Chapter 3
Into Their Silence

Technological development has empowered man with knowledge about the physical and the organic world, but the nuances of human relations still remain the most “mystifying thing.” Every human being, according to Shashi Deshpande, is involved with two kinds of relationships: person to person and person to society. It is necessary for women also to “live within relationships.” It becomes banal only when her variant roles are constricted and evaluated through a gender construct by the patriarchal society, though the difference between the sexes is only a biological factor. Yet legislators, philosophers, priests, myths and legends strive to “show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth.”

The vast gulf between the two spaces, the inner domestic space of the woman symbolized by the hearth and the outer ‘productive’ space of man symbolized by the world, always seeks to maintain the submissive, inferior status of woman. Any small change in the female consciousness will threaten the very existence of family. Any attempt to assert her self, her space, any attempt to disprove her otherness endangers the delicately maintained relationship between the sexes, particularly in marriage.

Animals mate, men marry. The institution of marriage is the central feature of all known forms of human society. Sociologists define it as a cultural phenomenon sanctioning a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring. Marriage is also a religious sacrament where men and women are bound in permanent union for the physical, social and spiritual purpose. Matrimony is often regarded in India as “the summum bonum of a woman’s life.” But often it degenerates into a weapon in the hands of the patriarchy to coerce and to silence. The new generation woman of changing consciousness, discontent with the rhetoric of equality, clamour for the right to establish her individuality.

The desire of the woman to revolt against the stereotyped roles assigned to her is well articulated by Deshpande. Indoctrined in the Indian cultural context her protagonists are victims of self-denial or suppression of their real selves. But denial
does not mean that the feelings cease to exist; they will still influence behaviour in various ways even though they are not conscious. A conflict will then exist between "the interjected and spurious conscious values and the genuine unconscious ones." 

Sarita, the doctor protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980; New Delhi: Penguin, 1990) represents the contemporary, educated, right-conscious, earning wife and her problem of adjustment in her tradition bound roles. Analysing her 20 year old marriage Saru realises the spurity of her self-assessment: "I had learnt it too, to create an image of myself for the world, to live within it hiding my real self so resolutely that at times I forget myself it was just a facade" (88). She proves to be a two-in-one woman: not merely the professional and the housewife, but one who conceals her divided self—the real and the ideal. This split personality springs from the sourness that pervades her marital life. In fact both Sarita and her husband Manohar are victims of schizophrenia: the perfect, confident, professional-cum-housewife during daytime and a trapped animal at night, the loving husband in the daylight and a sexual sadist in the dark. The novel opens with Saru’s horrible nightly experience of rape at the hands of an unrecognised figure which merges with that of her husband. The sexual assault, leaving her with a bruised mind and body, emanates from a threat to the conventional male superiority ego.

Through Saru, Deshpande highlights how “emancipation and success for woman in the patriarchal Indian society can cause subversion of roles in the family and destroy happiness.” The social status and recognition Saru gleans as a doctor and the demands on her time cleave a wedge in her marital life. The unexpected breaking of the news of her mother’s death by Prof. Kulkarni provides an opportunity to leave the “paradise of matching curtains and handloom bedspreads. This hell of savagery and submission” (28). Manu decides it as the return of the prodigal daughter to console the afflicted father. But her wants are simpler: “To sleep peacefully the night through. To wake up without pain. To go through tomorrow without apprehension” (27).

Using a double perspective, shifting of the narrative from the first person to the
third person in every alternate chapter, and juxtaposing past and present Deshpande portrays the sense of alienation confronted by the protagonist. Back in the ancestral home, which she had left on her marriage, Saru recollects three distant and distinct incidents instrumental in transforming her marital bliss to a monstrous invasion of her body. It all started with the explosion in the factory near their first residence. Together with the mutilation of human bodies it brought forth an explosion in their marital bond too. While it elevated Saru from the young bride to a venerable lady doctor, Manu was reduced to the status of the ‘doctor’s husband.’ Young and callow as she was, too exhilarated with dignity and importance on account of the namastes, nods and smiles she received for Saru, the doctor, she failed to note the change on the countenance of her companion. The same self-esteem that made her inches taller made him inches shorter. The conflict between her “achieved position and the ascribed position of Manu” gnawed their bliss sowing seeds of disenchantment. The egoclash became inevitable for she proved to be something more than his wife while he remained what he was. The $a+b=b+a$ equation, as Saru realises painfully, is true only in algebra but never in husband-wife relationship: “But here $a+b$ was not, definitely not $b+a$. It became a monstrously, unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible” (42).

Sex for the female is never a mechanical physical action, but an intense psychological and physiological act, the culmination of love. In the initial euphoric state sex, for Saru, had been a triumphant declaration of her love. The chawl residence was heaven inspite of the corridors smelling urine. But happiness always seems unreal to her, an illusion, an evanescent of which nothing is left except the sensations and feelings. Engrossed in her newly found dignity, the change in his tone and the indifference in his attitude passed her unnoticed. Though he remained a closed book, the exhilarating sexual experience lost its charm when she was fatigued after her long day at the hospital.

Manu’s “marginalisation from the centre to the periphery” was reinforced further by the tart remark of a friend’s wife: “If you had married a doctor . . . you’d
have gone to Ootty too" (111). It dampened their first holiday after the initial economic difficulty and shortage of time. The bitterness created by the taunt surfaced only at the middle of the night when he asserted his animal power over her. Saru feels humiliated at the thought of being used and reduced to a dark, damp and smelly hole when the unifying force of sex became an instrument of revenge. But the cheerful, caring mood of the same husband the next morning perplexes her as to whether he is a sham, a farce or a pretence. Caught between the reality of the bruised body and the solicitous behaviour of Manu she can not resist a gripping fear of disintegration. She fails to put the two men together, the fearful stranger of the night and the pathetic Manu of the day. This dichotomy never ceases to frighten her: "I felt a deadly fear. As I was isolated from everyone, from the whole world, by what was happening to me" (112).

In spite of our ancient masters celebrating sex through temple scenes, discussion of sex still remains a sensitive area. Like any other ordinary Indian woman, despite her profession, Saru too fails to give vent to her feelings, fears and frustrations. Her inability to discuss the matter creates a wall of silence between them. With each assault another brick is added until as she fears one day she "will be walled alive within it and die a slow, painful death" (96). The frantic search for a trusting face to confide herself ends in failure. Poojas, rituals and prayers only worsen her to feel like a fraud. The terrors of the night which vanish with the daylight incessantly reappear with darkness. Infact the traumatic inner landscape of Saru is "built around the metaphors of the ‘dark’ and the ‘light.’" *9 ‘Dark’ and ‘light’ symbolise her suffocative fear of sex and her longing to emerge out of the sickening state of humiliation, hurt and exhaustion. Revealing her problem seems to her as impossible and indecent as removing one's clothes in public. By unlocking the darkroom of her mind, she fears, she will reveal herself as the murderer of her husband. With all her unexpressed expectations, betrayal and bruises Saru feels like "a house full of unclean things, never cleaned, never opened" (29).

With the growing sense of disappointment and imbalance separation becomes
inevitable. But Deshpande heroines refuse to admit their failures because that would hurt their ego. They go on the pretence of success though they have proved to be fiasco. Saru does not belong to the generation of women like her own grandmother who accepted her deserted wifehood as fate. Two factors hold her back from a divorce, children and mother. She has refused to admit the skeleton firmly locked in the happy, healthy, ad-like family for it would profess true the warning of her mother, frequently invoked in her introspection, that love marriages would fail. Saru diagnoses that theirs is not a case of love dying but being affected by a kind of disease like syphilis or leprosy that cannot be admitted to others. The very concealment has made it gruesomely disgusting.

As Simone de Beauvoir opines “marriages are not generally founded on love.” That Saru’s marriage also sprang from her decision to outrage her mother than love becomes apparent in her admission, “If you hadn’t fought so bitterly, it you hadn’t been so against, perhaps I would never have married him” (96). Challenging the authority and domination of her mother she willingly succumbed to patriarchal domination, rather a victim of being a threat to it. Had it been founded on the solid rock of love and wisdom she would never have come back cringing from the sight of his letters, hating him and pitying him.

All through the dichotomy of hatred and pity Saru is aware of Manu’s predicament too. Though there is disparity in caste and cultural background they share one common factor: both belong to the same caste of self-hatred. The distance from Manu and their life together, safe in the calmness of her maiden home, provides ample opportunity to dispassionately analyse his motives. The realisation that what he does on her is the outcome of his own self-hatred troubles her, but she cannot resist hating herself for allowing him to torment her. Between her “desire to assert herself and her desire for self-effacement she is torn and divided.”

Pride in her career which becomes the only crutches to hold her disintegrating self too evaporates. If it has been her anodyne it is the cause of her disease too. She has diminished to a ventriloquist’s dummy for as long as there is a patient before her
she feels real: “Between patients there is nothing” (22). At the pinnacle of professional success Saru is tormented by a loss of identity. Deshpande employs dreams, nightmares and flashbacks to delineate the mental landscape of her protagonists. She conducts Saru back to the skipping contest of her schooldays to plumb the depths of her humiliation at the apex of her achievement: “And there it was success and humiliation inextricably linked together” (110). It is the temptation to ascribe to her gender role to avoid confrontation that makes her willing to shed the ‘doctor’ and become merely a lady. But the rational mind of Manu which is forced to accept her as the major provider of their luxurious lifestyle torpedoes her plan.

In the first stage of self-exploration Saru starts with self-flagellation. She is conscious that there is something in the male that is whittled down and ultimately destroyed by female domination. Experience at parental home had made her determined never to dominate. Yet paradoxically, her economic independence which is “insurance against subordination or suppression” becomes unknowingly the tool of her domination. The traditional status of man as provider is still strong in the Indian psyche. Instead of remaining a small boat towed by a larger ship, her allotted course in the gender realm, she becomes the ship itself. Sex therefore degenerates into a potent instrument for subordination. The speech that she conjures up for the college students, which she characteristically refuses to give, sums up the lesson Saru has learnt as necessary condition for a successful marriage: “A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he’s an MA, you should be a BA. If he’s 5’4” tall, you shouldn’t be more than 5’3” tall. If he’s earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees” (137).

Wielding efficiently first person narrative and flashback technique Deshpande analyses Saru-Manu relationship that “started in a romantic fashion.” Never being appreciated before, Saru fell before the first one for she had always thought of herself as “redundant, the unwanted, an appendage one could do without” (66). In the first flush of infatuation Saru considered herself privileged like the fisherman’s daughter courted by the king. All through her introspection Saru unconsciously
weighs the pros and cons of love-marriage against arranged-marriage. Unlike the wise daughter of the fisherman who sent the king first to her father, Saru gave herself unconditionally to love. Her act of defiance signifying a permanent break with her parents denies the chance to complain about her unhappy conjugal experiences. She married Manu to “attain autonomy of self and to secure the lost love in her parental home,” but the disparity of achievement leaves her thoroughly insecure.

The untainted happiness of early married life vanished soon as she became discontent, in her new role as career woman, with their shabby life-style and Manu’s indifference to it. When M. B. B. S failed to guarantee material prosperity it was her indomitable determination to succeed that urged her to become a flourishing professional with the help of her mentor, Boozie. The fact that Manu never protested against Boozie’s unusual partiality fills her with contempt. More than Boozie’s provocative behaviour to her in public on the day of the opening of the consulting rooms, it is Manu’s complacency that angers her. The extrinsic tranquility proved to be the precursor of the gathering storm. Saru recalls: “And they began then... the silences that grew between us. Just grew and grew like Jack’s beanstalk” (94).

Difference in social status between the spouses results in a shift of attitude. From a blindly adoring female Saru becomes disenchanted with Manu and his friends and their mesmerism with words. From the dynamic, romantic hero quoting Shelly and Keats he turns into a morose chauvinist, uncomfortable with the escalating ascendance of his wife. Manu fails to prove the versatile personality she had believed him to be. The clash between the two differing worlds of aspiration and achievement, of words and medicine widens the rift.

The estrangement reaches the climax with the interview for a special issue on career women. The interviewer’s casual query “how does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (182) blows the lid off the simmering pot. It undermines his confidence and status completely that the wounded male pride is satisfied by victimising the lady doctor to his bestiality. It turns the balance to his side when he grabs superiority through physical abuse in the darkness
of their private room. Through Saru, the novelist seems to imply that in the institution of marriage in the Indian milieu "an economically independent woman is still bound in shackles and must forever live in the fear of hurting the ego of her husband."15

The myth of self-sacrificing woman has always been scorned by Saru. But the gradual diminishing of the line of difference between those silly, stupid martyrs and herself forces her to lose all faith in the liberation of woman through education and employment. It is her own experience, her struggle to maintain her identity without destructing the gender role expected of her that reminds her of Betty Friedman's comment that "it was easier for her to start the women's lib movement than to change her own personal life" (107).

Indu of Roots and Shadows (1983; New Delhi: Disha Books, 1992) too feels suffocated in a marriage that fails to render physical or emotional satisfaction. She feels disillusioned and disintegrated with the denial of an assertive identity. Marriage denies her the fullness of experience. She is compelled to hide her "responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage" (38).

Deshpande exposes her protagonists "sandwiched between tradition and modernity, between illusion and reality and between the mask and the face."16 In her retrospection Indu realises that unhappiness in her married life has stemmed from self-surrender and self-abnegation. It is a marriage that suppresses her feminity, her human demands. Marriage that lacks the humanising influence of love becomes a hoax. Indu's rebellious love-marriage also deteriorates into a mere mechanical, physical affair when she is forced to curb herself "as if there was something shameful in total commitment" (143). It surprises her to discover that despite all his modernity Jayant still harbours preconceived notions of an ideal marriage.

Despite being the land of the Kamasutra woman is never expected to initiate sexual intimacy in the conservative Indian society. Jayant is shocked to find passion in Indu. It puts him off. Instead of her natural response she is forced to pretend, to be passive, unresponsive and still as dead on her nuptial bed. Sex loses all its
rejuvenating power when it becomes a onesided affair. The pain, frustration and
disappointment over the absurdity of her life is given vent to only in her intimate
tete-a-tete with Naren. Her hesitation to discuss her sexual dissatisfaction with
Jayant suggests the emotional polarity between them. As Ujwala Patil comments:
"By refusing to accept Indu’s real self, her human self, Jayant forces in her a state of
armed neutrality to life with him and mars the felicity of their relationship."¹⁷ She
too becomes an anachronism like him: a woman who loves her husband too
passionately and is forced to be ashamed of it.

When a woman is expected to negate her self and to behave in accordance with
the male construct of woman she finally fails to recognize herself. Marriage has
transformed Indu, as Naren observes, from the sharp-tongued to the toned. It has
taught her an immense capacity for deception too for she learns to reveal to Jayant
nothing but what he wants to see and hear. Her genuine responses and emotions
remain suppressed as if an expression of them would profane their relationship.
Emotional restriction reduces her to an automaton responding in the way it is
conditioned to do.

Usha Bande observes that the persistent denial of the right to express her feeling
“compels a duality of life”¹⁸ in Indu. Judging herself always from Jayant’s point of
view she belittles her claim of becoming an independent, assertive adult. Her likes
are conditioned by his wants: “Always what he wants, what he would like. What would
please him” (49). When she looks in the mirror she looks through the eyes of her
husband, when she dresses and undresses it is to please him. She has become a fluid
with no shape and form of its own. In becoming an ideal wife she has castrated her
real self. She loses the ‘I’ in her husband for she realises “without wants there is no
‘I’” (49). As purdah becomes part of the suppressed personality of a Muslim woman,
passivity becomes part of her consciousness. Education and employment do not
save Indu from fitting into the same groove of many an Indian woman who is
conditioned to believe that she has no identity save that of her husband.

Indu-Jayant marriage fails for they are on two different levels. He chooses his
level and in grooming herself to what he would like her to be brings only humiliation and discontent to her. Even a caring letter from Jayant fills her with the same cold, dead feeling after talking to him, making love to him. Her craving for commitment when not reciprocated with the same degree disappoints her. The realisation that when one’s expectations are pitched so high one is bound to be disappointed forces her to grade her expectations down. When it dawns on her that “neither love nor happiness come to us for the asking” (13) she prepares herself to wait.

Like Saru. Indu also had burgeoned into a flower of exquisite felicity through her initiation into physical relationship. But she feels the immeasurable distance between the idea of love and the reality. The small crack in the bond that starts with her passionate response to sex changes their life to one based on hypocrisy. There is no effective communication between them. His knowledge of her is limited only to those areas that are open to him. Fear of rejection prevents her to reveal her troubled inner world to him. As in the other marriages silence becomes an integral element of their life too. Indu ruefully remarks: “That was one thing I had learnt now. One thing my marriage had taught me. The gift of silence” (33).

A mathematical equation is employed by the novelist, once again, to suggest the difficult business of marriage: “The equation 2+2 = 4 is fine for Maths. But not for humans . . . leaving out that great incalculable . . . human emotions” (99). The realisation that for two people to merge into one identity is almost an impossibility dawns on her very late. Instead of becoming conscious of herself she fails to realise what her real needs are. There is a craving for success in Indu too, but doubts destroy her self-confidence. Hence she finds herself on the verge of bankruptcy: “What I had was nothing. What I wanted to have, I did not know” (105). At times she feels a sense of utter vacuity looming around her life. The thoughts that destroy her certainty and assurance remain unconfided, for like Maya of Cry, the Peacock, she is sure of his response: “Don’t be silly” (106).

Through flashback Indu re-lives her first meeting with Jayant which replaced her burden of uncertainty with absolutenes and certainty: “I had known then it was this
man and none other" (46). She considered herself whole in perfect communication with him. Indu feels cheated when it dawns on her that what is perfect understanding between them has been ignoring the vices of the other. Instead of providing harmony and happiness marriage has disintegrated her for she is forced to relinquish her identity before his masculinity. The cost of her marriage is her individuality. The realisation of the need to conform for survival and the awareness that conformity is the great destroyer of selfhood makes her cry out “I can never become myself” (34).

To become her whole self Indu too thinks of leaving her husband. But the knowledge that her withdrawal can shatter him forces her to act out a pleasant willingness that grates her insides.

The central figure in the novel is the perceptual emotional life of Indu. Through her protagonists the novelist “charts in a fictionalised version of the unacknowledged private world of a woman.” Contrary to Indu’s belief it is not her love alone that sustains their relationship through submission. The determination to avoid conflict results also from her earnestness to disprove her indomitable Akka who prophesied catastrophe for an inter-caste marriage. Hence she moulds herself to satiate Jayant for retaliation will certify her marriage as failure. Like Saru, Indu too clings to her marriage for fear of hurting her ego. She admits: “I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure. . . . And so I went on lying even to myself” (22).

The diametrically opposite temperaments also hinder perfect understanding. As S. P. Swain observes, “one is a writer in quest of an artistic selfhood while the other is a philistine in pursuit of materialistic happiness.” Indu’s decision to resign job, when it imposes demands on her individuality, is thwarted by Jayant for economic reasons. Self-alienation accelerates as the conflicting demands of her feminine desire to conform to the cultural ideal of feminine passivity clashes with her ambition to be a creative artist. More than her humiliation of succumbing to the demands of the editor, it’s Jayant’s failure to understand and support that hurts her.

Marriage to Indu is a trap, yet without the trap she feels rootless. With all her
education and exposure she has a nagging sense of loneliness and futility in his absence. The fury and frustration over Jayant’s letter confirms her love for him. Her hard won independence seems only an ephemera when she really questions herself. Marriage has made her so dependent. It baffles her that she who was determined to challenge and reform the traditional concept of Indian womanhood has slithered into the same trap. Hence Akka’s summons, like the news of the death of Saru’s mother, becomes a welcome relief: “A chance to get away. To avoid thinking about what was happening to me . . . to Jayant and me . . . and our life together” (18).

Marital friction is not necessarily an outcome of modernity and the liberation of women. Through the portrayal of Akka, the tyrannical matriarch who wields tremendous influence on her relatives, Deshpande highlights the traumatic effects of a traditional child-marriage. The story within the story narrated by Narmada Atya lays bare the wounded psyche of Akka which has altered her from an innocent, submissive female to a ruthless and dominant figure. What the nuptial bed did to her remains unknown except the fact that twice she ran away to her maiden home. Returning to her husband’s house, inspite of whipping and starvation, she preferred to be locked up rather than joining her husband. Her heart-piercing cry “lock me up again, lock me up” (70) reveals her intense desire to escape from him. Married at an age before realising the meaning of marriage, it became a punishment for her; the price she had to pay for all those saris and jewels.

Child-marriage stifled her childhood. Her tender soul withered under the sexual advances of her mate. The frightened child failed to satisfy a man twice her age who had a weakness for women. Like the Dowager Rani of Markandaya’s The Golden Honeycomb her inability to bear a child further belittled her status and was forced to witness his liaisons. The Indian society does not condemn a man who seeks pleasure in other woman. As Neena Arora remarks, “Man considers it as normal behaviour to satisfy his desire at both the emotional and physical levels outside marriage.” Like many other similar women Akka too endured and submitted to insults and humiliation with a deadly stoic patience. The same sexual and emotional abuse has changed her to an iron woman on his paralysis.
Deshpande tries to lay bare the innermost recesses of her protagonists who carry two selves. On the one hand “their inner self rebels to break away from tradition: while on the other, the cultural women archetypes thrust upon their psyche bind them to the tradition.”22 Jaya of That Long Silence (New Delhi: Penguin, 1998) too joins the Deshpande club of split-personalities. Vascillating between the two selves, ‘Suhasini’ steeped in tradition and ‘Jaya’ trying to break the shackles of tradition, the narrator-writer protagonist finds herself marooned on a no-man’s land unsure of herself. As the narrator’s mind switches back and forth the story travels from her childhood days to her ungratified married life. The crisis at her husband’s career jolts her from the external complacency, suddenly releasing all her dammed up emotions which fill the pages of a novel.

Jaya recalls her transformation from a carefree girl to an ideal wife who hides her true self. Despite being trained by a liberal father with no gender discrimination she finds herself married to an engineer whose only desire was to get married to “an educated, cultured wife” (90). If Saru and Indu married to rebel against the family, Jaya consented to the proposal after her initial protest for circumstantial pressures. Her marriage would not have taken place, as we gather from her retreat to the past, had her father been alive. However, the proposal was not thrust upon her for she had been guided by many other factors. Marriage to Mohan, since he demanded no dowry, would save her from an additional burden to her relatives and also offered an opportunity to get away from Ambegaon where she always felt as an alien. Dada, her brother, “had cleverly maneuvered into a position from which not marrying Mohan would have been childish, irresponsible and unfair.” (93). Hence like most other arranged marriages Jaya-Mohan marriage was also made for convenience, grounded on wrong reasons, unconcerned about the emotional affinity between them.

Sex becomes a necessary and intimating element in every marriage. But to a Deshpande protagonist it often becomes an instrument of power or an alienating element. Marriage and sex are two sides of the same coin but men and women see it differently. While men consider marriage as a license to physical intimacy, women
demand to be guided to sex through emotional intimacy. The difference in their attitude to sex pervades throughout their married life though it remains an area undiscussed between Jaya and Mohan as in the case of the other couples. Sensual memories remain the coldest in her for their relationship started with repudiating her theory of “first there’s love, then there’s sex” (95). Just as this marriage was his decision and her role was only to acquiesce, the physical intimacy also is taken for granted. Mohan, like most others of his gender, fails to realise that feminine sexuality is a complex phenomenon with its sensual and emotional overtures.

For Mohan sex is an act in itself, a silent wordless act, but for Jaya is an intense experience. Hence she too gets disenchanted, like Saru, after a romantic beginning where she earnestly followed the women’s magazine instructions to make herself appealing to him. Now after 17 years of living together the reality hits her: “he would have slept with me faithfully twice a week whether I creamed my face or not, whether I brushed my hair a hundred times or not, whether I wanted him or not” (96). Sex thus becomes a mechanical action which forces the woman to hide her feelings leaving her both ashamed and terrified of her frenetic emotions. She disciplines herself, like Indu, to sleep with him without desire. Sexual dissatisfaction leads her to doubt the very existence of emotional involvement between man and woman.

A backward glance reminds Jaya of the damages which have precipitated in their life together as a result of the diversity in their outlook. Mohan disdains the fanciful and is proudly matter of fact. His careful passion for neatness and order as against his own ancestral home clashes with Jaya for whom neatness is a hard discipline. Intent on achieving what he was deprived of in his past, he fails to empathise with the sensitive woman. This is, as R. S. Pathak remarks, “what ultimately alienates her from him, making family life unendurable.” Deshpande effectively utilizes the image of the shoe, the inside of which is filled with an unhealthy growth of fungus, to suggest the nature of their marital life.

The differing cultural backgrounds too aggravate the silence between them. In the Indian concept there are clearly segregated areas for men and women including
areas of work. The first quarrel between them resulted equally from her suggestion to cross his gender ascribed role to cook during the first months of her pregnancy and also from her comment on his mother’s profession as a cook. When she reciprocated his anger with her own, she once again transgressed her role. Mohan’s accusation “my mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her” (83) taught her to hold her anger on a leash. When the silence grew to days she was terrified of the dangerous nature and troubled to reconcile. The vocabulary of love, which she dreamt of developing between them, passes them by: so too that of anger. After the first disastrous foray into verbalising emotions that almost ripped their marriage apart, Jaya becomes tuned never to go “beyond those first basic mudras” (116). While Mohan finds strength in the silence of his mother’s subjugation, Jaya sees the deep rooted despair behind the mask of nonchalance and toughness.

The practice of giving a new name to a bride, a common Indian custom recurrent in Deshpande, is to “supersede or supplant the identity of the woman, which is in sharp contrast to the continuity, nay, reinforcing of the same familial identity of the male, an identity which is the product of patriarchal society.” The conflict between her maiden name Jaya and Suhasini, the mask imposed on her by marriage, symbolises the conflicting selves. The dichotomy between the two selves makes it impossible for her to identify with Mohan’s problems and remains aloof at the crisis. Jaya can distinguish her real self from Suhasini, a soft, placid, motherly woman, a woman who copes with life. Like the self-centred, worldly wise sparrow she remains inside the security of the hearth though it suffocates her. But it shocks her to realise that her long suffering, self-smothering metamorphosis has been in vain.

Many are double minded due to the controlling influences of the society. As Indira Bhatt opines, “Jaya is basically a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs.” There is no dearth of counselling and advice to a girl on the threshold of marriage. Inspite of her flippant attitude to the advice Jaya too finds herself compromising her stand for she has been
groomed of the importance and necessity of a stable marriage and family. Hence when there is the choice between family and individuality, like most other Indian women, she chooses the former. Strictly following Vanitamamie's advice she has been nurturing her 'sheltering tree' with deceit and lies. Back in her Dadar flat Jaya fears if too much watering has destroyed her married life as was the case of a Saptagiri plant. She has transformed even her external appearance so resolutely to suit his standards that at the final analysis there is "just emptiness and silence" (144). When her identity is relegated to the background she finds herself reduced to invisibility with nothing to distinguish her from Mehta's or Yadav's wife.

Domestic work usually provides woman with an occupation, an activity; but provides no escape from immanence and there is little affirmation of individuality. Family life becomes unbearable for Jaya for "few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition." Perusal of her diaries only provides a skeletal outline of that life leaving behind the essential core, the agonised cries of "I can't cope, I can't manage, I can't go on" (70). It shocks her to realise that the leit motif of her life has been reduced to what shall she make for breakfast or lunch. The unending monotony forces her to crave for a catastrophe to shake her out of the dull grooves, which unexpectedly arrives like a prize packet, a gift from her husband. Life would have continued, as before, punctuated by dreary quarrels had it not been for the disaster which forces the ignoble exile to the Dadar flat.

The return is ignominy to the small, drab flat disturbs the delicately balanced relationship founded on her firm determination to keep the balance on an even keel even at the cost of snipping off bits of herself. Since their marriage both of them have been scrupulously playing out their allotted roles. But now it seems she has forgotten her lines. Her refusal to hand him the keys of the flat is not relinquishment of his authority, but the outward manifestation of her long guerilla warfare.

Once Jaya enters her onetime residence she realises that "the ghost most fearful to confront is the ghost of one's old self" (13). Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time in her life she makes an attempt to decide who she
really is. In Deshpande novels the husbands are sure of their wants but the wives often remain vague about their likes and dislikes. Home coming helps Jaya to take stock of her relationship with Mohan, to review her life, to examine her inner self. So far, like the leg of a compass she was attached to Mohan. Her release from the Suhasini image provides a release from the maddening drudgery of the unchanging pattern of life.

Loss of the conundrum fills them with blankness and fear as though they have lost their props. Since he needs nothing Jaya finds her own career in jeopardy for he had been the propeller. The nothingness of what had appeared to be a busy and full life is frightening. With nothing to fall back upon they recede to the shelter of their silence. “Without the appurtenances of his official rank” Mohan becomes a pitiable shadow of his former self. The brash, arrogant facade cannot be maintained. Former self-assurance deserts him leaving behind a listless, frightened being demanding constant emotional and physical affinity. Jaya feels weighed down by the burden of his clinging to her which reminds her of Ramukaka’s eldest son, a hydrocephalic who could not move except his eyes that frantically searched for the mother. The enormity of his crime has erected a barrier between them. Communication has been limited to essential, functional level. Jaya admits: “The fact of what he had done, of what lay before us, came between us, an awkward, silent third, making comfortable conversation impossible” (55). In fact the whole novel is built around silence.

Each of them react to the crisis differently. While Mohan feels insecure, listless and unsettled like a confined animal Jaya remains engrossed in a thorough scanning of her self. Going through the corridors of memory she recalls the early phase of their marriage at Lohanagar from where Mohan manipulated a transfer to Bombay for the Gandhian motto of simple living and high thinking never appealed to him. Satiated with her elevation to the next level in the social ladder she had followed him like an ideal wife: “If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn’t want to know anything” (61). The Gandhari-like bandaging does not save her
marriage. Cracks become discernible affecting her mental and emotional equilibrium. Now the same blind acceptance makes her ashamed before her neighbours for she fails to conjure up a story to reason their unusual stay in the Dadar flat. The shameful retreat is communicated through the image of the village women who squat behind the bush whisking their saris over their faces. Jaya compares them to those women who never mind and feel safe as far as the intruder doesn’t know whose bottom it is.

In his moment of crisis Mohan expects his wife as a buffer to soften the impact of his guilt for he considers her as an associate in his crime. It is this attempt of the transfer of responsibility that determines her no longer to concede any authority to him. Further, herself tossed up in an emotional turbulence she fails to function as an anchor to hold him fast. Unaware of her problems, her inability to respond seems to him ‘just don’t care’ attitude. Confronting her own ghosts, she can only listen to his attempts at exorsising his ghosts which itself is an act of care. Jaya, unlike Sonia of Crime and Punishment, is unable to disburden him of the crime. When herself needs a pillar to lean on, Mohan’s demand is left uncatered to and he feels cheated. Her long silence is seen as an act of defiance which provokes him to leave the flat throwing a league of accusations. The angry outburst marks the death of Suhasini: “We had killed her between us” (120).

The one who had tethered herself to the millstone of marriage out of a sense of conformity begins to vegetate in the absence of her husband. With Mohan away Jaya finds herself in the category of unwanted, deserted wives. When the mood of loneliness and truncation overpowers her, she realises the need for a reorientation. Though “for a woman the waiting game starts early in childhood,” (3) Mohan’s absence in the Churchgate flat devastates her. The recurring dream of desertion is actually a projection of her inner feeling of insecurity, the fear of widowhood and desertion. In her delirium she becomes almost akin to Kusum who had always been the measuring scale of her sanity. A girl on the threshold of marriage never lacks advice but Jaya realises to her dismay that she has not been tutored what to do when
a marriage is over. The neurosis in her case is caused by the repressed, bottled up feelings which rush to her mind in the absence of Mohan. The limbo of waiting in anxiety provides her a chance to ponder over her different roles. Her sense of being unique and extraordinary on the one hand, which was implanted by her father who named her Jaya for victory, and “the mythological archetypes such as Sita and Draupadi which formed the other self of her psyche led to the split in her consciousness.”

She realises that she has mutilated her self in her attempt to fit in to the Procrustean bed of society, culture and tradition.

The novel is not only about Jaya’s efforts to obliterate the silence that is suffocating her, but also about the despair and resignation of other “victims of patriarchy and also their silence.” Behind the facade of toughness, nonchalance and surrender of her mother-in-law, Jaya perceives a despair too rooted to be articulated.

The invariably pregnant mother symbolises the powerlessness of the woman who had no say over her body. The desperate attempt to abort the child with the help of the midwife ends her life, much to the shame of the children. The silence in which Mohan’s sister bleeds to death with an ovarian tumour links her to her mother for she too is aware of the conditioned response of a patriarchal system to a barren woman.

The plight of Kusum reiterates the theme of alienation. Deshpande never sees people in isolation: they are part of families. In her novels there is “doubling and identification of characters or doubling and contrast.” Jaya contrasts Kusum, who always carried the aura of defeat, with her brother who always created an aura of success even in his failure. For Jaya, Kusum was what she would have been and what she is not. The unhinged Kusum, who refuses to believe that she is an unwanted element for her children, ends her rootlessness in the well. Jaya becomes perilously close to her, but deliberately moves away. The childless Vanitamani found a kindred spirit in Kusum for both of them were “born failures, born losers” (45). Always dominated by either her mother-in-law or her sister-in-law she was not unlike Kusum who was always ignored.

The force of Deshpande’s indictment of women’s lives lies in the way she is able
to universalize their condition “chiefly by drawing similarities among Jaya and a variety of other female figures, including characters from Indian history and myth and among different generation of women of her class and otherwise.” 32 Jeeja, Jaya’s house hold servant stands as the epitome of Indian woman who maintains the status of a husband for keeping her kumkum intact. Despite brutality from a good for nothing drunkard husband she continues to work as the provider for the family. Manu could not have hoped for a more steadfast follower. The same fate follows her daughter-in-law and the granddaughter too will inherit her qualities. Both the lower woman tied to domestic chore and the educated woman want to cling to marriage for failure in matrimony is considered to be her bane.

Thematically as well as ideologically Deshpande novels exhibit a continuity. “From the point of view of intertextuality we find not only traces of one novel in the other but also obvious repetitions.”33 The innermost recesses of a female heart are brought to light through the perspectives of Urmi. If Mohan’s suspension provides Jaya a dip into the past, the death of her little child chances a painful retreat into her self and her relation with others though Urmi feels trapped in the present. There is no escape from the pain. The death of Anu plunges her into morbidity and the gradual progress of the self through darkness, revolt and reconciliation is what is traced through Urmila’s experiences in The Binding Vine (London: Virago, 1993).

The two pivotal events in the novel that lead the protagonist into an analysis of women’s issues are death and rape. Yet the novel sheds ample light into the marital life of Urmi to recognise her as a deeply split personality between her desire for Kishore and his continuous absence. Once again Deshpande concentrates on the meaninglessness and sexual confusion confronted by women in tradition-bound institutions. The relationship between married couples of different categories during the ancient and modern times finds an anchorage in the novel. Divided into four harmonious parts, each introduced by epigraphs from the poems of Mira, the novel delineates the stories of three women--Kalpana, who is unconscious throughout, Mira, a poetess who is now dead and Urmila, her daughter-in-law who
discovers Mira’s poems and exposes the case of Kalpana. “But Urmila is more than a filter, a medium through whom the other stories come through, she is also part of the overall theme.” Deshpande hints at a certain trait of alienation in their marriage because Kishore remains a closed book.

Like most other marriages in Deshpande, Urmli also had a love-marriage. She recalls how she fell in love with Kishore at the age of fifteen. The breathlessness of that moment when she fell headlong into that emotion is still perceptible: “It was the day my grandfather died” (163). The unnatural death of her grandfather with whom she was residing alone singled Kishore out of the rest of the humanity who was till then “only Kishore, Vanaa’s rather strange, aloof brother” (163). The obtention of a letter from him three years later filled her with a sense of having manipulated his feelings by the strength of her own. Yet when reality confronts her, Urmi finds it difficult to cope with her marriage to one who fits into her life a few months a year and fits out again leaving nothing of himself.

Though Urmi believes in the anchoring power of love, she finds that their marriage is not founded on it. Nothing could touch the ecstasy that filled the early romantic phase of her love. It bestowed on her immense strength to remain confident and fearless. But somewhere on the way that confidence seems to have been replaced by the fear of Kishore not returning, not wanting to return. The very first night instilled in her the sense of distance between them. His parodying of marriage supported that trapped look on his face: “The two of us in a closed-room, and we can’t get out. That’s marriage” (137). It is her strong determination to prove him wrong that made her walk out of her nuptial bed, the very first night. Despite their years of familiarity this first walkout remains undiscussed.

The permanent detached look on his face stifles her emotion. Each separation from him is painful but the words “each time you leave me, the parting is like death” (139) remain unuttered except in her fantasy. Hence the relationship crumbles because of lack of communication. Though she escapes her culture bound role by remaining financially independent, she cannot elude the role of a sex-partner. Each
time she attempts to articulate her emotional insecurity during his absence, he asserts his sexuality. The archetypal Indian husband that he is, he fails to fathom the depth of her feelings. While Kishore prescribes sex as a solution to her problems, it is only a temporary answer to her. The closeness remains only at the physical level, it never deviates into the emotional level. It is this incompatibility that drives Urmi to a second walkout into the roar of thunder immediately after sex, just before the death of Anu. Experience forces her gradually to realise her inability to remove Kishore’s mask: “Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something in him I will never reach. I have lived with the hope that some day I will” (141). Silence stretches between them. Marriage is found to be degenerating when there is no emotional involvement. Sex alone cannot sustain a meaningful relationship.

Sexual starvation is equally dangerous. The realization of the need for sex in marriage is effectively suggested by Deshpande. It is “a marriage that suppresses Urmi’s human demands, a marriage that denies her fullness of experience.” Like any other normal human being Urmi too is haunted by erotic feelings during the long absences of Kishore working in the merchant Navy. Sometimes she finds it difficult to stifle her physical desires. When he leaves she finds in herself a frantic grappling for his image. On his return they pick up their lives from the moment of his return, rejecting the intermittent period of her longing. Though their physical passion remains intact, the intensity of her bodily hunger during his absence frightens her: “I often wished I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out, intact and whole, when he returned” (165). When love degenerates into a physical affair Urmi withdraws herself from him wrapping herself in a cocoon, never revealing her needs to him. Like the other protagonists of Deshpande, Urmi finds that even to the basic needs of life like love, marriage and sex the modern Indian woman finds herself in a state of utter confusion.

The comparison of the back of a bride’s neck waiting for her first night to a lamb waiting for the butcher’s knife to come down on it proves true in the case of Urmi’s mother-in-law. Deshpande employs Mira’s diary and poems to reveal once again a
rape in marriage. The heart rending story of Mira "seems parallel to the equally, or even more disgusting story of Kalpana."36 Arranged-marriage, to Urmila, is an absolutely cold-blooded affair where the female feelings are ignored and she remains vanquished throughout life. Married to a man at the age of eighteen Mira could find no solace in her husband who loved her too passionately. The diary bears eloquent witness to her intense dislike for the sexual act. Her cry of rage and anguish "Why does it have to be me? Why can’t he leave me alone?" (67) reaches out to Urmila across the years.

The invasion of one’s body “eventhough sanctified by marriage, can be as traumatic as rape.”37 But forced sex in marriage is not wrong to the traditional male psyche governed by the Manuian dictates. Mira’s cry represents the age old cry of women suppressed under the veneer of marriage. Perusing the voluminous pile of writing left by Mira, Urmi is able to reconstruct the tragic tale of a bud withered before blooming in an incompatible marriage. The poems highlight her repulsion for the man she married. Difference in age or generation does not necessarily effect a change of female experience in Deshpande. Urmi finds in Mira a predecessor to herself (and all other Deshpande women) who tries to hide her true self in self-defense. The diary reads: “I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings” (67). The ill-matched marriage sowed in her only a distaste for love when it was misunderstood as mere lust or physical passion. He never realised the need to develop an emotional bond with the sensitive girl before expressing his passion for her through sex. Hence like the child-bride (who later became Akka) of Roots and Shadows Mira lived “fearing the coming of the dark-clouded, engulfing night” (66).

The diaries and the poems complement each other, each gap filled by the other. But strangely enough, they reveal little about the family she was married to, apart from a few hints. Urmi fails to fathom the pains of Mira and Vanaa on their separation from family on marriage. Unlike Jaya, when re-christened as Nirmala, Mira rejected the forced identity:
Nirmala, they call, I stand statue - still
Do you build the new without razing the old?
A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold
Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira. (101)

And steadfastly remains Mira until she dies in childbirth

Deshpande equips Urmi with emotional stasis to bond with the agony of her dead mother-in-law and the anguish of Shakutai. Woman is sometimes reduced to an instrument for physical pleasure and procreation. While women in the West could protest against it, conditioned by the cultural ethos, Indian woman still fails to assert themselves. While Mira joins Saru in silently suffering the nightly assaults, Shakutai is a deserted wife who is forced to manage single handedly her home and children. Yet she is the typical Indian woman who hankers after the marriage of her own daughters for social security and for fear of society which will blame only the abandoned wife if the girls go astray. Mulk Raj Anand writes: “No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy . . . and make male young into wanton animals who assault any possible victim when possessed by lust.”

The idea of marriage providing security to the woman is well established in the Indian society. It is indeed ironic that in order to avoid exploitation of one kind they willingly succumb themselves to another.

Women pine for love and understanding in marriage. But to Shakutai, the greatest misfortune in her life has been marrying the good-for-nothing husband who demanded her body even without any privacy. Marriage has transformed the efficient and sweet sister of Shakutai to a frightened creature who belittles herself to appeal her niece to become her husband’s second wife in order to safeguard her position as a childless wife. A marriage based on fear will end only in disaster. The married lives of these women, both working and nonworking ends in disenchantment. Through Sulu and Mira, Deshpande suggests “how the institution of marriage can sometimes shatter the self-confidence of a person and transform a vivacious girl into a fearful and nervous woman.”
The marriage of Akka, Kishore’s step mother, also turns sour because it had never been a union of souls. She had been prewarned of his obsession with his first wife and son. In fact he never wanted a life-partner, only a mother to the child. But she stoically accepted to live under the shadow of the dead for like many others marriage for her was an unavoidable necessity.

That education and employment have not exonerated Indian woman from the grip of tradition becomes evident through Vanaa, Urmī’s friend and sister-in-law. Submissive and malleable Vanaa serves a foil to Urmī who urges her to become assertive. Though it is the mother who bears the child it is the husband who decides the number of children. Vanaa’s intense desire to have a third child is thwarted by Harish not because of any genuine concern for his wife but on reasons of economics. Despite her exposure to the external world she “let him bulldozern and “crawls before him” (81) for her inability to liberate herself of the set images.

Deshpande transcends into the broader arena of alienation that goes beyond the level of matrimony in A Matter of Time (New Delhi: Penguin, 1966). “A composite study in human relationships,” the novel explores the intricate relationships within a family concentrating on three generations of women. Like any other Deshpande novel, this also begins with a crisis leading to physical as well as emotional alienation. It deals with the abrupt disintegration of Gopal’s happy family. When after 20 years of married life Gopal suddenly declares his decision of renunciation, his wife Sumi retreats into a shocked silence. The use of third person narrative denies a chance to gauge the effect of the shock when Gopal unceremoniously breaks the news to a T.V. watching wife. Though she had a premonition of something unpleasant approaching, his words coming to her against the background of clown’s song “Jeena yahan, marna yahan, iske sivajan kahan” leaves her unperturbed except for ramming of her head for an interpretation of the song. The realisation dawns on her only later when she abruptly gets up at three in the morning and “finds herself alone in the bed, the pillow by her side cold and smooth, the other half of the bed unrumpled, the blanket still unfolded. So it is true what he told her, he meant it, he’s already done it” (9).
Sumi exhibits tremendous will power to pick up the broken threads of life. One wonders whether that part of her self that can sense and feel has departed with Gopal. Unlike Jaya of That Long Silence she “does not crumble to pieces at the pain and humiliation inflicted on her.” Surprisingly her only grudge towards her Budha-like husband is leaving her the task of intimating her daughters the fact that their father has walked out on them. Once the truth dawns on her she is able to see the picture with a detachment that surprises everyone. But beneath the apparent, unperturbed composure of Sumi is a kind of blankness that suggests her disorientation. Only when she returns with her three daughters to the shelter of the Big House that the dam that she has erected with her silence breaks.

The Hindu tradition envisages four stages in a man’s life--Brahmacharya, Grahasthashrama, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. Having relished both Brahmacharya and Grahasthashrama, Gopal has moved forward to experience the third stage which ultimately will lead to Sanyasa. It is only in the darkness of her room Sumi realises the sense of dejavu. Just as it takes time to share your life with another person, it is equally difficult to get used to the sense of being lonely. It is not loneliness that is her enemy, but a sense of alienation. She wonders whether her children accuse her of occasioning the desertion. Tracing her mind for past incidents that hint his desertion she remembers that Gopal never believed in sa-hriday, in the sense of oneness. Ramesh’s narration of how Gopal suddenly decided to leave his sister in Bombay to join a college in Shivpur affirms the potential in him to walk out on his family. Hence while others are pondering over possible reasons, Sumi knows that “the reason lies inside him, the reason is him” (24).

A close look at her marriage instills in her the feeling that they belonged to two different realms, though each succeeded in merging with the other. The unexpected quirks in Gopal that first fascinated Sumi ceased to be amusing in marital life. It was her stubbornness, as Sumi recaptures now, to break out of her father’s authority that engendered in her a boldness to spend a night in Gopal’s room forcing him to accept her into his life. Immature at the age of eighteen life was a joke for her to understand
that there was something in him untangeable for others. The lack of understanding though not created any problems becomes clear when she comments: “She (Gopal’s sister) knew him, yes, she did, much better than I did. Or still do” (24). Their differing views on destiny reiterates the conflicting attitudes to life. The word ‘destiny’ was as innocuous as a domestic cat to Sumi for whom living was just like a magician’s bag, full of odds and ends. Life was chance, but nothing predetermined. But a magician, being an entertainer never takes the chance of ugly frightening things out of his bag. Hence Gopal’s theory seems to fit better now to Sumi: “Destiny is just us, and therefore inescapable, because we can never escape ourselves. Certain actions are inevitable because we are what we are” (26). She refuses to question Gopal on his proclamation of desertion for she knows that he who gave an impossible metaphysical reason for resigning a job would provide an equally complex answer. Yet she wants to know how he who held that men are shaped by the age and the society can turn his back on everything in his life.

With Gopal’s absence, the swift flowing stream of Sumi’s life, her movements and thoughts have slowed down. It is only a necessary physical reaction to her emotional state. Sumi wilfully tries to transform her traumatic inertia into meaning in order to preserve herself and also for her children. Deshpande aptly employs the bird image to communicate Sumi’s mental stage: “Like a stunned bird coming back to life, there is a frenzy of movement, a tremendous flurry of activity, a frenetic shaking of feathers. Sumi cannot be still” (28). With remarkable swiftness she dispels melancholy or nostalgia because of the realisation that her breakdown will shatter her children.

The Big House provides safety for the four females, yet Sumi experiences a sense of homelessness and rootlessness. Though she shows no outward sign of distress, “has an air of being lost, of having no place in her childhood home” (33). Her need for constant physical contact is a manifestation of her sense of insecurity. In her alacrity the children discern a kind of purposeless extravagance, an exaggeration that is different from her normal vivacity and quickness. Gopal never was over
protective, yet his absence leaves a vast emptiness: “I can’t find my bearings, there are no markers any more to show me which way I should go” (36). This dichotomy between the stoical and the lost runs throughout the rest of her life.

“Centuries may separate us from the mythical figures of yore, but even today a woman’s worth is measured only through her marital status.” Gopal’s desertion is not just a tragedy, it is both a shame and disgrace to the family. Ironically, the disgrace clings not so much to the man who abandoned his family but to the wife who is left behind to moor the despair filled hearts. Deserted like Yasodhara, she has to endure comments from people like Shankar’s mother who always support the subjugation of women: “You should be with him... Go back to your husband, he’s a good man. If you’ve done wrong, he’ll forgive you. And if he has - women shouldn’t have any pride” (161).

In this novel Deshpande, for the first time, attempts to understand the male psychology. In fact the voice of Gopal highlights the unheard misery of Sumi when he recapitulates on their blissful intimacy. Though he fails to articulate the reason for his desertion it becomes clear that he relished every moment of his life as father and husband. Gopal undoubtedly exonerates Sumi of anything to do with his decision. His humiliation by the students and resignation of job offer no valid reason for his walkout on the family. It seems even he is not aware of the specific reasons. Vague references to his past by Gopal reveal that the Hamlet-like marriage of his parents and later their gruesome death had created a void in his mind. The revelation that his only sister did not share the same father with him cut away the very foundations of his life. His ruminations establish that he had been nurturing a sense of loneliness and desolation right from his childhood.

The metaphysical question of the meaning of life runs as an undercurrent in Gopal’s narrative. He is disillusioned with human ties which to him are only a masquerade. Plagued by an emptiness, which had been submerged for a time in his absorption with Sumi and his children, he feared its disastrous effect on them. He had witnessed the same fear of emptiness engulfing his sister consequent on the death of her husband and her terminal illness.
The poignancy of what they have lost in the swift dismemberment of the family is projected when Gopal admits how he “needed her, her warmth, her humanness and womanness” (68). Premi is shocked to see the carelessness with which they have cast away such an intimate, valuable friendship. Gopal, though separated from Sumi, still remembers how he found ‘Ananda’ in Sumi, an echo of the same joy Purandaradasa had found in his Lord Vithala: “I was close to that great mystery, the otherness of myself. And I got it, a glimpse of the purest joy, the purest metal, untouched by any base alloy” (89). But the bliss was only momentary. Gopal confesses to Premi that the miracle failed for him leaving nothing. Budha could fill his feeling of emptiness with compassion for the world, but for Gopal there was nothing. He envied Sumi, he admits, for a life within her is enough reason for a woman to live whereas for a man the meaning has to be found in his own life. Even the body responded to the mental condition. After the feeling of humiliation of his inability to sustain his physical excitement he knew their marital bliss was over. He realises: “marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes - a lifetime of commitment - is not possible for all of us” (69).

The unpreplanned meeting between Sumi and Gopal leaves a burden of unsaid things between them. Yet they continue with the trivial for silence is more treacherous. It is when she gets a glimpse of Gopal’s new life that she feels the reality of his life apart from her and children. She painfully understands the actuality of their separation: “We can never be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives are diverged, they now move separately, two different streams” (85).

Sumi copes admirably with her role as a single parent; bears her status as a deserted wife with equanimity sheltering inside a deathlike silence. Her very silence, however, conveys her pain more effectively than words can. She clearly informs Gopal that she has not been the force behind Aru for suing against her father. Fiercely independent like Urmi, she refuses financial help from her parents, friends
and relatives by taking a teaching job. The past comes filtered through memories. But Sumi has resolutely turned away from her immediate past, preparing herself for the future. Though she feels rudderless, “she fully realizes that tying a lacerated heart to one’s wrist as it were and showing it to the world is meaningless.” Only when Sumi confides in Devi we realise which self she has been parading before others.

It has been important for Sumi to contain her feelings about Gopals’ desertion within herself. Only in this way it has been possible for her to cope. Even while celebrating her last pay packet her tone gives no indication that she is worried by the prospect. Anxiety about money, like “the by-now familiar incubus of loneliness” (194) becomes almost a relief after the inexplicable, haunting fears. She sets Gopal completely free declaring their life together as complete. Yet with the final gruesome tragedy when Sumi has been all set to make her life meaningful, “The Big House watches one more generation going down in history and one generation writhing under the impact of a relentless fate.”

The fate of Kalyani’s marriage is more poignant than her daughter’s. An intelligent girl prophesied by her doting father to become the first woman engineer is forced into a marriage with her maternal uncle to safeguard her mother’s marital status, to retain the property within the family. The cultural devaluation of girls is reflected in the psychology of Indian women. According to the Brahadaranyaka Upanishad it is the son who frees his father of all his sins. Therefore he is called a son. “By his son a father stands firm in this world” (1. 5. 17). It is this belief that made Manorama ruthless in arranging her only daughter’s marriage. Without a son she felt insecure, terrified that her husband would remarry. Hence despite the risk of abnormality in consanguineous marriage Shripati was forced into a marriage to repay his debt to his sister. Marriage degenerates into a pawn. The crack in their marriage has resulted from the loss of the four-year-old abnormal son in the medley at a railway station. Refusing to forgive his wife’s negligence Shripati left her on the platform forcing her ultimately to go back to her parents with her two daughters. That act of public desertion is “a memory so painfully blotted out that to bring it back to
life would be as painful as the process of childbirth" (144). Shripati returned, not for
the sake of his wife and children, but on the request of his sister on her death bed.
Living in the same house on two floors with stony silence in between, connected only
by a hanging bell, they live a totally estranged life. It is not by Kalyani but through
Sumi and Premi that Deshpande stresses the poignancy of Kalyani’s loss. Aru
wonders why Kalyani still signs her name as Kalyani Pandit. Widowhood is
considered a curse. But for Kalyani her life in the tomblike house is worse than
widowhood. Her wifehood becomes almost a compensation for all her privations:
deprivation of a man’s love, the companionship and contact that any wife craves for.
It is the same traditional attitude to marriage that makes Kalyani’s futile attempt to
reunite Gopal and Sumi despite her own experience. Though her kumkum is intact,
which enables her to move with others with the pride of a wife, she has ceased to be
a wife at least since the loss of her son.

History repeats itself through Sumi and Gopal though the difference between
the two pairs is too conspicuous. It is the emptiness of life that induces Gopal to
desert his family. Sumi seems to have inherited her nonchalance from her mother
who is forced to suffer silently behind a facade. Kalyani is punished to live with the
psychic wound of guilt and forced widowhood. Sumi wonders whether this savagery
was only an excuse that helped Shripati to get out of a marriage he had never wanted.
For 35 years she has remained a silent passive sufferer. Her silence denies her a
chance to exonerate her of the accusation. A marriage arranged purely on account
of an expediency, the loss of the abnormal son, Shripati’s enforced obligation to his
sister—all these paved way for “the hopelessness that lay within the relationship that
doomed it from the start.” The great wall of silence built between them remains
intact till his death. The fact that Kalyani can mourn his death only by her blood
relationship with him reiterates the bygone death of her husband.

Silence forms an insistent metaphor in Deshpande. To her protagonists it
becomes a part of their lives, a distinguishing mark. “Very few women in India are
encouraged to leave behind them anything other than silence.” Deshpande does not
extol this Indian habit of silence on the part of women but shows it as a weapon in the hands of men, a punishment inflicted on women. *A Matter of Time* has over three decades of silence at its heart. While it is used by Saru, Jaya and Indu as a protest against threat to their individuality, as a strategy to maintain their troubled marital relationship, the silence that is imposed on Kalyani is ugly, not companionable.

The same destructive silence permeates into the life of Madhu and Som in *Small Remedies* (New Delhi, Viking, 2000). As Madhu, the narrator departs to Bhavanipur to write the biography of Savitribai Indorekar, the grande dame of the Gwalior gharama, she reinforces their mute parting at the railway station: “There’s no pretence of conversation between us, he stands outside silent and motionless” (20). In her attempt to reconstruct the life of Bai, as she goes back and forth in time remembering and retelling the stories of Leela, Bai and Munni, she unfolds her own story: a life transformed in one traumatic moment which took away everything she had loved and believed--her marriage, her son and very nearly her sanity.

Most people unquestioningly accept their lives until some catastrophe shake them out of their complacency. As Deshpande admits her “novels always begin in a moment of crisis.” The separation of Madhu and Som seems to emanate from the loss of their only child. Seeing the other partner reflects one’s own grief, guilt and anger over the incident. In his silence she hears her own questions leaving sharp points of piercing pain for they are “like twins, mirror images reflecting each other’s physical selves, each other’s souls” (107). To remember makes life impossible for her. Hence her quick acceptance of the assignment on Bai’s biography, to be far removed from Som and Bombay.

Using flashback Deshpande traces Madhu’s marriage maturing from friendship to love. Infact, like Sumi and Gopal, each of them relishes every moment of their life for each could merge with the other. With her marriage she gained everything she lacked, a family, a friend and a child. Som’s involvement and success in his profession as a doctor or her own obsession with her motherhood, nor the passage of time do not in anyway hinder their mutual understanding. It begins, unexpectedly,
with the revelation of an unpleasant incident in the past long submerged in her unconscious and which surfaces with the sight of the painting titled “Mistress” at Rekha’s exhibition. The almost perfect married life of Som-Madhu tumbles down with “a nightmare that is the beginning of the nightmare” of their lives (259). The past which her present comfortable, contented life overtakes returns with the nightmare of the deadbody in the sack which she recognises as that of the man who slept with her at the age of sixteen. Words often cannot contain the weight and vastness of the truth; it can give only a partial picture. Unburdening the terror of the gruesome death to Som, she fails to anticipate the effect it produces on their blissful married life. Overnight it shoves her from the pedestal of the chaste and untouched girl he married to the molested, destroyed girl. Suddenly she becomes a stranger to Som, a woman whom he didn’t recognise. It transforms him from a genial, easy-going man to a savage, destructive, hating her and hating himself.

Madhu is unable to comprehend the attitude of Som who himself had a premarital relationship. Our society is conditioned to accept male immorality while the slightest deviation, or rape by the same male categorises the female as immoral. The enormity of the past incident, which had lost its significance during the traumatic period of her life—her father’s illness and death, which incidentally had been the cause of the incident—confronts Madhu only in her present. It is not the incident itself but how it mars her marriage that makes her repeatedly regret her confession. The weight of his grief, anger and suspicion burdens her. By the time she regrets her sharing the past with him, it has already been too late: “I’d taken the plunge and there was no parachute I could open, nothing on the ground to soften my fall” (266).

Mutual trust is the ground on which a marriage is built. Without trust there can be no truth. While Madhu was trying to focus on the painter’s suicide consequent on his unpreplanned association with his friend’s daughter, Som holds up to the single act of sex. Som dismisses the truth of their blissful life together with his insistence on “Tell me the truth” (254). Her refusal to guarantee the truth he wants to hear is not protest in any way, but the fact is that such a truth never exists. Infact it is a
struggle between two levels of truths. He fails to understand how her emotional turmoil over the loss of her father dwarfed the importance of the unwholesome incident.

Like Manu, Som too resorts to use sex as a means of vengeance. The concealed violence both frightens and infuriates her. Though her body responds in the accustomed way, it is only a shadow of their earlier love-making. If the brutal sex of the postnightmare period has been an expression of his anger at the destruction of his belief in her chastity, refusal of physical contact which immediately follows symbolises his total estrangement. When in his anger and frustration Som suspects her of infidelity dragging even her brother Tony into suspicion, the wall of silence rises between them: “It’s when he adds, in desperation, I now think, Tony’s name to the list that I retreat into silence. I will no longer answer him, I will say nothing, I will deny nothing” (256). But the silence effects a bigger barrier between them than words have been able to. Locked in the silent, fearful struggle they exhaust themselves. Deshpande compares their self-destruction to two travellers embarked on a terrible journey, rocketing at a dangerous speed, unable to help themselves. It is for the sake of children that many estranged couples keep a superficial garb of marriage. The mask that Madhu and Som manage to wear during the daylight degenerates into a nightmare with Adit safely ensconced in his room. With Adit’s death there is nothing to hold them together.

While circumstances and age diminish the enormity of Madhu’s unpleasant, premarital sexual encounter, the other protagonists are not entirely blameless in nurturing extramarital affairs. The disillusionment in marital life often make them look for other avenues. In most Deshpande novels “the protagonist shares a greater level of compatibility with a man other than her husband.” This compatibility often leads towards crossing the boundary of platonic relationship and progresses towards physical attraction. Saru’s relationship with her professor Boozie originating from a dramatic misunderstanding assists her to elevate her status from a mere M. B. B.S to an M. D with own clinic. Later his continued interest in her remains a mystery to
her until the realisation of his homosexuality. The fact that behind the visage of an aggressive magazine hero there was nothing masculine at all frees Saru of the sin of sexual infidelity. Just as Saru was enamoured by the aura of Manu it was the marvellous dexterity of Boozie as a surgeon that attracted her. To Saru the connection remains a Pygmalion-Galatea story where she was the raw material to be shaped, moulded and chiseled to perfection. Strangely enough she has never felt troubled by the chance of a marital discord grounded on this relation. Saru admits, “I told myself my relationship with this man couldn’t, wouldn’t hurt Manu” (The Dark 91). Whether it is marital alienation leading to extramarital relationship or vice versa, it definitely adds more bricks to the wall of silence between them.

Saru’s chance encounter with Padmakar, her classmate, develops into a complicated level as he tries to forge a deeper relationship with her. She is able to dissuade him, though belatedly, and brings an end to this relationship not because she is afraid of the consequences but because she realises the futility of love and romance. The code word of the age is sex, but that to Saru has now become a dirty game. Examining the motives behind her rendezvous with Padmakar, Saru admits that she had done it deliberately because she had foolishly imagined it would give her an escape route out of her loveless trap. The two men bring to Saru “the disillusioning realisation that there can be no happiness or fulfillment in these relationships.”

It is discontent resulting from the rigours of male misconception of sexuality and the desperate need to assert herself that urges Indu to dare into an extramarital relationship with Naren that lasts for two nights. Despite her claim of monogamy, she succumbs to carnality. It is an alliance that goes beyond the mere sensual level, for with him her bodily desires cease to be a sin and shame. Only Naren has been able to penetrate her self-made citadel. He deliberately provokes Indu into an awareness of her hypocrisy as a writer. Excoriating her for fighting against her womanhood in her creative output, Naren plays a definite role in establishing her identity as a writer. Like Saru, Indu too feels that her sexual encounter with Naren has nothing to do with Jayant. But while Manohar adapts an enigmatic silence, Jayant is unaware of the
adventures of his wife. Inspite of the knowledge that she does not have to pretend or act out pleasant willingness before Naren, Indu knows very well that his principle of detachment is contrary to her craving for involvement. Yet the remorseless ease and the detached objectivity with which she analyses her act distances her more from the Sati-Savitri image.

Naren, in many ways, is akin to Kamat who becomes a critic of Jaya in *That Long Silence*. While Mohan is pleased with her 'Seeta column' that deliberately and successfully hides her identity, Kamat chastises her for the gilded pieces suffer from lack of any originality. He refuses to let her wallow in self-pity. Instead, as an experienced professional he analyses situations objectively and rationally offering her an opportunity to understand her own self. External appearance or opulence has nothing to do with this alliance. On the contrary with this man she has never been a mere female, but just an individual. She suffers no condescension as a sexual object and feels uninhibited to reveal her problems.

Father-fixation too perhaps complicates her relationship with Kamat. At one moment he becomes almost a father figure wrapping her in a security that she has been denied of since his death, the next moment he behaves like any other male admirer. Recounting the moment of physical closeness from which she withdraws, Jaya comments: “There had been nothing but an overwhelming urge to respond to him with my body, the equally overwhelming certainty of my mind that I could not do so” (157). Inspite of a willing body and ample opportunities her marriage vows restrain her. It is the same interest of safeguarding her marriage and her image as an ideal wife that forces her to turn her back on her mentor-cum-admirer on his death.

The association between Urmi and Bhaskar in the absence of her husband too invites criticism. In him she finds a patient hearer and a fellow sufferer. The experience of a similar pain associated with death enables Bhaskar to share the hitherto unexpressed agony over the loss of Anu. Urmi cannot talk about her past to anyone else for they are not separated from it. Unlike Vanaa and Inni, she feels safe in his company for since the death of the daughter, her body has been quiescent. Urmi
remains totally faithful to her husband inspite of his long absences from home. The pain she suffers once she becomes aware of the attitude of Bhaskar categorically affirms her stand: “Bhaskar had no business stepping outside the role I’ve allotted to him in my life. I don’t really know what his role is to be, but certainly it’s not this, not that of a lover” (Binding 62). However liberated she is, Urmi will never overstep the boundaries chalked out in marriage.

Women sometimes retreat into silence for reasons other than marital disharmony and threat on individuality. The ennui experienced by bereaved mothers forms a recurring motif in Deshpande. *Small Remedies* is profoundly about death and coming to terms with death, which is not an easy task. Madhu’s nightmare not only annihilates her marriage but causes the loss of her only child. Infact both the novel and the biography start from Madhu’s own tragedy--the loss of Adit in a bus bomb-blast. The novel has internalised the horror and the brutal cruelty of Ayodhya issue and the intensity of suffering through words and images. It lays bare the innermost psychological consequences of the violence, destruction and death slowly, but surely manipulating flashbacks, dreams and nightmares. The Ayodhya episode is “only the princess’s pea in a thickly padded mattress . . . the small seed inside the core.”

Madhu Sapatarshi, the narrator-biographer, and her subject Savitri Indorekar have lost their children in the Ayodhya bomb-blast. Though the novel roughly is the biography of Bai, it eventually becomes Madhu’s autobiography as well for she admits: “It’s becoming increasingly clear to me that I cannot keep myself out of this book of Bai’s that I cannot be the invisible narrator” (172). It’s not a direct probing of a bereaved mother’s psyche but present associations and comments take her back to her loss. Infact she has undertaken the task of writing the biography to cope with her own trauma, “to see Munni’s mother, the mother who lost her daughter, like I did my son” (283).

In the life of a person, the same moment never returns. Madhu realises it with the irrevocable loss of her motherhood. The metamorphosis from Aditya-chi-Ai
(Aditya’s mother), the identity in which she had drowned herself for nearly eighteen years, to a bereaved mother is so total that there is only a frightening emptiness engulfing her. Both the day and the nights, with no dreams of Adit, leaves her bruised and battered. She is forced to go through the semblance of living, with no desire to do so, for it is through children that one lives for posterity. The “huge fact” (17) of what happened to them takes her so abruptly that she feels alienated from human beings: finds the odour of humans strange as if cursed like Ashvathama, cast out of the human circle. Deshpande implies the ephemeral nature of happiness by picturing it as enclosed in a glass case so fragile that it can get shattered at a touch of the fears that surround it. There is no power that can help us avoid disasters. Basking in the bliss of family life Madhu had never realised the ineffectuality of Ganesha, om, or swastikas to put disaster away. She has accepted the assignment to be free from memories, from people who connect her to the death. She longs for the “tabula rasa of amnesia” (153) to be like Bai who never speaks of the daughter whom she neglected for the sake of her career. But past is something that cannot be erased, it is like a palimpsest. The pictures remain, tantalizing and tormenting her.

It is with the birth of a child that a marriage becomes a family. Away in Bhavanipur Madhu recollects those glorious moments when she really became a part of Som’s family through her son. Childbirth after two years of marriage was an intense experience for “a child’s birth is a rebirth for a woman” (88). Blissfully immersed in the glory, thrill and joy of a mother, Small Remedies, a gift on Adit’s birth from which the novel has taken its title, had become her Bible for nurturing her child. But she has put away every picture of those glorious moments that the very house has become a vacuum, “a house where there are no records of the past, no mute witnesses to it. Just blankness” (106). A mother needs no photograph to remember her child for the images are etched in so deeply.

Madhu longs for something to fill the emptiness that is tormenting her. Neither Som’s letter, nor her visits to Savitribai, offer any relief. She doubts whether the book that is expected of her will ever comeforth. To the mother only the child
matters: “The others are mere shadows” (146). All her life had been centred around Adit, the sun. Even Som was on the periphery, like a star revolving round the sun. Now without the sun a total darkness has engulfed her. She, who was orphaned at childhood, had presaged a similar contingency and made arrangements for the future of her son. But Adit’s premature death was the only casualty she was totally unprepared for. Hence when she thinks of the Brontes it is not the death of the siblings that touches her, but the anguish of the father who lost his three children becomes tangible. Like the Brontes, Deshpande has used a clear and lucid style to express “the intensity of emotions in the novel.” The theme and style come together as ‘swar’ and ‘thaal.’

“Death is not an event, it is an end. It’s like a nuclear devastation; there’s nothing left” (211) except silence. Som and Madhu move through the rubble of their devastated lives searching for any bits or pieces of their past. Even the silence and darkness around her speak eloquently of her loss. Her frantic craving for a rough rude justice, an eye for an eye is not fulfilled for as she asks, “which one human in the faceless mob can I hold responsible” (123).

Discussing about feminine identity in India, Sudhir Kakar opines: “Motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can.” Each woman approaches motherhood with her own unique constellation of values, expectations, fears and beliefs. Motherless child as she was, motherhood was an unknown world to Madhu: yet it had completely transformed her life. Her child became the controlling centre of her life. Hence when in his adolescence, when the total dependence of the childhood gave way to evasive adulthood she could not adjust herself. “The adolescent commonly becomes a problem to his parents or to the community because he is a problem to himself.” When she realised, later that every son at a period is continually afraid that he will be completely incorporated by the protective love of his mother and lose his autonomy she could pacify herself. Looking back Madhu realises that she was, as Som’s father used to say, obsessed with her son, putramoha. Every present incident reminds her of the irrevocable nature of
Grappling with the death or loss of a child is a theme which connects the novel both to *The Binding Vine* and rather more marginally to *A Matter of Time*. Agony caused by the death of her one-year-old daughter dominates the consciousness of Urmi despite her varied experiences and involvement. "It's Urmila's agony at the death of Anu which weaves all emotions and themes into unity." The intensity of her emotions and her attempt to cope with the loss are powerfully projected by the novelist. Despite attempts by others to help her to normality, like Madhu, she too feels devastated by the loss. When Madhu tries to forget her pain and finds it impossible, Urmi fears that her attempt to ease her pain would be a betrayal to her daughter. Instead of fighting her pain she holds on to it for she believes that if she lets go that pain, she would lose Anu completely.

Neither the age of the child, nor the existence of other children can mitigate the soul-piercing pain of a bereaved mother. Though Urmila has her son to look into posterity, it can never fill the void: "As if the core of me has been scooped out, leaving a hollow" (*Binding*, 17). A sense of hopelessness haunts her with the painful realisation that all the king's horses and all the kings men cannot put humpty-dumpty together again. The routine absorbs everything like a sponge except pain. The two days after the death are completely lost to her except a few disjointed fragments. Each memory of the past fills her with longing. She refuses to accept death for even now she can feel the smell of the sweet baby flesh, and hear the soft snuffling sounds of the small chest. Only the mother can feel the heaviness of her breast gorged with milk on her separation from the child. The bitter realisation that to survive, to do justice to Kartik, she has to conquer the memories is impossible for her because she feels, "To forget is to betray" (21).
Nothing on earth can replace a lost child though togetherness sometimes helps. Both Urmila and Madhu want to deal with their grief singlehandedly. Madhu fiercely guards her agony from everyone, even from Tony for there are no words to express the void and emptiness. Urmila fails to distinguish between loneliness and togetherness: “I wish they’d realise that it makes no difference to me, whether I am alone or whether someone is with me” (13). The terrible certainty of death rushes on her as she remembers the exact moment of Anu’s death in the silence of the room. Like Madhu, Urmila too does not need any picture to remember her daughter for every bit, every moment of her life is indelibly etched in her mind. Suggestion about Anu’s photograph explodes a rage in her for to put Anu on the wall is to place her among the dead, to separate her from the mother’s world.

In Deshpande novels dreams and nightmares often speak of the subconscious. Urmila’s dream of leaving Anu behind in a strange house and Kishore’s failure to take her back to her in her frantic search through unknown streets reinforces the acuity of her perdition. Madhu’s nightmares suggest the impossibility of their family reunion. Every woman wants to give her child, particularly the daughter, the world she dreamt for herself. But through death Anu has turned her back on her mother’s hopes.

Both Urmila and Madhu feel the intense agony of the abrupt decease of their children. Death has arrested the growth of their children. When Inni pampers her, she realises the magnitude of her loss: “I’ve lost not just my baby Anu as a child, as a girl, as a young woman” (130). She feels breathless, aghast with the weight of her loss. As Madhu distances herself from her home and from persons who remind her of her son, Urmila is reluctant to visit Ranidurg where she lost Anu for between the girl who lived there and the woman who has lost her child, there is a chasm too wide to be bridged. The single moment of death has transformed the world of the living. Dwelling in the house of sorrow, happiness seems an alien country to the mother.

It is her grief over her daughter’s death that drives Urmila to befriend the mother of a rape-victim. When Urmila mourns for her dead daughter, Shakutai’s heart mutely
cries for the death-like existence of her daughter Kalpana. While Urmi and Madhu have not satiated their love when death suddenly snatched their children, circumstances never allowed Shakutai to shower on her child all her maternal affection. Pressures of single-parenthood and fear of the security of her daughters have forced her to conceal her feelings behind the facade of disinterestedness. Even her grief has to be masked for the sake of her other children.

The sense of silence that pervades The Big House also emanates from the loss of a child. Though the pain over the loss remains unexpressed the mother had to pay a heavy price, her matrimony. But Kalyani overcomes the oppressive silence by permeating into others her heart full of affection. Shripati has not spoken to her since the day of the tragedy. To a mother the child is more important, not his mental state, for it is the flesh of her flesh, the blood of her blood. Yet Kalyani’s silence over the incident remains inexplicable. It is through Sumi’s memory that Deshpande gives a glimpse of the mother’s nocturnal self-mortification. When she breaks down at the death of Sumi it is equally for her long-lost son.

Though Kalyani, Urmila, Shakutai and Madhu have experienced the terrible loss of a part of their selves, they have been careful about the living as well. How the death of the male child becomes a lethal punishment for the surviving sibling is effectively conveyed through a parlance of Saru’s conscience. All along Saru had placed her problems on Manu, an external factor. But the The Dark Holds No Terrors “presents the inner drama of Saru that has a lot to do with the past.” The novel derives its strength equally from the stark presentation of Saru’s marriage to a man who is consumed by the reversal of the gender roles and also from the depiction of her lurid childhood. Probing through the troubled mind of the protagonist, the narrative focusses on certain events that have been too deeply etched to be erased by the business of the present.

Saru is in fact a victim of the scathing influence of gender discrimination on a tender psyche. The novel exposes the girl child’s struggle to grow out of the grip of the phallocentric society into an individual rather than become a gender role. Saru
as a child has been constantly reminded that being a girl she is only a temporary sojourner in her home, a burden to be passed over to someone. When a girl’s worth is measured in terms of fairness of skin, she is denied many a joy which hinders her marketability. The mother’s blatant remark “He’s different. He’s boy” (40) firmly implants in young Saru’s mind a sense of otherness.

Restriction on mobility operates on the basis of gender and age. Saru recalls how girls are taught to repress their sexuality even in the security of their homes. Right from childhood she is indoctrinated to be passive and submissive. As Simone deBeauvoir observes, to be feminine is to appear weak, futile and docile. “The young girl is supposed to repress her spontaneity and replace it with studied grace and charm taught by the elders.” On reaching puberty Saru feels the oppressive curtailment of her freedom. Hence growing up becomes a disgrace to her when she is to be ashamed of her body even before her father.

With the advent of puberty, when traditional rituals demand her to stay aloof, Saru feels like a pariah. A kind of shame engulfs her making her rebel against the fact that puts her in the same class with her mother. It is only when as a medical student she is initiated into anatomy and physiology does she feel released from the shame and fear of her womanhood. There are ritualistic, economic and psychological reasons for the preference for sons. Female education is never given preference in the traditional households for the daughter is considered an irretrievable expense. But too much of denial leads way to rebellion. When her desire for education is thwarted, when asked to choose between marriage or education, Saru refuses to be accepted as a burden: “Is that all I am, a responsibility?” (144).

Psychologists emphasising the role of parents in personality development maintain that parental default of one kind or another, neglect, indifference or display of favouritism to another child “can produce basic anxiety, the feeling of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world.” Partiality frustrates the basic need of a growing child creating emotional conflicts. Through the myth of Dhruva, Deshpande has effectively articulated sibling jealousy ensuing from gender dis-
crimination. The feelings of envy and hatred sabotage Saru’s love for her only brother. The three year seniority places her at an advantage to dominate him. Saru ruefully remarks: “No dictatorship would have been more absolute” (33). The Satyajit Ray movie pushes back all the pain of not only his death, but of what she did while he was alive.

Myths and legends are not used as mere embellishment or for local or ethnic colouring. The deeply ingrained imprints on the Indian psyche are best illustrated by the Dhruva story. Deshpande has admitted to Lakshmi Holmstrom how she has modified the Dhruva story. He “displaces his elder sister in his parent’s affection, but it is she who pushed him off his father’s lap whereas in the puranas it is the elder boy Dhruva who is displaced and pushed off by the younger Uttama.” The young Saru pushes Dhruva off his father’s lap to see if he will become the Northstar. The height of sibling jealousy, is provoked, no doubt, by the mother’s blatant favouritism. When her mother accuses her bitterly of his death by drowning, “why are you alive when he is dead,” (159) she feels like being pushed off her parents’ lap a second time. Dhruva’s birth as well as his death result in her rejection. In her adult life too the ghosts of the mythical and biological past continue to haunt her. Saru’s attitude to her children is conditioned by her past. She harbours fears of the same pattern of relationship in Renu’s jealousy and rejection of Abhi: “Do we travel, not in straight lines, but in circles. Do we come to the same point again and again? Dhruva and I, Renu and Abhi . . . Is life an endless repetition of the same pattern?” (173).

While a daughter’s achievements go unappreciated, unmerited importance is bestowed on the son for his role as the lighter of the pyre. Hence Saru’s instant response to her mother’s death is who lit the pyre. Looking back, Saru’s mind is preoccupied with only unpleasant memories of how she was sidelined. While his birthdays were celebrated with a puja, her birthdays passed with no puja. The mother’s reference to her birthday as a terrible day makes her wonder whether the birth itself or the rains that made it terrible. And after Dhruva’s death her birthdays were passed over in silence both at home and at school for everything becomes meaningless to the mother in “A. D. after Dhruva” (148).
Childhood relationship between the parents and the children govern their adult relationships too. In most Deshpande novels "mother and mother figures are not the matriarchs to be glorified but the suffocative and authoritative figures to be disdained." The rift between the two and the enforced rebellion created by a gender based partiality mars Saru's future as well. Maternal instincts die in her and she hates natural feminine biological functions. The rejection of the mother is very pronounced in her blatant statement "If you are a woman, I don't want to be one" (63). The negation of the living daughter for the dead son causes indelible scars in Saru’s mind. Without the guidance of a mother Saru develops an aversion towards all that tradition and rituals stand for where a girl is always treated inferior. The acts of defiance spring from her resentment towards the mother and what the mother stands for. She seems to enjoy a vivacious pleasure in deliberately going against the mother's rigid conservatism. Her spontaneous surge towards life leads her to view the mother's world as narrow and stifling.

When a child is denied of genuine love he develops some strategy to cope with his deprivation by diverting his constructive energy to alleviate the basic anxiety. Parental neglect and indifference to her education cast a sense of unwantedness which Sumi tries to overcome by hardwork and insistence on success. The history of her grandmother who was forced to become a dependent when abandoned by her husband also influences Saru's determination to be economically independent. Medical education gives her a chance to sever from the maternal authority and to prove her mettle. She recalls how easily she thought she could detach herself from her parents, medically and clinically like the cutting of the umbilical cord. But behind the facade of total separation, the deprived daughter surfaces when she opens her mother's almirah after her death. It reminds her of all the ceremonial gifts associated with marriage, pregnancy and childhood which were denied to her.

The insecurity of the impressionable years manifests itself in the wrong choice of partners, leading to an unwholesome situation. It is her passionate desire to hurt the mother that makes her rush headlong into a marriage with Manu, a low-caste.
Further, medical college opens to her a vista of opportunities to bloom into a woman. Failure as a daughter forces her to take the next role with a determination to succeed which is not easily achieved. When she finds in Manu a recognition as an individual, “paradoxically enough, this recognition of self leads to a craving for self-effacement.”

Past is something that intrudes into the present without permission. Almost every present incident reminds a past action. Though Saru staunchly holds her complete severance from the mother, the dead mother proves to be as lethal as the live one. The house, as Saru examines, contains no vestige of the daughter except a photograph with Dhruva. Saru wonders how successfully the mother had erased the daughter from her life. Kulkarni’s report of the mother’s refusal to consult the doctor-daughter inspite of carcinova, echoes the firmness of her decision: “Daughter? I don’t have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless” (196). Saru is still haunted by the curse prophesying only unhappiness for her. No mother would curse a daughter like that. Even in death she refuses to let Saru live in happiness.

Saru apprehends an analogous rift between herself and Renu, her daughter. Renu’s verbal noncommunication and the eloquent, mystifying expressions in her paintings leave Saru nervous. She fears that Renu has become a woman despite her age: a critical, cold, shrewd, objective observer reminiscent of her own mother. It speaks of “Saru’s projection of the unconscious fear of getting rejected by the mother.”

Rejection as a daughter forces Saru to surrender herself to be labelled as a successful wife. Indu too continues in her marriage to disprove the prophecy of the matriarchal tyrant Akka. Coming back to her ancestral home Indu recalls her marriage to Jayant, full of vehemence for Akka. Determined to win “she sheds bits of herself each day so that the balance is not bent on one side and she is not accused for the decision” (Roots 133). Both Saru and Indu fall into the category of the rebellious daughter who freeing herself from the parental home or mother’s hold,
tries to open up her future “not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of another monster.”

Socio-culturally the mother has a very strong and secure hold on Indian psyche as the reservoir of all positive values. Myths, legends, religion and tradition buttress her image. But a Deshpande mother is contrary to the magnanimous, all-caring maternal figure in Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*. The myth of unquestioned obedience is replaced by filial rebellion against mothers. Daughters wriggle out of the constricted world to a new environment where the mother cannot exercise her will. To the motherless Indu, the childless matriarch, Akka, fails to function as a mother-surrogate. To her she is narrowminded, bigoted and selfish. While Akka can reduce even the elders like Anant Kaka to a red-faced, stuttering schoolboy with her venomous tongue, Indu alone refuses to cede. In her death also Indu alone stands untouched by sorrow.

Taking stock of her past, Indu recognizes the rebellious child who has been accumulating ‘I won’ts’ ever since her childhood: “It had become a mountain of a negation giving me an immense strength to withstand” (74). The world of the carefree and bold Indu clashes with the prescriptive regime of Akka. The stone-wall refuses to accept Indu’s liberal attitude to the boys in her college. But when the long-dead, never-seen mother is blamed for her behaviour the rift becomes complete. The accusation that the mother had trapped Govind, her father, tarnishes the sanctity she had attached to the relationship. “Akka’s words had been a profanation and desecration” (75) of their mutual love that had overcome unsurmountable barriers of caste and lived a tragically short but intensely happy life. Hence the decision to leave is made the same day, determined never to return. It is the same antipathy towards Akka and what she represents that lands her up in her marriage to Jayant. Indu too resorts to marriage as an escape from matriarchal domination. Her emotional deprivation finds solace in Jayant.

“In the early formative years of the child... he or she is exposed to traditional pattern which sharply defines the male or female pattern of behaviour.” Like Saru’s,
Indu’s feminist reactions too date back to her childhood where she had to content with sexist discrimination at home. Right from childhood Indu has felt hedged in by her sex. She has been a witness to the secondary place attributed to women in the family even under a matriarch. Herself a victim of oppression, Akka perpetuates the same for others. Indu still remembers her refusal as a child to fall in line with the other women of her family: “As a girl they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked” (158). The denial of freedom on the grounds of gender instills in her a resentment towards her body which is further aggravated by the graceless way in which she is initiated into the world of woman. The onset of puberty perplexes her for she concentrates on the restrictions that follow. Hence she resents her womanhood for it means closing of many doors. The same reason, Indu admits to Naren, reflects in her writing too where she refuses to write on the lives and frustrations of her class.

That Long Silence too affords no glimpse of a loving tender bond between mothers and daughters. Traditional and gender biased the mother figures do not become confidants of Jaya. Hence when the drama of her womanhood began, it had been agonising and terrible. While watching how easily Rati has sailed into her womanhood, even without the assitance of the mother, Jaya remembers the awkwardness and the burden of her adolescence. She pictures Ai as one who never remembers the childhood incidents. She has only contempt for the slapdash ways of her mother. The anger of the daughter towards the all-questioning mother is expressed in no uncertain terms: “She can’t dictate to me. I’ll do just what I want” (75). The same declaration is repeated years later by Rati suggesting the gap between the next generation of mother and daughter. The antipathy gets augmented when Ai bestows the Dadar flat to Dada. Though Jaya eventually receives it from him, the sting still remains. Hence her anger and surprise at Mohan’s suggestion of living in the flat. The fury towards the mother stems also from her feeling of being betrayed. The hurry with which she disposed the property in her absence, without preparing Jaya for it, has made her homeless. Her marriage hence becomes a revenge for Ai opposed to it.
The memories of the two grandmothers are also not pleasant for they have failed to comprehend young Jaya’s need to assert herself. As a child she too had noticed the distribution of work in the ancestral family according to gender though she has never felt the trauma of discrimination under a loving father. Even nostalgia fails to make the memory of aji a comfortable one for she recollects her vehement criticism of Jaya: “Look at you - for everything a question, for everything a retort. What husband can be comfortable with that?” (27).

In Binding Vinc and Small Remedies Deshpande deviates from the usual hammering on motherhood. Both the novels resonate an undercurrent of the pangs of mother-child separation on extraordinary grounds. Urmi bears the burden of unsatiated motherhood as well as an emotionally impoverished childhood. Though Urmi as a child had exhibited an unperturbed attitude to her stay at the ancestral house with her grandparents, the adult Urmi still harbours the unexpressed pangs of the denial of parental care. The reason for the separation which remains a puzzle to her subconscious mind is explained to her during a moment of closeness between Inni and Urmi while she is recuperating the loss of her daughter. Inni’s belated explanation to Urmi’s unvoiced accusation of the denial of parental care equally highlights the anguish of a mother who could not protest against the dictates of the father. Inni pours out: “Nothing could make him change his mind... I didn’t want you to be sent away to Ranidurg, believe me Urmi. I didn’t want that, I wanted you with us. I never got used to the idea of your being in Ranidurg. I wanted you with me...” (Binding 200). If Kalyani is punished for the loss of her son, it is the vulnerability of the female child and the lack of wisdom on the part of the young mother who leaves the child with a male servant that brings forth a forced estrangement. Though Inni is granted absolution by her daughter, it cannot completely expunge the scars of that old cruelty. In the same way Shakutai feels guilty of her failure as a mother and wants Urmi to protect her children.

Shakutai’s question “why does God give us daughters?” (176) is “symptomatic of the normal oppressed woman’s reaction to feminity.” It exposes the attitude of the
society towards a rape victim: while the predator goes unpunished, the prey is forced to bear the brunt of his sin. The news of the rape is rigorously suppressed for fear of the reputation of the family. Every female is conscious about her security. Urmi recollects the recurring, menacing nightmare of a strange man standing in the shadows at the end of the grove. Even as an adult she feels sexually threatened. The belated confession of Inni stresses that “the vulnerability of the girl child and subsequent social stigma is something which affects the rich and the poor alike.”

The fear of safety, when imposes restrictions on the female, creates problems between the mother and the daughter as in the case of Shakutai and Kalpana. The mother’s reaction often reflects the society we live in, while Kalpana symbolises the urge of the modern girl to liberate herself.

In the opinion of Urmi “It is women who take parenthood seriously, men don’t, not to the same extent anyway” (76) and hence feels the pangs of alienation too. Mandira, the daughter of Vanaa, inspite of belonging to the new generation, holds her mother solely responsible for the nurture of children. Her declaration not to become a working woman which stems from the pangs of the absence of the mother from home can not be comprehended by Vanaa who as a child was accustomed to her mother as a teacher. The mother is torn between the husband who reprimands her for laxity and the daughter who harbours feelings of negation.

Through the portrayal of Savitribai Deshpande debunks the myth of motherhood in Small Remedies. Madhu, the biographer wants to do justice to her old-time playmate Munni. She is determined to bestow the immortality that Bai hankers after only if she is willing to reveal to the world her only daughter whose existence she has successfully obliterated inorder to present a picture of respectability. Grieving over the death of her own child, Madhu refuses to accept the dictates of the old-fashioned woman who whitewashes her life through selective amnesia with no reference to her past life with Munni and Ghulam Saheb. Deshpande juxtaposes Neemgaon and Bhavanipur to deal with the past and the present.

Madhu recalls her introduction to the vivacious Munni who used to convince her
that she was only on a brief visit to Neemgaon from Pune where her father was. Her vehement denial of any relationship to Ghulam Saab and the stories of his cruelty still remain fresh in Madhu. But the photograph of Ghulam Saab from Bai’s collection reminds how closely she resembled the biological father desperate her deliberate attempts at cultivating “a bedraggled ragamuffin look” (75) to be removed from the tidy elegance of the father and the delicate beauty of the mother, especially the eyes. It is the same pair of eyes that enabled Madhu to recognize years later the old friend in the bus though she deliberately evaded the recognition by posing as Shailaja Joshi, “a long way from Munni, daughter of Savitribai and Ghulam Saab” (77).

The label of illegitimacy and the negation by a celebritee mother spurred the juvenile mind to relatiate by rejecting the father. Munni forever remained unwavering as a child in her defiance, in her stubborn adherence to her truth and her bravado concealing the distress, terror and grief. The tormenting interrogation of the diplomat Innokenty in The First Circle reminds Madhu of the chilling, terrifying interrogation and the feeling of humiliation Munni might have experienced as a child going through repeated questions about her lineage. While interviewing Bai, Madhu senses a similar defiance in Bai too: “There is no Munni in her life, no illegitimate child, no abandoned husband, no lover” (77-78). To the mourning Madhu who lost her child in the same bomb-blast that killed Shailaja Joshi, Bai who denies her own child seems to be the meanest kind of creatures.

From the beginnings of human history the child has been the most seminal factor of human life. A child “is a beginning, a renewal, a continuation, an assertion of immortality” (168). The desire for a child or the anguish of childlessness has been reverberated in the epics. But Bai hopes to reach out to immortality through music and the biography. The woman who had the audacity to walk out on her marriage and family and the mother who conceals the existence of her daughter do not seem to merge. It is significant that she has named her Indorekar, the name she adopted as a singer, neither of her marriage nor of her lover. But Munni had always hankered for the name, respectability and the conventional life Bai had found stultifying.
Death usually leaves the battle unfinished. Saru finds herself disarmed with the death of her mother. But Bai is not reconciled even after the death of her daughter. She continues to be the same indifferent mother walking without a backward glance “at the child hovering in the shadows, the child who was waiting . . . for a word from the mother, a glance. Any kind of recognition of her presence” (169). Life as well as death desprives Munni of love, care and recognition as a daughter.

Bai’s denial of her only daughter takes Madhu back in time to a motherless child growing up in an all-male household, to whom Munni’s mother always spelt an enchanting femininity. Young Madhu knew nothing of mothers for she never felt her even as an absence. The only girlish picture and the single anecdote of the highly impetuous girl who threw away the thermometer when the temperature failed to go down never matched with a motherly figure. Hence the mother who died of galloping T. B. when Madhu was hardly six months old “remained a blank space” (17) through her childhood. But the father-daughter relationship was always a comfortable one: the space between them was never crowded with demands, doubts, assertions or questions. The smell of his cigarettes permeating her early life provided an assurance of his presence and a sense of security. His death collapsed her world: she was left with nothing but an abyss.

The denial as well as the ceasing of paternal affection hampers the growth of the tender psyche. The reminiscences of Madhu give a peep into the unfathomable chasm of emotional turmoil experienced by an orphaned child. She remembers how the death of her father suddenly made her rudderless: “My father dead, Babu (the servant) gone, I knew not where, the home that had been mine ever since I could remember, no longer there these things made me suddenly a stranger to my own life” (41). With the abrupt cessation of her untroubled world she became a mere observer of other lives, not a participant. The recurring dreams of terror that haunted the days after the tragedy suggests her mental condition. Though Joe and Leela brought her out of the void, the enemity of Paula (Joe’s daughter) darkened her life once again. The unuttered pangs of negation, alienation and insult she experienced as an intruder
into the house of Paula crowds her memory. When the nights turned out to be horrific with physical and mental torture the silence and the vacuum of the hostel during the vacation appealed more than the sleepless nights at the Joes. It is only with marriage she got into a real, model family, like a model house correct to the last brick, tile and roof with a dingified father, nurturing mother, responsible brother and surrogate mother sisters. But the Ayodhya bomb blasted her hard won, long cherished house of security, warmth and belonging.

The irretrievable loss of her father torments Jaya even years after his death for her father has been not “only a source of her strongest emotions but also part her moral makeup.” As Kamat points out to her, she has the monstrous ego of a child who refuses to accept the demise of her father. Her complaint against Appa is not just that he died, but that he has bestowed on her a wrong idea about herself. Further, the terrifying sense of emptiness that sprang from the loss of her father has permeated into her family life.

Inspite of a doting father it is the deep-rooted craving in the Indian psyche for a male progeny that makes the life of Kalyani a hell. To her mother, first and foremost, Kalyani became the visible symbol of her failure to produce a son. Secondly Kalyani could never elevate herself to the mother’s dream of an accomplished, beautiful daughter. With a dominating mother like Manorama, Kalyani became “timid and unsure of herself with a sense of inadequacy as well” (A Matter 150). Kalyani recalls how terror drove her into dumbness when questioned about an anonymous letter. To her mother the silence confirmed her guilt in the same way her husband later established her guilt over the disappearance of her son. This numbness out of terror sealed her future twice: first when Manorama stopped her education and married her quickly off to Shripati and the second when Shripati deserted her.

Manorama died unforgiving and unrelenting in her anger towards her daughter as the mother of Saru. When her husband died immediately after a rift between them over his much adored daughter, Kalyani had to bear the blame of murdering her father
as well. Even her last words in the deathbed, that echo in the ears of Kalyani everynight, confirm her antagonism: “You are my enemy, you were born to make my life miserable” (153). The woman who stoically survived the myriad acts of maternal cruelty and the widowhood enforced on her by a living husband is indeed commendable.

Premi and Sumi too are victims of childhood scars and Sumi apprehends the same for her children. She has an odd feeling that The Big House is accepting them, like it did Kalyani years back, making them part of herself. Watching her children unconsciously lowering their voice to the exact decibel required to keep them away from being heard by their ‘upstair’ grandfather, Sumi painfully remarks: “I don’t want my daughters live with a hand clasped over their mouths, like Premi and I had to” (59). The single image contains within itself all the unheard feelings of pain, agony, alienation and anger that Sumi experienced as a child. She does not want her daughters to live in a zenana for the all-female looks so lopsided and imbalanced. It is her deeply buried childhood fears that makes her an intruder at home. To Sumi, who had witnessed the adoration of the male child, the walls of the house cry out: “we’re interlopers, my daughters and I, Just passing through” (71).

To Premi too childhood offers memories which “are only of deprivation and fear” (133). Her peculiar ‘two floored family’ compelled young Premi to distance from others for fear of their investigative questions. She felt like a leper among other children with normal families. Seeing happy families was like watching a movie. As children they accepted the oddity of their life for it had become a part of their lives. To the child the shame of it mattered more than the knowledge of what really happened. The singular response of Kalyani to the incident, “the baby was crying,” burdens Premi with guilt. Her complaint to Aru, “My father never spoke to me until I was ten” (18) throws light on her emotional deprivation. Her marriage too is considered as an instrument to punish the mother, to sever her from her children.

Vanaa too expresses the pangs of a bruised psyche. To the father, whose very existence and the second marriage was grounded on the sole purpose of nurturing his
first child by his late wife, the daughter literally never existed. Urmi recalls how Vanaa never failed to laugh at his jokes so that he would notice her: “But he never did, for him, there was only Kishore” (Binding 52). The unemotional way in which Vanaa comments how she was never a disappointment for her father who never expected anything from her surfaces the long-buried hurt.

The novelist highlights the consequences of parental desertion through the vehement reactions of Aru, a loving but fiercely independent young woman. While Sumi, Premi and Vanaa have unquestioningly accepted paternal neglect, Aru confronts her father for his desertion has not only created an empty space in the family but caused the disintegration of it. Without the family she has a sense of having lost her footing in the world. Contrary to the other emotionally deprived daughters who have never tasted the sweetness of paternal affection, Aru refuses to let go what she has been cherishing so far. The bitter experience of her grandmother fills her with indignation, a sense of pity at the enormous loss. Aru holds her hostility before Gopal. Deshpande says, like a surgeon holding the surgical knife to remove the tumour. But the failure of her attempt completely exhausts her. Encompassed in her humiliation she decides to sue against her father. It is not her antipathy but her love for him, the intense desire to keep their family intact, that drives her to the extremes. Sumi painfully observes the altered nature of her children: Aru’s reserve changes into a secretiveness, Charu becomes doggedly singleminded in her pursuit of a medical career and Seema keeps aloof from her mother and sisters. Aru has the frustrated look of a person combating a shadow, “a shadow that absorbs her anger and gives her nothing in return” (65). Her agony gets aggravated by her sense of guilt for she thinks that it was her remark on the occasion of his resignation that led to the bomb blast in their lives.

An undercurrent of guilt qualifies the emotional life of most of Deshpande’s protagonists. In psychology ‘displaced anger’ dominates when the person directs his hostile feeling towards some object or person other than the one acutely causes his frustration and if no scapegoat is found, “may turn his hostility inward and blame
himself for his failure.” The whole personality of Saru is conditioned by her sense of guilt. She holds herself reprehensible for decentralizing her husband, rebelling and deserting her parents and above all, the drowning of Dhruva. The inability to refute the accusation of her mother as the murderer of her brother stems from the fact that “Dhruva’s demise had always been her subconscious desire and there is very thin demarcation between her wish and its fulfillment.” The truth lies somewhere between. The agony of not being sure tortures her. Two voices “Sarutai, wait for me” (The Dark 190) and “you killed him. Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive, when he’s dead?” (191) incessantly haunt her. The burden of childhood and all its nightmares which had receded with her marriage returns with her failure as a wife. Dream is a device that Deshpande often employs to surface the unconfided guilt of her protagonists. Present suffering seems to Saru as the punishment for all her wrongs: “My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on her. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (217). This triple-layered sense of guilt has corroded her life.

The recurring dreams of Indu which commence with the demolition of the house reinforce her sense of neglecting the family for long. She does not need any psychologist to explain to her the significance of the dream. She had rejected the family and tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and herself. But she now realizes that alienation is not the answer; on the contrary too much of it will cause death by terrible loneliness of spirit: “I had pulled in my boundaries and found myself the poorer for it” (Roots 10).

Both Saru and Jaya are confronted with an unexamined guilt over a past incident, a vague feeling of having harmed another being. While Saru is tormented by her association with the death of Dhruva, Jaya cannot forgive herself for running away from the death scene of Kamat. It is the fear of social stigma that forces her to desert him to grapple alone with death. As Sarla Palkar observes, “she perhaps does her role of a wife to perfection, but fails as a human being.” Though Jaya could detach herself from that woman who had witnessed the death of Kamat, the tears that flowed
like a sudden haemorrhage in the privacy of her bathroom emphasises her guilt over her helplessness as a woman and wife. Her inability to rise to the level of Sonia in The Crime and Punishment when her partner commits a crime also gnaws at her conscience. She has failed to fit into Mohan’s expectations of an ideal wife.

Kalyani holds herself responsible for the separation of Sumi and Gopal. It is her guilty conscience over the failure to be a model wife for her daughters that leads her to belittle herself before her son-in-law. She pleads with him: “I taught her nothing, it’s all my fault, Gopala, forgive me and don’t punish her for it” (A Matter 47).

The soul that is most incised is Madhu who spends sleepless nights flaying herself with “the question was it my fault” (Small 113). The theory of the unknown destiny, though takes away the guilt, fails to mitigate the pain of living the rest of her life without her son: “Hopelessness, childlessness, emptiness-none of these change their colours because guilt has gone” (113). The bomb that killed him has shaped them to be different beings; each moment of their lives is now imbued with the fact of his death, with the fact of how he died. Besides, Madhu doubts whether it is her prayer to punish Paula that has made her childless for childlessness is the worst curse humans can think even for their enemies. She wonders whether her curse has boomeranged to the origination with the same lethal quality.

The meaninglessness of life has disseminated into our familial and societal relationships. Saru recollects how they were deprived of the joy of belonging on account of the alienation from the paternal relatives: “We never had uncles, aunts, cousins like other children had” (The Dark 26). The deprived child had to invent an imaginary friend to tide over the isolation after the death of Dhruva. Neither her adult life provides any lasting friendship. They have no friends: just colleagues and neighbours. Even their socialising is calculable. They are monotonously alike in their desperate attempts to float. The insipidity of hay-bye relationships that fails to cater to the need for companionship is commented on by Indu too. The sense of futility over the use and throw mode of relations becomes evident in her explosion to Naren: “We don’t have friends, but the right contacts and ‘people one should know’
who entertain us just as we entertain them” (Roots 25). The banner of rational, unprejudiced broad minds often hides selfishness, secrecy and bigotry.

While Saru is tormented by loneliness in a nuclear family, the aura of joint-family does not dispel Indu’s alienation. Outrageous marriage becomes only a phase in the prolonged process of estrangement beginning from childhood. If education and employment encourage Indu to break the clutches of tradition, they eventually become instrumental in separating her from others. As a child her English education set her apart from others. The worlds of the docile Mini and the rebellious Indu never converged. Successful career only widens the gap with her ever failing cousins. The words of the old uncle still ring in her ears: “For a woman, intelligence is always a burden” (30). Her decade long physical separation from home has made her a stranger to the unrecognisable nieces and nephews. The inheritance of the property of Akka leaves an unbridgeable gap. The heartless words hurt her like being flayed alive. The knowledge of the deceptive nature of the crust does not mitigate the pain. With no armour to protect her, she is forced to don an attitude of ‘I don’t care’ inspite of the hurt and humiliation. The images of the darkroom, dust and barrenness suggest the loneliness that haunts her on her return. “With all her freedom, fastidiousness and power Indu has a nagging sense of loneliness and futility.”

The fact of the vacuity of the materialistic world creeps into the life of Jaya too. Despite the fiction of their friendship Jaya confesses that Rupa is still a stranger to her: “we skated, hastily and fearfully over the thin ice of our daily routine. We didn’t probe: we didn’t even want to” (That Long 48-49). Rahul alone refused to contribute to this ‘let’s pretend’ game. Her coldness towards Mukta emanates from the desire to contain herself within her shell. Even when loneliness and fear of loss and desertion threaten her Jaya refuses to confide in anybody. Change of environment too threatens her nerves. Transplanted from the silent beauty of Saptagiri, it has taken her long to get used to the grey and uniform ugliness of Bombay. The diverse sounds of the nocturnal city has always assaulted her with a premonition of something
worse. Further, the materialistic attitude of Mohan towards friendships is beyond the comprehension of his wife.

Deshpande heroines are not mere housewives, but they are career women also. Though not a full-fledged professional like Saru and Indu, Jaya too has proved her mettle as a successful columnist. On the threshold of establishing herself as a creative writer she is forced to masquerade behind the ‘Seeta column’ for Mohan fears a close resemblance between her prize winning story and their personal life. Hesitation to jeopardize her marriage compels her to cheat the writer in her. To an intensely thinking woman like Jaya, the light “skimming over life” sketches provide only an escape. “a safehole” (149). The apt image of a worm crawling into a hole describes the budding writer dwindling into a stereotyped, house-wife columnist. Safe within the warmth of her popular column she is forced to shut the door firmly on all other women who had invaded her being, screaming for attention. “But Seeta was safer” (149) for her as a wife.

If societal expectations of a woman as a writer alienates Jaya from her job, for Indu too her journalistic profession ceases to be a vocation and it degenerates merely to a monetary source. The worker gets alienated from work when it ceases to be one that appreciates his skill, when the product is controlled by an external agency. When her attempt to expose the ruthlessness and unscrupulousness in pursuit of power and fame is thwarted by the editor, Indu becomes deflated. When she is forced to rewrite the story heaping praises on the glamorous, seemingly sincere and dedicated social worker “it was a kind of self-flagellation” (Roots 17). Hence she continues--hating it, hating herself feeling trapped. Like Saru Indu too is not free to give up her job because of monetary benefits. Hence Akka’s summons gives a chance to deviate from the long dusty road.

Bai alone among Deshpande protagonists is wedded to her career, neglecting her home and child. The novelist presents only Bai’s illusion of a life of success achieved at the cost of severance of ties, the pain of which she does not reveal. With her words Bai attempts to build a “huge cutout of an artist” (Small 200) barring...
Madhu’s view of the human being behind it. Her muteness about her personal life poses a hindrance to link the singer to the wife and mother who flouted society. Since it is through the memory of the biographer that the past of Bai is created, her mind remains unexplored.

The journey to Bhavanipur equips Madhu to confront her own chaos, “to make sense of it, to speak of it, to convert the fractured images, the vague shapes and sounds into a coherent word pattern” (29). Though the final moment of madness between Som and Madhu that drove Adit to his death remains unexpressed, Urmi is able to communicate for the first time to Hari the agony of waiting for Adit. Her refusal to accept his death, the frantic search for him on the roads, busstops and sea shore and the vast emptiness that embraces her with the confirmation of his death finally find a way out.

It is the smile of the widowed mother whom she confronts at the Bhavanipur temple that pushes her back to life, to realise that loss and sorrow are not her monopoly. She learns that many are forced to conceal their suffering as if all is well. The letter from Som calling her back acknowledges their need for a renewal of their relationship: “We need to be together, we need to mourn him together, we need to face the fact of his death and our continuing life together. Only in this is healing possible” (323). Her assignment helps Madhu to reconstruct her past, how she survived the deaths of her mother, father and later, Joe and Leela. Just as Tony and Madhu had brought Joe back to life through their recollections, she realises that only Som and she can recreate Adit. Her final rejection of longing for amnesia implies a return to life for she realises, “as long as there is memory, there’s always the possibility of retrieval, as long as there is memory, loss is never total” (324).

Depression resulting from death drives Urmi too to an inward journey that enables her to discern life differently. In the web of loss and despair “Deshpande leaves enough space for the glimmerings of hope through the redemptive powers of love.” All our scriptures assert the binding power of love that enables us to transcend problems of individual life. *Binding Vine* for the first time provides an
instance of female bonding which is to be continued in the next novel. It is grief over the death of her daughter that drives Urmi to befriend the mother of the rape victim and delve into the rape-in-marriage of her long-dead mother-in-law. Her crusade for Kalpana and her translation of the poems of Mira help in conquering her pain. Sunita Reddy observes: “Urmi alleviates her grief by discovering and empathising with the sorrow of these women.” The encounter with the unlettered Shakutai who keeps her poise amidst gruesome experiences edifies her to remain uncrushed despite the challenges.

It is the same female bonding and power of will that equip Sumi also to face the crisis though ultimately she falls a prey to forces beyond human control. A feeling of void and anxiety pushes Sumi also to an intense self-examination. Yet she rediscovers her identity in the given role. Both Kalyani and Sumi try to cushion themselves against the cruelty of life through the genuine support and concern of kith and kin. While Kalyani overcomes her unexpressed misery by her permeating love, the discovery of her creative capacity helps Sumi to cope with reality. As Sema Jena comments, “the techniques of withdrawal becomes a means by which a woman rediscovers her personality and digs up her hidden potential and learns not to repress her talents.”

The journey to self-awareness is not an easy task for the protagonists of Deshpande. It demands a surrender of the inflated ego and an intensely painful self-examination. Nostos begins a process of introspection leading to a hitherto unexperienced self-discovery. “It is only when Sarita withdraws from her immediate family, her husband and children that she is able to overcome by her sense of guilt.” Saru had often sought external help to release her from the trauma. Her backward journey has been a vague, undefined search for reassurance and assistance from her father who stood by her at the time of her medical admission. As Ragini Ramachandra opines, “escape had been her mould of resolving tangled knots.” But the title signifies the need of confrontation. Ironically it is the same pusillaneous father who has always avoided truth and confrontation that teaches her that escapism is no
permanent solution. The brief stay at home gives her a chance to review her past and determines her not to allow herself to be victimised. She learns that the dead mother and brother are beyond confrontation and reconciliation. She has to deal with the living. The attitude of young Madhava, “My life is my own” (That Long 208) connects her to her future. She realises the need to disentangle herself from the dark shadows of her past for self-emancipation. With the confession about her part in the death of Dhruva the reality dawns on her that she has been only passively responsible for the tragedy. The disclosure about her marriage teaches her the futility of searching an external agency to end her misery. Paradoxically it is in the words of Dhuryodhana quoted by her mother that Saru culminates her search. Through her story Deshpande transcends to the fundamental problem of alienation and aloneness. It is only through acceptance that one can become whole. Saru accepts the selves which she had rejected so resolutely and embraced so passionately afterwards: the undutiful daughter, unloving sister and unconcerned wife. The nights now no longer terrify her and she gathers enough strength to squarely face the reality. The alacrity with which she wears the mantle of her profession and her last instruction to the father “if Manu comes tell him to wait” (221) emphasise the disappearance of all frightening shadows.

“Despite the tussles with the mother, the daughters have an irresistible urge to return home.” 78 Nostos after ten years of immigration enables Indu to critically analyse her matrimony which separated her from, yet reminded her everyday of her home. She realises to her dismay that her hardwon independence seems only an ephemera. Under the guise of independence the rebel in her had conditioned herself to be as submissive as any other Indian woman. She who has been moulding herself on Jayant’s pattern gleans courage to stand by herself. Like Saru, self-introspection enables Indu to confront the hideous ghost of her own cowardice. The realisation that there is nothing to be ashamed of her sexual need liberates her from a sense of guilt. The understanding that marriage has hampered her individuality because she had regarded it as a trap and not a nurturing bond turns a new leaf in her life. Her choice
of security through reconciliation does not in any way tarnish her image. "The ethos in the novel is neither victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposing ideas and conflicting selves."79

The prodigal daughter on her return inherits not only of the wealth of Akka, but her indomitable spirit too. After serious introspection Indu establishes her individuality by refusing to cater to the demands of others. Her reconciliation with the dead Akka enables her to look at rules as essential elements that add to the grace and dignity of life. Within the matrix of the Indian familial situation Indu is able to make space for herself by accommodating others too. Brooding over tradition, marriage, love, sex and her own life she leaves home not as a fragmented personality but as a whole self. The realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes as the right thing to do and the determination and tenacity to adhere to it guarantees her the clear light of life.

Return to the Dadar flat has been a homecoming experience to Jaya for as she enters the ghosts of her past spring at her with "a savagery that was overwhelming" (That Long 13). Her withdrawal from quotidian life enables her to review her life with Mohan and to examine herself. The novel in fact becomes "a self-critique of Jaya."80 Together with the system she too has partaken in victimising her. In her terrible loneliness she realises the meaninglessness of the pursuit of happiness. Neither total detachment nor complete conformity guarantees harmony. When her hysterical defence mechanism fails Jaya for the first time attempts to decide what she is. In the cathartic state realization dawns on her that she had been bound by fear and scared of breaking through the thin veneer of a happy family. Shuttling between her past and present Jaya struggles alone with her trauma: "though it upsets her mental equilibrium she emerges victorious."81

Writhing out of the emotional upheaval Jaya comes to terms with herself and breaks her silence through writing. Articulation of her life with all its varied phases teaches her that fragmentation is not possible. The decision to remain whole fills her with vigour and vitality. She decides to listen and to speak. After the purgation, like
the other protagonists, Jaya too realises the need of interdependence. In marriage if one is a sheltering tree the other is the earth in which it is rooted. Her decision to give up her ‘Seeta column’ heralds the quitting of her Seeta role also. She seeks a reorientation of her relationships and hopes for a new awareness in Mohan for without hope life is impossible. The decision to discard both Prakrit and the persistent image of the two bullocks yoked together suggest the course of life head. As Sarla Palkar opines, “by her journey into the past, Jaya gets the guidance for her future.”

The fictional world of Deshpande embodies the essence of the cultural milieu of India with all its complexities. Caught in a world of transition the women folk of different classes and ages are also in a process of redefining and rediscovering themselves. In the extended families in the novels one can hear the clash between tradition and modernity. From the traditional roles of daughter, sister, wife and mother the Deshpande protagonists struggle to emerge as individuals in their own right. Deserting their homes which stand for patriarchy and gender discrimination Saru, Jaya and Indu find themselves surrendering to another form of patriarchal control through marriage. The willing acceptance of the mantle of an ideal wife which springs from the anxiety to prove them successful before their mothers often make them emotionally and sexually famished. The psychological betrayal “make them undertake a self exploratory journey which finally culminates in compromise and conformity.” Deshpande effectively employs the technique of flashback to draw attention to the process of socialisation that forces the Indian girlchild forever to mould herself into the straitjackets of tradition which ultimately effects a rift between the mother and the daughter. The journey to the past is a journey of discovery where she confronts ghosts of her own self. The review of their lives (in their gender constructed roles) help them to cast off their constricting role models. The struggle against gender constructions becomes a form of search for an authentic identity. Once they are reconciled to their own selves the protagonists discard their silence which is a strong symbol used by Deshpande for submission as well as anger.
issuing out of helplessness. The decision to break silence equips Indu and Jaya to articulate through their books and enables Saru to continue her medical profession without any qualms.

The awareness comes from within. The advice of Krisha to Arjuna, “yathechasai tatha karo . . . do as you desire” (That Long 192) becomes the guiding principle not only for Jaya, but to the others as well. Coming to terms with themselves the protagonists are able to integrate themselves with family and society for they learn that it is only through relationships that self is made whole. They follow the path of Saru who places her trust in self-confidence and the possibility of human interdependence. It is through the power of female bonding that Urmi, Sumi, Kalyani and Madhu are able to recuperate their loss. These novels are not mere documentations of female resistance to patriarchal ideologies but the attempts made by women to forge an identity of their own, to voice themselves. Urmi and Kalpana assert the changing attitude towards marriage. Through the portrayal of these women Deshpande corrects the assumption that woman wants to be dominated. From a state of passive acceptance they move to one of active assertion. Refusing to succumb to societal pressures and creating enough space within the accepted social institution Deshpande women succeed in establishing their individuality.
Notes


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