CHAPTER- IV

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In the previous chapter Shashi Deshpande’s novels are discussed from the biological and linguistic points of view which are two important pillars of the gynocentric theory. In this chapter, two models of gynocentric theory – psychological and cultural – will be applied respectively to Shashi Deshpande’s novels. It would also be discussed how her novels carry the major features of gynocentricism as they echo the voice of a woman writer.

4.1 Psychological Study

Yes, I am a feminist in the sense that I think, we need to have a world, which we should recognize, as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior and inferior; we are two halves of one species. I fully agree with Simone de Beauvoir that the fact that we are human is much more important than our being men and women. I think that’s my idea of feminism (Gangadharan: 1998, 11).

The above statement expresses Shashi Deshpande’s views about feminism during her interview with Geeta Gangadharan where she states that she believes in humanity, not in superiority or inferiority of man and woman which is the aim of gynocentricism.

However, the leading psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, are of the opinion that when women create literature, it is inferior
in comparison to that of their male counterparts because women lack the power of the ‘phallus’. The absence of ‘phallus’ leads women to anxiety which is seen in the form of ‘lack’ in their literature. Lacan believes that the ‘phallus’ signifies the symbolic language. During the stage of acquisition of language, the girl child is unable to identify herself fully with the father and so is at the disadvantage in the process of acquiring language in comparison to the male child. K. K. Ruthven in *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* (1984) quotes Lacan:

> If femininity is a construct effected in language and language exists only in the paternal symbolic, women end up losers no matter what subject position they adopt for they can only be either pseudo mates or end up being marginalized females (Ruthven: 1984, 98).

But the gynocritics go one step ahead. They do not accept women’s writing as inferior at all. They challenge the associations made and the analogies drawn by the conventional psychoanalysts. They refuse to accept ‘the penis as the pen’. According to gynocritics, writing is an activity that takes place in the mind and compares it with the process of conception in the uterus. They boldly challenge the conventional psychoanalysts by saying that mother – daughter relationship is an excellent point from which they acquire immense energy and power and so there is no ‘lack’ in experience. A woman’s “identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care” (Gilligan: 1982, 160). They believe that women in general and women writers in particular share an intense relationship which is determined by the psychodynamics of female bonding.
Through the research of the members of the Stone Centre at USA of the Wellesley Centre for women, a new psychology of women emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Jean Baker Miller in *Towards a New Psychology of Women* (1976) reflects the difference in the starting point for women’s development. According to her “Women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with other” (Miller: 1976, 83). Women, seeing themselves in relation to others, merge and organize themselves in the service of home, husband and children, resting their sense of identity and value on it. Thus, women find themselves psychologically confined to various roles of wife, mother and daughter. If mothering, sacrifice, tolerance and care are the most excellent virtues, it is shocking that men devalue them in favour of power and success. It is the patriarchal system which has denied men the opportunity to nurture and care. Gynocritics argue that both men and women should share positive feminine and masculine qualities.

This new psychology emphasizes on women’s rather than men’s experiences and derives its interpretative categories from women’s own descriptions of their experience. The research has been described as women – centred. They have recognized women’s inner strength and the value of women’s basic psychological structure. Women centered psychologists have found care – giving and allied values like empathy, affiliation, nurturing and a collective vision of social life to be central to the female experience. This new psychology challenges the traditional male idea of self – in – relationship.

The part assigned to women has been devalued and treated unimportant. This devaluation generates within women a sense of inferiority and dejection. Without an equal opportunity and right to
develop them, they find this situation oppressive, creating a feeling of discontent. This arouses conflict which leads them towards difficulty in adjustment and adaptation. Being a suppressed, powerless and dependent group, they do not verbalize their conflict or show it in any manner. They are accused of making unjust, invalid, exaggerated demands and are hardly heard because the dominant group (men) found them trivial.

Carol Gilligan, in *In A Different Voice : Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (1982) notes that men and women have different approaches to morality. The male morality has a ‘justice orientation’ while the female morality has a ‘responsibility orientation’. She shows that women’s sense of self and of morality revolves round issues of responsibility for care of and inclusion of other people. She believes that psychology has persistently and systematically misunderstood women.

Even Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering : Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978) notes that contemporary child rearing methods produce a need for connectedness in girls and separation in boys. The boys’ initial identification with the mother is replaced with the identification with the socially accepted male role. This is the reason that boys become more detached while girls become emotionally dependent and exploitable. The girls’ identification with their mother leads to the need to ‘mother’. Finally, she focuses on the reproduction of mothering giving way to the subordination of women.

In *Healing Connection : How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and Life* (1997) Miller and Stiver raise a question why some women have difficulties entering into growth – fostering relationships
and how they can grow into them. They state psychological problems faced by women to form and sustain intimate relationships through cries, frailties and various other difficulties. They stress that a healthy relationship is one which leads to mutual growth and list five things important for mutually empowering relationship which are zest, action, knowledge, worth and desire for more connection. They argue that, women, in longing for intimate connection, sabotage their true nature by concealing or suppressing those feelings which are expressions disliked by male.

In order to understand female psyche their caring nature and female bonding are important to study. Caring nature, the pivotal point for gynocritics, is considered a woman’s basic trait and is often extolled as a virtue. But it is devalued as an irrational or un rational urge by patriarchy. According to gynocritics any failure on the part of either the care given or the cared – for, blocks the relationship and healthy communication. Care, empathy and nurturing have come to acknowledge as feminine virtues. Though these virtues are essential for the enhancement of humanity, society places little value and few rewards on these.

Female bonding, an important expression of nurturing and care giving, helps in female identity formation. It challenges the male – centred approach and interpretation of female psychological development and offers new paradigms to contextualize female friendship. It became an act of self – affirmation for many to recognize and appreciate the mother. The notion of sisterhood or female friendship is accepted in India due to the rigid male – female compartmentalization as it is a growth – fostering relationship. Women often had the ‘inner room’ to themselves,
which is used to be their exclusive domain. Sudhir Kakar in his thoughtprovoking book *The Inner World* (1981) says:

The special maternal affection that is reserved for daughters, contrary to expectations derived from social and cultural prescription, is partly to be explained by the fact that a mother’s unconscious identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son (Kakar: 1981, 284).

Together women can resist the patriarchal power structure. Healthy relationship foster the psychological development and mutual growth but unhealthy ones diminish or destroy the relationship. It also leads to trouble when it is one-sided. The absence of reciprocity of care thus generates feelings of worthlessness, lack of zest, isolation, depression and inertness, further leading to neglect, lack of communication, alienation, conflict and identity crisis.

As more and more women started seeing women as women and not as, what Freud termed ‘castrated men’, gynocriticism gained more acceptability. They saw women’s intrinsic strength and show the corroding effect on both the psyche of women and the psyche of society when strong humanitarian values like care, nurturing, empathy and sympathy are devalued by the patriarchal culture.

Self – assertion is a positive quality, but when it is practiced at the cost of negation of care and other positive feminine values, it creates ultimate discontent. Care and nurturing are natural to the female psyche. If allowed to blossom, they may lead women to self – actualization. But feminist psychologists regret that the values of care, empathy, tolerance
and nurturing should ultimately become a source of suffering. When women care for others out of a fearful need to please others, they lose their sense of self. According to Carol Gilligan, this is the first stage of female development. The most important thrust of gynocritics have been that of making women ‘visible’ and their voices ‘audible’ to the society. By taking the gynocritical position, it shows how women writers locate women’s voices within the patriarchal discourse.

In the context of contemporary Indian writing in English, Shashi Deshpande is one of the most confident voices who explore individual and universal predicaments through the female psyche. She has revealed the subconscious and unconscious psyche of her female characters. As compared to other Indian women novelists of the twentieth century, she is much more vociferous in voicing her fears and concerns regarding the future of women in uncongenial surroundings.

She has focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society and has marvellous understanding of the psyche of women and therefore her novels are dominated by female protagonists who struggle hard in their lives, break patriarchal order, protest against male dominance and at last come out in flying colours in their quest of self identity. She specially explores the world of urban women with all their overwhelming problems and challenges.

Her female protagonists are sensitive and self – conscious. They pass through a great turmoil and suffering. They are desirous to revolt against the stereotyped roles assigned to them by the society. They are in conflict with their inner selves because they deny their real feelings.
Shashi Deshpande exposes their pain, agony, helplessness, exploitation and the most important is the problems of being a woman.

All novels of Shashi Deshpande are somewhat similar. They are all stories about middle class housewives and their psychological states. She deals with the inner world of the Indian women and portrays her heroines’ conflict in the fast changing socio – economic milieu. Doubt, anxiety and the feelings of void of values push them to intense self examination. They are caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationships within their given world. Their concerns are primarily in the context of the family and community. Deshpande has reflected woman’s changing perspectives and their search for bonding within family as a mode of strength. Her heroines rebel against the traditional way of life and patriarchal values. They struggle to transcend the restrictive roles and at last seek freedom from the traditional norms and way of life. In a way, she highlights a woman’s psyche, the way she is made to feel an inferior being and the psyche of an unwanted child. The mother – daughter relationship and the idea of sisterhood have also an important place in her novels.

In order to avoid repetition, the researcher has changed the structure of narration of this chapter. Important issues which are included under ‘Psychological Study’ of women are psyche of an unwanted child, mother – daughter relationship, idea of sisterhood, disappointment in marital relationship, inner turmoil of a working housewife, feeling of homelessness, fear to face oneself, feeling agony in the process of changing the name etc. All these factors are responsible for the inner turmoil of women and they have to come out of this turmoil by being firm in their action and decision which is the aim of gynocentricism.
According to Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, food, clothing and shelter are basic needs. The second important need is love and recognition and the third need is self – actualization. In the case of women, second and third needs are not fulfilled. It creates pain and agony in women. The gynocritics try to provide them love, recognition and self – actualization through writing.

*The trauma of being an unloved and unwanted child* is an important issue to describe the psyche of women. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), Sarita’s mother’s obvious preference for her son Dhruva creates a sense of alienation and rejection in her own house. Even after Dhruva’s death, the constant pining for her dead son and rejection of her daughter cause deep indelible scars in her mind. This sense of rejection by her mother fills the mind of Saru with a feeling of hatred towards her mother. This rejection by the mother leads to Saru’s psychological insecurity. She craves for the love of her mother throughout her life. Once Saru laments:

But of my birth, my mother had said to me once …It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible. And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rains (Deshpande: 1980, 169).

The partisan attitude and the strong preference for son of her mother drive her to a sense of restlessness, alienation and make grave effect on Saru’s mind. Her mother’s statements about the death of Dhruva fill guilt in her. She carries within her this guilt and this sense of guilt is
intensified when her mother punishes her for everything. Saru does not forget the traumatizing effect of her mother’s hysterical outburst:

You did it, you did this. You killed him... You killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead? (Deshpande: 1980,191).

These words follow her for days, months, years all her life and at every juncture she turns back to this very moment and measures her feelings and achievements up to the total loss of inner quietude so unabashedly underline by her mother’s words.

The societal environment moulds the psyche of a mother as a traditional woman who treats the male child as an ultimate panacea to all problems but the girl child is an unwanted burden, as she cannot fulfill the parental needs or ungratified ambitions within the social calculus. The warmth and value given to a male child is denied to the girl, which makes her either depressed or rebellious. When a mother differentiates between her own children – the boy and the girl – for whom she has equally suffered and taken equal pain, there is no other torch bearer than for the girl like Saru.

In If I Die Today (1982) a fourteen year old girl Mriga suffers from the feelings of an unwanted child. Though Dr. Kulkarni appears modern and westernized, he is seized by the typical Hindu mentality desiring for a son and an heir and so he never forgives Mriga for not being a son. So Mriga without any fault suffers from loneliness and aspires parental love throughout her life.
Deshpande also tries to unmask the outwardly sophisticated and well-educated person’s yearning for a son, a heir. Pitying Mriga for being unkindly treated by her father, Dr. Kulkarni, Manju thinks:

"Behind the pipe-smoking perfectly mannered phlegmatic style that he cultivated, was her after all, just a traditional Hindu man longing for a son and heir? And taking it out on poor Mriga because she was only a girl? (Deshpande: 1982, 36)."

Even her mother being a weak person never lives according to her own wish. She is a sad and suppressed creature, too weak to give Mriga the support and love and eventually Mriga grows up without love and warmth of her parents. The story again concentrates on the patriarchal society. Mriga becomes hysterical and dreams of an imaginary accident and her subsequent death in a hospital leaving her hard hearted father heartbroken.

Bitter childhood experiences play a diabolic role in shaping the mentality of her character. Mriga grows in the environment of hatred, hostility and lovelessness. Even one can argue that being an unwanted child is the root, the origin of Mriga’s tragic tale. The need of parental love is essential for the well being of an individual’s mental health. She cannot drink the cup of joy because her mind is convinced that she can never be loved. That is the psychology of an unwanted child. A psychologist, Arnold Buss has stated that the core of self esteem is formed by the unconditional love of the parents. Since Mriga has not been fortunate enough to receive the unconditional love of her parents, the level of her self regard is low. She is uncertain about her worth and her place in the society.
Kalyani in *A Matter of Time* (1996) is also an example of an unwanted child whose mother’s attitude towards Kalyani for not being a son creates wounded psyche in her. Though she suffers a lot, Kalyani emerges as one of the most powerful characters in the novel. Hers is a pitiable story with deep endurance and strength. She seems to have an endless capacity to bear pain. Even Kalyani’s mother Manoroma lives in constant fear that her husband might marry again as she is not able to give him a son. Kalyani is intelligent and good in study. But because of her mother’s insecurities, she is not allowed to complete her education. So women like Kalyani in India live in suppression and do not even get chance to develop their individuality.

Thus, these female characters because of the scared relationship of the family members and upbringing as an unwanted and unloved child create inner turmoil in them which creates a lifelong gap in their personality. Only some of the characters like Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) with their strong will power and determination are able to come out from that wounded psyche and establish their identity.

In the Indian culture, the parents’ extreme insistence of the male heir sometimes creates injustice towards the female child. They forget that female child also needs love and proper upbringing. But the parents’ partial attitude towards them leads them to inner turmoil which mould their personality incomplete. But only with their strong determination, they establish their individuality in their own house and society which is an important characteristic of the gynocentric study and is clearly reflected in Shashi Deshpande’s novels.
Mother – daughter relationship, another important issue to understand the psyche of women, play a significant role in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. Generally mother is regarded as a sheltering tree that showers love, sympathy and warmth to the child. The love and sympathy of a mother makes her daughter strong and capable to face all the problems of the world.

But in some novels of Shashi Deshpande, mother – daughter relationship is not rhythmic and fulfilling. In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), the relationship between Saru and her mother is not consistently maintained. Even during the crucial time of puberty, her mother’s cold attitude towards her develops an aversion to all traditional practices.

Saru’s buoyancies and gregariousness are also suffocated by her mother’s constant criticism and fault finding. She is made to feel ugly and undesirable. Like a traditional Indian mother she thinks that physical beauty is a precondition of worldly success for a girl and so is constantly critical of her daughter’s appearance:

> I was an ugly girl. At least, my mother told me so. I can remember her eyeing me dispassionately, saying - you will never be good looking. You are too dark for that (Deshpande: 1980, 61).

So, instead of giving support and courage to face the world, she always criticizes her. For her mother, she remains to be a responsibility which cannot be evaded as she is a girl. She feels shattered and humiliated when the mother fails to show any sympathy towards her.
Rejection by her mother during the early years leads her to psychological insecurity. She hates her mother and wants to hurt her and makes her suffer. Her confrontation with her mother reaches its peak when she decides to marry Manu. It is Saru’s antagonism towards her mother and her rejection of the age – old traditional values represented by her that drive Saru into the arms of Manohar. It is the sign of rejecting her mother’s wishes. She also thinks that her mother is responsible for her unhappiness and shattered marital life. The separation from the mother brings pain and rejection. As Nancy Chodorow in “Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective” points out “this differentiation requires physiological maturation and a maturation which happens in relation to the mother (Chodorow: 1989, 5 – 6 ).

In fact, in her grief, her mother is not able to comprehend her daughter’s bewilderment and sense of being lost. She fails to know that Saru has also lost her own brother and needs emotional support. Yet all the blame is put on her and she is not allowed to have any escape from this sense of guilt, which makes her too vulnerable and insecure in her relationship with others. Consequently this guilt overpowers her psyche and does not allow her to breathe freely and it suffocates her.

For Saru, the parental house is almost non – existent once she marries against their wishes. Even the news of her mother’s death reaches to her indirectly. Thus, she is deprived of a normal childhood as well as the feeling of warmth and security that communication with her parents would have provided her with. All these lead to the terrors in Saru’s life. These terrors take the shape of a recurring nightmare. She is very sensitive regarding relationship with her daughter Renu and is
apprehensive that it may follow the pattern of her own relationship with her mother.

Though the mother – daughter relationship in this novel is based on hatred, inside it, there run currents of love, of an unfulfilled urge to be nurtured, of strong desires to be accepted. On close reading, one finds how Saru imitates her mother’s way of life.

Her mother’s love towards Saru is seen when she prepares special food on the day Saru acquires first position in the class. She presents her a pair of earrings on her birthday. She takes Saru to the ritual ‘Haldi – Kumkum’ ceremonies at the neighbours or at the temple. She does all that a loving but traditional mother generally does for her daughter. The mother’s approach, however, is mechanical; she does not garnish these acts with emotions. In normal circumstances, this behaviour is the accepted norm, but because of her strong gender bias, she gives Saru a feeling of being rejected. Her words hurt Saru more than her acts soothe her. Even on her birthday, while presenting earrings, her words hurt her – “You’re a big girl now. Time you have something nice to wear in your ears” (171). Even after Dhruva’s death, the words of her mother disappoint her.

Gradually her hostile attitude towards her mother changes to a positive note. She begins to identify with her mother. Indeed during her stay in her natal’s house, she even begins to wear her mother’s saris. Like her mother, she busies herself in household works. She sits on the floor to dress up as her mother did; she cooks on the stove. She feels satisfied nurturing her father and Madhav as her mother would have. She eats her food only after Baba and Madhav are fed. This gives her self satisfaction.
She tries to understand her mother and even identify herself with her mother. According to Valli Rao:

… a search for her own feminine side and for the reunification of her split self … and finally we see ‘rebirthing’ her own individual personality separate from her mother’s ( Rao : 1995 , 107 ).

Thus, she finally emerges from her ordeal a person more capable of accepting and forgiving herself than she has been at the start.

In *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), the image of a mother is portrayed in a negative light, but mother always showers love to her daughter as she is a mother. Kshama remembers her mother with distaste. Devi doesn’t even want to think of her mother. The mother - daughter antagonism is experienced by Mrs. Raman and her daughter Sonali. Sonali is really averse to her mother to whom she attributes all her negative qualities. Even the description of Sonali’s mother, Jyoti Raman is rather cruel:

Short, thin almost to the point of emancipation. Thick leased glasses behind which lurked poor eyesight and perpetual anxiety ( Deshpande : 1983 , 23 ).

Because of her traumatic experiences with her husband, Sonali’s mother does not approve of any sort of man – woman relationship and even discourages her daughter from talking to those girls whom she suspects of having boy friends. Thus, when she sees her daughter talking to Bunny, whom she disapproves of, she orders her to come home at once; and Sonali is annoyed so much so that she bursts out:

Amma, why do you shout at me like that? You insult me; you humiliate me before my friends. It’s not fair.
I’m ashamed of you, I’m ashamed (Deshapande : 1983, 23).

She develops hatred towards her mother who always seems to be controlling her life. Once she says with immense disgust: “Mothers! I hope I never become one” (36). Mrs. Jyoti Raman is warned by Bunny to go away with her daughter but Sonali is against this and fights with her mother the day before her mother is murdered. It is too late when Sonali realizes that her mother is trying to protect her from the sordid happenings in the school and outside it.

Mridula, too, does not share a good relationship with her mother. Her mother is unaware of the happenings in her daughter’s life whether it is her birthday party or the fact that she is pregnant and is in bad company. She deliberately keeps her mother away from her life. Mridula seems to enjoy telling lies to her mother. It is like she is punishing her mother. Her mother can not observe the fact that she is in trouble and depressed and the result is she meets terrible end of life. In fact, her mother is not responsible for the pathetic end of Mridula as she is totally unaware of the life and working of Mridula.

Devayani is almost antagonistic towards her mother. She finds out the truth only when she finds her mother in the midst of one of her epileptic fits and can never forget that picture; it still haunts her. She is always afraid that she would be known as the ‘girl whose mother gets fits’. It gives her a sense of shame and she rejects all thoughts of marriage. She does not show any interest in getting married; she and her mother are never close to each other. Her feelings about mothers in
general are expressed when Sonali tells Devi that she has been telling for her father’s address. And she thinks:

Mothers! Dead or alive, they don’t leave you alone. Or may be, it’s we who can’t leave them alone. And if it isn’t mothers, it is fathers (Deshpande: 1983, 183).

Kshama, the protagonist, too does not enjoy a good relationship with her mother. The thought of her mother fills her with disgust:

She had been sixteen when Pratap was born. It had seemed a disaster to her; and for some reasons, her rage had been directed against her mother. The sight of her with disgust… (Deshpande: 1983, 92).

Though all these female characters hate their mothers, mothers do not forget their duty to help and guide their daughters. In a way, mothers stand as rock against harsh reality of life. Thus, mother – daughter relationship is an important characteristic of the gynocentric study.

In *Roots and Shadows* (1983), the relationship between Akka and Indu is like a mother – daughter relationship. Akka is a mother surrogate of Indu. But like other novels of Shashi Deshpande, Indu also hates Akka’s authority. She thinks that Akka is an obstacle in the path of her progress as she only thinks and behaves like a traditional and orthodox woman. Being a new woman, Indu rebels against Akka, her world, her authority, her values and marries Jayant who does not belong to her caste against the wishes of Akka.

Though Indu regards Akka as an extreme authoritarian and orthodox, Akka understands and realizes the boldness of Indu, and makes her the heiress of the wealth. After Akka’s death, Indu inherits the
ancestral family house and jewellery, giving her a rare opportunity to
decide the future of the entire family. It is perhaps her boldness and a
desire to choose her own life style that makes Akka decide in Indu’s favour. A great responsibility has been thrust on her shoulders by what
Akka did before she died. Indu is a bold lady and so accepts all the
responsibilities boldly. In this way, she establishes her identity.

In *The Binding Vine* (1993), the relationship between Mira and
Urmila is strong. Though Mira is Urmila’s mother – in – law, she
understands the pain and suffering of her dead mother – in - law and tries
to expose her pathetic life through publication of her writing. So, it is
Urmila who gives voice to Mira’s suppressed soul.

Urmila is also traumatized by the death of her daughter Anu. She is
grieving over the death of her young daughter and nourishes the pain
within her for it allows her to be with her child. Urmi remembers her child so much that she holds her daughter’s clothes and toys and feels the child’s body close to her and tells her brother, “There’s nothing that
doesn’t remind me of her” (27). She is unable to forget her little daughter as her memories continue to haunt her. She fights with the memories but also realizes that forgetting is betrayal:

I must reject those memories. I have to conquer them.
This is one battle I have to win of I am to go on living.
And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray (Deshpande : 1993 , 21).

When Inni wants to have a framed photograph of Anu on the wall, she reacts bitterly:
I don’t need a picture to remember her; I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life. How can you imagine I need a picture …? (Deshpande, 1993, 68).

Mother – daughter relationship is very strong in the case of Urmil and Anu. Urmila is like an oak and her infant daughter Anu is like a creeper around her. As she narrates:

Once again I can feel the softness of her body in my arms, the heaviness of her head flopping over my shoulder; I can feel her toe scrabbling at my midriff (Deshpande: 1993, 27).

The daughter – mother relationship between Urmila and her mother Inni is again expressed through the image of a plant by the novelist:

Enough to unnerve anyone, let alone a sensitive plant like our poor Inni, to have her child grin at her that way at five in the morning (Deshpande: 1993, 25).

It is obvious that there is no compatibility between the sophisticated Inni and her daughter Urmil. Once in a chocked voice, Inni bursts out that Urmil had been sent to Ranidurg as a child to be brought up by her grandparents, because Urmil’s father did not approve of the way his wife was bringing up the child.

Children feel neglected in the absence of the mother from home. The conversation between Mandira – Urmila’s niece and Urmila shows it:

‘You know, Urmiauntie, when I grow up, I’m never going to leave my children to go to work’.
‘What will you do?’
‘Stay at home and look after them’.
‘When they grow up, they’ll go away and won’t need you’. ‘What will you do then?’
‘Then I’ll go and work’.
‘Who’ll give you a job when you’re old?’
‘I don’t care, I’ll never leave my children alone’
( Deshpande : 1993 , 72 ).

Mandira disliked being left to the care of a maid servant. These illustrations reveal that the relationship between mother – daughter in Deshpande’s novels is very much important. Only mother’s love and sympathy can provide daughters fulfillment and rich experiences of life. In fact, mothers provide enough courage to face the problems of life. Thus, mother – daughter relationship is an important characteristic of the gynocentric study which is found in many of Shashi Deshpande’s novels.

Frustrated motherhood is represented through the picture of Shakutai. Although Urmila is neither a friend nor a relative of Shakutai, she develops a concern for her and her daughter Kalpana because of the binding vine of humanitarianism. Shakutai, who is choked to learn that her daughter has been a victim of rape and has been spending her days in the hospital attending upon Kalpana. Shakutai’s relationship with her daughter is marked by a strong element of mourning. The mother is overcome with feelings of helplessness. It is the intensity of love from the side of mother – Shakutai that she even scolds Kalpana for going out in such a way. Though Shakutai’s husband has left her and her children for another woman, Shakutai, being a mother, cannot escape from her responsibility of a mother.

In A Matter Of Time (1996), after the desertion of her husband, Sumi is completely aware of her responsibility as a mother – cum – single
parent to her three daughters. She stands for responsibility, motherly love, care and concern. She is constantly worried about her grown – up daughters as they were also dejected with their father’s desertion. She desires that her daughter’s life should be easy and comfortable.

Though Sumi is deserted by her husband – Gopal, she tries to hide her miseries from daughters, as she does not wish to make her daughters unhappy. On the contrary, she gives courage to them to face the world bravely. Here a mother proves to be a sheltering tree in the real sense. Even at the end of the novel, when Sumi dies in an accident, her daughters do not take shelter to their father and boldly tell him that they have learnt to live in their own way which is really praiseworthy. Though Sumi is not physically present amongst her daughters, her love and sympathy is always with them which give them courage to face the world boldly.

In *Small Remedies* (2000), the relationship between Savitribai and Munni is equally important to understand their psyche. Munni, the illegitimate child of Savitribai through Ghulam Saab, is alienated in her very childhood because of her parents’ unusual relationship. The fact is that her mother, a Brahmin married woman is living with a Muslim man makes them misfit in the society.

Savitribai and Munni have never really enjoyed normal relationship. Munni has always worked in opposition to her mother and the loss of a family name and fame. Like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), she wants to distance herself from her mother in every matter. So, the mother – daughter relationship in the case of Savitribai and Munni is not strong. Though Munni keeps herself away from this
In *Moving On* (2004), the relationship between Manjari and Mai is not so sound. Sometimes there are quarrels between them and in one of their quarrels Mai blames Manjari that children can break the heart of parents, but contrary, Manjari rebels against her and argues that parents also can “break their children’s hearts” (207). Because of her mother’s attitude, Jiji suffers a lot as after the death of Malu, her sister, her mother’s behaviour changes. Mai thinks that with Malu’s death “there was nothing left but an empty shell” (206). Mai forgets the presence of Jiji who also needs motherly love, security and sympathy. Mai fails to understand it and the result is Jiji develops hatred for Mai; and there is a big rift between them.

The relationship between Mai and Manjari, though it is not so sound, her mother’s death nearly shocks her. After the death of her mother, the girl who needs everybody’s approval suddenly finds herself surrounded by strangers and emptiness of life that cloud over her personality and emotional existence. The influence of her mother on Manjari’s mind is so strong that years after, the death of an appendix patient in the hospital nearly shocks her and she is completely broken down to see the same situation of her Mai’s death. The patient’s death reminds her of the critical condition of her mother. Thus, apparently their relationship is not sound, but the fact is that Manjari loves her mother from the bottom of her heart and it is difficult for her to forget her mother even years after which shows the depth of their relationship. The relationship between Kamala and Hemi is one such example. Though Hemi is retarded, Kamala shows her motherly love and affection towards
her. In short, mother – daughter relationship is very important to understand the psyche of female characters.

Even the relationship between Rani and her daughter Roshni in *The Country of Deceit* (2008) is not healthy. She always thinks that she is not taken care of by her mother because of her filmy career. She is not satisfied with her mother and also advises her mother not to do the same with Roshan and Neha by returning again in the filmy career. Though Roshni is not satisfied with Rani, Rani always thinks about Roshni. So concern for her daughter is of paramount importance for the mother. The accident of Rani brings them together.

The concept of the mother – daughter relationship is the central concern of recent feminist psychological studies. This relationship aids the development of the female personality. The girls, being of the same gender as the mother do not completely separate from their mothers. They sense their mother’s disappointments, painful experiences and the seething rage inside them and discard the very virtues of caring and nurturing which has become instrumental in their mothers’ suffering. Moreover, the mothers also tend to experience their daughters as more like and continuous with themselves. Thus, the formation of identity blends with attachment felt for their mothers.

If we look at the mother – daughter relationship in Shashi Deshpande’s novels, on the surface level, their relationship is not healthy or sound. But if we deeply think about their relations, all the mothers of all the novels are caring, lovable and stand as a rock against the patriarchal ideology. They are all like “sheltering trees” that shower love, sympathy and warmth to their daughters which is an important
characteristic of gynocentrism. In this sense, if we evaluate Shashi Deshpande’s novels, they all are gynocentric.

The third important characteristic is that many of female characters are suffering from the fear to face themselves, which is the fundamental paradox of life. As they are born and brought up under patriarchal culture, they have hidden fear to face themselves. The reason is they are brought up in such circumstances that they do not have courage to show their individuality and self identity.

Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980) is a prisoner of her own fear, confusion and self – righteousness. Instead of searching within herself, she runs to others to seek their sympathy or compensation. She turns to Booze for happiness, then to Padmakar but her inhibitions fail her. She runs away from herself. She is confused, gets nervous and finds no answer. Her capacity to endure pain abruptly seems to exhaust one day. She tries hard to overcome her psychological fear. So the need for quest arises. Finally, she realizes that no one will help her. She has to come out from sorrows by herself. This realization fills her with a sense of victory. Now she is no longer a skeleton in the cupboard. Saru realizes that “one has to grow up as the terrors are inside us all the time. We carry them within us, and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them to scratch and maul” (85).

She ultimately determines to face her husband and asserts her own independent individuality. Through this novel, Shashi Deshpande tells us that the women should not only be independent but they should also believe in their strength. Saru’s reassessment of her relationship with her mother and husband enables her to reidentify her own self and come to
terms with the fact that a woman should not necessarily be a paragon of all virtues – this awareness equips her with a better confidence to face the rest of the problems of the life boldly.

Manju in *If I Die Today* (1982) struggles to be her own “ME” within and without. The endeavour all through, on the part of Manju, has been to assert her feminine self through self – realization and self – probing. Manju’s unbalanced outlook of life serves as a sequel to a distorted and ambivalent personality. Because of her scared relationship with her husband, Manju has turned into an emotional pretzel. Now she is rather in a miserable state. Marriage for her is a ruin, wreckage, destroying and disintegrating her feminine self.

For a middle class wife, there is no alternative except to live in her husband’s house in all circumstances. Manju is crying for freedom but it is not possible for her. As she says:

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

Most of the female characters are brought up in a very conservative traditional ideology that they always afraid to articulate themselves and establish individuality. If they give voice to their turmoil, they have to face more and more conflicts, so survival and surrender become the integral part of their life. No doubt, compromise and adjustment in the family show their maturity, but too much compromises and adjustment repress their individuality.
Even in the case of Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1988), the question “Who am I?” (24) haunts her so much obsessively that she fails to find herself and her identity. In such a suffocating patriarchal set – up, she finds her female identity effected. Deshpande reveals the consciousness of Jaya, through an exposition of her mind in the process of thinking, feeling and reacting to the stimuli of the moment and situation. In doing so, she goes on to assert the feminine psyche of the protagonist. At the end, Shashi Deshpande portrays Jaya’s emerging individuality.

Since her early childhood, Jaya had designed her life according to the desires of the members of the family. She had neither courage nor will to justify her own choice and this was the beginning of her predicament. Writing about such persons, Alfred Moller observes:

> The more they become restricted, the more they rebelled, (and) hence the guilt complex, and inferiority generated in them (Moller: 1979, 22).

The seventeen years of their married life is led only on physical level in a superficial manner. It is frustrating and depressing ordeal that Jaya has undergone. It is a disgusting experience that to live with a man who does not love his wife the way she is expected him to do. This is a common experience for many women in the contemporary society. Through the character of Jaya, Deshpande has expressed the ambivalent attitude of contemporary educated women in India who can neither reconcile themselves to a new situation when their husbands ignore them and crush their ambition in life nor cast off their husbands simply because the husband is like a sheltering tree.

Struggling with the threats to her freedom and her integrity, Jaya desperately needs to protect herself from dissipating and sinking in the
crumbling world around her. Jaya is caught in the dilemma, firstly trying to be a suitable wife to her husband and secondly struggling to express the emotions of women’s experience, but seldom expressing them in a male dominated chauvinistic society. Jaya knows that their relationship is spoiled by incompatibility and lack of communication. If she suffers, she suffers it in silence, if she revolts, it is also in silence. When silence fails as a protective cover, hysteria becomes the only shield. Jaya says:

I must not laugh. I must not laugh … even in the midst of my rising hysteria, a warning bell sounded loud and clear. I had no control over myself, I had to cork in this laughter. But it was too late I could not hold it any longer. Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as I rocked helplessly (Deshpande: 1988, 122).

Jaya keeps telling herself considering the gravity of the situation. She is able to regain her sanity only after she decides to break her silence and record her story.

Even Manjari in *Moving On* (2004) lives the life of fear. The underworld people try to grab her house by frightening her. But with her strong will power and courage, she emerges as a fearless woman, prepares to fight and lives in her father’s house on her own terms without being dictated by the patriarchal norms. She negotiates with many oppression and exploitation and keeps her life’s autonomy untouched by patriarchal hegemony. She is proud to be born as a woman which is reflected in her utterance when she says, “One’s womanhood is always a positive gift”. Thus, she establishes her identity in the man made culture.
Thus, Shashi Deshpande’s female characters face the problems bravely and find out their own self. They give voice to their suppressed silences. Though, they suffer, eventually they get success in establishing their own identity within the dominant culture which is an important mark of gynocentricism. In this way, if we evaluate Shashi Deshpande’s novels, they are undoubtedly gynocentric. Shashi Deshpande’s female characters understand that nobody else can help them out. In order to live without fear, they have to look into the face of reality and grapple with it alone. They ultimately determine to face the situation bravely and assert their independent individuality.

Fourth important characteristic of Shashi Deshpande’s novels is the idea of sisterhood and female bonding which unites women to share common experiences of life as a woman can only understand the feelings of other oppressed women. Woman is always bound with relationship as she has collective identity. The feeling of sisterhood gives women warmth, sympathy and strength to face the problems bravely which are an important hallmark of the gynocentric study.

In *The Binding Vine* (1993), the idea of sisterhood is found in the relationship between Urmila and Shakutai. Urmila tries to understand the plight of Shakutai and her daughter Kalpana and gives her moral support. Urmila escorts the sobbing Shakuntala to her house on Vanna’s request and from that point begins their association. Urmila visits her regularly to inquire after her daughter and through their conversation we get a gloomy picture of Kalpana’s life. In spite of all her sympathies, Urmila is unable to do anything for Kalpana. She remains a mute spectator until the hospital authority decides to shift her to a suburban hospital as beds are in much demand in the crowded hospital. Urmila then decides to take the matter to
the press, so that the rapist may be identified and caught. Eventually, the case is reopened and the identity of the rapist is revealed. The rapist is discovered to be Shakuntala’s sister Sulu’s husband. Thus, with the help of Urmila, Shakutai and Kalpana get justice.

As discussed earlier, Urmila herself is not happy in her personal life. Urmi is able to feel her pain and anguish years later and connects her sorrow to that of Shakutai who also has the same thing to say, “Why does this have to happen to me?” (67). Urmi alleviates her grief by discovering and empathizing with the sorrow of these women. Urmila understands Kalpana and Shakuntala’s plight, their suffering and every flicker of their emotion.

Urmi is fully aware of the unequal treatment meted out to women. She sympathizes with Shakutai, encourages Vanna to be more assertive and is totally absorbed by the writing left behind by her dead – in – law, Mira. According to Indira Nityanandan:

The step forward, achieved in this novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one. Urmila draws society’s attention to the plight of the rape victim and is determined to get Mira’s poems published. This is a positive development in the protagonist for Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fighting only their own battles (Nityanandan: 2000, 66).

By helping Kalpana and Shakutai, Urmi wants everyone to realize how very painful these are for the victim and how great is the necessity for an exemplary punishment to the criminal.
Urmila and Vanna help each other in their distress and suffering. Vanna helps Urmila to come out of her emotional crisis. In this way, the relationship of all the women introduces the concept of female bonding. Unlike Vanna and Priti, Urmi wants to assert herself and not crawl before a man. She determines not to break down herself. She faces boldly both death and rape. Thus, the inner feelings of a woman’s heart are brought to light through the perspective of the protagonist.

In *A Matter of Time* (1996), when Sumi is deserted by her husband, she is helped, sympathized and supported by her family members particularly her parents, sisters, cousins who comfort her to some extent and cushion her against the cruelties of life.

Premi, Sumi’s sister is filled with the rage “at their carelessness in throwing away what they had, uncaring it seems to her, of the value of what they have discarded” (Deshpande: 1996, 136). Even Kalyani, Sumi’s mother, though she is deserted by her husband and lives a lonely life for many years, takes it upon herself to plead with her son – in – law to return home. Even the support of other women in the family has helped her to withstand the shock, pain, humiliation and the trauma of desertion.

The idea of sisterhood in *Moving On* (2004) is very strong in the case of Gayatri and Manjari. In the absence of mother, Gayatri gives motherly love and affection to Manjari:

Gayatri did not let me feel any sense of loss. Yet, she was never a mother figure to me; she was always a sister and a companion (Deshpande: 2004, 9).
The relationship between Manjari and Malu was also strong. Before the birth of Malu, Manjari was the youngest child in the family, but the birth of Malu gives her the new identity “the baby’s Jiji” (41). She always takes care of Malu. By quoting:

I was the first born, but I had to wait for Malu to come to find the foil to Malu. I was strong while she was delicate. I was practical and she was the dreamy and absent minded. I was the son of the family, the tough one, while Malu was the daughter, gentle and to be protected. In fact, Baba and I were the protectors who looked after Malu and Mai (Deshpande: 2004, 41).

This bond is so strong that she does not even hide the critical matter like menstruation from her sister.

In *In the Country of Deceit* (2008), the love between two sisters Savi and Devayani is intact even after the death of their parents. There is a great understanding between them. Though Savi is married and having two children and living in Delhi with her husband, she always thinks about Devayani, her happiness, her marriage as Savi is also suffering from guilty conscience. She thinks that she has escaped from the responsibilities and duties towards her parents and only Devayani has to perform all these duties towards her parents. In order to be free from this guilt, she desires to give happiness to Devayani. In a letter Keshav, Savi’s husband writes to Devayani:

She thinks she escaped the problems at home – the financial problems, Appa’s death, Amma’s illness – and left you to face everything alone. She thinks that it’s because of all these problems that you did not get married and that it is her duty to create that wrong (Deshapande: 2008, 53).
But when Devayani exposes her relationship with Ashok, a married man and a father of a daughter, Savi is shocked and disgusted. She warns Devayani about their dark future. This news creates a rift between two sisters, though for a short time. Savi always guides her and shows true direction. It is because of Savi’s insistence and love, Devayani returns to her family and comes out from Ashok’s life. So, Savi’s role in Devayani’s life is important.

Even in the case of Kusuma and Devayani, an intimate female bonding is reflected. Kusuma is always ready to serve Devayani by cooking food for her as she knows that living lonely in a house is really difficult. Even the relationship between Devayani and Rani is good. Being a heroine, it is difficult for Rani to mingle with everyone, but she is happy with Devayani and shares all her views and thoughts with Devayani without hesitation. She frankly opens her mind before Devayani:

She told me I was the first person she knew in Rajnur apart from her husband’s family. She clearly liked being in my house. I feel good here, she said (Deshpande: 2008, 14).

The relationship between Devayani and Sindhu is also good. Though Devayani’s mother is dead, Sindhu works as a mother figure and takes care of her.

Thus, it is because of this intimate female bonding with Savi, Kusuma and Sindhu, Devayani at last leaves Ashok and starts a new life.
Thus, female bonding, in this novel, is a backbone. In short, this novel is about a woman’s making, taking and losing space.

Here, Shashi Deshpande introduces the issue of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one. Female bonding is a very important aspect of gynocentricism through which women counter patriarchy and try to create a world of their own. It plays a significant role in identity formation as well as in sustaining women in the patriarchal set up. In a society where the male and female worlds are strictly compartmentalized, women find their space in the ‘inner courtyard’, where the feminine atmosphere is supreme. Away from the male domain and secure from the male gaze, women try to forge strong ties and get a feeling of belonging.

Together, women can resist the patriarchal power structure. In Indian culture, where segregation of the sexes, a social order, based on class and caste hierarchy is normal, female bonding is natural. In India, female bonding is deeper because the dominant discourse, by and large, excludes male involvement in the domestic field. The miracle of The Binding Vine is that out of this web of loss and despair emerge strands of life and hope – a binding vine of love, concern and sisterhood. Through it, Shashi Deshpande renders visible the extraordinary endurance and grace concealed in women’s everyday lives. This is a positive development of all the female characters.

Even the process of changing the name of a woman after marriage is painful to her as it snatches her previous identity. The psyche of Mira is also reflected through the process of changing her name at her husband’s house. The Indian custom of changing the bride’s name is a pivotal point
of frustration – a complete revamping of any young girl’s psyche. It is so aptly documented in the saga of Deshpande’s heroines or protagonists like Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1988) and Mira in *The Binding Vine* (1993). Mira, who is bound in a marriage against her own choice, cringes further when a new name ‘Nirmala’ is thrust on her. But she refuses to give up her name and proclaims:


Her suppressed feelings of showing her self-identity and realization are expressed through her writing. Her writing reveals her utter loneliness of life which was a part of her being. It also exposes psychological fear and suffering of Mira. Though she is subjugated, she continues her writing which proves her intense desire to become an independent woman. Another example is Jaya whose name is also changed from Jaya to Suhasini after marriage. She hesitantly accepts her new name “Suhasini”. Jaya and Suhasini are the two facets of the same coin. Jaya her pre-marital name means ‘victory’ and Suhasini the post-marital name given by her husband means “a smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who caped” (16). Jaya has two selves. Suhasini steeped into tradition and Jaya trying to break free from the shackles of tradition. The result is a fragmented self, vacillating between these two personalities. To conform to the ideals of a wife and a mother she suppresses her emotional needs which make her lonely and vulnerable:
I had to admit the truth to myself that I had often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony (Deshpande: 1988, 4).

Her devotion to her family does not make her happy, as it fails to provide any intellectual or emotional fulfillment. Marriage and home do not give any autonomy to her as a woman. Keenly aware of her own imperfect freedom, she opts for silence – obedience, surrender, subordination, timidity and passive acceptance of things in life. Like Gandhari, Jaya has blindly and faithfully followed the path of traditional role without exercising her intellect and deliberately turned a blind eye towards Mohan. Even in the views of Shashi Deshpande:

I have been very concerned with the predicament of the woman as an artist; looking back I can see that I have explored this in different women – Indu in Roots and Shadows, Jaya in That Long Silence, Mira in The Binding Vine, Savitribai in Small Remedies. These are different women, not puppets who will dance to my tune. They express their desires, their frustrations, their ambitions in various ways; each looks for her own way of realizing her ambitions as an artist, each comes to terms with problems in her own way (Deshpande: 2003, 159).

The feeling of homelessness is another important point to evaluate Shashi Deshpande’s novels from gynocentric point of view. The psyche of Saru is reflected through her feelings of homelessness. It is an affirmation of her sense of isolation. She leaves home ‘twice’ to seek release – once to establish her independence from her mother’s suppression and the second time to establish her indispensability to her husband. The feeling of homelessness is indicative of inner disintegration. Tension between the different parts within one’s self takes away the harmony within and without. She is split within dual
personalities. She is “a confident professional in a white coat by day” (106) and “a trapped animal by night” (106). There is a constant fear in her that even as a doctor she is just “a well trained animal … capable of making the right noises, the right gestures automatically” (Deshpande: 1980, 19).

Despite all these, there is a strong urge to return home to the security and warmth of the family. Like most of the female protagonists, Indu returns back to the cocooned existence of her family to impart a new meaning to her existence and to delve into herself. Here she realizes the inner self and eventually is at peace with herself.

Breaking the illusion of romantic love leading to happiness in life, Deshpande has explored the Indian middle class woman’s unhappiness in the institution of marriage. Through the lives of Jaya, Indu, Urmi and Sumi, she has depicted the lack of understanding and communication that often mars the relationship. The changing attitude of these women who are educated and intelligent leads to disharmony in their marriage. The traditional mentality of men fails to see that the woman also needs to realize her potential outside the domestic sphere. Even when not suppressed by dominating husbands, Urmi and Sumi feel an unbridgeable gap, created by their husband’s indifference. Both realize that they are ignorant of a part of their husband’s personality. Thus, Shashi Deshpande’s characters’ struggle is that of ordinary woman fighting to be herself rather than confirm to stereotypes – to a fixed idea of how a woman should be. Here, Shashi Deshpande tries to free the female psyche from the conventional male control. In short, almost all the literary ventures of Shashi Deshpande revolve round the pathetic and heart rending condition of women in a male dominated society.
The realities of women’s lives seem to be gaining greater significance day by day. The conflict that was crystallized years ago seems to be now exploding and the basic cause of this conflict being a cultural mythology, the ideals of femininity and the stated ‘place’ of women. Over the years, the gap has widened between myth and reality and so the woman’s problems of living is that she can express none of the resentment she feels. To have herself chained to her place in society and the family is an unconscious acceptance of her status.

Shashi Deshpande is interested mainly in the study of the lives and working of the mind of the characters. The most prominent feature of her art is her delineation of character. She is primarily interested in the portrayal of female protagonists as living in separate, closed, sequestered world full of existential problems and passions. Each individual is portrayed as an unsolved mystery, being solitary and introspective. Their emotional needs remain unsatisfied though these women have their material needs. Thus, Shashi Deshpande by probing into the women’s psyche has opened up avenues for the study into the various social, cultural, political, economic, feminist and sexual issues.

The women protagonists in her novels gain “personhood” yet do not negate the family or the society. They go beyond what Elaine Showalter calls the “Female Phase” which is the phase of “self – discovery, turning inward freed from the dependence of opposition, a search for identity” (13).

In her quest for identity, Deshpande’s protagonists move from despair to hope, from self – negation to self – assertion. Her struggle is to attain wholeness, completeness and an authentic selfhood. They are in
search of this distinct self. The quest is an attempt to assert human values, to affirm their rights as human beings. In her quest the conflict arises why they try to balance her multiple roles as a member of the family, as a professional and above all as a ‘human being’.

Shashi Deshpande successfully delineates their problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, failure and foibles. She believes that husband – wife relationship should be treated on the line of equal rights. Once the wife gets her right position in the family there is no question of her being frustrated. Her novels present mostly a typical, middle class housewife’s life because her main concern is the urge to find oneself, to create space for oneself, to grow on one’s own. Her female characters are well educated but they are frustrated either sexually or professionally. They have their inner conflicts and quest for identity.

She wants to support the right of women and make them aware of their rights in the society. The strong point about her novels is her delineation of the woman’s inner world. Her female protagonists struggle to find their own voice and are continuously in search to define them.

Like Virginia Woolf, Shashi Deshpande also reveals the subconscious and unconscious psyche of her characters. Her female protagonists are sensitive, self – conscious, brilliant and creative. They revolt against the traditional parental family and come out from the suffocated atmosphere of the narrow minded society.

We also notice that Shashi Deshpande’s novels are the result of the writer’s sensitivity to be able to identify herself with other women, mothers and friends. It is their strength, warmth and courage that she
turns into a strong personality who does not bother about the opinions of patriarchy. In this way, all the novels of Shashi Deshpande are gynocentric.

4.2 Cultural Study

It is important to understand that woman’s culture is not and should not be seen as a subculture. It is hardly possible for the majority to wear in subculture, women voice their social existence within the general culture and wherever they are confined by patriarchal restraint or segregation into separateness (with subordination as its purpose) they transform this restraint into complementarities (asserting importance and ever superiority of woman’s function) and redefine it. Thus, women live in a duality – as members of the general culture and as partakers of women’s culture (Lerner: 1979, 52).

Gynocentric study gives prime importance to the cultural model of difference as the gynocritics believe that all the other three models of difference – linguistic, biological and psychoanalytical – are rooted in the cultural model. They opine that both men and women are different from one another only because the culture has moulded them from their childhood and shaped them differently. On account of which women began to experience a common culture as they are bound by that culture and yet has its own distinctiveness and specificity. Women’s culture lies within the general culture which is dominated by men but the ways and means women adopt to express their distinct experience from women’s culture, which is far beyond men to comprehend where they express themselves within the limitation imposed upon them by the dominant culture and yet show shade of the distinctive women’s culture.
Gynocritics are not ready to believe that women live only within the subordination of the general dominant culture. They differ by believing that the distinctiveness of women’s culture, represented in women’s writing, should be maintained and supported by the dominant culture because there are many economic, social and political factors that go into writing of a book.

Gynocriticism looks at gender from a socio – cultural angle. Gynocritics believe that while sex is a biological given, gender is a social and cultural construct. Men and women are biologically different, but that does not imply that they are unequal. Women have been denigrated in patriarchal society. They study women within the present conditions of patriarchal relations. Virginia Woolf commenting on the difference between male and female writers argues:

It is probable, however, that both in life and in art, the values of woman are not the values of man. Thus when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values – to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important (Woolf : 1975, 81).

In Indian culture, in most cases, women are treated as inferior creatures, pleasure giving commodities or childbearing machines. But with woman’s education spreading fast, more and more women writers came into arena. They saw the plight of their less fortunate sisters and realized the enormity of the social bias against women. Women started becoming economically independent and strove for the realization of their own aspirations. When they tried to incorporate it in life, they came into conflict with the conventional moral code. In fact, a set of new paradigms related to their life came into existence. Tradition and modernity, self –
assertion and self – effacement and economic independence made contrary demands. Post – independence literature in India portrays all these trends and gives voice to women. Over the years the age old image of woman seems to be blurring slowly and gradually transforming into a new image. Thus, the emergence of the new woman is a by product of the changes taking place in society.

Today a woman is not a doll in the hands of man. She is being seen establishing her identity in almost every walk of life. Apart from many other fields, women have also heralded a new consciousness in the realm of literature. Their immense contribution to English literature in general and fiction in particular is praiseworthy. A number of women writers had made tireless identity in a male dominated patriarchal framework. Aneer Jung in *Unveiling India* (1987) holds the opinion:

In this complex pantheon of diversities, the Indian woman remains the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective consciousness prized by a society that is locked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. She remains the still centre, like the centre of the potter’s wheel, circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has enriched and helped her acquire a quality of concentration (Jung : 1987, 26).

If we look at Shashi Deshpande’s novels from gynocentric point of view, keeping the cultural point of view in mind, all her novels come out as emblem of women’s culture. Shashi Deshpande while consciously following the male literary tradition has shown glimpses of women’s culture that she has highlighted through her female characters. What she does in her novels is to celebrate womanhood. Shashi Deshpande, by portraying female characters, has shown how it is the dominant culture
which trains women into submission, believing that their house, husband and children are their prime possessions and they should concentrate their energies upon them.

Elaine Showalter while discussing about women’s writing inspired by women’s culture says that women’s writing is a double – voiced discourse that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant. Shashi Deshpande in her novels celebrates womanhood. Her novels are an epitome of women’s culture.

Her works passionately highlight the predicament of women. 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 constricting dilemmas of pre – fixed definitions and pre – set norms and thus attempting to redefine their status. The attitudinal postures of Deshpande’s protagonists confirm the theory of Julia Kristeva that the consideration of femininity as marginality offers a position and not the essence, as they exhibit the courage to transcend the marginality and active their epicentric participation in life. According to Simone de Beauvoir:

Pay not attention to a woman’s murmurs, her cries, her pains, nature has made her for our use and for bearing everything; children, sorrows, blows and pains inflicted by man. Do not accuse yourself of hardness ( Beauvoir : 1974, 285 ).

Shashi Deshpande portrays the world of the women of today. She has also portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemmas, her efforts to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife, mother and
above all as human being in the tradition – bound male dominated Indian
society. Her protagonists raise their voice against the role models of
daughter, sister, mother, and wife and refuse to be the object of cultural
and social oppressions of age old patriarchal society. It is also true that
they being sensitive, intelligent and career oriented middle class women
of a changed time feel suffocated and engaged in the male defined codes
of life.

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists revolt against social taboos and
ceaselessly question the very concept of love, marriage and sex and feel
an urge to redefine human relationship and behaviour. There is a quest for
self – the search for identity. Their hatred for the existing system and
tradition does not however bring them any satisfaction; rather it leads to
frustration, helplessness and the sense of meaninglessness. A sense of
alienation seems to sap up their energy, the vital part of their being. In
“Writing From the Margin” Shashi Deshpande wrote:

The women in my novels, like the women in India
today, or indeed like women or humans anywhere, have
so many forces working on them – and all at the same
time. There’s history and culture, there’s religion and
customs, there are individual and family, faiths and
beliefs, family traditions and histories. And last but not
the least, there are also the people around us and their
expectations and our relationships with them
( Deshpande : 2003, 160 ).

These middle class women show realistic and mature approach in
the assessment of their situation in society. They feel hemmed in by the
social shackles which bind them to achieve independence within the
framework. To them, marriage means constricting bonds but is not
against the social institution of marriage. They are able to come in terms
with themselves and the social reality around them by seeking a
realizable goal within the accepted codes of society. Shashi Deshpande gives a pre–eminent position to marriage and marital relationship in her novels.

Her female characters are rebellions against the roles assigned by culture. In addition to her traditional role, she has to play a professional role if she is a working woman. Though she is divided between her natural and cultural roles, hers is a subservient, secondary and marginal role and expect her to disown the change in it. What she wants is the freedom to think and decide for herself and the liberation from her womanhood. For she finds her ‘womanly self’ trapped and suffocated within her family. This condition of women is clearly reflected in Shashi Deshpande’s novels.

The chief factors which are responsible for the pathetic situation of women in the patriarchal Indian culture are economic independence and role reversal, gender bias, conflict between what she acquires in actual life and what she desires, womanhood without motherhood, dissatisfied marriage or marital unhappiness, pathetic situation of widows etc. Women are oppressed in the man made culture by these factors, but Shashi Deshpande’s heroines with their strong determination and will power come out from all pathos and establish their self identity and self respect which is the aim of the gynocentric study.

Economic independence and role reversal are important issues which are responsible for the pathetic situation of women. Generally, women are dependent on men as they are the supreme authority in the family, but when they become economically independent, earn bread and butter and provide shelter to the family, it creates inferiority complex in
men. The result is lifelong barriers and rift in the family and women become the worst victim of it.

Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) is the worst victim of such ideology as she is both the winner of the bread and butter and superior to her husband. Saru is conscious of the fact that she is superior to her husband in qualifications, social status, and mental caliber and in many other respects. But, in her heart of hearts, she repels against it. Being an unwanted child to her parents, she inherits a psychology which does not allow her to displease anyone and so she goes on enduring everything. As she observes:

\[
a + b \text{ they told us in mathematics is equal to } b + a. \text{ But here } a + b \text{ was not, definitely not equal to } b + a. \text{ It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible (Deshapnde : 1980, 42).}
\]

The real cause of the disintegration of the family is an interview of Manohar by a lady reporter for a women’s magazine, who admires Saru by telling her ‘bread winner of the family’. Since than, Manohar becomes a sadist and tortures Saru in bed. Her dreams of a happy married life is shattered. Eventually, ‘the dark’ engulfs her entirely and becomes totally terror stricken and tension – ridden and at last decides to leave her husband’s house.

Money is the only factor in their everyday existence. In the patriarchal culture, the wife who brings money is kept as a ‘hen that lays golden eggs’. The man is the dominant factor who exercises his superiority not by winning better bread than his wife but by inflicting physical abuse and having brutal sex with her who is, after all, his slave. She may be a person of higher status, she may be famous, and she may
even earn more money than he does, yet within the four walls, he makes it very clear as to who the real master is. The woman stoops only to conquer herself and the difficult situations, later she does not try to conquer or over ride the man.

Even in modern times, when woman has achieved economic independence and high educational standards, she is still regarded as inferior. Despite holding a responsible professional position and contributing substantially to the household income, a woman’s work is not valued. After working outside the house, she still bears the onus of being a superlative housekeeper and cook. Commitment to her career is viewed as a deviation from her socially ordained roles of wife and mother while her career is seen just as a means of earning extra money. The man continues to remain the master who creates terrible mental conflict in her as she is torn between social expectations and the need to realize her potential. Deshpande explores this conflict in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980). It proves that the working woman is still worse, aggravated by her problems of marital adjustment and quest for her own identity.

The role of a wife in the present time is nothing less than walking on the razor’s edge. Realizing this fact, Saru is obliged to give ironically the following imaginary advice to the future wives in Nalu’s college:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband...That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don’t even try to reverse the doctor – nurse, executive – secretary, principal – teacher role...women’s magazine’s will tell you that a marriage should be an equal partnership. That’s nonsense. Rubbish. No partnership can be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it’s unequal in favour of
your husband. If the scales tilt in your favour, God help you, both of you (Deshpande: 1980, 124).

Saru is portrayed as a woman who is exploited by patriarchy at least, at familial, social and finally in her private life. She feels oppressed as her personal feelings and emotions are ignored and suppressed by her husband who represents the male dominated society. On the surface, she seems to be happy but she is far from it. For her emotional involvement is more important than sexual relationship. The husband and wife live together under the same roof experiencing emptiness, loneliness and alienation. It is evident that Saru is virtually devoid of communication with her husband and this had caused erosion of proper understanding between wife and husband. She further laments for her experience of bitter loneliness in marital life. She too has wishes, likes and dislikes that these are as important for her as they are for men. So far, man’s position was supreme, that of woman secondary, but now she is not ready to be marginalized. She wants to be heard, respected and treated as an equal. This is, however, not easy to achieve as the society is not ready to grant her equal position.

With regard to sex, marriage and love, the attitude of the Indian woman is undergoing change. Woman feels trapped in a loveless marriage and seeks fulfillment outside wedlock. She is out to break the taboos and the barriers and assert her right to her life. Literature is focusing on the problems generated by her revolt. The 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.
In a way, this novel is the critique of the patriarchal mode of thinking which subordinates woman to man. This patriarchal ideology teaches woman to internalize this concept in the process of socialization. It brings into focus the concepts of gender which are man – made. As Patricia Meyer Spacks remarks:

There seems to be something what we might call a woman’s point of view...an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries (Spacks: 1975, 4 – 5).

This novel focuses on woman’s awareness of her predicament her wanting to have an independent social image. It provides good acoustics for woman’s voice and establishes that woman, too, has choices in life.

At the end of the novel, Saru’s thoughts “My life is my own” brings individuality in her. She is to live in spite of their miserable life. Earlier Sarita had desired “a room of one’s own” like Virginia Woolf. But she believed that any aggressive move to go against the hierarchical role placed before her as a woman is bound to fail. She is to accept her womanhood and be her very true self, a difficult task to achieve in a conservative male dominated set – up. As Betty Friedan asserts:

For woman, as for man, the need for self - fulfillment – autonomy, self – realization, independence, individuality, self – actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences, when it is thwarted (Friedan: 1981, 282).

In the beginning, Saru refuses to confront her husband, but later she decides to face him. “If Manu comes, tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can” (202). This is an indication of the capacity to assert her
rights. It definitely expresses the revival of her individuality. In the views of Ramamoorthi:

She [Saru] learns to free herself from the guilt, shame, humiliation and she is also initiated into the mystery of human existence (Ramamoorthi: 1991, 47).

Saru realizes that up till now she had been a puppet but the significant step in the revitalization of her relationship with her husband establishes her individuality.

Thus, the novel ends with the certainty that now Saru will no longer be a victim of Manu’s frustrations and strange behaviour. She derives pride in her professional success and decides not to feel guilty for someone else’s failure. A confident Saru realizes that the essence of any marriage is understanding and mutual respect and not subjugation of one by the other. With this knowledge, she readies herself to confront Manu.

Saru is the representative of middle class working women in modern India. She rebels against tradition but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. This is because, Saru lives in transitional society. She passes from the illusion to reality, from frustration to submission and as the wheel finally comes round, she makes an ultimate attempt to reconcile herself. Saru desires to liberate herself from the shackles of tradition and exercises her right to reveal her individual capabilities and realizes her feminine self through identity – assertion and self – affirmation. In the words of S.P. Swain:

Saru’s journey is a journey from self – alienation to self – identification, from negation to assertion, from difference to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self (Swain: 1998, 39).
Thus, the end of the novel suggests that the woman should not only be independent but she should also believe in her strength.

Urmi in *The Binding Vine* (1993) is also economically independent and takes decision on her own. Her fiercely independent nature is first seen when at the age of fifteen, she chooses to stay alone with her grand father’s dead body while Kishore goes to fetch some other members of the family. Her problem is that being financially emancipated and having confidence in herself as she works outside the home, she has developed a kind of self identity which denies her to submit before her husband, Kishore. Even she cannot bear the submission of other women before their spouses.

Though Manjari (Jiji) in *Moving On* (2004) is a widow, she becomes economically independent by purchasing a car and turns it into a taxi. But having a car is supposed to be the privilege of men. Jiji’s efforts of purchasing and learning to drive a car show her self identity in the man made culture.

‘Having a car of my own – you privileged men who take these things for granted can’t imagine what it means to people like me’.
‘But why do you need a car?’
‘What do you mean why? I bet if I were a man, you’d never have asked that question’ (Deshpande : 2004, 65).

A step ahead, Jiji also decides to do the job. Her words “Life is full of possibilities” (65) shows her positive attitude towards life. She also thought to start a Yoga school. The assumption that a woman shouldn’t be a taxi driver is totally based on the patriarchal ideology. She installs a computer at home and types the manuscripts as the means of self –
employment. Thus, she supports her economic and physical existence and psychological dependence of woman on man. To be in equal terms with men in our traditional society, women have to carve out a new path as shown by Manjari by not depending on men economically, physically and emotionally, but then a new society has to emerge, a new relationship between men and women would be established in which women would have their own space and place for development which is an important point of gynocentric study.

Though all these female characters are economically independent and have their own good earning, they suffer a lot as patriarchal ideology can not bear superiority of women. Though women are superior in earning livelihood, men try to crush their intellect and ability by suppressing their personality. But Shashi Deshpande’s female characters fight boldly against this suppression and come out as winner which is the pivotal point of gynocentricism.

*Gender bias* is another issue which suppresses the personality of women. Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) becomes a victim of gender bias by her own mother. From her childhood, Sarita is constantly reminded of the worthlessness of her sex. She has been fired by the ambition to do something that would prove her merit to her mother. She is constantly reminded that she is a girl whose destiny is to get married and leave the parental house. As a traditional woman, her mother is over conscious and is also concerned about Sarita’s appearance, the colour of her skin, so she resists her from going out of the house in the hot sun.
In fact, male oriented society structures females in such a way that they work against even those of their own gender. Through various examples in the novel, Shashi Deshpande conveys an important message that suppression, subjugation and exploitation are not confined to the male – female relationship only but exists between female – female relationship as well. As Veena Das quotes:

Daughters are comparable to something kept in trust for another (amanat). You have to care for them, love them and you will be held responsible for them but you are destined to lose them. Once a daughter is properly married and goes to her own house it is like a debt that has been paid (Das: 1992, 93).

Saru revolts against her mother’s oppressive dictatorship and marries a man of her choice. By marrying a man outside of her caste, Sarita dares to challenge the age old traditions. Saru’s mother, a woman rooted in tradition constantly reminds her of the difference between her and her brother, Dhruva. The bitterness that has crept into their relationship after Dhruva’s death and her mother’s constant reminder that she is a girl make the growing Saru hate her sexuality. Saru grows up hating her womanhood that consisted of feeling impure and shamed of one’s sexuality and living with the sole purpose of getting married. The result is she becomes a doctor and decides to live in the hostel in order to avoid gender discrimination of the mother. She vows to rebel against the traditions which is oppressive and suffocating to her. It is here, while studying anatomy that she begins to accept her womanhood. So her character proves that savage customs regard their daughters as burden. They face discrimination throughout their life against the male members of the family. This injustice fills their life with hatred, insult and humiliation. To come out of such situation, sometimes they become rebel
against these taboos, and some of them come out as winner and establish their identity, while thousands of women remain suppressed and marginal.

Leela in *Small Remedies* (2000) also becomes a victim of gross gender discrimination practiced in the communist party. She is a hard working party activist, but when the occasion comes, men junior to her reaches the higher position of power while she is sidelined by the party and never reaches the top of hierarchy. She learns the bitter reality that hard work and loyalty to ideology are of no merits and gender is merit unto itself. She is a woman who has the courage of her convictions. She resigns from her party when she feels that the party’s reaction is not appropriate.

Thus, Leela is aware of her needs and the goals that she has been aspiring for. Therefore, she fights against all odds and restrictions to achieve them. All her life, she tries to fulfill the desire of her true self irrespective of the limitations of tradition. In her personal life too she revolts against tradition. In spite of the barriers of caste, class, religion and tradition, she finds fulfillment. Through her determination, Leela attains self – realization and fulfillment in love and companionship of Joe. All her life she has striven to attain various demands of self and her persistent pursuit of these eventually earns her happiness and contentment.

Though Shashi Deshpande’s female characters become victim of gender discrimination, they with courage and strong will power establish individuality which is the positive aspect of their characters. They are not
stark rebellions, but within the dominant culture, they create their own space and place which is the hallmark of gynocentric theory.

The third issue for the pathetic situation of women in the man made culture is the conflict between what she acquires and what she desires in the actual life. The age old orthodox tradition does not give women space for individuality as the creator of rules are men. So in the patriarchal culture women’s desires are neglected and male ideology is throbbed on them. They don’t care a little about the feelings and emotions of women. They treat them only as an object to satisfy their needs which is the reason of women’s pathos.

Shashi Deshpande portrays the inner world of the Indian woman in the realistic manner. A woman and her desires, efforts and failures in the traditional Indian society is the main theme of this novel. One of the best examples of it is the famous psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud, who based his theory of sexuality on the possession of the phallus / pennies. A man is a man because he possesses the phallus. So, a woman is simply not a man. Therefore, a woman is a lack, a negative. This lack of female self can also be reflected in art and literature where women frequently appeal as objects of men’s desires. Women are always associated with the passive body and men with the active mind and this idea is in the centre of this novel.

From childhood, women are always taught the concept of male superiority and are conditioned to co-operate in their own subordination. Unlike women in many western countries, Indian women are denied equal opportunities for working with men in many spheres of life. Women’s powerlessness stems from this unequal gender relations. With
Sita and Savitri as predominant models of reference, Indian women are expected to be pure and faithful as wives, though husbands are not required to be so. In most cases, they generally do not have the freedom to decide when they should marry, whom they should marry, how many children they should have or how the children should be brought up. When a woman is married off, in most cases, in her new home, she is often made to act the part of an unpaid domestic servant with a marginally superior status.

Is to be a feminist to want to be like a man? I don’t think so. On the contrary, to me it has meant an acceptance of my womanhood as a positive thing not as a lack. An understanding that I am different, not inferior. And how can feminism be anti-men when it is really working for a better, a more meaningful and companionable relationship between men and women, instead of the uneasy relationship between tyrant and oppressed? (Deshpande: 2003, 83–84).

From the above statement, a reader can understand that Shashi Deshpande’s writing comes out of her own intense and long suppressed feelings about what is to be a woman in our society. Her writing comes out of her consciousness of the conflict between her idea of herself as a human being and the idea that society has of her as a woman. Shashi Deshpande moves further and catches on the subtle psychological complexities of the individual mind.

Indu in Roots and Shadows (1983) is brought up under the care of Atya, Kaka and Akka and she is expected to follow the traditions of the family. However, her intelligence, education and rebellious nature always brings her into conflict with Akka for her orthodox ideology. She goes on questioning the conventions which define different patterns of
behaviour for girls and boys. Refusing to be meek and polite, which are traditionally expected for a girl, she is constantly at war with Akka.

She is a determined girl and longs for freedom and independence and so she leaves the house of Akka to enter into another home where she would be free and independent from the shackles of tradition and orthodoxy. She marries a man of different caste of her own choice. The man whom she marries leads her to great disappointment as he is no different from the less educated and conservative Indian men. After marriage, she experiences disillusionment in sex and suffers silent sexual humiliation. Jayant’s traditional beliefs that woman should be passive and not demonstrative of her love and emotions shock Indu. Jayant’s views coloured by the age old traditions has defined woman as a means to fulfill man’s needs and not as a human being with her own sexual needs. Indu is hurt to find her love rejected and suppressed by him. It upsets her. Her dreams are shattered. Soon she realizes the futility of her decision that one can never exchange roots with another. She painfully realizes that she has walked into just another trap. She is physically and mentally dissatisfied with him. It is a marriage that suppresses her femininity and her human demands. Jayant expects her ‘to submit’. Indu does it because she loves him. Indu’s marriage with Jayant denies her fullness of experience. It brings her no satisfaction and completeness. Gradually, Indu submits herself to Jayant, not for love, but to avoid conflict.

On her marriage with Jayant, she has compromised on several issues. Their sexual relationship is a source of ‘tension’ between Indu and Jayant because she is a passionate initiator in their sexual relationship. Jayant is trying to force his patriarchal values on Indu. The result is she begins to conceal her real feelings from him. As she quotes:
I had found in myself an immense capacity for
decception. I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but
what he wanted to see, to say to him nothing but what
he wanted to bear. I hid my responses and emotions as
if they were bits of garbage (Deshpande : 1983, 41).

Her marriage has compelled in her a duality of life. As a result of
her unhappy conjugal life with Jayant, Indu establishes extra marital
relationship with Naren. She even suffers no guilt in her extra – marital
relationship with Naren and decides not to tell Jayant about it.

Like Sarita in The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), Indu too is a
‘new’ woman – modern, economically independent and married to a man
of her choice. Though she considers herself to be a liberated woman, she
too is unassertive. Without realizing it, her relationship with her husband
has deteriorated into the same kind of empty traditional relationship
between husband and wife that she has always despised.

Thus, in a patriarchal culture, woman’s emotions are of no value.
Only man’s desires are in the centre. Through the character of Indu,
Shashi Deshpande has commented on how “Indian women are forced by
bigoted society to repress their sexuality” (Deshpande : 2003, 8). As she
begins to suppress her real feelings, she begins to experience a
 corresponding loss of self – esteem. Gradually, she allows herself to enter
into a passive, almost traditional relationship with her husband.

Indu tries hard to find out reasons for the unhappiness in her
married life and comes to the conclusion that ‘self surrender’ and ‘self –
abnegation’ are her great enemies. She finds out that she loves her
husband “too passionately” (92) whereas her husband Jayant never tries
to understand her feelings and emotions. In fact, there is no proper communication and harmony between them.

After suffering a lot, Indu realizes that she cannot continue to live up to Jayant’s expectations. She becomes conscious of the fact that by giving into Jayant’s wishes constantly, she has denied her own selfhood and reduced herself to a subordinate position. She also realizes that by being submissive to Jayant, she has cheated her of her real self. At last, she makes a new start by deciding to assert herself.

Indu’s predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary India where the new socio-economic forces have shaken old cultural modes. The society continues to be male dominated and attitudes towards women continue to be the same. Women, on their part, are becoming more and more conscious of the various emancipation movements.

At last, she swears never to conform to the concept of the ideal woman as represented by the tradition oriented culture where a woman does not have an independent identity. Now she is ashamed of the fact that she is too obedient to her husband. She hopes that she can be her normal self again by being away from him and living by herself. She desires to liberate herself and exercises her right to reveal her individual capabilities and realizes her feminine self through identity assertion and self affirmation.

One of the first things that she does is to finance her cousin Mini’s marriage with Akka’s money instead of buying a bungalow in the suburbs as Jayant wants her to do. Second Indu resigns from her job and decides
to write a book of her own. Indu is the representative of her generation. She is obsessed with her identity. It is for the sake of her identity that she takes exile from the family. She even decides to sell the house, giving some share of money to the different family members. She makes a decision for herself. In this way, she seeks freedom from stereotypes of gender, class, caste values and to move ahead towards a greater individual self.

Hers is a journey from ignorance to knowledge, through suffering. Going through a process of introspection, self analysis and self – realization, she emerges as a confident individual fully in control of herself. She becomes more helpful and able to accept life just as it is. In the early days, Indu was meek and polite, docile and humble but now she has become bold and conscious of herself. She comes out of her emotional upheaval and decides to lead a meaningful life with her husband. The home she had discarded becomes the place of refuge and consolation to her. It is Akka’s house which offers her ample opportunity to recognize her self by rethinking about her. It is here she begins to see life in a new way.

Her returning home is not defeatism but the triumph of the independence of women. She learns to live in the society. Now she feels a sense of hope for existence. She begins to realize herself as an important partner in the endless circle of life. She being sensitive starts aspiring to become independent and complete in herself. She brushes aside all the age – old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society.

The novel ends in affirmation of the individuality of Indu and also the principle of life which is endless. She has learnt to see not only her
life full of possibilities of growth and grace but the very meaning of life itself. It is with this understanding, realization and reconciliation, she goes back to Jayant. She also realizes that Akka is not a sadist. Thus, a changed Indu, not ashamed of her love and sexuality but proud of it, meets Jayant with a challenge for him to accept her. Thus, Indu’s realization and assertion of her needs makes the novel end on a clear note of affirmation, to which Jaya greatly contributes.

Even Devayani in *In The Country of Deceit* (2008) moves between her desires and reality of life. Though she establishes physical relationship with Ashok Chinnapa, she realizes that there is no future of their relationship as it is not accepted by the patriarchal norms. It will come to an end any day and so she decides to stop this relationship. Even in her letter to Ashok, she writes:

I am very clear about it – I have no claim on your life. There is no future for us. Even when we began, we did not look beyond the few moments, the few hours, we had together. We never spoke of it, but we both knew it would have to end some day. Love is not enough, Ashok, love is never enough (Deshpande: 2008, 237).

Devayani has realized the reality of life that the relationship between a married man and an unmarried woman is not possible. An unmarried woman cannot be a ‘mistress’ or ‘other woman’ of a married man. Even the society does not accept such relations. So this realization of Devayani leads her to her self – realization. She is tired of lying and deceiving others. She does not want to live in the country of deceit. At last, she confesses to Ashok in a letter:

I too have my bonds and I can’t go on lying to the people I love, I can’t go on deceiving them. And there’s
another reason as well there’s a promise I have to keep. I know it’s only a promise I made to myself, but I have to keep it. If I don’t, however reasonable and logical I think is, I will always be waiting fearfully for thunderbolts and lightening to strike – not me, but someone I love. And so … ( Deshpande : 2008, 237 ).

She decides that she will live afterwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. She, no doubt, makes some adjustment of her own volition taking care to see that she does not lapse into servility. Her decision to have her own way gives a new confidence to her and this confidence brings her emancipation.

Devayani is a ‘new woman’. She is conscious of herself as a ‘being’. She is aware of her strength as a female individual. She is also aware of her strength as a woman. She is thus not only a sociological construct but a combination of the psycho – socio – historico – cultural process. She is an individual with capacity to reflect on her own position and speak for herself. She not only has economic independence, but stands on her own. She like female hero is free to make her choices and accepts self responsibility. When a woman is able to deconstruct her dependence syndrome and counter the conditions that devalue her, she achieves the essential consciousness of herself as a subject rather than an object.

Thus, all these women characters are crushed between tradition and modernity. The double edgedness plays havoc in their personality. They are confused about their own role in the family and the society. Here Deshpande has shown women within themselves, between their own knowledge and that thrust on them by the surrounding. The age old traditional customs suppress their personality and individuality, but their
modern thoughts and ideology force them to free from the shackles of tradition. Though they suffer, they suffer only for sometimes, and at last emerge as individual, with new identity and establish their individuality in the patriarchal culture which is the aim of gynocentricism. In this way, Shashi Deshpande’s all the novels are gynocentric.

*Womanhood without motherhood* is the fourth issue which creates a lot of problems in the life of woman. Patriarchal culture insists and accepts woman if she is blessed with motherhood. If she cannot become a mother without her fault, she is treated harshly and abused by other family members including her husband. So without her fault, she becomes a victim of harsh treatment by the society. Nobody condemns man for it. She always lives with the threat that her husband might discard her anytime which suppresses her individuality.

Cynthia in *If I Die Today* (1982) becomes a victim of womanhood without motherhood which is a threat to her. Because of her issuelessness, her marriage seems to have failed or reached the point of wreckage, in spite of education, economic independence and material well being. In fact, she is much earlier version of Saru, a doctor who earns more than her husband, and still lives under turmoil throughout the life.

Narmada Atya, Indu’s sixty years old aunt in *Roots and Shadows* (1983) is a childless widow and dependent on her natal family. She is one of those traditional women who remain unfazed by misfortunes. In fact, the misfortunes are created by man as she suffers a lot without her fault.
Jaya and Kusum’s aunt Vanitamami in *That Long Silence* (1988) is childless, unattractive and incompetent and is neglected by her husband. After her marriage her life is ruled by her mother – in – law. As a daughter – in – law her role has remained a passive one and she is allowed no participation in decision – making. The adoption of Kusum is the only protest she can register successfully. For her, the husband is a “sheltering tree” and marriage the only destiny for a woman. Her character proves that a childless woman has no place or space in her own house and she is neglected in every juncture of family life.

Shashi Deshpande has very minutely portrayed *dissatisfied picture of marriage and marital unhappiness* on the part of women in the Indian culture which is the fifth issue for the pathetic situation of women. Though they compromise a lot with their husbands and other family members, the male counterparts cannot even bother to understand them which create dissatisfaction and unhappiness in women. Almost all the novels of Shashi Deshpande reflect dissatisfied picture of marriage and marital unhappiness. By discussing this issue, Shashi Deshpande wants to give women proper and respected place in the family. Shashi Deshpande believes that women should have their own space and place in the family and society and this is the attempt of Shashi Deshpande to give women proper space in the patriarchal culture which is an important characteristic of the gynocentric theory.

Through the character of Mrs. Jyoti Raman, a school teacher, in *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), Deshpande represents marital unhappiness. Mrs. Jyoti Raman hints at the sexual aggression of men tolerated silently by women. For Indian women like Mrs. Jyoti Raman marriage is considered mandatory for fulfillment and happiness. One of
the primary tests of gender differentiation is the dominance of a man over his wife, the superiority of the male over female and every woman is to endorse this ethics in the relationship with man. Mrs. Jyoti Raman is a representative of this unequal status of women in our society.

She is somehow able to free herself from her husband threatening to commit suicide but there are many other women who are not so lucky. Her character highlights women’s silences and the truths that lie behind their silences. She tries to free herself from this oppressive gender differentiation and so she takes divorce. Divorce frees a woman legally but the memories attached to the marriage cannot be erased easily. The social stigmas associated with divorce in the Indian society haunt her and she has to continue to struggle and suffer at various levels – economical, emotional and psychological. A woman may get relief from the painful life of marriage through divorce, but it will not always re-establish her socially, psychologically or financially. Moreover, it can also turn out to be the beginning of another phase of troubles as the divorcée has to further bear the onslaughts of a harsh society, which does not allow her to be free and happy. She demonstrates strength and maturity even in adversity.

Mrs. Jyoti Raman starts job as a teacher and acquires financial stability and brings up her daughter Sonali but unfortunately she is murdered. In the case of Jyoti Raman education is regarded as a key instrument for the empowerment of women. Education changes her views, improves her mode of employment and facilitates her participation in public life. It proves that economic independence gives woman personal autonomy and decision making power. In a way, though she is murdered, she has established her self and identity.
In *That Long Silence* (1988), through the example of Jaya, the author explores man–woman relationship of Indian society. In the Indian context, once a girl gets married, the husband completely dominates over her. If the wife does not conform to the norms and ideals set by the husband, there is disharmony and tension. Jaya is essentially a modern woman rooted in tradition whereas her husband Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in the age old customs. The difference between their outlooks is so marked that they fail, time and again, to understand each other. This greatly affects their marital life. It becomes more of a compromise than a relationship based on true love or mutual understanding. There increases a silence between the husband and the wife and creates a tension between them.

But a change has been wrought in Jaya’s situation. By giving expression to her story, she has decided to articulate her predicament and thereby would break her silence. Though Jaya makes compromise with Mohan, she asserts her identity. The novel thus seeks to portray a woman who becomes aware of the biased attitude of her husband. Jaya who stands for the modern emancipated woman, has asserted her individuality by challenging the taboos and destructive social norms. Jaya, through the process of reliving the past in her mind, gets guidance for the future. Though she chooses to remain within the family, a change has been wrought. She has come out of her confining slots allotted to her by the patriarchal society. She emerges at the end as a woman with certain willingness to compromise with life’s problems. With the growing emphasis on education, the Indian woman has started experiencing freedom but at the same time, she also struggles to improve her situation.
The inability of the man to understand such needs and accept the individuality of woman threatens their marriage.

Thus, through the character of Jaya, Shashi Deshpande has reflected the plight of the middle class woman. After long cogitation, she decides to break silence 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 the society, especially middle class.

The earlier impulsive Jaya becomes a mature woman, she emerges as a determined, strong willed modern woman who is prepared to face life and accept her responsibilities. During the process of her articulation, Jaya observes that meaningful co-existence can come only through understanding, respect and compassion not through domination or subjugation. Jaya realizes that it is fear on the part of woman that has allowed the subjugation to continue. Woman has allowed victimization instead of bargaining for partnership. In the views of Sarala Palkar:

The important insight that Shashi Deshpande imparts to us through Jaya is that women should accept their own responsibility for what they are, see how much they have contributed to their victimization instead of putting the blame on everybody except themselves (Palkar: 1991, 169).

Jaya understands that she also has contributed to her victimization and that she had to fight her own battle and work out her own solution, articulate her predicaments and establish her identity. Shashi Deshpande, through the character of Jaya, highlights that women should accept their own responsibilities for what they are. It is through self–analysis and self understanding that they can begin to change their lives and overcome
the hurdles in their way to progress. It is their battle and they have to fight with determination and courage in order to obtain what they want. Thus, the novel becomes a self critique of Jaya who has fathomed the darkness of herself and learnt to articulate her predicament. She shows, as P. Ramamoorthy observes that, “it is possible for a woman to live in the world where men also live” (Ramamoorthy: 1991, 38).

She decides that she will live from now onwards without sacrificing her identity or individuality. In short, Jaya gives us the new image of the Indian woman who now strives to stand on her own legs. The suffering of women in silence has come to be broken with assertion, courage and determination in order to march towards progress for self fulfillment and peaceful life. It also challenges the men to alter their attitude to give women their due rights and dignity.

Emotionally immature and sensitive at heart, Mira in The Binding Vine (1993) can not accept her husband’s love and obsession that is limited to sex only. She fails to accept him as her master. Her inability to cope and his forced love – making makes her nurture a dislike for him. She realizes that the patriarchal Hindu society and its traditions do not acknowledge a woman’s feelings. 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 with me. I don’t mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, and it is bliss when he does that. But she comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, so it begins. ‘Please’, he says ‘please, I love you’. And over and over again until he has done, ‘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).

Mira becomes a victim and endures the violation of her body in silence. But her feelings are expressed through her poetry in which she pours her bitter experiences. Her untimely death in childbirth ends her cloistered existence with a man whom she does not love. Mira’s tragedy is a tragedy of higher denominations. By pointing this aspect of Hindu cultural heritage, Shashi Deshpande gives a realistic picture of Hindu marriages.

The marriage of Akka also proves how terribly unfair our society is towards women. Even before her marriage, she is warned that her protective husband has been obsessed with his wife and after her death is interested only in his son. In fact, he marries only so that his son can have a mother. Her example describes the fate of many women who stoically accept marriage under any condition, because marriage is the only goal in life for a girl in our society and finding a groom is the most difficult thing on the earth. And so Akka willingly agrees to marry Kishore’s father in spite of the risk of living under the shadow of a dead woman.

There is a gap between Urmila and Kishore. Kishore’s job in the merchant navy disrupts her dream of a normal life. She feels frustrated with his short visit as she never finds time to develop an emotional relationship. The long separation from him often fills her with physical longing to have him permanently by her side. Urmila is unable to tell Kishore to change his job because she lacks the courage to tell him that she needs his physical presence in her life. Her efforts to express these feelings to him are always answered by Kishore’s passionate lovemaking. The sexual relationship between Urmila and Kishore is passionate and
satisfying. Yet, after every intercourse, Urmila experiences disappointment as Kishore withdraws into a world of his own. It creates a gap between them to such an extent that she rejects money sent by him for her as a wife expected more than just monetary support. She longs for the emotional security that a husband provides to a wife. But lack of such needs lead to frustrations. This places the sophisticated, well educated Urmila on the same plane as other oppressed Indian women in a patriarchal society.

This is the predicament of a typical middle class Indian woman who wants expression but gets suppression and oppression. But Shashi Deshpande’s women question the existing tradition and customs and critically examine the patriarchal values of the Indian society. The new woman identifies and uses her potential to emerge successful in life. She struggles to redefine her role and identity.

According to Beauvoir, in a patriarchal society “marriage is a destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (1974, 445). According to Hindu marriage system, marriage is a bondage that extends beyond the husband’s death. Hindus feel that the goal of life of a woman is to worship her husband. In marriage, oneness, companionship and maturity are stressed. It is assumed that the interests of the husband and wife are one and that whatever is the benefit of the one is for the benefit of the other also. Woman is essentially a subservient partner in marriage. In a way, marriage for her is a trap which negates her rights to individuality, independence and self – realization. Usually in the institution of marriage, a woman is reduced as an object for decoration, for possession and for man’s sexual gratification. It turns out to be an institution of oppression for her in various forms rather than of her
protection for which it was primarily instituted. In the words of J.S. Mill: “No slave is a slave to the same length, and in so full in a sense of words, as a wife is” (Mill: 1974, 25). A man is represented as a taker of woman and the woman is a giver in marriage. She becomes man’s half and acquires his name, his religion, his family and his class. She is truly reduced to the status of a nurse – maid of the children.

In *A Matter Of Time* (1996), Gopal’s desertion upsets everyone in the family; his departure has brought out her real hidden strength. Right from her marriage, Sumi has willingly subordinated herself to her husband. She shows boundless patience and accepts sympathy, loyalty and stupefied bewilderment after her tragedy with the same sense of equanimity. Even in her parental house, she “has the air of being lost, of having no place”. At last, she accepts the harsh facts of life boldly, maintaining that Gopal is “going his way and I have to go mine” (161). She wants her daughters’ life to be unchequered by unhappiness, “easy and comfortable” (220). Life she knows is not a bed of roses, and what pays in life is a sane and balanced attitude to it.

She is so self-controlled that she would not even talk about Gopal’s act of desertion. In fact, sensitive and self respecting persons like her feel their misfortune more keenly. Her silent suffering assumes at times a heroic proportion. She accepts the harsh facts of life boldly. She surrounds herself with a death like silence that can convey her pain more effectively than words can express. When all the family members curse, cry and agonize over Gopal’s desertion, the only person to meet Gopal without rancour is Sumi. Her self assertion prevents her to show her grief to him. Nor she requests him to come back to her and controls her feelings.
Sumi reveals an independent nature. She even refuses to accept financial help from her parents, her doctor sister or Gopal’s ever-helpful doctor nephew, Ramesh. She insists on taking up a temporary teaching post at once and is actively on the lookout for a permanent job. With great determination, she learns to ride a two-wheeler which is her first step towards self-assertion.

It is not that easy for a woman to begin a new life at this age who is separated from her husband, but Sumi picks up the threads of her life and shows her individuality with power and independence. Even today, the fate of a woman is being measured only through their marital status. A woman in the society gets respect only if she has her husband and they live together under the same roof.

Sumi’s method of resistance is balanced and motivated towards reclaiming her identity. She becomes economically independent, immerses herself in gardening, writes and directs plays and thus discovers herself. In the Indian culture, not only social institutions and customs thwart the free growth of a woman’s personality, but the prevailing ideology also assigns her an inferior status. She is denied independent personality. Further, she may not rise in revolt against these customs and institutional framework.

The novel ends on a note of hope. The last image on which the novelist closes her story is not the death of Sumi but of Aru and Kalyani standing together at the door and the ‘smile of encouragement’, which they have for Gopal. The important truth revealed here is that self-pity is not the answer. It is only through a process of self-examination and
self – searching through courage that one can change one’s situation from despair to hope.

Madhu’s happy married life in *Small Remedies* (2000) turns into hell with her honest confession of an incident of pre – marital sex. The revelation of this secret of her mind shatters Som. Unable to accept his wife’s ruined chastity, Som’s obsession with this incident destroys their relationship. Unable to understand that her physical intimacy with that man involved no emotions, Som begins to doubt Madhu’s character. He questions her relationship with every man she was close to.

Marriage with such a man ceases to be a union of hearts. Love and understanding – the essential qualities of a happy marriage are missing in their lives. Madhu rather keeps silence than loves her husband. He doesn’t shower love on her but only expects her to be dependant and obedient. Her husband’s extreme emotional indifference and callousness have made her intensely vulnerable. His disappointment in loving and marrying a girl who had lost her chastity is the result of the traditional beliefs. As N.K. Jain points out:

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

Madhu’s unhappy married life shows that even if the innocent pre – marital sex of women lead to rift between husband and wife as husbands always have idealistic image of a pure woman. They cannot bear the impurity of their wives. On the contrary, if they have affair with other women, their wives have to endure everything without raising voice against them.
Even Manjari’s (Jiji’s) married life with Shyam in *Moving On* (2004) is not satisfactory. 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 ambience. Manjari – Shyam relationship is only superficial. They quarrel on many things but the diarrhea of Anand brings them together. After that they stop quarreling but there is a huge gap between them. Their union is the union of two hungry bodies. Shyam’s lack of concern for his wife becomes more apparent when he establishes a physical contact with Malu, Manjari’s sister who becomes pregnant and a cause of worry to her parents. This leads to utter confusion and Shyam becomes a traitor in the eyes of Manjari. Manjari is full of grief at the time of the death of Malu.

Manjari’s courage is reflected when it is revealed that her sister Malu is made pregnant by her husband. She leaves her husband when Malu dies after giving birth to Sachi followed by Shyam’s suicide. The death of Shyam brings hollowness in her life. Manjari faces a painful period of struggle and strain. Estranged from family, living among the strangers she grapples with innumerable difficulties to support herself, to survive with the baby son.

After the death of Shyam, nobody from Shyam’s house comes to see Jiji except his brother who visits her house twice. So the death of Shyam leaves the accompaniment and sympathy of other members of the family. Jiji has married against the wishes of her parents, so in a way, she shuts the doors of her parental home also. Remarriage only as a means of social security for a single woman is not acceptable to her. So, she decides not to get into marriage again, neither persuasion nor other
considerations – physical, financial, emotional – can prevail on her. In this way, she assaults her identity.

The problem of marriage and love is presented through the character of Vasu who is the Mai of Manjari. Manjari reveals that her parents though seemingly happy, in fact, never led a blissful life. The woman in a male dominated societal framework tries to move out of the caged existence and asserts the individual self. But she never wishes to break up the family ties. So her role gives a lovely and vivid picture of the traditional life, particularly in four walls of the house. Shashi Deshpande points out how a wife of a doctor has to live as an object causing ripples of conflicts and tensions in the suffocating and stagnating life of tradition. Mai’s relation with her husband shows that husband – wife relationship is meaningless, unless they have put into practice the orthodox notion of a dominant husband and a suppressed wife.

If the girl child, the daughter, the wife, the mother, the mother – in – law have only to execute roles decided for them, then what is the point in educating them and talking of equal opportunities at the social, economical, religious and political front. In such a scenario, the options are rightly limited. Either the female self willingly accepts and remains forever silent or she revolts and makes a desperate effort not only to reverse but transform the very social fabric. However, for the later type, the movement from a silent, submissive and passive housewife to a dominant, active lady calls in for a long period of emotive conflict that ultimately leads to a change in approach and attitude and consequently to a realization of one’s true self or real self. Mai’s character proves that the wife is nothing but simply “a man’s upper servant”. Any woman who
does not practice passive obedience to the utmost will never be acceptable to such an absolute sovereign as a husband.

In short, Shashi Deshpande depicts Mai as a female protagonist with her heightened physical, sexual, emotional, aesthetic and romantic needs. On the other hand, her male counterpart has been delineated as a practical indifferent person who fails to share and appreciate the needs and greed of his wife. This temperamental gap leads to alienation and frustration. Mai longs and wishes, claims and reclaims for love of her husband and even she initiates for it but in vain and therefore it breeds boredom, loneliness, neurosis, suffering and finally, it intensifies her insanity. So Shashi Deshpande’s treatment of man – woman relationship is artistically, aesthetically and psychologically sound.

The relationship between Rani and her husband in *In The Country of Deceit* (2008) is also not healthy. There is always a communication gap between them. Even in privacy, they talk in a very formal way. They don’t have warmth and love between them. The intensity of the relationship of the husband – wife is not found in the case of Rani and her husband. But Rani with her will power establishes her identity in the society.

Some of the female characters of Shashi Deshpande’s novels are victims of double standards of society which is the terrible hindrance in the full development of the female. The patriarchal culture treats men and women differently as the norms for men and also for women are different. Savitribai in *Small Remedies* (2000) becomes a victim of the double standards of the society – one for men and other for women. Savitribai’s father with his unconventional ways stands out from society.
He is a widower, bringing up a daughter on his own with the help of a male servant Babu at home. He is unconventional in the sense that he observes no rituals or religious rites and openly indulges in drink every evening. But all his unorthodox behaviour never invites any censure or disapproval from society.

But when it comes to Savitribai, it is a different story. People are shocked and disapproved of Savitribai’s action as she elopes with a tabla player to some other town and also begets a female child from him. Her decision to live with Ghulam Saab makes her immoral but the same tradition and society approve of the mistress kept by Bai’s father – in – law and even the woman Madhu’s father visit in Neemgaon. Here Shashi Deshpande points out the hypocrisy of our society in recognizing a man’s sexuality and negating the same needs in a woman.

But Savitribai is a woman who strongly believes in herself and has the courage to set out on her own, to seek the fruition of her own genius. She is an achiever and unafraid of being alone. She is almost like a male in razing down conventional emotions, in cutting through domestic letters and in using people who comes her way for her own ends. In a way, she is a milestone in the portrayal of women.

Savitribai’s father – in – law can get away with his way of life without any censure or disapproval from society. He has a mistress who is a well known Thumri singer. He visits her regularly and the people around know this. The women look on in amusement and gossip about it. They wonder at his choice of a mistress but there is never any outrage over the fact. His choosing a wife from one’s own class and mistress from another is quite acceptable, but for a daughter – in – law pursuing a career
in classical music is scandalous. She is considered an immoral woman. Like her father and father–in–law, she too has led a most unorthodox life but has also paid a price for it as a woman. To society, her way of life is inexorable while her father’s or for that matter her father–in–law’s is connived at.

In an Indian society, for a man who indulges in his love of music and even to have a singer for a mistress is all right. But for a daughter–in–law to be learning music seriously, as if she is going to be a professional, is scandalous and unthinkable. This juxtaposition or double standards of the Indian society create pathos in women.

Savitribai Indorekar is a lone traveller in the journey of life. She has to sacrifice her married life, her only daughter Munni and eventually her relationship with Ghulam Saab at the last days of her life. After a long struggle, her efforts bear fruits, become a professional singer, and gradually reach the pinnacle of success. She has created her own space, her own individual identity amidst the male dominated society. She suffers, struggles and sacrifices everything in life but paves the way for every Indian woman. As Madhu says:

I see the artist, the woman in search of her genius, of her destiny. But the artist was born of the woman. First there was the woman and then the artist (Deshpande: 2000, 133).

Thus, through the character of Savitribai, Shashi Deshpande spreads the message: “To be your own light”. We expect all Indian women to be like Savitribai in the new millennium. As it is said:

You are the chisel
You are the sculptor
And the stone
Life is what you make it.

As discussed earlier, Madhu herself is a victim of the double standards of the society. Through her marriage with Som, Shashi Deshpande gives a stark picture of the patriarchal mindset of men. In an Indian culture, 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 requested to serve her husband with single minded devotion and loyalty. Even if the husband is lecherous, she is not to question him or raise her voice against it. 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 or the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behaviour ( Reddy : 2001, 132 ).

Through Madhu’s character, Shashi Deshpande suggests that in our society, pre – marital sex could lead to disintegration of marriage. Shashi Deshpande herself in an interview with Gita Viswanath mentions:

Marriage is a more complicated relationship because it is not a blood tie. Also there is the physicality of sex. And there are enormous demands made on each other and it is that which interests me ( Viswanath : 2005, 229 ).

After many ups and downs, Madhu knows that even if there are no dreams left for her because of Adit’s death and her husband’s misbehaviour, life has to be lived, and for it there are small remedies
which are available around us. Even the completion of the biography would give her a new start in her unhappy life.

In short, *Small Remedies* (2000) exposes the progress made towards the goal of female emancipation through representation and examination of the lives of India’s middle class women. It is a multi-layered story of female’s joy and suffering.

Another issue of the pathetic condition of women in the patriarchal society is *the unbearable life of widows*. Widows are not treated as human beings. They are deprived of their rights as female. They have to follow the rules and norms created by male ideology only. They don’t have open space for them even in their own house. They are considered as burden of the family as well as of the society.

Deshpande also highlights some of the crude practices in our society in *Moving On* (2004). She depicts the plight of an Indian woman becoming a widow at the early age. It is really painful that Jiji becomes widow at a very early age. She gets married at the age of eighteen and becomes a widow at the age of twenty, so hers is a very short married life. In the delineation of Manjari’s character, Shashi Deshpande throws ample light on how the public eye ravenously ogles the features of a widow.

Manjari has herself witnessed the forces of society trying dexterously to violate her widowhood. Deshpande makes us all aware of the dualistic treatment meted out to widows who become a thing of mockery and oppression. She makes us realize that we have moved from
a world of orthodox ideas where to maintain a marital bliss, women used to compose a silence about their bodies.

Manjari is a brave woman. Though she is a widow, to her marriage without love is not acceptable only for social security concern. That is why she has rejected Raja’s proposal of marriage. A loveless existence in wedded life is no less than mechanized life. In this way, she challenges the notion that a young woman cannot live without the support of a man in her life. she has developed her own space in the patriarchal society which is an important characteristic of the gynocentric study.

In all these novels, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed Indian women into three categories. Firstly, those who blindly follow tradition as a virtue, secondly those who realize what is good but still are unable to come out and thirdly those who are independent. To the first group belong to the uneducated women who look upon age old beliefs and superstitions. Narmada Atya, Kaki, Sumitra, Kamala, Sunanda, Kusuma, Shakutai, Vimala, Kalyani, Manorama etc. are remarkably traditional in their outlook, manner and matter. Akka too belongs to this category without selfishness or powerlessness. With the help of women like Kalyani, Mini, Sulu, Akka, Jeeja, Shakutai, Inni, Mohan’s mother, Savi, Mai and Kusuma, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the condition of women who are confined to tradition and lead a life of self denial and suffering. All these characters depict the pre dominance of marriage in a woman’s life. Their lives present the endless sorrow caused by forced incompatible arranged marriages. Analyzing from a woman’s point of view, Deshpande points the uneasiness of women in the traditional role which expects her to be an embodiment of suffering.
In the second category we can include Mini, Sindhu, Jiji’s Mai, Gayatri, Mira etc. who are educated and to some extent aware of the peculiar situation from which they cannot come out with their independent self. Lack of will, power and too much consciousness make them sacrifice. While Indu, Jaya, Sumi, Devayani, Leela, Savitribai Indorekar, Madhu, Manjari, Sumitra come in the third category in which they are independent and have liberated themselves from the impinging influence of the family.

Shashi Deshpande strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and expose the evils of society fearlessly. In the modern age, women are beginning to be very conscious of the fact that their rights are also human rights and all rights for all is the principles of equality, of opportunity for everyone in society. Woman’s self dignity, worth and quality will earn her stable position not only in family, but everywhere. Now woman is not lagging behind man but is rather abreast of him.

All these female characters of Shashi Deshpande’s novels share common experiences of working according to wishes and commands of the dominant culture, but yet reflect the woman centered approach. Elaine Showalter while discussing women’s writings inspired by women’s culture, says, “Women’s writing is a double voiced discourse that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted (women) and the dominant (men) (1988, 199). Shashi deshpande in her novels follows a male tradition but celebrates womanhood. She writes in the language of male - masters but sings the songs of women - marginals.
Shashi Deshpande’s women protagonists find themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by the society, attempt to assert the individuality, sensitive to the changing times and situations, they revolt against the traditions in their search for freedom. They succeed in achieving self-identity and independence and choose their partners in life to live with in pursuance of their felt need to lead a family life. Standing at a cross road of tradition, they do seek a change, but within the cultural norms so as to enable themselves to live with dignity and self-respect. So they are caught between a traditional upbringing and the longing for freedom in the modern sense.

The question arises here why women have allowed men to subordinate them? De Beauvoir discusses the female body and motherhood. For De Beauvoir marriage is an oppressive and exploitative economic arrangement, which reinforces sexual inequality and binds women to domesticity. The general belief is that if the female is protected and provided for by her male partner, she is happy. But by refuting this belief, De Beauvoir argued that the fulfillment of human potential must be judged not in terms of happiness, but in terms of liberty. Liberty is something more than maintaining one’s existence peacefully and comfortably.

Shashi Deshpande also aims to focus on the importance of family values. The tension created in the husband-wife relationship by the lack of understanding and mutual respect affects the familial relationships. The end of the novel shows that women are aware of the importance of family at the same time accepting their need to discover their ‘self’. Shashi Deshpande points the uneasiness of women in a traditional role which expects her devotion and a selfless bestowal of love and affection.
Returning home of the heroines is very symbolic which shows her victory over defeatism. Their perception is best expressed in the words of Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), “There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (Woolf: 1929, 76). Knowing that their mind and vision cannot be denied to them, knowing that they thus achieved personhood, achieved selfhood and self realization, find their voice. They return to society or become a part of it.

Shashi Deshpande shows her women seeking the solution of their problems within marriage. Intelligent and well aware they realize the importance of marriage but they are also aware of their own individuality. Thus, they strive to create a balance. Through a process of introspection and self – analysis they find a positive solution in the end. The importance of family leads them to the path of affirmation rather than rejection which is an important characteristic of the gynocentric study.

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are not her mouth pieces but emerge as living persons who possess personal traits and characteristics that set them apart from other characters. All these women seek a redefinition of the self. They try to pilfer their identity in a man made culture but do not want to jeopardize their inherent femininity in this process. This quest for self – realization is the basis of the creed of gynocentricism.

In Shashi Deshpande’s novels, there is a conscious attempt to represent the suppressed emotions of women and to assert their quest for independence in a concrete manner. Her women characters represent the cosmopolitan feminine struggle to live life completely as human beings.
A woman can be a wife, a mother, a friend, a companion and still be herself – be independent, be capable of having an energy which erases her conditioning and frees her from her psychic fears and the bondage of centuries.

Education has been regarded as an important instrument for changing women’s subjugated position in society. Their education should have given them the freedom and courage to do what they believe in. It should have given them determination to assert themselves as individuals. In fact, the educated Indian woman can light the path for her daughters. That seems to be Shashi Deshpande’s vision of the future. Education brings economic independence which in turn changes their outlook and the traditional belief of a superior husband and an inferior wife.

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. The change in woman as important member of the family directly influences the life of the family both physically and morally. Thus, as we say that “An educated mother makes her family and society also change”. Change will come about only if women themselves acknowledge and articulate the desire and need for change, actively seek to bring about change and honestly and openly engage with her demands such change imposes.

Shashi Deshpande has re – incarnated the new Indian women and has re - enforced the female dilemma in her novels. Her concern for women is reflected in her novels. Her regard for social problems,
especially of the middle class women is evident. She highlights that her novels could have been written only for women:

As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides only a woman could write my books – they are written from the inside as it were (Deshpande : 1991, 31).

In short, shashi deshpande’s novels are an epitome of women’s culture which narrates the grave experiences of women and their social pressure to live into the four walls of the house, which is completely true for most women even today. The women readers understand and appreciate a woman’s writing fully because all have common experiences of the male dominated culture. Shashi Deshpande in an interview said:

I find a lot of men unsympathetic to my writing and a lot of women extremely sympathetic. This is because the world is viewed in different ways by men and women. Women see a mirror image and men see, perhaps a deformed image of themselves (Carvalho: 1990, 15).

To conclude, Shashi Deshpande writes in accordance with the male tradition and still her writings represent strong shades of women’s writing. All her female protagonists with a long journey of struggle and oppression, come out as individual and find out their space and place in the Indian culture which is an important characteristic of the gynocentric study. In this way, if we evaluate Shashi Deshpande’s novels, they all are undoubtedly gynocentric.
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