 232).

As a single woman, Manjari herself struggles with the desires and demands of her body. Manjari’s bodily desires have made her forget the difference between good and evil. Though she is a victim of Raman’s carnal pulls, she feels ill at ease but does not stop him. This shows her excessive concern for the bodily urges:

I don’t want to hear his voice either. Only the body, his body, only my body, my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensation. The smell of sun dried clothes, of sweet, the hardness, the pressure of his body, its weight on mine and my body responding, welcoming his … ( Deshpande: 2004, 257).

Manjari considers this sexual act only as a mechanical affair, without emotional touch, nothing else. What Manjari fails to control is her sexuality – the betrayal of her body and its relentless demands to be fed. She negotiates with it by sleeping with her tenant, a much younger man, but again in her own terms, at her whim and desire, not his.

Manjari is a woman who cannot betray her desire and her demands of her own body. Her sexual relation with her tenant Raman cannot be considered otherwise, for she is in full command of the situation as she wants to move out of the “eternal conflict between man and woman, the
man asserting his rights claiming his right to her body the female denying
him” (276) and claiming her body for herself. Her sexual relation with
her young tenant cannot be considered as woman’s enslavement, her
subordination to him, for in her sexual relation with him she is in full
command of the situation. She can come out of this sexual bond and
claim her body for herself. A woman’s body has its own sanctity which
she can claim as her own and not to be owned solely by a man. Manjari in
her own way resolves the gender conflict:

The eternal conflict between man and woman, the man
asserting his rights, claiming his right to her body, the
female denying him (Deshpande : 2004, 276 ).

To keep her self – identity and relational autonomy intact, Manjari
challenges the essential notion of female identity. She gives up wearing
sarís, cuts her hair short, fully realizing that “they can smell it, yes, they
can smell the woman in you” (284). In not remarrying at a young age she
defies the institution of marriage for social security and declares:

Never again, I am never going to get into that situation
again, staking everything, my life and my future, on
one relationship on one person. And then losing it all

In this realization, Manjari underlines Deshpande’s view that the
woman should be herself, not owned or claimed by men. As Foucault
mentions that power develops through dispersed systems, which is then
exercised over the body and ironically, we keep in functioning.

She is so strong that in order to sell out her ancestral house, she is
even physically assaulted, almost on the verge of rape. But firmly and
stubbornly, she decides not to leave and fight against those evils who want to grab her house. Thus, one of the most urgent concerns of Shashi Deshpande has been a woman’s rights over her body.

Through Manjari – Raman relationship, Shashi Deshpande has highlighted the changing pattern of sexual practice. This incident affects Manjari in such a way that it stops her to accept Raja, a one time wooer of Manjari. He wants to understand the reasons which are responsible for it and when Manjari narrates everything to Raja, he realizes the problems of widow in general and Manjari in particular. Here, what the author tries to focus is the truth of the body, which cannot be denied:

But if the face knows how to deceive, the body cannot lie. I can lie in words, I can make my face show what is not there, I can conceal what is there, but body can’t lie. The body is honest, yes it told me its need and I have gone with it, I have given it what it wants (Deshpande: 2004, 259).

Through his diary, we also come to learn that Manjari’s father was also a believer and a lover of his wife’s body. He was inclined towards the beautiful body of Vasu, his wife. He also mentioned how like all Indian ladies, she maintained her silence and shyness about her body and does not enter into any discussion regarding it. Thus, Vasu was a traditional woman for him. His wife was in the centre of his life. But his this idea disintegrated as he watched his beloved wife succumb to illness and perceived his own impending death. Manjari’s father expressed his faith in his wife’s body in the diary:

We can never deny the ties of the body; we can never leave them behind us. The ties we forge through our bodies are the strongest, the hardest to sever … Look at
the way, we connect the organs of the body to emotions and feelings; we speak of blood, of the heart, the guts, the liver (Deshpande: 2004, 114).

Of course, there are other women characters in the novel: Malu, Gayatri and Sachi who do not exhibit similar views on love, marriage, sexuality and domesticity. Manjari alone redefines woman’s emancipation, freedom from orthodox belief and social restrictions. She is the role model of relational autonomy without yielding to anyone not even dictated by her children. She lives in her own terms and follows the ideology of “Live and let live”. Thus, **Moving On** (2004) is a mature work of art concerning about woman’s bodily desires. Regarding her concern for the woman’s body and its needs, she follows what June Gaur believes:

For one thing, this is a novel in which the body is the focus. Therefore, the physical could not in any way be left out or merely hinted at. Doesn’t Manjari speak of ‘meeting Mr. Bones head on?’ And does not she criticize her mother for not doing so? And don’t forget that Manjari’s father, the anatomist, instilled in her an acceptance of the human body and its needs (Gaur: 2004, 5).

**In The Country of Deceit** (2008), the latest novel of Shashi Deshpande, is the story of Devayani, a young unmarried woman living alone in a small town of Karnataka called Rajnur. This novel is different from earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande as the protagonists of the earlier novels are all married and become victim of male chauvinism, while the protagonist of this novel is unmarried, chooses the man whom she wants and establishes sexual relationship with him. So her desire is in the centre of their relationship.
Devayani, the protagonist of the novel, is just recovering from the loss of her mother and starting life anew which is symbolized by the demolition of her ancestral home and the building of a modern house. For Devayani, Shashi Deshpande in “In the First Person” writes:

I also know that Devayani, a character from one of those novels, is still waiting for me to write another, to give her a stage on which she can play a role again (Deshpande: 2003, 28).

Devayani is the only well developed character of this novel. She is generous, long suffering and patient with all the calamities thrown her way like father’s death, mother’s illness and her ultimate death. Above all, she is honest, honest to her own self. Devayani chooses to live alone in the small town of Rajnur after her parents’ death, ignoring the gently voiced disapproval of her family and friends. Teaching English, developing a garden and making friendship with a self – sufficient former actress Rani who settles in the town with her husband and her three children Roshni, the daughter of her first marriage, Neha and Rohan, Devayani’s life is tranquil, imbued with a hard won independence. Then she meets Ashok Chinappa, the new District Superintendent of Police in Rajnur. They fall in love despite the fact that Ashok is much older, married and as both painfully acknowledge from the very beginning – it is a relationship without a future.

Sindhu, the aunt of Devayani is suffering from breast cancer and the doctor advises her for breast surgery. Keshav, her husband worries a lot and holds her hands before surgery. At that time, Sindhu wants to tell him:
Don’t hold my hand, hold my breast, touch it, caress it, and kiss it. It has given you and me so much pleasure. Let me know that pleasure once again (Deshpande: 2008, 41).

Sindhu is a traditional woman who thinks that the happiness and satisfaction of the husband is the only means of fulfillment for a woman. She is worried as her one breast; the means of her and her husband’s pleasure will be removed through surgery. As she writes:

...that life is lived through the body. Not such a new thought, you’ll say. But when you come to some knowledge on your own, it’s always bright and shining, like a newly minted coin (Deshpande: 2008, 41-42).

The incident described by Sindhu in her letter to Devayani which she has seen on the T.V. show where people are willing to tell the world the kind of things what they directly can’t say. This time the guest is a woman who is suffering from breast cancer. She desires to remove all her clothes in the nightclub and wants to dance before audience and she does it. In the beginning, this incident surprises and shocks Sindhu but later she realizes that the purpose of that lady is not showing vulgarity but she wants to show the world her body and also wants to announce to the world that her body is still here. It is still alive. In this way, she struggles to survive her body as Sindhu herself tries to survive her body (breast) before surgery. That’s why she requests Keshav to hold her breasts, not hands. As narrated by Sindhu:

Anyway that day the guest was a woman who’d had breast cancer ... removing your clothes in nightclub and dancing? Striptease? Anyway that’s what she wanted to do and she did it ... And I thought – imagine a woman in India saying this! Imagine the audience
cheering a woman who says it! … But I cheered the woman as much as the audience did. Because now I can understand why she wanted to do such a strange thing. She wanted to show the world her body, she wanted to announce to the world – my body is here, I’m still here, I’m alive exactly the way I had wanted Keshav to hold my breast when I thought I would lose it (Deshpande: 2008, 42).

For that woman, her body and its demands are important. Sindhu also tries to explain Devayani about her bodily desires as she is an unmarried young woman and the Indian culture does not allow any unmarried woman to fulfill her bodily desires without marriage. By quoting this:

I come to the point: you are still young; your natural desires will be with you for many years. Our country does not allow women to fulfill these desires without marriage … I want you to think of this. Remember, this is a very natural feeling, a very natural desire and you have a right to expect your life to contain this anand as well (Deshpande: 2008, 42-43).

None can remain aloof from this bodily hunger. Even Rani’s husband Kailash Navilur’s father is not an exception. Though he is a school teacher in the National school, there is a big scandal when he elopes with a much younger colleague. He abandones his wife and two young sons. His wife suffers a lot and faces many hardships in bringing up their sons:

His [KN’s] father had been a school teacher who had, as she put it, run away with a much younger colleague, abandoning his wife and two young sons. The wife had suffered great hardships and had brought up her sons on her own (Deshpande: 2008, 47).
In her anger his wife has burnt all his books. She brings “them out and made a bonfire of them, that she stood there grimly until the last book was burnt” (Deshpande : 2008, 79 -80). In fact, the fire is a symbol of her anguish and agony towards her husband. But within two months, her husband wants to return. There is a debate if she will allow him to come back. As she is a traditional woman, she allows him to come back. But has there been a woman from new generation, she will have firmly said ‘no’ to him. According to Sindhu’s daughter Tara, that woman has to learn to live independently and discards her husband from her life. Thus, the married man like KN’s father cannot hide his sexual desire. Even the Hindi teacher in Kusuma’s school runs away with a girl. He is a married man while that girl is only in her tender age. Thus, an unmarried woman has to be more careful than the married one. Devayani is an unmarried woman and it is really difficult for her to save herself from this deceit of love. Commenting on the discriminatory attitude of society, Annis Pratt remarks:

Society considers the sex experiences of man as attributes of her general development, while similar experiences in the life of women are looked upon as a terrible calamity, a loss of honour and of all that is good and noble in a human being (Pratt : 1981, 37).

Thus, sexuality is the main force or the driving energy behind the body’s self – expression. From Freud to Foucault, sexuality has been a subject of intense debate. In India, overt sexuality is considered as an act of shame for both a woman and a man. In fact, a female body’s fulfillment comes only in the bonding with a male body, in marriage. But marriage gets fractured where bodily gratification becomes an illusion and remains a brute force.
It also happens to Devayani when Ashok meets her at Rani’s house. He falls in love with Rani at first sight, though he is a married man and a father of a daughter. He falls in love with her in such a way that like a teenager he wishes to see her all the time and waits whole day for a small glimpse of her.

Though Ashok does not force Devayani to love him, she finally accepts him as his lover. For the first time, when they meet at the lonely place, they establish sexual relationship:

He put his arms around me, held me for a moment and let me go. He then cupped my face in his two hands and looked into my face. I could feel his breath on my face. My heart was fluttering widely within me. He began to trace my features with his fingers – my eyebrows, my nose, my chin, my lips. I could never have imagined that such a gentle touch, a touch so light that I could scarcely feel it, could evoke such a strong response from my body. Then it was the turn of his lips, which touched my cheeks, my forehead, my eyes, finally came to my lips and rested gently on them... And now I was part of it too, my lips were seeking him, my hands began roving over his body, my body made room for him and finally, painfully, joyfully, accepted him (Deshpande: 2008, 131 – 132).

Thus, Devayani – Ashok relationship is at the centre of this novel. Though both make love many times, they are well aware of the fact that their relationship is without future. Many times, Devayani suffers from guilty consciousness. The fact is that their relationship is illicit and the society does not accept the relationship between a married man and an unmarried woman. Savitri’s (Devayani’s sister) explanation makes her
these feelings strong and she suffers from inner turmoil. At last, though she desperately loves him, she tries to avoid him and does not even accept the birthday gift offered by him.

Devayani is a bold woman and does not believe in patriarchal ideology. She accepts Ashok’s love because she thinks that marriage is not the only means of the fulfillment of sexual desires. Through this relationship, she achieves whatever she desires – love, sex, loyalty, happiness etc. She also receives mutual understanding from Ashok. She does not blame Ashok for this relationship as she also longs for bodily union. Instead of suffocating marriage as in other novels we see, she prefers free relationship with Ashok:

He only wants to sleep with you, he only wants your body, Savi said. Yes, he took me to bed the first time we were together, but I wanted it too, Shree. I was frightened, but my God, I wanted it too. And it must have been the right thing to do, because there was no awkwardness between us after that, there were no barriers between us. We were comfortable with each other (Deshpande : 2008, 200).

Both Ashok and Devayani are well aware of that “there’s no future of us, both of us know that. We know we have to give this up, sometime, some day” (Deshpande : 2008, 201). At last, Ashok goes to Bangalore as he gets seniority and Devayani lives alone. No one is there to caress her, to kiss her, to love her. But she is ready to face this situation bravely. The end of their relationship as well as of this novel is very positive. Though Ashok leaves Rajnur and goes far away from Devayani’s life, she starts to think in a new way. Again with determination, she decides to live the life in a new way though she lives in “a constant struggle between trying to forget and wanting to remember”(259).
Even the relationship between Rani and KN is not satisfactory. The purpose of their marriage is not based on true love. The purpose of Rani selecting KN is to spend “easy life with a wealthy man, a heaven after the turbulence of her earlier life” (158) while the purpose of KN selecting Rani is to have “a beautiful wife and one more possession he could be proud of” (158). Such a couple cannot live happily. Though they live under one roof, their souls always remain aloof. They don’t have intimate relationship.

The relationship between Rani and Mahesh Tiwari, her lover whom she calls Maheshji was not happy too. They also had quarrelled many times. There were many reasons like his drinking habit, his idleness, his wife and her demand for a divorce. Thus Rani, though she was a well known actress, became the victim of male harassment. Many times, he got angry, became abusive and sometimes violent.

Rani’s decision of leaving Maheshji is quite appropriate. She is firm in her decision. Despite repeated calls from Mahesh and threats of suicide, she does not return to him as Rani is not ready to humiliate herself in the hands of male like Mahesh Tiwari.

Besides, there are various examples and incidents which expose violence against woman’s body. The film story narrated by Sindhu regarding separation of husband and wife is one such example. After a long time, when they meet, they start discussing the reasons of their separation and the reasons are lack of understanding and communication during sexual intercourse. The difference between male and female’s sexual desire is that man desires sex while woman desires love along with
sex. But man does not understand the need of a woman which brings disaster in the marriage. As described here:

\[
\text{The point is, the man always says: I want to be comfortable, I want to be looked after, I want children, I want love, I want sex, sex, sex, sex …} \\
\text{The woman says: I want children, I want to be looked after, I want to be loved, tell me you love me, I want love, love, love, love … (Deshpande: 2008, 98).}
\]

The traditional mindset to ignore woman’s sexuality and to consider a woman immoral and frivolous, if she gives expression to her pleasures in sex. But now, sex is being viewed by more and more women as a physical need. In this regards, Promilla Kapur remarks:

\[
\text{All these findings suggest that the negative attitude towards sex or that of condemnation has lost ground considerably and the positive attitude regarding sex as one on the needs of every human being is emerging (Kapur: 1973, 220).}
\]

The film from which Rani again enters into the film industry is “Sannata”. The theme of this film is taken from the past incident of Devayani’s school life when she, along with four friends, passed through the Mango grove. The owner of the grove caught one of the girls from their group named Shanti and the remaining children, out of fear, ran away from there leaving Shanti. Shanti caught by that owner became the victim of bodily harassment:

\[
\text{Shanti the oldest among us, Shanti whose already developed figure seems to be bursting out of her school uniform. The hand drops casually from her shoulder to her breast. Her body makes an involuntary movement, she cringes. His face changes, he moves closer to her,}
\]
he says something to her, he seems to forget us ... In a few moments, she joins us. She stops, bending forwards from her waist as if to ease the pain in her guts. We watch her until she straightens up, until she recovers (Deshpande: 2008, 170-171).

Through this incident, the theme of the film is about the rape of a woman when she was a girl. In a way, rape is only a game for film makers to grab awards, nothing else:

And a rape victim’s was a good role; as Sadhu had candidly said, there was a much greater possibility of getting an award with such a role (Deshpande: 2008, 168).

The third incident is about the harassment of Devayani herself. After the meeting with the producer and the director of the film “Sannata”, when Devayani was sitting alone, one of the young men from the boisterous group of men at the another table of the restaurant got up, walked to her and tried to harass her by putting hands on her shoulder:

‘Why are you sitting alone? Come and join us’.
‘No thanks’.
‘Oh, come on. Be a sport’.
‘No, I’m okay’.
‘I’ll join you then. We can lunch together’.
‘No, I want to be alone’.
‘I know you don’t mean that’.
He sat down in the chair across me. I got up, but he got up too and put his hand on my shoulder.
‘Be a good girl, sit down. Let’s have a good time’ (Deshpande: 2008, 141).

Meanwhile, Sadhu, Rani’s secretary entered the restaurant and tackled the whole incident.
Another incident is that when Devayani was in school at Rajnur, there was a talk about an adulterous couple which was caught by the woman’s husband in his own home at the day time. Because of the patriarchal ideology, this couple met tragic end. The couple was caught in the act, people snatched their clothes and made them naked:

Impossible to connect it to the ugliness of the couple in Rajnur, caught in the act, snatching at their clothes, trying to cover their nakedness, left with nothing, not even a shred of dignity (Deshpande: 2008, 149).

Even Kusuma’s husband had a mistress for a long time. His mistress was old enough to be his mother; and the society along with Kusuma called her “that fat and ugly whore” (149). All these incidents show the illtreatment mated out to women in the patriarchal society. All the female characters except Devayani become victim of patriarchal ideology. Only Devayani comes out of it and establishes her self identity.

Here, Devayani proves that marriage may not offer the best of all possible worlds to a man and a woman for neither a man nor a woman is complete in himself or herself. Both biologically and emotionally need each other and if they can develop a measure of harmony in their relations, so much the better.

* * * * * * *

The issue of menstruation is another important theme discussed by Shashi Deshpande in her novels. It is generally ignored by male writers. Women writers write about the normal household circumstances about the female vulnerability and menstrual blood. These issues are important
to a woman and it is in itself a radical attack on the silence in society and a journey towards independence, understanding and self – assurance.

In *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980), for Sarita, the inset of biological changes like menstruation is unbearable. She prays god that it should not happen to her any more and save her from being ashamed of her forever. The process of training the girl child for her feminine roles begins in early childhood. It is intensified from the moment of her attaining puberty. Shashi Deshpande chooses to focus on the traumatic nature of the girl’s this experience and its psychologically demoralizing effect upon the young girl. All Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists have difficulty in accepting their budding femininity. They feel that the menstrual cycle experienced by girls is a terrible curse upon them as it makes the end of the freedom of childhood and the spontaneity that girls have experienced in their father’s household. For Sarita:

> It was torture, not just the three days when I couldn’t enter the kitchen or the puja room. Not just the sleeping on a straw mat covered with a thin sheet. Not just the feeling of being as pariah, with my special cup and plate by my side in which I was served from a distance, for my touch was … pollution. A kind of shame … ( Deshpande : 1980, 62 ).

Saru is filled with the sense of shame at her monthly ordeal, praying desperately for a miracle to put an end to it. She resents the traditional practice in her orthodox home where she is treated like a pariah during those three days when she is made to sleep on a straw mat with a special cup and a plate by her side in which she is served from a distance as her touch would mean pollution. Without the sympathetic support of her mother, she is left in the crucial time of puberty and
adolescence. The rejection by the mother during these impressionable years leads Saru’s psychological insecurity. The first experience of menstruation is horrible for her and the mother is there to frighten her with the fact that she would bleed for years and years. The mother does not let her enter the kitchen and puja room also.

Saru grows up hating her womanhood that consists the feelings of impure and ashamed of one’s sexuality and living with the sole purpose of getting married. But her studying of anatomy and physiology makes her to accept her womanhood rather than detest it. Even in the later life, Sarita, though she becomes a doctor, cannot free herself from the revulsion towards her sexuality acquired in childhood and refers to herself as a “dark, damp, smelly hole” (29). The social norms laid down for puberty, makes the young girl feel unclean, unwanted, untouchable and devalued. Still in remote villages and even among educated people, a woman is considered unholy during the menstruation period. The same issue is discussed in many of her novels.

In *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Indu utters in despair: “For four days now you are unclean. You cannot touch anyone or anything” (87). The onset of puberty perplexes her and makes her conscious of her own body. She endures the restrictions of puberty imposed on her. Indu also bitterly recollects how crudely the idea of womanhood was thrust upon her:

My womanhood … I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day, I had grown up “you’re a woman now.” I, a woman? My mind had flung off the thought with an amazing swiftness...“And don’t forget”. She had
ended. “For four days now, you are unclean. You can’t touch anyone or anything”. And that had been my introduction to the beautiful world of being a woman. I was unclean (Deshpande: 1983, 87).

As a result, she begins to resent her womanhood. She hates this situation. The idea of her unclean body has been planted in the mind. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. Simone de Beauvoir rightly observes:

For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feeling of shame appears. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on (Beauvoir: 1974, 335).

In The Binding Vine (1993), Mira, Urmila’s mother—in—law writes about her puberty experience—“companion for three days, window in the corner room of the house where the women set for three days segregated from …” (Deshpande, 1993, 98). Simone de Beauvoir also expresses something similar when she talks of:

… the dramatic conflict that harrows the adolescent girl at puberty: she cannot become ‘grown—up’ without accepting her femininity; and she knows already that her sex condemns her to a mutilated and fixed existence, which she faces at this time under the form of impure sickness and a vague sense of guilt (Beauvoir: 1974, 470).

If we look at these novels from gynocentric point of view, her writing echoes womanhood. Shashi Deshpande appreciates the courage of most of the female protagonists who fight for their space and they have done what they wanted to do, not according to the norms of patriarchy. She has described the willingness of women. The extra—marital relationship of female protagonists represent the willingness of these
females. Sarita is attracted to Boozie and Padmakar Rao, Indu is attracted to Naren, Jaya to Kamat, Manjari to Raman and Devayani to Ashok. These protagonists see their attractions objectively and do not allow themselves to be bogged down by any feeling of guilt. Lack of any meaningful communication with their spouses leads them in developing such relationships. But such attractions are short lived and have no serious impact on their marriage.

A visible boldness in the treatment of sexuality can be seen in Deshpande’s novels as not only does she talk about sexual oppression in case of Saru, Mira, Kalpana and Shakutai, but also focuses on the sexual needs of a woman as in the case of Devayani. Indu focuses about her unfulfilled desires as the root cause of unhappiness in her marriage. Jaya and Urmi feel dissatisfied because of their incompatibility with their husbands in sex life.

Deshpande’s main aim in depicting pre–marital or extra–marital sex is not to show the women seeking gratification outside marriage. But she tries to stress the fact that the sex without emotional involvement is of no importance. Women seek emotional involvement in any relationship and when emotions are attached to their husbands, their intimacy with other men is just incidental. As Madhu and Indu refuse to give importance to such incidents in their life. Similarly, Mira and Akka reject their husband’s idea of love which was limited to their only sexual gratification.

Through various examples of female protagonists, Shashi Deshpande describes that woman is now awakened to the futility of the various long preserved notions and taboos and has started opposing them.
In this crusade, she is sometimes alone and alienated. Most culture defines women’s roles through their bodily behavior, menstruation and puberty, chastity and marriage, procreative ability and power. But now women have learnt to find out their own place.

If we see the female protagonists Indu, Saru, Urmi, Devayani, Jaya, Shakuntala, Manjari from gynocentric point of view, they are the women who have control of their body and after some pathetic experiences, have become mature and come out as an individual. This glorification and admiration of women who without bothering about social and religious norms, go ahead to offer helping hands and refuse to women exploited by the society. It becomes an important stance to be noticed by a gynocentric reader.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, the key to female emancipation lay in woman’s release from her bodily identification. She views that although we are tied to our bodily selves by hunger or lust; we can overcome these base desires and pursue our full intellectual and emotional potential. According to Raman Seldom:

Now the time has come when woman’s body must be heard and woman must uncensore herself, recover her good, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal. She must throw of her guilt … (Seldom : 1981, 150-51).

The woman has to realize her position and uplift herself. There is no one else to give her a helping hand. She has to help herself, express herself and find a firm footing for herself in the family and the society.
3.2 Linguistic Study

It is through the medium of language that we define and categorize areas of difference and similarity, which in turn allow us to comprehend the world around us. Male–centered categorization pre–dominate in American English and subtly shape our understanding and perception of reality; this is why attention to increasingly directed to the inherently oppressive aspects for women of the male constructed language system (Furman: 1978, 182).

Nelly Furman puts the problem of language by women very appropriately. While quoting Lacan, Andrea Nye, in Feminist Theory and The Philosophies of Man (1988) writes that as the available language for woman to use “is itself sexist, she will always either replicate sexist attitudes or fumble inarticulately and impotently” (Nye: 1988, 174), while quoting Carolyn Bruke’s views about language in Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader (1988) even Showalter puts:

The central issue in much recent women’s writing … is to find and use an appropriate female language … The very forms of the dominant mode of discourse shows the mark of the dominant masculine ideology. Hence, when a woman writer writes or speaks herself into existence, she is forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue, a language with which she may not be personally comfortable (Showalter: 1988, 191).

The above statements by various theorists mention that women are not completely comfortable with the language created by male dominated culture. According to gynocritics, the problem is not that the language is not sufficient in expressing the women’s consciousness and experiences
but women have not been allowed to use all the resources of language. On account of which they express themselves through silences, gaps and are forced into euphemisms and circumlocution. Gynocritics like Robin Lakoff have gone into coining a term “woman’s language” and have highlighted the various characteristics of the woman’s language. As Anees Jung opines:

I had not known then that silence could be a language through which women in this language realized themselves. I owe that legacy to mother, a legacy which I am just beginning to unravel and understand (Jung: 1987, 20).

With very few exceptions, the literary scene until 1960 showed women silently suffering and accepting the male authority unquestioningly but with the emergence of gender oriented fiction, classically idealized woman transformed into a new woman, eager to discover her true self.

Women’s writing is struggling against internalization of role models which is thrust on women and has learnt to express the untold narrative of being a woman. It is believed that male and their writings are known for “knowledge, power, clarity, conciseness, strong action, while female for their feelings, domestic intimacy, small scale forms, weak action” (Seldom: 1981, 147). Women’s writing is the literature of silence. Its meaning lies enclosed and camouflaged. It seeks to express which has been submerged and suppressed. Writing in itself has always been an act of courage. In The Empire Writes Back (1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareith Griffiths and Helen Tiffin mentions:

Women in many societies have been relegated to the position of ‘other’ marginalized and in a metaphorical
sense, ‘colonized’, forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial (men) domination from positions deeply embedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from the emporiums …Women like post – colonial people, have had to construct a language of their own when their only available ‘tools’ are those of the ‘colonizer’ ( Ascroft : 1989 , 75 ).

Shashi Deshpande’s own struggle as a writer has focused on women’s issues, problems and experiences which are equally symptomic of the resistance to feminist expression that prevails in India in the middle of the twentieth century. In her works, she articulates suppressed voices – those of middle class women trapped between the conflicting demands of traditional expectations of a woman’s role and the search for self – fulfillment and identity. It is specially reflected in Shashi Deshpande’s works, where she searches for spaces and gaps to fill them up with voices, so that they are heard. Thus, in this context, the language becomes a facilitator of access to speech.

Her novels trace the need for her women protagonists to tell, retell and end the silences imposed on them through centuries of restraint and social conditioning. According to Shashi Deshpande, women have not participated in the process of word – making and so she gives voice to the issue of women’s writing. In a way, she gives voice to thousands of voiceless women who bear the darkness stoically.

Telling stories is a mode of self – realization and making oneself into a more - co - ordinated person. In most of the novels of Shashi Deshpande, female protagonists are writers and narrators of the story which lead them to the journey of self – realization. Jaya writes in That Long Silence (1988), Mira writes poems and Urmila transcribes them in
The Binding Vine (1993), Sumi writes a play in A Matter of Time (1996), Madhu writes biography of Savitribai Indorekar in Small Remedies (2000), Indu writes in Roots and Shadows (1983), Mai in Moving On (2004) and Devayani in In The Country of Deceit (2008). Thus, the trope of writing as an outlet is a major thread in Deshpande’s novels. Even Shashi Deshpande herself would not like to compromise with the dignity and essential freedom of a writer. She thinks that everyone has a right to choose a language.

In her The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), Saru at her father’s house, recalls her problems which had started from her childhood. They become quite serious after her younger brother Dhruva’s death which is referred to in the novel after Dhruva’s death. It symbolizes the pre - lapsarian and post - lapsarian life for Saru. His brother’s death overshadows all other memories of her life as if that is the point of her downfall. Even after marriage, she remains silent which leads her to ‘darkness’. So the novel is built round the metaphors of ‘the dark’ and ‘the light’.

Even Sarita’s father advises her that she should talk about it to her husband and she should not make silence. Instead of fretting and fuming in silence, she has to articulate her fears and anxieties in words, face facts and take her own decisions instead of being imprisoned by her silence; she should liberate herself through words through narrative. In the conversation between Saru and her father towards the end of the novel, finally the silence is broken, when Saru declares: “May be I deserve it after all” (204).
Almost at the end of the novel, the release occurs when Saru is able to speak, to voice the darkness within her to her father. She gives voice to the months and years of her silence. Even her father encourages her to speak: “Now … go on, tell me. Tell me everything (199). The breaking of the silence of the past and the present makes a relief for Saru. In an Interview with Romita Choudhari, Shashi Deshpande speaks:

I think a woman’s story is about much more than victimization. Saru’s strength lies in her decision to come out of her silence and speak. She is in charge of her life and consciously acts on her decision. She chooses to keep quiet and later chooses to speak … It’s not an end. It’s a beginning. They’ve stripped themselves. Seen themselves. Bare. One starts from there. It’s like rebirth (Choudhari : 1995, 20).

The effort of Saru to speak against her own husband aims at discovering the strangled voice articulating woman’s silent discourse, deciphering the coded language and liberating the imagination of woman from interior to exterior. It provides the cause, will, strength and means to articulate the silence of women.

The silence of Saru is the silence which has been a destiny of the Indian women down the centuries. They can be abused, beaten, expelled, raped, aborted and still they have to suffer it silently. This may also be read as the expression of the entire womankind which has been forced to keep their lips sealed for centuries by the deep rooted system of the society, especially middle – class. Thus, she is a role model for all the women who are suffering from this or that kind of injustice. They have got to articulate their grievances. In the views of Jasbir Jain:
Women’s writing is the literature of silence. Its meaning lies hidden and camouflaged. It is also the literature of silence for it seeks to express what has been submerged and suppressed (Jain: 1996, 8).

In *If I Die Today* (1982) the linguistic approach to women is not minutely described except the character of Manju. Manju is silenced because of the scared relationship between wife and husband. She is forced to remain silent as during her second pregnancy her husband has some doubts regarding her relationship with Guru. This leads her to gap of communication between husband and wife. Manju finds her married life fraught with silences and barriers. Her second pregnancy leads her to silence and distances from her motherhood and finds her first daughter against her wishes growing up and clinging to her father like a vine. There is a total lack of harmony between Manju and her husband. Her husband always remains angry with her.

Her *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) brilliantly explores realities of women’s lives. It also exposes women’s silences and reveals the truths that lie behind their silences – silences of a mother, daughter, sister, widow, a young girl, silences that speak a thousand words that pave the way to search for one’s own space and voice, to come in terms with one.

The metaphor of ‘silence’ is very powerfully recurring in this novel. To begin with when Kshama meets Mr. Mathews when he takes her to the school for the first time. She plainly expects appreciation and approval but she would not commit herself. Again when he mentions that the place needed new blood, she meets his inquiring gaze with silence. She seems to be quite uncommunicative, brooding, reserved and unwilling to talk more than what she considers necessary on any subject.
Thus, silence in this novel becomes cumulatively metaphorical in meaning.

Towards the end of the novel, Kshama is shown returning to her home realizing that she could find release from this enforced confinement and she begins to write the script of her life for herself. Kshama muses after Devayani has left:

> I know we have to break down our own walls. Devayani … has she been able to do that? Has she got out at last? And I … (Deshpande: 1983, 265).

Thus, at the end of the novel, Kshama tries to come out of the terrible silence which oppresses her personality. Her decision leads her to self-revelation and individuality.

Another female character, Mrs. Raman, is only sixteen when she is married and the experience of her wedding night is horrible. The worst thing is that during the sexual intercourse, the more she is reluctant, her husband enjoys it more. Her speechless reluctance excites him enormously. She endures everything silently and becomes a silent sufferer. As described here:

> She was trapped. And the worst horror had been that, the more reluctant she was, the more he had seemed to enjoy it. It had seemed to excite him enormously, her resistance. She had learnt then not to protest, to endure silently (Deshpande: 1983, 161).

Thus, silence is almost like ruthless void that is not only spreading monstrously but also systematically eliminating her real self. To silently adapt to a particular role decided by a tradition automatically implies an erasure of the real self.
The result is she becomes pregnant and begets a female child namely Sonali. She is also silent because of the anxiety of her daughter and without opposing and speaking a single word, she leaves her husband. Her decision to leave her husband leads her to the self – assertion. Though her parents are not happy with the divorce, she is happy with this decision. The breaking and the erasure of silence are thus pivotal to the growth of individuals in particular and marriage in general. After divorce, she completes her education and gets a job. So, after divorce, her self – assertion and individuality is exposed. But unfortunately she is murdered by a male and thus, she becomes a victim of patriarchy. As quoted here:

Helplessness and despair both left her when she knew she was free of him. She knew then with confidence and certainly what she wanted. She completed her education, got a job, and with her daughter, moved away form her silently disapproving family (Deshpande: 1983, 162).

Many women like Mridula and Mrs. Raman are murdered by men like Girish and Mr. Varma as they have doubt that they know about the scandal of girls’ sex racket. In order to make these women speechless, they brutally murder them and if a woman like Sarmila try to stop them, they are also threatened to make them speechless. Thus, patriarchal culture tries to suppress the voice of women. They have to be only mute spectators.

Thus, throughout the novel, patriarchy tries to keep women silent and suppressed. If they try to raise their voice, they are bitterly punished. But female characters like Kshama and Mrs. Jyoti Raman break that
deadening silence thrust upon them and establish their individuality, though in this process, they suffer a lot. But their suffering leads them to their identity formation.

In *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Indu, the protagonist remains silent throughout her life. Several instances prove that all along Indu has been playing the role of wife to perfection to keep Jayant happy and satisfied. Despite her reluctance, she has to continue the frustrating job of writing for the magazine just to keep Jayant satisfied. Even at the place of her job, when she puts the two stories about the same woman on the editor’s table, the editor rejects her story knowing well that it is true. The truth about the story is not accepted by the editor as it is written by a woman writer. So she gives up her work as a journalist out of disgust for writing only about women and their problems and starts working for another magazine. As Indu explains the reason for shift:

> Women, women, women … I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a case and thrown away the key. I couldn’t go on (Deshpande: 1983, 78).

Among the many compromises that she makes in order to keep up the semblance of a happy marriage, the most distressing one is that she has given up her ambition of being a writer on her own. Further, as a creative writer and working in a magazine, she loses her enthusiasm to write on being forced by the editor to suppress facts and present a glossy picture to the readers. In her, there is an inner need for creativity and fulfillment but this creative expression in her is inhibited due to lack of privacy. Virginia Woolf attributes woman’s lack of creativity to her not having a room of her own. In Indu’s case, strong social and family
pressure stifle her creativity and holds all creative activities in subservience to her role as a home maker.

Appalled by the woman’s hypocrisy and the attitude of the editor, she tells Jayant about it who steeps in his middle class values merely says:

“That’s life … a long way go. What can one person do against the whole system! No point making a spectacle of yourself with futile gestures. We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget, we have a long way to go (Deshpande : 1983, 17).

With his this statement, she is even more hurt as instead of supporting her, he asks her to compromise and commands her not to resign the job. Thus, she continues to write what suits the magazine and not her own conscience. Here, she realizes the absurdity of her existence, as she has to compromise against her consciousness with the value of a hypocrite society where success is counted the most important matter. She hates herself for it and wakes up each day with the feeling that she is trapped against her wishes. Here Jayant is exposed as an authoritative husband who has the final say in this regard to a meekly submissive wife. O.P. Bhatnakar rightly remarks:

The novel deals with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with male – dominated society (Bhatnakar : 2007, 26).

Thus, it is not only Indu’s married life which makes her feel uneasy, but her writing also. She finds herself writing only what the editor wishes and the public may accept. Though she is attached to woman’s magazine, she often writes through the eyes of men. She thinks
how many lies she has to write in the bargain. She also decides to resign the job and devotes herself to the kind of writing she has always dreamt of.

Throughout the novel, Indu is critical about Akka and her authority. Here, there is a question why she does not favour and dislikes Akka every time. The solution is that feminism does not mean a feminine reaction against whatever is masculine in order to accept whatever comes from females or femininity. It is a theoretical position in which the law of patriarchy is upset whether that is cherished by men or women. Women’s writing without this essential conflict with the masculine oriented notions will not be sufficiently powerful, for women’s writing, according to Showalter:

…necessarily takes place within, rather than outside, a dominant male discourse, through acts of “revision, appropriation and subversion (Showalter: 1988, 4).

She further argues:

Women’s literary and critical texts are both double – voiced discourse, inevitably and continually engaged with patrilineal and matrilineal sources (Showalter: 1988, 5).

Both the positions are evident in *Roots and Shadows* (1983). Indu writes as if she were a man, but without the style of masculine writing. She writes in a fluid narrative style. Although Akka is a woman, all her views are strictly in conformity with the masculine laws. Indu’s hatred of Akka is not personal but is directed at the authoritarian ideas, conventional ideas, and superstitions and so on, shared by all simply because they are liked by Akka. This does not say that women’s
participation in our culture is granted. Rather, they are kept silenced. In Indian society, to be a clever woman is a ‘disgrace’. Sharing Indu’s feelings her old uncle says “for a woman intelligence is always a burden, Indu. We like our women not to think (33).

Here, Shashi Deshpande unveils Indian women in proper light and shade. As a woman, Indu is hardly left with any choice. Her life is so acutely circumscribed that she cannot make quick decisions:

A woman’s life, they had told me, contained no choices. And all my life, especially in this house, I had seen the truth of this. The women had no choice but to submit, to accept. And I had often wondered … have they been born without wills, or have their will atrophied through a life time of disuse? (Deshpande : 1983, 6).

Indu recognizes her displacement and marginalized position as a woman and a process of ego dissolution begins. She finds herself merging into others, experiencing loss of boundaries. The authoritative and dominating male has not only suppressed her female voice but also brings silence, dullness and repulsion to the houses in which women live:

The house was silent, as if tired of its pretence of liveliness. A few women who had been left behind, and who had been carrying on an interminable argument in the kitchen, their voices rising and falling monotonously, were now hustled out by an authoritative male voice (Deshpande : 1983, 6).

Women like Indu can neither express themselves nor choose for themselves. They can neither love nor hate but be content with “the gift of silence” (33) that marriage has brought them.
Indu is interested in creative writing – a means to articulate her feminine voice. We hear her to speak – speak through her body, consciousness and pen. A woman like Indu’s creativity is phallic action that calls for women’s recovery of loss. With the advent of a new strategy, women enter into the symbolic order.

The novel ends with Indu’s realization that she is a writer “that I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing. That I could on the other hand pay for Mini’s wedding (Dehspande:1983, 205). This statement of Indu is her assertion of her will and self. She shall not remain a doll or a puppet but she will take decisions for herself and affirm her being. Indu has learnt to see not only her life full of possibilities for growth and grace but the very meaning of life itself. The novel ends with her breaking of the long silence. As Simone de Beauvoir observes:

The more women assert themselves as human beings, the more the marvelous quality of the ‘other’ will die in them (Beauvoir: 1974, 173).

Even Usha Tambe, commenting on Indu’s decision to start writing according to wishes and not to use Akka’s money to enrich herself says “The important point is that she is making independent decision” (Tambe: 1994,12).

**That Long Silence** (1988) is the story of Jaya, an Indian housewife who maintains silence throughout her life despite the hardships that threatens to break it. The title itself suggests the protagonist’s long silence. The novel is a protest against the limitation of women’s lives which moves from the personal to the impersonal, from the experiences to the act and art of expressing them. It is about a writer self –
consciously trying to put into words her own experiences, which brings in the act of writing itself, a woman engaged in the activity of writing confronting the masculine gaze. Jaya, the heroine wants to write in detail about her life:

> For I am not writing of all those innocent young girls I’ve written till now…And I know this – you can never be the heroine of your own story. Self – revelation is a cruel story. The real picture, that real “you” never emerges. Looking for it is a bewildering a trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces (Deshpande: 1988, 1).

Jaya is a modern predicament. She knows pretty well that in order to get by in a relationship one has to learn a lot about tricks and ‘silence’ is one of the important tricks for her. She is an intense thinking woman, eager to probe the meaning of marriage and love of life itself. In fact, she considers writing as merely a form of escape, a creeping into a “sofa hole” (149). She longs to confront life directly through her fiction and she has made a good start too. Her story about a man “who could not reach out to his wife except through her body” (144) is seen as an honest probing into life and has appeared in a magazine and even wins a first prize for its authentic depiction of life. During this time, she is on the threshold of getting recognition as a creative writer of some merit. Yet her husband has been much hurt by this story and expresses his displeasure as he suspects that it is a literal presentation of their married life.

The success of Jaya’s story depicting the relationship between man and woman is weighed in relation to what society would think of future.
So he wants Jaya to think like him and induces her not to deliberate on such themes that would affect their married life. As her husband protests:

"Jaya, how could you, how could you have done it? ... They will all know now, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us; they will think I am this kind of a man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write such ugly things, how will you face people after this? (Deshpande: 1988, 143–144).

Jaya, a representative of the typical Indian woman, in the present context moulds herself as her husband’s will. She stops such kind of writing as she does not want to displease her husband. Instead of expressing her true emotions and ideology, she shifts to a convenient style of writing, something that could be polished easily in a weekly column.

Jaya’s supportive and submissive role proves detrimental to her creative talent. She stops writing about the oppressed women – a subject in which her imagination soared high. So much so that she compromises on the quality of her writing. She begins to write humorous pieces on the travails of a middle class housewife in a column entitled ‘Seeta’ which is the mirror to Jaya who lives in the pages of her diary as wife and mother. But these silly things for a magazine do not satisfy her intellectual requirements. She writes the ‘Seeta’ column for this magazine and comes to believe that everyone likes it. It caters to the taste of Mohan, editors and readers. But later on in her moment of self – analysis and self – scrutiny, she realizes that the ‘Seeta’ column is a patriarchal construct:

"The means through which I had shut the door, firmly, on all those women who invaded my being, screaming
for my attention; women … I could not write about, because they might resemble Mohan’s mother, or aunt, or my mother, or aunt. Seeta was safer (Deshpande: 1988, 149).

She intensely desires to establish her identity. In spite of Mohan’s disapproval, she keeps writing serious stories and sending them to the magazines. One of them is about a child widow. It is based on an actual story narrated by her father. As Jaya writes:

She was only a child and they humiliated her, disgraced her in public because she hadn’t shaved her head. They called her a whore, a daughter of a whore, a fact which arouses Jaya’s indignation and impels her to write the story (Deshpande: 1988, 147).

But the story is rejected by one magazine after another. The reason is that in her stream of thoughts, -Jaya, too, looks at her marital relations where there is no conversation left between them. This unhappiness is reflected not only in her conjugal life, but also in her writing.

Thus, Jaya has deliberately annihilated the creative aspect of her personality by ignoring the subject of women’s suffering which is so close to her heart. In accepting the role of a traditional house wife, she has actually neglected her own ‘self’, her own identity. This reversal perplexed her and she expresses her dissatisfaction to Kamat who asks her frankly:

Why didn’t you use that anger in your story? I will tell you what is wrong with your story. Its too restrained, spew out your anger in your writing woman spew it out (Deshpande: 1988, 147).
Her reply is “because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?” (Deshpande: 1988, 147). Kamat comes to her rescue. According to him, her stories lack strong emotions as she has suppressed her anger and frustration, but cannot express her anger or feelings lest it should damage her relation with Mohan. Kamat understands her literary capability and criticizes her for writing such stuff: “I can never imagine you writing this” (149).

After years of adjustment and self-surrender, Jaya is even afraid of expressing her likes and dislikes. Unable to expose her real self, she feels that “self revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real you never emerge. The truth, however, is that she is taught from the very childhood that husband is like a “sheltering tree” (84) and from the very first day of her married life, she has tried to make his life comfortable by “keeping her mind off the office – life like Gandhari bandaging her eyes” (61). Now discernable cracks are visible in her mental and emotional equilibrium. Indira Bhatt points out:

The novel presents the condition of the woman in Indian society – her role model – and how the different types of women act out their roles with their silence (Bhatt: 1991, 156).

Outwardly, she is a satisfied housewife married to an apparently caring man, with a comfortable home, with no dearth of material comfort. But on scrutiny, it is revealed that to achieve this stage of fulfillment as a wife, Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refuses to fit in with her image as a wife and mother besides a failed writer. In the views of Suman Ahuja:
Jaya caught in an emotional, eddy endeavors to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying albeit in vain, to rediscover her true self, which is but an ephemera … an unfulfilled writer (Ahuja: 1989,2).

Here, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the irony of a woman writer who is supposed to present her views and ideas before society but still she remains silent probing into her past struggling with her present and trying to establish a rapport with her future. The literary value of Jaya’s writing is not important – writing that are within boundaries and do not emanate from personal experience are acceptable. The core of That Long Silence (1988) is the theme of writing as restraint or self – revelation. She revolts in silence. She comments on a situation, when her husband talks about women being treated cruelly by their husbands and he calls it “strength”:

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 a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender (Deshpande: 1988,36).

Even during the sexual intercourse, Jaya remains silent. She cannot say ‘yes’ when her husband asks her whether he has hurt her. Broadly speaking, Jaya’s predicament is caused by lack of communication between husband and wife. It proves that there is not a harmonious relationship between them. As she said:

Nothing, nothing between us … Nothing between me and Mohan. We live together but there had been only emptiness between us (Deshpande: 1988,185).

There is hardly any communication between Jaya and Mohan, neither verbal nor emotional. Mohan wants a well educated and cultured
wife, not a reciprocating and loving one. So he resolves to marry Jaya when he sees her speaking English fluently. But after marriage she has to remain silent in the family.

Jaya finally decides to come out of the cocoon when life becomes intolerable to her. She firmly resolves to break the icy silence which has plagued her family since long. Now she decides to speak, “I will have to ease that long silence between us” (192). This is her own decision and it is a welcome step towards restoring normalcy and happiness in the family. The first step towards self realization is Jaya’s rejection of ‘Seeta’ column. Her second decisive step is giving up using Prakrit, the language of the down – trodden women as she recollects that while studying Sanskrit, she had learnt with outrage that women characters were not allowed to speak Sanskrit and had to use Prakrit.

At last, Jaya articulates her long silence – her innermost thoughts, her fears, her doubts and all that she had suppressed during her seventeen years of marriage. She has decided not to be passive and silent. She says:

The panic has gone. I am Mohan’s wife. I had thought and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible (Deshpande : 1988 , 191).

Now Jaya realizes that in order to attain selfhood, a woman must transcend silence, negation and self – alienation. Jaya’s decision by the end of the novel to write what she wishes is a validation of her discovery of herself. It is the rebirth and resurrection of self. A new Jaya is born out of an ‘agonizing and despairing’ Jaya. She decides to give her own answers to Mohan and not the answers expected by him. The ending of
the narrative with “life has always to be made possible” (Deshpande: 1988, 193) is a note of hope and affirmation. Shashi Deshpande in an interview with Geeta Gangadharan says that That Long Silence (1988) is “more meaningful than any other of her works, for it deals with a much large issue – the long silence of women” (Gangadharan: 1998, 11). Thus the breaking and the erasure of silence is the central to the growth of individual. It symbolizes the assertion of her feminine voice with hope and promises a voice that articulates her inner thoughts. Such an ending suggests a new beginning of Jaya. She is not a revolutionary character but wants to be different from the regular housewife’s life style.

The silence of women brings the unfortunate destiny, pain and suffering but once they speak or give voice, they come out from their problems to some extent. Jaya, at the end of the novel, chooses to operate within the self imposed limits of the family, resolving to change her life by renegotiating the power relations and improving the interpersonal relationship within it rather than through the instrumentality of her writing by breaking silence. Her act of giving up the newspaper column ‘Seeta’ reflects her desire for the giving up of the traditional role model of wife. Mohan persuades her to continue writing for the column but now she inwardly refuses to be Mohan’s traditional wife. Like, Gandhari, earlier she had bandaged her eyes like her blind husband but as Gandhari removes bandage, she also gives up all the bandages and gives vent to her suppressed feelings. This may also be read as the expression of the entire womankind which has been forced to keep its lips sealed for centuries by the system of society, especially middle class. In “Masks and Disguise”, Shashi Deshpande writes:
But Draupadi’s junction of ‘Be silent about what you think’ applies not just to women writers, it is meant for all women which means that women have to remain silent even about the small world that is theirs. In other words, women writers are doubly confined; for them both as women and as writers, it is only this little space of domestic life that is available. And their words have to remain confined within that space as well (Deshpande: 2003, 182).

Thus, through the example of Jaya, Shashi Deshpande in this novel attempts to break the silence thrust on women and their position in society by the domineering males. It depicts the suppressed feelings, aspirations and agony of women and also challenges the men to alter their attitude to give women their due rights and dignity. There is a quote from The Gita, the final saying at the end of Lord Krishna’s long sermon to Arjuna. Free will and self realization are important factors in the words of Lord Krishna. The heroine admits that there is scope for growth and change. There is profundity in the verse of The Gita quoted by the heroine:

I have given you knowledge.
Now make the choice.
The choice is yours.
Do as you desire (Deshpande: 1988, 192).

In The Binding Vine (1993), Mira, the dead mother – in – law of Urmila is silent. She has expressed her suppressed feelings through writing. Though she is dead, she exists in her notebooks and poems which she has left behind in an old trunk. Many years after Urmila’s marriage, she is given this old trunk with full of books and other odds and ends by her husband’s step mother who is referred to as Akka. After a careful study, Urmila is able to decipher the essence of the thoughts which Mira had
perhaps, tried to put down on paper. Mira’s photographs and writings resurrect in Urmi’s mind an image of a vivacious and intelligent young girl. Her desire to be a poet and her inhibitions about expressing it aloud, her fear of being laughed at, are all obvious in her poems.

Her writing reveals the feelings of a vibrant young woman trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage and of a gifted writer whose work, because she is a woman, must remain secret and unread. Despite the opposition from the family members, Urmila wants them to get published. Mira had never expected any recognition from her poetry. She was lonely and anguished and through writing, she had locked her thoughts in an old trunk for nobody else to see for they would call her ‘mad’ for being entranced by the seven colours in a single white ray of light passing through a prism.

Through the publication of her poems, Urmila wants to expose the evils of society and encourages women to express themselves strongly. Mira’s narrative is placed at the centre of the novel to affect and to find reflection in the lives of other women. The efforts of Urmi to publish Mira’s poems aim at discovering the strangled voice articulating woman’s silent discourse, deciphering the coded language and liberating the imagination of woman from interior to exterior. This may be taken to mean that Deshpande converts a muted woman into a ‘talking woman’ and provides the cause, will, strength and means to articulate the silence of women.

When Vanna comes to know about this plan, she is enraged and like a traditional woman feels that Urmi is a traitor who will destroy the honour of the family by publishing the poems written by a woman. Thus,
publishing poems written by a woman is regarded as humiliation of the family.

Mira’s story reflects the lack of communication between the two young people because a girl’s wishes and desires are not given any importance. Social constraints push them to work within traditional roles. Mira turns to writing, jottings that are not communicated to the world outside and that surface only later when Urmia not only reads but translates into English which was originally written in Kannada by Mira.

Through her diaries, Urmila establishes a communication with her and tries to reconstruct the tragic tale of a suppressed woman who suffered a lot and in a way her pain turned into poetry. The poems and entries in the diary are proof enough for Urmila to conceive the forced sexual activity Mira had to undergo in an incompatible marriage. In the eyes of Urmia, Mira’s diary “is not a daily account of her routine life but a communication with herself” (Deshpande, 1993, 51).

Through this example, Shashi Deshpande also highlights the injustice meted out to women in the literary world where men dominate. This is not because women are not talented, but because men are considered creatively superior to women. Mira’s diary also reveals that Venu, a famous poet whom she idealized, is contemptuous of her writing, when she gives him her poems to read, he replies:

Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men (Deshpande: 1993, 127).
Venu brings to mind the words of Ruskin as mentioned by Kate Millett in her *Sexual Politics* (1971):

Ruskin is solicitous to warn women away from accomplishment. They may get a smattering of information, but they are given orders to halt at the point of difficulty: understanding the meaning, the inevitableness of natural laws and follow at least one of them as far as to the threshold of the bitter valley of humiliation into which only the wisest and bravest of men can descent (Millett: 1971, 97).

This is also a kind of brutality of men like Venu because “even to force your will upon another is to be brutal” (133). This reflects the agony of a creative woman writer in the androcentric world. Even the man like higher category think in such a way is really disgusting. This is a scheme of depriving woman of imagination and the power of communication.

The silent efforts of Mira to use language are a means to her redemption. She uses her pen as a weapon to save herself from abuse, anonymity and mutilation in the prison house of her husband. However, Mira’s attempt through her poems makes her a model of female survival that creates herself and recreates the world through her poetic power, through the power of language. Mira, thus, becomes a symbol for other women in society who have nothing to offer but a legacy of violence and her efforts show the way to millions of oppressed and victimized women a way through which they can transcend their limitations.

Urmila strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of the society fearlessly. The need to express one’s feelings and the need to be heard by the society is an all – pervading urge for the present day women. Language is a tool of
male domination to subjugate and relegate women to a secondary position. The feminist writers allege that the very structure of language is phallocentric. Women writers reject all existing language and literature as patriarchal and attempt to structure what they call a feminine language. Women as writers are neglected, silenced and excluded from the main stream since woman’s consciousness and worldview are different from that of men’s, their expression ought to be studied not in comparison with that of the man but by its own standards.

In *A Matter of Time* (1996), the most striking example of silence is Kalyani who spends nearly forty years in total silence with her husband Shripati. The relationship between Kalyani and Shripati is conjugal. The lack of communication between them impinges on the wider issues of patriarchy which influences the successive generations. History is repeated itself in the life of Sumi. But both Kalyani and Sumi are silent. Kalyani suffers silently. She fears a similar fate to Sumi. Kalyani’s fears are based on patriarchal oppression that condemns women to the margins of silence. She is made to realize that while losing her son, a male heir, she has abandoned her motherhood as well as her right as a wife.

But her silence turns into a powerful tool of resistance as it practices a lack of participation in the social power relations. Kalyani’s resistance is so hard that even the author remarks in one of her interviews that Kalyani appears to Aru not “as a victim but as a woman came out of all the victimization intact” (Ramarao: 1998, 256). When silence becomes deliberate it acts as a barrier to the penetration of the soul by a perceiver; it works as an operation of power rather than powerlessness. As it withholds communication it becomes a potent tool of resistance.
Deshpande valorizes Kalyani’s individualistic, dogged resolve to resist her tortures and survive her own terms.

Kalyani is reminded of Yamunabai, her mother’s teacher and mentor, whose article of faith was “Nimittmatram Bhava Savyasachi” which has been explained as –

… be thou only the instrument, Arjuna. The end is not us, it is outside us, it is quite separate from us. We are only the instruments (Deshpande: 1996, 188).

This kind of outlook is typical of Indian women and enables them to face their problems in a better way. The final message conveyed by the novelist through the character of Kalyani is to face the challenges of life boldly and resolutely.

Sumi, the protagonist copes quite admirably with the humiliation and disgrace of being a deserted wife. She does not rave and rant but surrounds herself with a dead like silence. Her very silence, however, conveys her pain more effectively that word can. Words and ideas cannot mean the same to men and women because the meanings of words have been built round the interests of men. Women have not participated in the process of word making. According to Shashi Deshpande in “Writing From the Margin”:

Our experiences are different and in a sense they inhibit different worlds. And it is their worlds that writers recreate through their creative imagination. My writing originated in the fact of my being a woman in the society I live in, it is shaped by that fact. The way I see the world is coloured by this fact of my being a woman, by the historical and social circumstances of women’s lives. My themes, therefore, my characters and
possibility may differ from a man’s (Deshpande: 2003, 144).

Sumi in spite of her knowledge of Gopal’s leaving out of the house is unable to understand the reason for his desertion. The lack of communication adds to the inability of the husband and wife to acknowledge each other’s needs and this threatens their marriage. After Gopal’s leaving Sumi, she revives her creativity.

In the presence of Gopal, Sumi as a creative writer withered away as she only thought about Gopal and their daughters. It was impossible for her to write anything. But in the absence of him, her potentiality as a writer blooms in full swing. She starts to think independently from her point of view.

It is Gopal’s desertion that awakens her to the world and Sumi discovers her creativity. An important thing about Sumi is her ability to relate herself to the world. Sumi in time enters the world of creative writing. Her first attempt, a play entitled ‘The Gardener’s Son’ is a success and the success of this play gives her the courage to deal with more daring themes like female sexuality. She admits ‘it feels so good, and now suddenly I want to do so many things” (231). She decides to write a story of Surpanakha, the sister of King Ravana. The episode of Surpanakha speaks of Sumi’s eagerness to place man–woman relationship on sound, non–partisan footing and also of her modernity in thought. Shashi Deshapnede in “Writing From the Margin” mentions:

We live in a patriarchal society, in a patriarchal culture, which in effect means that this is man’s world. And therefore, the laws, customs and beliefs are all such as to give the important place to men, to their needs, their
occupations, and their interests...The history of women is as Virginia Woolf said that of invisibility and silence in public life. And so, in the same way as women’s lives are regarded as being less significant that men’s writing by women too is considered minor, inferior and trivial ...Serious literature is supposed to be written by men about men; when women write, it is never regarded as just ‘writing’ it is always ‘women’s writing’ (Deshpande: 2003, 145).

Saru, Sumi’s daughter rebels against the decision of her father. But Sumi consoles her. Though the three women Aru, Sumi and Kalyani are victims of patriarchal dominance, they reclaim their identity by their acts of resistance. Aru tries to repossess her lost situation by angry protest, Sumi regains her identity when her merit as an individual is recognized and Kalyani feels empowered when Shripati’s will, referring to her as Vithalrao and Manorama’s daughter and not as her wife, is read out to her. She does not feel the sting of having been robbed of her marital status:

On the contrary, it is as if the words have given her something more than the house, restored something she had lost; they seem in fact, to have strengthened her (Deshpande: 1996, 245).

She ultimately finds her identity and individuality.

In Small Remedies (2000), the protagonist Madhu’s life is the story of grief and isolation as her son is killed in a bomb blast. After finishing her graduation wanting to be financially independent, she decides to take a job. Leela’s husband Joe’s friend Hamidbhai’s offer to work for his magazine “City Views” comes as a welcome opportunity for Madhu. To her, the job in which she edits and rewrites most of the articles and the small room that Hamidbhai rents her come a symbol of her independent
identity. Madhu gets the sense of fulfillment from her new job. The appreciation and self – fulfillment that she has received gives her pride and a sense of self – satisfaction. And Madhu after long years of alienation becomes aware of her needs and aspired to fulfill them.

Madhu’s attention is diverted from her grief when Chandru forces her into taking the job of writing the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, a living legend of Gwaliar Gharana to whom words are insignificant “svara and raga define her craft and Madhu has to work on her life to script with words” (Deshapnde : 2000 , 164 ). Madhu arrives in Bhavanipur to interview Savitribai. But here also, she remains aloof. She grudgingly takes up this writing assignment partly to uncover the truth behind the beautiful and mysterious Savitribai with whom Madhu is interacted during childhood, although in a peripheral manner.

Madhu’s job of writing a biography of Savitribai brings out in pieces, often selected pieces, the life and personality of Bai. Through the interviews in which Bai carefully gives a self – satisfying version of her life and Madhu’s knowledge of Bai’s life which came from being her neighbour many years back, she tries to capture the real Bai.

Mere facts do not cohere, only the glue of imagination can join them into a plausible narrative. Aware of the enormous power of the words which can sculpt a life and congeal a person into a fixed image , Madhu is overwhelmed by her own omnipotence because she can create an infinite range of Savitribai a great ‘rebel’ who defies the conventions of her time. She is the feminist who lived her life on her own terms. The great artist who sacrificed everything ‘for the cause of art’ or the impetuous lover who abandoned a secured married life in a Brahman
household to live with her Muslim accompanist struggles to find her individuality. Madhu’s publishers want a trendy feminist biography: “Victim stories are out of fashion, heroines are in”. But Madhu cannot impose the new concept of ‘heroism’ on an old fashioned woman who whitewashes her life through selective amnesia.

Madhu is a creator with great potential. She starts writing as the assistant editor of “City News”. When she starts writing the biography of Savitribai, she is well aware of the fact that there are three books. Firstly, there is Bai’s book, the book Bai wants to be written in which she is the heroine; the importance should be only on her and her alone. Secondly, there is May’s and Yogi’s book in which the publishers are in the centre as the publishers are interested in a book that is controversial. “Trendy, politically correct, with sell” (125) and thirdly there is her own book for which she is searching for the real Bai in the jungle of the words she has collected. From all these, she tries to find out the ‘real Bai’.

While writing the biography, Madhu compares Leela and Savitribai and sees parallels between the lives of these two women. She thinks:

I have begun thinking that in writing about Bai, I’m writing about Leela as well. And my mother and all those women who reached beyond their grasp Bai moving out of her class in search of her destiny as a singer, Leela breaking out of the conventions of widowhood, looking for justice for the weak, my mother running in her bare feet, using her body as an instrument for speed – yes, they’re in it together. But they paid the price for their attempts to break out (Deshpande: 2000, 284).

Though it is Bai’s biography, it is Leela’s biography also. Bai and Leela are the rebels of their time, both dare to dream and achieve freedom.
Madhu realizes “that both were courageous women, both were women who worked for and got the measure of freedom they needed, both were ready to accept wholly the consequences of their actions” (284) and that more importantly whatever happened, they still went on with their lives.

The biographer and the protagonist Madhu exercises her choices, rejects her husband’s essentialist approach and reconstructs her ‘self’. By accepting the challenge to write the biography, she exerts her artistic and intellectual capacities. Writing itself is an act of empowerment and inversely where there is power, there is resistance.

Through writing, Madhu tries to discover herself, this is how she reinforces a pre – woman vision and asserts her solidarity with another suffering woman. After finishing her initial task of collecting material on Bai’s life, Madhu feels the power of the words. She would recreate the great singer in the frame she wishes to design for her. She wields the pen and acknowledges that:

I can take over Bai’s life and make what I want of it through my words. I can trap her into an image I create, seal her into in identity I make for her. The power of the writer is the power of the creator. Yes, I can do much. I can make Bai the rebel who rejected conventions of her times. The feminists who lived her life on her own terms. The great artist who struggle and sacrificed everything in the cause of her art. The woman who gave up everything – a comfortable home, a husband and a family for love (Deshpande: 2000, 166).
Thus, both Savitribai and Madhu try to assert their individuality, but in a different way. Music is at the core of the story of Savitribai and creative writing is at the core of Madhu. Bai forgets herself in her music and Madhu tries to draw her pain into writing. Art is beyond class, caste and religion. Savitribai comes out from an orthodox Brahmin family and it is politics that creates problems in her life, not art.

These female characters try to live life on their own terms, resisting its vagaries with stony silences, balanced self – assertion and immersion in the arts. For Savitribai, it is music and for Madhu it is writing. After pain and suffering, they gain inner vision and the strength to reconcile.

Moving On (2004) is also about writing. The novel itself begins with a man sitting down to write and wondering how to begin. In the next chapter, we have his daughter Manjari, sitting down to tell her own story. Manjari is also reading the diary written by her father who is no longer living. From her father’s diary, Manjari tries to find a self – “The truth is, I’m scared. I’m scared of reading what Baba has said about me” (46).

Vasu, Manjari’s mother is a writer of romanticized marriage stories published in popular Marathi magazines. Writing to her is a substitute for her, a world of make – belief she romanticized in her stories. As the author narrates:

Living among women who had to be aggressive and strong to survive the endless drudgery and continuous lechery, she wrote of silent, sacrificing women … An independent woman who hated being questioned, she wrote of women who found happiness in submission, not only to their husbands, but their families as well (Deshpande: 2004, 125).
She receives little fame as the writer of the novel ‘Manasi’ that was made into the film; but still there is an enigmatic silence about her. What Vasu fails to get in real life, she achieves through her writing, always giving the ideal family image. Manjari’s mother is the always dignified but detached matriarch. In an interview with Gita Viswanath, Shashi Deshpande says:

Silence has been also extensively theorized in feminism as a manifestation of repression on the one hand as well as a weapon used by women to express on the other (Viswanath: 2005, 231).

There is a contrast between the writing of Mai’s husband Badri Narayan, the doctor of bones and his wife Vasu. They inhabit two different worlds – the former’s being the physical world and the later’s the emotional and the huge chasm between the two could never be bridged. It is believed that –

It is the male experience that is the universal experience. I also began to understand that writing about women never comes into the category of writing about ‘important issues’ (Deshpande: 2003, 146).

In Moving On (2004), there are two stories that move parallel to and also intersect each other – one being a man’s story and the other a woman’s. What are significant in the novel are the narrative voice and its location and identity as an individual, a daughter and a woman. To keep Manjari’s individual identity separate and autonomous, the novelist projects her as the narrative voice, an individual being an unorthodox in her idiosyncratic behaviour, a daughter and a woman all around up in one. As rightly pointed out by Shashi Deshpande:
There are two stories that move parallel to and also intersect each other – one being a man’s story and the other a woman’s. What is significant in the novel is the narrative voice and its location and identity as an individual, a daughter and a woman (Deshpande: 2004, 219).

Manjari is not only a narrator but also a reader and she reads the diary written by her father, revisits her parents’ past and discovers the hidden curves of their lives.

Thus, narrating story and reading the diary are important sources for Manjari to expose her individuality and self-fulfillment. According to Shashi Deshpande in “The Enemy Within: Censorship and Self-Censorship”:

Writing itself is a breaking of barriers articulation itself a breaking of silences though the writer is never, or rarely aware at the moment of writing of any kind of restraint on her / him (Deshpande: 2003, 229).

In In the Country of Deceit (2008), Shashi Deshpande’s latest novel exposes the lives of Rani and Devayani who do not surrender themselves to the circumstances or patriarchal oppression. Devayani translates a book about a history of Rajnur from Kannada to English written by her mother’s old teacher who is dead and her son wants to translate it. So that other can read it and Devayani, by translating this book, performs her duty very well.

Devayani also works as a translator of Rani’s speech. On many occasions, she has to translate Kannada into English for Rani. On many
incidents, Rani insists “to translate for me. You have to tell me who all the people are” (Deshpande: 2008, 217).

Gundu’s mother is a very sophisticated woman of Rajnur and has been a writer. She is a poet who writes in English and introduces Devayani to Leslie, a writer who has written one book which is published in the states. Leslie is highly excited by the book translated by Devayani about Rajnur. Devayani’s book is published and many people including Mr. Matthews are pleased with her translation and offer her another task to write:

What surprised me was his asking me whether I was prepared to ghostwrite another book. The publisher was planning a book by an eminent industrialist and pleased with my work, he had requested Mr. Matthews to ask me whether I would do it (Deshpande: 2008, 154).

So, after publishing her first book, Mr. Matthews offers her to write another book, but she is busy with her own life story – love story:

How could I think of being a ghostwriter when I was so busy scripting my own story, my own love story? But was I scripting it myself, or did it have a ghostwriter in Rani? (Deshpande: 2008, 155).

Bhavani, one student of Devayani wants to learn English from Devayani as she wants to help her husband in business. Through learning English, she also wants to improve her own status and social life, so that her children should not be ashamed of her. So in order to maintain rapport with her family and social status, she wants to learn language. To quote this:
She wanted to learn English to help her husband’s career, she told me, to improve her own status and social life and so that her children should not be ashamed of her. I was astonished at all the things she thought a language could do …(Deshpande : 2008, 46).

Thus, through writing and translating, women like Devayani and Bhavani want to achieve individuality. Writing and translation provide them special status in the society. So language becomes an important medium for them to expose themselves in the man made society.

Through exposing women as writers, Shashi Deshpande attempts to break the silence thrust on women and their position in society by the domineering males. It depicts the suppressed feelings, aspirations and agony of women and also challenges men to alter their attitude to give women their due rights and dignity.

Another important feature of women’s language is that in comparison to men, women writers do not experiment with the style of narration. The style of narration is generally conservative. Shashi Deshpande is very much careful about the style of narration. Her style is lucid and language is always kept simple and commonplace. Her attitude to her character seems to be compassionate and sympathetic. Despite her serious tone, her novels make a fascinating reading. Her novels have an interesting beginning and both the beginning and the end are convincing.

She does not indulge in showy bombastic or rhetorical English. Deshpande’s concern has been the expression of the Indian middle class ethos, and her simple unassuming English reflects it. The English language she uses is of the kind used by an average, middle – class people and the language used in her writing also suits to them. She is
fully aware of the problems Indian writers in English face and is of the opinion that they should evolve a language of their own; this will remain distinctively Indian and yet be English.

Women writers are very much particular about the usage of words and do not pay much attention to the arrangement of sentence construction which is the characteristic of gynocentric writing. As Patricia Mayer Spacks in *The Female Imagination* (1975) quotes Simone de Beauvoir and writes that “their [women’s] vocabulary is often more notable than their syntax because they are interested in things rather than the relation of things … (Spacks: 1975, 19).

Shashi Deshpande’s novels are perfect examples to look into for notable vocabulary. She does not want to experiment with words, that is why she has used many Marathi or Kannada words to describe various characters and their relationships to each other, such as Chandu Mama (rather than uncle Chandu), Ajji (rather than grandmother), Akka (rather than paternal aunt), Atya (rather than mother). The culturally specific words and sentences sit easily and naturally in her body of work, so that the work reflects a contemporary, middle – class Indian English.

Frequent references of the names from Indian epics like Dasaratha, Rama, Draupadi, Surpanakha, Sita, Gandhari etc. are used. Folk tales and fables are also used to influence the minds of the characters and infuse a sense of morality in them. Besides, typical Indian expressions are used in the novel to convey the feelings in an intimate manner. Shashi Deshpande tries to recreate the characters in their own situation by using Indian proverbs and expressions. One such example is when Jaya moves to a new house with her husband and cleans it, she describes her experiences:
“The fan moved at its fastest; nevertheless, we were bathed in sweat by the time we had done (Deshpande: 1988, 13).

The most important characteristic of Gynocentric writing is abundant use of metaphors. Shashi Deshpande has used various metaphors as a literary device to capture the intensity of her creation and the fertility of her imagination. Some of her recurring metaphors are ‘the dark’ and ‘the sunlight’, ‘death’ and ‘life’, ‘silence’ and ‘the binding vine’. Though these metaphors are not many in number, they reveal the inner workings of the protagonist’s minds and the emotional ripples in their hearts.

The very first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) is built round metaphors of ‘the dark’ and ‘the light’. Sarita, the protagonist, is afraid of ‘the dark’ at night as ‘the darkness’ is responsible for her pathetic life and she longs to see ‘the light’ to have relaxation and to emerge out of the boredom and exhaustion. Another metaphor is ‘death’ which is reflected in many of her novels. Death is a natural process of life and separation. Death of Akka, of Atya’s husband, Indu’s mother, Urmi’s daughter Anu, Sumi’s death, Naren’s mother, Manjari’s parents, Devayani’s parents etc. are all deaths which are viewed as happenings which have occurred in the past. Some of them lead to widowhood, others to orphanhood.

Language does not give women the right to speak directly against the patriarchal culture. A woman writer writes in this way because she is not allowed to use language fully. And gynocentric theory gives importance to women’s language through which the female characters assert their individuality.
Shashi Deshpande in her novels tells the tale of women for herself or for the whole of womankind. It brings out the idea of woman explicating herself and emerging out of the cocoon of self pity to spread her wings of self – confidence, as present in some silent writings of Sahshi Deshpande. Even Indira Goswami observes:

Creative process probably is the same for both, man and woman, but suddenly, somewhere, sometimes I come across experiences, or some incidents which make me realize with a jerk that I am a woman (Goswami : 1990, 1).

Deshpande’s protagonists Jaya, Mira, Urmi, Sumi, Madhu, Manjari and Devayani move of in their lives through the process of word – making, questioning, telling and retelling. All these female protagonists find their memories in retreat, silence and finally telling. However, Manjari in Moving On (2004) learns about herself from her father’s diary, sees herself so different from what she had thought and she had created and in getting to know her parents, meets herself. There is a need for women to come foreword and tell their own tales so that a more realistic picture may emerge.

According to Deshpande, change will come about only if women themselves articulate the desire and need for change and honestly and openly engage with the demands such change imposes.
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