CHAPTER – II

Emerging Woman in Shashi Deshpande’s Early Novels: 
*Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, 
The Dark Holds No Terror, The Binding Vine*

Indian English fiction writers who are directly or indirectly engaged in the vital task of formulating a new consciousness of women in our rapidly changing environment constitute a significant group. The chronicle of their writing which budded in the works of Toru Dutt, has travelled a long way during the nineteen-eighties maturing and blooming in the works of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy and others. In their works, Indian English fiction has attained its utmost maturity both in respect of its theme, form and style. Gone are the inhibitions of the yesteryears, when these writers speak freely about love, sex, gender inequalities and even same sex relationships. Shashi Deshpande is one of leading women novelists who has portrayed contemporary women realistically as they appear in our society, with objectivity and insight.

Woman’s image has always been constructed upon man’s imagination. This entrapment has limited her pitiably. Binding her with the concepts of softness, sympathy, beauty and sacrifice, it obliterates her own identity. As Simone de Beauvoir rightly suggests in her introduction to *The Second Sex*, this social construct of the ‘eternal feminine’ has confined women to a socially, culturally and economically inferior status. Men always establish norms, and women are defined as the “other” with reference to these norms- “He is the subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.” (de Beauvoir 14). We cannot but agree with Beauvoir’s contention
that it is not by increasing her worth as human being that a woman will gain value in man's eyes but rather by modelling herself on his dreams. The inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity, but is produced by cultural construction of gender differences.

The ingredients used in literary creations are mostly the writer's experiences, either direct or indirect. We may say, a la Lawrence, that the novel is the "book of life" and this reminds us of Margaret Atwood's assertion that "although a novel is not a political tract, a how-to book, a sociology textbook or a pattern of correct morality, it is also not merely a piece of Art for Art's sake, divorced from real life" (3). While depersonalizing many current theories, the Indian English novels, too, insistently place the human being at the center, though always in ways that are 'worlded'. In more ways than one, these have voiced the muted existence of the gendered subalterns.

Starting her writing career in the 1970s, Shashi Deshpande has twenty-three books to her credit - ten novels, eight volumes of short stories, four books for children, and one collection of essays. In recognition of her major contribution to Indian English fiction, she was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award for the year 1990 for That Long Silence. Her writing career thus reveals an unending process of problemmatizing life's conflicts and negotiations. Her novels are open-ended and this perception of viewing human life without any definite closures concretizes major themes of her novels which primarily focus on man-woman relationship, desires and passions, sexualities, gender bias, rebellion and protest. With these recurring themes Deshpande creates a space, a site for contestation of ideologies from where
various voices find utterance breaking the long silence of ages. Implicit in these is
the author's critique of the widely contested site of socio-cultural life in modern urban
and postcolonial India. Deshpande's perceptions of women's autonomy and
independence are deeply entrenched in the Indian woman's situatedness within the
socio-cultural and economic milieu of the country. In all the four novels mentioned in
the title she makes strong statements on the status of contemporary Indian women
in their resistances and submissions to the dictates of phallocentrism. Her work can
perhaps be read best within a broadly postcolonial-feminist framework. Various
ideologically encoded binaries such as speech/silence, modernity/tradition,

male/female, oppressor/victim, central/marginal etc. are diffused within the body of
the texts. Although consistently pressurized in tangled relationships, her protagonists
in Roots and Shadows, That Long Silence, The Dark Holds No Terror, The Binding

Vin,- Indu, Jaya, Saru, Urmi, refuse to become prisoners of orthodoxies, fossilized
traditions and stereotypically idealized identities. Deshpande asserts that her writing
is strongly gendered in the sense that her novels could have been written only by a
woman- “As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is
bound to surface. Besides only a woman could write my books- they are written
from the inside, as it were” (“On the Writing of a Novel", Dhawan 8). Such a view
brings into contestation her own position that she would like to be recognized as a
writer without the qualifier “woman” or “feminist”, although in her works one may
explore and underline gender specific issues. But, however much she may deny the
influence of feminism in her novels, it is the core of her novels. Her heroines speak
of Virginia Woolf and Betty Friedan and it becomes quite obvious that the women
she has created are feminists. I would like to posit that the author's own
ambivalence comes through in her work. Referring to Friedan she points out that it
was easier to start the woman's liberation movement than to change one's own
personal life. Deshpande believes that changing one's personal life in a given social
situation is, undoubtedly, challenging as most women live without a room of their
own, says Deshpande. The woman's issue in India is different from what it is in
western countries. The writers who are conscious of the "othering" of women need
to, as Shashi Deshpande puts it in her Afterword to Shakti,-

...make ordinary women understand the possibility of power, of being
able to control their own lives. And to have this power, not as mothers,
not as devoted wives, but as ordinary women, as humans. (319)

In place of a western/Indian version of 'feminism' what the novelist privileges is
perhaps a kind of gendered humanism. In her thought provoking essay, "Of
Concerns, Of Anxieties", Deshpande writes that her writing originated from her
suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, her experience of
the difficulty of playing the different roles enjoined on her by the society. It evolved
out of her consciousness of the conflict between her idea of herself as a human
being and the idea that society has of her as a woman. She adds that by being a
feminist, she believes that the female of the species has the same right to be born
and survive and to fulfill herself and shape her life according to her needs and the
potential that lies within her, as the male has. Being a feminist does not require one
to give up family life or to hate men. As she rightly points out, the greatest
revolutions can take place in the mind. It is not necessary to walk out, to commit
adultery, to divorce, to show defiance or a rejection of tradition. In a recent interview to Bulan Lahiri Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on being asked “whether she would describe herself as a feminist,” says,

I think that gendering is a bigger institution than anything in the world. Sexual difference is the only empirical difference that everyone can sense. Gendering is our first and most persistent instrument of abstraction. That’s the most primitive theoretical tool. Both Worker and employee are in it, colonizer and colonized are in it. Those kinds of distinctions disappear. Any kind of academic work is incorrect if not gendered (The Hindu Literary Review 1).

The novels under discussion reconstruct aspects of women’s experience and attempt to give voice to ‘muted’ ideologies, registering resistance. Instead of scraping postcolonial issues such as nationalism, imperialism, etc., Deshpande explores the female psyche and reconstructs the lost or suppressed records of female experience. She re-invents the emerging Indian woman with a shift in the perceptions of relationships, aspirations and motherhood. In letting her women experience the silence within she lets them get a glimpse of their inner being and empowers them. Thus Deshpande’s novels become, according to Usha Bande, novels of ‘becoming’ (191). She attempts to break the long silence of Indian women in her writing by transforming a predominantly androcentric symbolic order to a feminine narration. She rewrites ‘herstory’, subverting in Derrida’s words, “a whole, dense, enigmatic, and heavily stratified history” (Dissemination, 148). Echoing Jasbir Jain we can say that Deshpande’s writing is the literature of silence in two ways.
First, its meaning lies hidden and camouflaged. Second, it is also the literature of silence for it seeks to express what has been submerged and suppressed.

A close reading of all her novels reveals that her primary concern is with the exploration of human psyche. Deshpande writes through her body inventing the “impregnable language” (Cixous, 56) which deconstructs the traditional image of the signifier at the textual, linguistic and psychological level, and the patriarchal authority at the cultural level. “Writing”, to Deshpande is not only a means of self discovery and self learning but also a process in which the author has a definite role to play in the broader social context. If one self of the writer writes about and articulates all those voices which struggle to be recognized in a never ending, subversive dialogism, the other self is a critical reader who constantly assesses how these voices have been materialized in the writing. In all the four novels the novelist explores what happens in the psyche of her heroines as they go through the complex process of self-realization. In an interview to Joel Kuortti, Deshpande once said: ... my books go into the female mind and the psychology of the human female (Tense Past, Tense Present 34). Thus, she creates a familiar world anew in which authentic experiences of the inner psyche of Indian women is powerfully projected.

Body becomes the very medium through which femininity is spatialized and sexualized in these fictions. Deshpande attempts to write about the extra-marital relationships and female sexuality. These are important in two ways: first, they indicate women's pleasure in their own bodies and acceptance of the bodily desires which become an important stage in the evolution of a feminist consciousness;
Second, for the middle-class Indian woman's sexuality from the woman's viewpoint is in itself a move against patriarchy. The author attempts to break the long silence of Indian women in her writing by transforming a predominantly androcentric symbolic order to a feminine narration. While the texture of the novels is suffused with feminine sensibility, the structure of the novels, too, is feminine in the sense in which Luce Irigaray uses it. Susheila Nasta in her discussion of the intersections of feminism, gender and postcoloniality observes- "Language is both a source and womb of creativity... of telling the stories of women that have previously been silenced, it can also become a major site of contest, a revolutionary struggle" (Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, The Caribbean and South Africa, xiii). Deshpande uses English as the language of self-expression. It thus articulates the previously suppressed voices- those of women trapped between the conflicting demands of traditional expectations of a woman's role and the search for self-fulfilment and identity. A number of Third World Postcolonial Feminist theorists (reference may be cited of Chandra T Mohanty's Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse and Benita Parry's Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse), write increasingly about the need to make room for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives to go beyond a literature of opposition, and to work across/through the incapacitating disparity of home/abroad, nation/gender. By examining the sites where these courses intersect and by deconstructing the 'meaning' they ascribe, it is possible to open up a 'third space' (R Radhakrishnan's term Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity, 45)- where oppressed and silent minorities can not only speak, but also can be heard. In dealing with the interior
landscape and the psychic journey of the characters, Deshpande has extended and enlarged the thematic horizon of the Indian English novels. The poignant and artistic portrayal of the individual experiences in these narratives touch a note in the mind of sensitive readers (sa-hriday), and the protagonists remain with them even long afterwards.

Roots and Shadows

The first novel under discussion, Roots and Shadows, won the Thirumathi Rangamal prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-83. In a book-review of the novel C. W. Watson has pointed out-

This novel which was published in 1983 succeeds magnificently in its haunting description of the decline of a once prosperous middle-class family in south-India. Much of the material of modern Indian writing in English is drawn from this social milieu- one has only to think of recent novels by Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh and Amit Chaudhuri, but where the strength of this novel lies is in the marvelous evocation of character and mood. (75)

The story is of Indu, a middle class young girl, brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka, the mother image in the novel. The novel begins with the protagonist’s return to her ancestral house. The parental home initiates her into an understanding of the meaning of human life. It is here that she discovers what her roots are - as an independent woman and a writer, and what her shadows are – as a daughter, a mother and commercial writer.
From the very beginning of the novel, we see Akka as a perpetrator of patriarchy. She is dominant and becomes a hindrance to Indu in achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. Akka is conscious of her high caste and behaves arrogantly. One example will suffice. She resents Indu for going to the hospital because as she says, “God knows what caste the nurses are... or the doctors; I couldn’t drink a drop of water there” (21). Indu, on the other hand, from a very tender age, has always hated Akka for her narrow mindedness. She rebels against her conventional world and her rigid values and marries Jayant in spite of Akka’s strong opposition. To attain freedom, she seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage inevitable in the parental family and thinks that by fitting herself in a new role of a wife she will attain her freedom.

The entire world presented in the novel is a well-knit closed world of a joint family which belongs to the upper caste Brahmin sect. Because of the Tenancy Act the members have lost their land to their tenants, and this has completely altered the power equation, empowering those who were landless till now. Though in the caste hierarchy the members are above their newly empowered tenant, the lower caste man ultimately becomes more powerful because of his strong political association and economic strength. Anant, who have enjoyed power, which comes with caste, for a long time, finds it difficult to adjust with the situation. He says,

Our own lands.... for generations they were our.... And we had to hand them over just like that....If some one had told me some years back, I’d never have believed it. When father was alive, he just had to go there and the fellows would fall at his feet. Now they have become too big. They know they have the upper hand. They’re
arrogant, disrespectful. And for generations we were kings (59-60).

Akka's decision of giving money to Indu is the first major crack in the stronghold of patriarchy. The other members of the family curse her and even think of challenging her will in a court of law. At first they hope that Indu will not use her power, but quietly hand over everything to her elders. They refuse to accept her empowerment. But Indu studies the situation and decides to take her decisions carefully for she is cautious not to be unjust to some deserving and meritorious persons. It is now that she becomes serious about her new role. Akka's decision of making Indu guardian of her property leads to much controversial discussion among her relatives. Their wants are never ending, their love is hypocritical, and their affection is filled with jealousy, hatred and envy. Indu observes- "There are strong and the weak. And the strong have to dominate the weak. It's inevitable. And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones. That's why she put the burden on me. And now, it is an obligation. I have to carry the burden. And to do that, I have to be hard. If I'm soft, I'll just cave in"(159). The house ultimately is brought down and the family members are forced to leave their closed world.

As a motherless child, Indu was brought up by the members of the joint family. Since her childhood, it has been drilled in her mind by the women members of the family that she as a female has to be meek and must learn to obey. Indu recalls later-

As a child, they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning.

As a Girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything,
even defeat, with grace, because you are a girl, they had said. It is
the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive (158).

This reminds us of Beauvoir’s observation-

To be feminine is to appear weak, futile, docile. The young girl is
supposed not only to deck herself out, to make herself ready, but also to
repress her spontaneity and replace it with the studied grace and charm
taught her by her elders. Any self-assertion will diminish her femininity
and her attractiveness. (359)

Indu bitterly recollects how crudely the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her-

My womanhood… I had never thought of it until the knowledge had
been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up.
‘You’re a woman now’, kaki had told me, ‘you can have babies
yourself’. I, a woman? My mind had flung of the thought with an
amazing swiftness. I was only a child, and then, she had gone on to
tell me badly, crudely, how I could have a baby.
And I, who had all the child’s unselfconsciousness about my own
body, had, for the first time, felt an immense hatred for it, and don’t
forget she had ended, ‘for four days now you are unclean… You
can’t touch any one or anything? (79)

Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother
and develops apathy towards childbirth. She fosters an obscure sense of guilt and
feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. Striking a new
environment, Indu marries Jayant, a man of different caste but of her own choice
and leaves her parental home. Indu leaves her ancestral house but very soon she realizes the fruits of her decision. Both she and Jayant wanted to achieve complete happiness, but her marriage to Jayant suppresses her feminity and her human demands. She is physically and spiritually dissatisfied with her husband, who takes her for granted and expects her to submit to his desires and wants. Her love marriage degenerates and Indu feels that she has abused her body's sanctity by the denial of full experience, satisfaction or happiness. The paradox of the situation is that Indu is not completely happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot live without him. She speaks about her incompleteness-

"This is my real sorrow. That I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant. I had not known it...that there was, somewhere outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant ... and lost the ability to be alone"(31) Marrying Jayant, Indu realizes that it is because of him that her life is meaningful in one view and also meaningless in another view. Indu knows quite well that she can never fit herself into the ideal woman compartment, and that she could never think of performing self-effacing rituals, which justified her existence in relation with a man. But in course of her own introspection of herself, she realizes that she is not very different from her conventional female counterparts, for she was unconsciously and consciously trying to mould and change and shape herself according to Jayant's desires and needs. She was once an independent, intelligent, logical and rational thinker, but after her marriage, she becomes one of those archetype submissive Indian women whose identity is only an extension of their husbands'. Jayant, on the other hand, in spite of his seemingly western style of life,
behaves like an average Indian male- "It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I'm like that, he turns away from me; I've learnt my lesson now. And so I pretend. I'm passive. And unresponsive" (83). Indu experiences only disillusionment in sex and suffers humiliation without raising a voice of protest. She is shocked to see that she is turning into an "ideal" Indian wife, obeying her husband's wishes and fancies. At a crucial time, she even thinks of leaving her husband, hoping to become whole self again, but she hangs on to her marriage though she knows that her marriage is a failure.

It is exactly when Indu is at the cross roads of her life with her sense of certainty, confidence and assurance withering away, she gets an opportunity to go back to her ancestral home. During her stay in her ancestral house, she gets an opportunity to review the past. Here she learns that, Akka's life is a stunning example of how women had been subjected to frustration and disappointment. Indu hears from Atya Akka's sufferance and her silences:

But I heard that twice she tried to run away... a girl of thirteen. Her mother-in-law I heard, whipped her for that and locked her up for three days. Starved her as well. And, then sent her back to her husband's room. The child, they said, cried and clung to her mother-in law saying, "Lock me up again, lock me up." But there was no escape from a husband then, I remember her telling me before my own marriage was consummated- "Now your punishment begins, Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels." (70)

For the first time, she understands and analyses Akka's behaviour in a sympathetic way.
Indu learns from Mini that "compromise" is the key word of marriage, and she has to learn to be content with it. In contrast to her, Mini prefers to adopt the traditional lifestyle. Because, there was no way out she seeks refuge in the age old tradition of a wife's submission to her husband's choices, desires, whims and wants. Indu asks Mini, her choice of spouse, and is shocked to hear her passive acceptance-

What choice do I have, Indu... of course I'm marrying him because there's nothing else you can do ..... Any man, Indu? Yes, any man. Any man who says 'yes'... You don't know what it has been like. Watching Kaka, Hemant and even Madhav—kaka running around after eligible men: if the horoscopes matched, there was true meeting to be arranged, And all those people coming and asking all kinds of questions... and they would say, "she's not modern enough"... She's too fashionable for us! Or too short, or too tall, or too dark, or something.... And I, feeling as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl.... I am tired Indu, I don't care what kind of a man he is, once we are married, and he becomes my husband, none of his flaws will matter (125-26).

A woman's pursuit of sexual pleasure is never accepted by our patriarchal society. It is realized only for the childbearing purpose. Indu, is quite impressed by Naren's idea of detachment, and experiences a sense of freedom, and very openly talks about herself and her failures. The newly acquired sense of freedom that she got from Naren's friendship, makes her aware of her natural impulses. Initial she rejects his love thinking that love is "monogamous", but later quite willingly offers
herself twice. Thus Indu, having found her sexual personality being suppressed, strives for expression and acceptance through an extra-marital affair with her cousin, Naren: “I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don’t need to erase any thing, I have done, and I told myself in a fit of bravado. (152) Her extra-marital relationship with her cousin Naren, brings no guilt to her initially, and she decides not to tell Jayant about it because to her- “That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together” (205). But the next day, she is quite worried and studies each and every action in terms of the situation that pushed her way towards Naren. Her mind is burdened with the traditional concepts of “sin”, “crime”, “right” and “wrong”. Indu says: “…Wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him a spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, is dishonorable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with Naren” (171).

In her novel, Shashi Deshpande openly tells about a woman’s sexuality and the theme of marriage and sexuality as traced in this novel shows a development from tradition to revolt to affirmation. By presenting Indu’s psychological turmoil in this manner, the novelist exposes the double standards opted in our society.

Marriage and sexuality as a subject of study has been left unexplored by most of the early Indian English novelists. Shashi Deshpande has emerged as a writer possessing deep insight into the female psyche. Focusing on the marital relations she seeks to expose the tradition by which a woman is trained to play her
subservient role in the family. The narrative also raises such serious issues as
childmarriage and rape in marriage. Akka was a victim of child marriage— a traditional
evil of that time. She was married at the age of twelve to a man thrice her age. She
becomes a victim of his lust and her attempts to escape the nightly tortures of her
husband are a failure. She highlights the Indian tradition, which had denied a woman
her right over her own body and made her a victim of marital rape. As a result of
such inhuman conditions Akka begins to view sex as a punishment. In spite of
regular ill-treatment, beastly assault and humiliation, Akka served her husband like a
dutiful wife when he suffered a stroke. But she did not allow any his mistress to see
him— "Listen to me, it's my turn now. I've listened to you long enough. She came here.
Twice she wanted to see you. She cried and begged to be allowed to see you just
for a short while. I threw her out. You'll never see her again." (71).

Through Naren's idea of detachment, Indu rebuilds her lost vision. She now
realizes that she had only lacked courage. She is now an assertive woman with
emerging new self. She wants to project her true self to Jayant instead of the
pretentious one she had been showing all these days. Indu reflects—

Here, in this house, in this family, was a role waiting for me. A role
that I would, perhaps, act out more successfully than the one I had
tried until now. For had I not, so very often, felt myself just a mouthing,
grimacing puppet, dully saying the lines I had to, feeling, actually,
nothing? Had I not felt myself flat, one dimensional, just a blurred
figure merging into the background? Where as here, I would stand
out, sharp and clear... (143)

As Indu muses on her life, its problems, she sees the truth that, she was running
after illusion only in search of happiness, and sees that the source of her unhappiness was tradition. Unless and until the roots, the source of her fears are not uprooted, Indu cannot achieve fulfillment. She therefore destroys the roots, eliminates her fears, and confronts her problems with courage. She affirms- “Now I fell clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges of my self. And free.” (180).

Indu now realizes that her marriage is a uniting bond and not a “trap” as she felt earlier. The veil from her mind lifts up as she decides to reveal to Jayant her whole life, her weakness and her strengths, her virtues and her vices as well. Indu decides to take up Akka’s burden and live up to her expectations. She decides to fulfill all the obligations she has towards the family and towards herself. Indu decides to marry Mini to a better man and not to the man chosen by Akka and pay for the wedding. Ultimately she feels- “How the darkness inside me was banished, replaced instead by a gentle kindly dawn” (179). Indu understands, that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. She wants to go back to Jayant, for she loves and needs him, and wants to restart her life built on the foundation of honesty. Now onwards she is not going to suppress her feelings only to please Jayant. She really achieves freedom and decides to do what she thinks she should be doing. She -“Returns home, equipped with that quality of courage, necessary to face the challenge of identity crisis for her marriage had, always posed—returns to suffer, to question and to find roots” (Patil 136). Commenting on Indu’s decision to start writing according on her own wishes and not to use Akka’s money to enrich herself, Usha Tambe says, “the important point is that she is making independent decision,” (124). Thus Indu
gains confidence and emerges as a new woman. S.P. Swain aptly sums up Indu's growth thus:

The meek, docile and humble Indu of the early days finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying male authority, hierarchy and the irony of a woman's masked existence. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self's struggle for harmony and sanity. She is able to discover her roots as an independent woman, a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. (95)

By shattering the matrix of man-made stereotypes into which women so far have been stiflingly cast and by bringing the reader face to face with their real nature, Shashi Deshpande tries to carve out the effigy of a new woman who is more palatable and real to the mind of the reader. Indu's problematic of "becoming" expresses Deshpande's feminist polemics against sexual and gender roles imposed upon women in a patriarchal culture. The novel ends with a positive note with the hope of the new dawn. Thus, Shashi Deshpande conveys the message that the modern Indian woman should learn to conquer her fear and must assert herself. The novel comes to an end with a note of compromise rather than a revolt and revenge which is the basic attribute of Indian feminism.

*That Long Silence*

Deshpande has repeatedly emphasized that a lifetime of introspection went into the making of *That Long Silence*, the Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel for 1990. It is perhaps the most autobiographical of all writings, though not in personal
details but in thoughts and ideas. Her writing is strongly gendered in the sense that her novels could have been written only by a woman. In her narrative, she raises a number of issues and interrogates that which has been blindly accepted till date making the text open-ended, viable for multiple interpretations which reject the traditional meanings. *That Long Silence*, written as an exercise of memory and catharsis, is the autobiographical narrative of the protagonist, Jaya. Her husband, Mohan, involved in a case of corruption at work, is hiding out with her in a small suburban flat in Bombay. This limbo of waiting and anxiety gives Jaya the time and opportunity to reflect on her life and particularly upon her roles as a woman-daughter, sister, wife, and mother. She finally recovers her fragmented self and realizes a vital truth—“Self-revelation is a cruel process. The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges” (1).

An indepth analysis of the novel reveals that it “seeks to expose patriarchal practices” (*Sexual/ Textual Politics*, xiv) and is perhaps concerned with the “articulation of women’s experience” (*A Literature of Their Own*, 4). Our society projects marriage as the vital essence of a woman’s life without which her life becomes meaningless. “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society”(445), affirms Beauvoir. This idea is so deep-rooted in the Indian psyche that marriage-ties have always been considered as sacred and eternal. Hence, for centuries women have been forced to bear physical and mental torture, indifference and non-communication to continue this bond. Jaya’s dreams of having a happy home prove to be a fiasco when her husband is caught in a case of bribery. The corrupt practices of Mohan in his office and his indifference to her create a rift
between them. But she never voices her dissent and remains silent amidst all emotional turmoil. In the Indian set-up where “Marriages never end, they cannot... they are a state of being” and where husband is considered to be a “sheltering tree” (32), Jaya muses- “A pair of bullocks yoked together... that was how I saw the two of us”(7). Marriage becomes almost an institution enslaving women to a lifetime of male dominion- “marriages never end, they cannot- they are a state of being” (127). In an interesting collection of essays entitled Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia, Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault argue that to “a girl straining toward marriage, to a woman after she has gained that paradisiacal state, marriage works effectively as purdah... preventing her from achieving selfhood and individuality” (79). The girl child is consciously inculcated into the idea that marriage is her ultimate goal and thus she is enveloped in a kind of mental purdah from her early childhood. The process of schooling herself to play the role of the “other” begins with the marriage negotiations. It will be perhaps worth quoting Beauvoir’s comment in this context: In such circumstances the girl seems absolutely passive; she is married, given in marriage by her parents. Boys get married, they take a wife” (448). Jaya also faces the same situations-“the truth is that he had decided to marry me, I had only to acquiesce” (94), she reminisces. With marriage comes a re-moulding of personality in many ways. Jaya’s renaming as “Suhasini” is a symbolic obliteration of her past identity and submission to that of her husband. The first lesson on the necessity of annihilating her “self” identity had come the first time she had lost her temper and seen the reaction on Mohan’s face. She recalls: “He had looked at me
as if my emotions had made me ugly, as if I'd got bloated into the. Later, when I knew him better, I realized that to him anger made me 'unwomanly.'" (83).

Thus the author creates a space, a site for contestation of ideologies from where various voices find utterance breaking the long silence of ages. Implicit in these is her critique of the widely contested site of socio-cultural life in modern urban and postcolonial India. The novel reconstructs aspects of woman's experience and attempts to give voice to 'muted' ideologies, registering resistance. Silence implies the traditional expectation that the women will silently fall into the role strait-jacketed for them. It thus becomes the metaphor for submission and loss of identity. Deshpande strongly opposes these specifications of roles and writes in her article "Why I am a Feminist"- ...I believe that women are neither inferior not subordinate human beings...I believe that women (and men as well) should not be straitjacketed into roles that wrap their personalities, but should have options available to them (Writing from the Margin, 83)

In That Long Silence, Deshpande uses her narrative to raise such important issues as a woman's right to her body. Body has always been an important site for feminist discourse. Female body is most often rendered 'docile' under the domination of patriarchy. It becomes primarily a source of social control in an androcentric social order. Cowering under patriarchal dominion and subjugation, it is never free. The body thus becomes the "practical, direct locus of social control" (The Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body, 2362). Silence becomes the ultimate reality when the bodies are subjugated and self-dignity is wounded. Until and unless women gain their bodily rights, the male-female equation
is bound to be tilted and lop-sided. Luce Irigaray rightly claims that- “It is important for us to guard and keep our own bodies and at the same time make them emerge from the silence and subjugation” (421). Perhaps, what Deshpande is seeking in her novel is a response to the female body, that grants it the right to its own truth, its right to self possession. The body is the room for the 'self'. Female emancipation will only be fully realized when the rights to the room are given to women. The experiences of women under patriarchal domination and those of the colonized subjects are, in many ways, similar. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their seminal volume, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, rightly point out- “In many different societies, women, like colonized subjects, have been relegated to the position of ‘Other’, ‘colonized' by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with colonized races and cultures an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression” (“Feminisms”, 233). All the female characters suffer either directly or indirectly because of this male dominance. This common suffering creates a strong bond between them irrespective of class, caste, social status and generation-gap and helps the readers to understand this mosaic of suffering and compliance. Ajjii, Jaya, Mukta, Vimala, Jeeja, Nayana are all victims of an endemic imbalance between male power and female powerlessness within marriage. In their common heritage of oppression and voicelessness they all are in a way the “gendered subalterns”. Spivak rightly contests that “the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant” (287) - making the females “subalterns”. Thus, Deshpande’s perceptions of both women’s autonomy and acquiescence are deeply entrenched in the Indian woman’s situatedness within the socio-cultural and
economic milieu of the country. In this novel she makes strong statements on the status of contemporary Indian women in their resistances and submissions to the dictates of phallocentrism. Mohan’s mother has been the traditional long-suffering Indian wife; uncomplainingly bearing the burden of her husband’s harshly imposed authority over his household. The father has been a merciless tyrant, demanding that fresh food be served to him whatever time he decided to return home failing which, she was tortured mercilessly. She had gone to the mid-wife to get herself aborted, thus dying in a futile attempt to stop the chain of unwanted pregnancies forced on her body. While Mohan saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, Jaya confesses “I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon.” (31)

Deshpande’s attempt to voice the muted gendered subalterns constitutes part of the decolonizing feminist project. Jaya’s maidservant Jeeja’s uncomplainingly support to an unemployed drunkard husband and her patient acceptance of his second marriage as perfectly justified, the sounds of a woman being beaten by her husband in a neighbouring flat at Dadar- the woman’s soft moaning, ‘mother, mother, mother,’” (57) ruthlessly exposes the patriarchal injustice.

Deshpande gets to the root of existence and gives vent to a kind of female subjectivity which refuses to reconcile and identify herself with a male dominated society. The female self, in order to emerge in its own right, has first to validate her existence on her own terms, without male protection and support. Obliterating her real self Jaya had tried to be only “Mohan’s wife”. As long as she “had cut off the bits of me [her] that had refused to be Mohan’s wife” (191) she could never make proper
choices. Jaya longs for communion rather than a mere physical union, but never has the courage to make demands, for that would necessitate releasing herself from psychological fetters regarding feminine behaviour. So drilled is she in denying her own sexuality, that she walks out on Kamat, the man who had reached out to her physically and emotionally, afraid to face the truth of her own sexual arousal by a man who is not her husband. The existentialists hold the view that most of the decisions, problems or questions in the life of an individual are not accessible to reason and the freedom to choose is central to human existence. Even the refusal to choose is a choice because an individual may thus identify and assert his unique mode of expression as well as of existence. An Action is always to be chosen: otherwise it cannot be action proper. To quote Kierkegaard: "The real action is not an external act, but an internal decision in which the individual puts an end to the mere possibility and identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it" (302). *That Long Silence* reveals Jaya’s progress from a state of split personality to that of unified sensibility. Deshpande explores the root-cause of the fragmentation of her heroine and reveals what happens in her psyche in the process of individuation. The protagonist realizes that she must exercise her choice and give up using Prakrit, the language of the subalterns. Life now holds no terror for Jaya- “I have always thought – there’s only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices. “Yathechasi thatha kuru” (191-92), she concludes. She recovers her Self and relates to the society in a more compassionate way. The wifely role no longer holds her in bondage and her sense of self provides her with fresh choices within the old
framework and she now returns to the reconstructed realities. She finally resolves to break her silence and asserts- "I will have to erase the silence between us" (192).

Through Jaya, Deshpande also scrutinizes a dilemma facing many women writers even today- their inability to let their imagination free play, without being restricted either by the distractions of domestic life or the code of the society. In an interview with Romita Choudhury, the novelist said- "The struggle not to reveal oneself in one's writing as in That Long Silence is partly autobiographical" (19).

Mohan sets the parameters for the kind of writing his male ego and the norms of the male dominated society permit Jaya to write. But Jaya finally decides to leave the soapy "Sita columns" and to write her own story. In her book Feminism: Theory, Criticism, Analysis, Sushila Singh writes- "Once women begin to write, they can reasonably represent their experience, including the thematics of their long muted femininity "(68). Jaya, too, through "herstory" voices her long muted femininity.

The novelist attempts to break the long silence of Indian women in her writing by transforming a predominantly androcentric symbolic order to a feminine narration. The image of "multicoloured patchwork quilt" aptly sums up the narrative pattern. The narration is an introspection in the stream of consciousness mode reminding the readers of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. In a recent interview to B K Das (published in The Indian Journal of English Studies, 2009), Deshpande stated: "Whether you are a man or a woman, you are getting into the mind of another person. Imagination, knowledge and sympathy are needed as well as writing skill" (323). In Indian languages there is so much difference between men's language and women's language. In this novel Deshpande takes up an "other" mode of discourse,
to authentically depict the working of the psyche of the central protagonist. This reminds us of Helen Cixous' contention that writing is of the body and that a woman does not write like a man because she speaks with the body. The sentence structures are broken down and the limitations of punctuations are removed in an attempt to convey female experience and the way a woman's mind works. The texts contain instances of continuous narrative where thought and action are seamlessly represented. Deshpande expresses meaning in both modes that Kristeva discusses—Symbolically, i.e., through the use of logical terms; and Semiotically, through a breathless flow of words that are more emotive than logical. The focus combines the sexual with the symbolic in order to “discover first the specificity of the feminine and then the specificity of each woman” (Kristeva, 210).

The author has confessed that “I must have been more than halfway through this novel when I realized that it was about women's silences” (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays, 19). Her writings themselves are a type of audible “silence” in the sense that silence is broken by the presentation of silence. Through Jaya the novelist re-invents the emerging Indian woman with a shift in the perceptions of relationships, aspirations and motherhood. In letting her heroine experience the silence within she lets her get a glimpse of their inner being and empowers her. Jaya ultimately learns how to move on, how to make the most of one's life. Through her protagonist, the novelist depicts the fact that one must understand the meaning of life and learn how to face it. In her afterword to Shakti, Deshpande pointed out: "What women need is the ...power to take their own decisions, without being constrained by traditional ideas of honour or sacrifice, an
ability to see beyond these ideas, to see things with their own eyes, with their own minds” (319).

The novel has wide-ranging dimensions and raises questions about the process of self-revelation, the search for meaning of a dull and drab life and our relationships and responsibilities. In my subsequent readings, this multi-layered text reminded me of the classical ‘onion peel’ image— the more we peel, the more layers are revealed. Several layers of meaning become apparent as the text unfolds. Situating the novel against Postcolonial Studies (vis-à-vis Said’s idea of Contrapuntal Reading, Bhabha’s concept of Hybrid and Ambivalent cultures, and Spivak’s theory of the Gendered Subaltern) Feminism, Intertextuality, Existentialism, Reader Response Criticism, as well as other theoretical perspectives we can read between the lines and understand the text better. Such diversity qualifies this fiction as a ‘plural text’. But this is certainly not an attempt to prove that the text is Postcolonial, Feminist or that it adheres to any such categorization. Deshpande strongly negates such cataloging. In an interview with Ranjana Harish she emphasized- “I don’t think any qualifying words are necessary- not Indian, not Indo-English, not woman, not feminist, not third world” (60).

Existentialism which first appeared as a philosophy in the nineteenth century from the ideas of the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard later developed as a philosophical vision as well as a literary movement and gained popularity only in the last century, after the Second World War. Propagated by such great thinkers as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus this philosophy begins with “man” primarily
as the “existing subject” and not a “thinking subject.” As Sartre has explained in his article “Existentialism is a Humanism”— I quote, “man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterward... he will be what he makes of himself” (289). It is through an exercise of free will and decision that man becomes authentically himself. The existentialists hold the view that most of the decisions, problems or questions in the life of an individual are not accessible to reason and the freedom to choose is central to human existence. Even the refusal to choose is a choice because an individual may thus identify and assert his unique mode of expression as well as of existence. Because individuals are free to choose their own path, existentialists have argued, they must accept the risk and responsibility of following their commitment wherever it leads. Freedom of choice entails commitment and responsibility. This commitment is controlled, at least partially, by “dread” and “anxiety”- the two very significant concepts in existentialist philosophy. Deshpande’s narrative technique is simple and has little to do with the disjointed and broken depiction of absurdity and sufferings in an inexplicable universe depicted by Sartre, Camus, Beckett and others. But the similarity lies elsewhere. What characterizes her work is a sense of insecurity, rootlessness, alienation, dread, anxiety, angst, and void embedded within the text with immaculate craft. She explores the root cause of the fragmentation of her heroine and reveals what happens in her psyche in the process of individuation.

The novel gives us an experience of death and desolation and hammer in us an unbearable sense of nullity. That Long Silence is perhaps best understood as a thesis of existential human presence in which the characters are stripped of all the
illusions that adorn their beings. The theme of death has figured rather prominently in the writings of the existentialists. This sense of "ending" and "death" hovers around the fiction from the very beginning. The novel is strewn with images of death and descriptions of people dying- Kusum, Ajji, Kamat, Nair, Vimala and Jaya's parents. In the beginning of the novel Jaya speaks of a "A peaceful and colourful death. And I had thought of the lemmings then" (10)- through the stream-of-consciousness technique. In spite of whatever comfort life has to offer, there is always a crucial sense of emptiness and a wish for death. Jaya asks Mohan, "Did you never wish to die, to kill yourself?" (11) and later ponders "Surely there comes a moment in every human's life when he or she says, like the Sibyl- I wish to die" (11). The description of Dadar Flat gives rise to a sense of decay paralleling the protagonist's unhappy self: "The place reeked of mildew and rot. The fetid stench of the garbage had drifted in through the door" and "a trail of garbage on the soiled cement stairs, cigarette butts, scraps of paper, bits of vegetable peel" (12). With his eyes glassy and wide open, vomit dribbling out of the corner of his mouth, the smell of vomit and urine in the room Kamat's death presents a sordid scene indeed. The description of Ajji's room or Kusum lying on her bed evokes nauseating experiences as well.

Man's freedom and his quest for authentic personal being meet with resistance and sometimes with frustration. As far as the individual is concerned existence ends in death. For the existentialist, man is never just part of the cosmos but always stands to it in a relationship of tension with possibilities for tragic conflict. In this tragic, absurd world the only reality is "anxiety" in the whole chain of beings. To the
man lost in the world and its diversions this anxiety is a brief, fleeting fear. But if that fear becomes conscious of itself, it becomes “anguish”. But it may have other forms as well. This becomes “boredom” when the ordinary man strives to quash it in him and benumb it and “terror” when the mind contemplates death. As Jaya reflects: There had been for me that other waiting... waiting fearfully for disaster, for a catastrophe.” The existential awareness of the “nothing” and of the condition of annihilation that haunt man’s existence also finds expression in this text. Lonely and without true companionship, Jaya feels afraid and ruminates: “We seemed to be left with nothing... the nothingness of what had seemed a busy and full life was frightening. It used to seem meaningless to me- just one futile life after another, each one a cipher ending in nothing, and the total, after so many births, again nothing” (151). In her terrible loneliness she realizes that the pursuit of happiness is meaningless and loneliness is the essential condition of human existence. She shudders when she thinks of Kamat’s loneliness: “The loneliness of a man facing his death- is there anything like it in this world?” (166) Human desire cannot be satisfied by life as it is. The individual must, consciously or unconsciously, experience anxiety, disappointment, and a sense of estrangement from life and horror of death. The existential concept shows that man is no longer asserting a position but enduring a fate. And yet, inside his prison, he still exerts a parody of choice. The protagonist realizes that she must exercise her choice and give up using Prakrit, the language of the subalterns. Life now holds no terror for Jaya. “I have always thought – there’s only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices” (191), “Yathechasi thatha
kuru" (192) - she concludes. In his book, *Critical Essays on Post-colonial Literature*, B. K. Das has made a significant comment on the novelist's use of realism in the following words:

"If we take a look at the trends in Indian English fiction, we will be struck by realism that underlies this genre in the post-Independence period. We come across five broad types of realism - social realism, psychological realism, historical realism, mythical realism and magic realism in Indian English fiction. Women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and Shashi Deshpande lay emphasis on social realism and family relationship. (169)

The realistic treatment of human predicament in Deshpande's fiction along with the contemporary angst in an existential manner might appear to be depressing. But in this web of loss and despair, and experience of existential trauma, Deshpande leaves enough space for the glimmerings of hope. The conviction that we can always hope and that life has always to be made possible speaks of a genuinely positive attitude to life.

Reader-response criticism focuses on the reader (or "audience") and his or her experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that focus their attention primarily on the author or the content and form of the work. It recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts "real existence" to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. It argues that literature should be viewed as a performing art in which each reader creates his or her own, possibly unique, text-related performance. Thus, the primary focus falls on the reader and the
process of reading rather than on the author or the text. B. K. Das in *Aspects of Commonwealth Literature* points out -

The most important thing in reader response criticism is that the reader must be made to feel for himself the new meaning of the novel. To do this he must actively participate in bringing out the meaning, and this participation is an essential precondition for communication between the reader and the writer. . . Readers are like mirrors, who reflect different types of images of the author and her created characters according to their perception and understanding. In other words, a reader performs the role of a mirror in reflecting the image of the characters of the novel.

Shashi Deshpande attempts to break the long silence of Indian women in her writing by transforming a predominantly androcentric symbolic order to a feminine narration. The image of "multicoloured patchwork quilt" aptly sums up the narrative pattern. The narration is an introspection in the stream of consciousness mode reminding the readers of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Since her pre-occupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, Deshpande has tried to create a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the stream-of-consciousness of her central character. In *That Long Silence* we hear a woman speak through her body, through her consciousness, and through her pen. The ecriture feminine deconstructs the traditional image of the signifier at the textual, linguistic and psychological level, and the patriarchal authority at the cultural level. In this novel Deshpande takes up an "other" mode of discourse, the ecriture feminine, to authentically depict the working of the psyche of the central protagonist. This
reminds us of Helen Cixous’ view that writing is of the body and that a woman does not write like a man because she speaks with the body. In an interview Deshpande had confessed to Geetha Gangadharan, that this novel is her best and it is more meaningful and deals with a much larger issue- the long silence of women. The enigmatic use of silence in this text leads most of the readers to the wrong notion that Deshpande wants to show a breakdown of communication through language. But silence can also be the ultimate weapon in a verbal duel. Jaya revolts through her silence. When Mohan accuses her of no faults she wants to burst out in anger but fails to break her silence and cries out: “Oh, God, why couldn’t I speak?” She had been scared—scared of jeopardising the only career she had, in her marriage. The pent up feelings makes her neurotic. “A woman can never be angry,” Says Jaya desperately. She “can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There’s no room for anger in my life.” But she finally resolves to break her silence and asserts—“I will have to erase the silence between us” (192). Thus the title becomes symbolic and implies the necessity to break the silence, to revolt and to establish self identity. Apart from Jaya’s predicament, Silence has other facets too. Mohan’s mother is verbally, physically and sexually abused by her husband and resigns to silence. While Mohan saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, Jaya confesses “I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon” (31). While Kusums silence results in her madness, in case of Vimala, her suffering that results from an “ovarian tumour with metastases” because of which she bleeds to death never finds a voice. Whether she is the subaltern Jeeja, Nayana, or middle class Mukta or
Jaya's Saptagiri Ajji, silence becomes the metaphor for their stoicism in this unsympathetic patriarchal world.

Intertextuality is the shaping of a text's meanings by other texts. It can refer to an author's borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. The term "intertextuality" has, itself, been borrowed and transformed many times since it was coined by poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1966. Kristeva's coinage of "intertextuality" represents an attempt to synthesize Saussure's study of how signs derive their meaning within the structure of a text with Bakhtin's dialogism—his examination of the multiple meanings, or "heteroglossia," in each text. In 1968 Barthes announced 'the death of the author' and 'the birth of the reader', declaring that 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' (Barthes 1977, 148). The framing of texts by other texts has implications not only for their writers but also for their readers. The concept of intertextuality reminds us that each text exists in relation to others. Michel Foucault had rightly opined that the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences. If one were to talk about intertextuality in this novel, two streams of elements are dominant. First her constant references to the Mahabharata and Bhagwat Gita, and second, the knowledge of English literature that her characters exhibit and share. There is the intertextuality that arises from the numerous literary allusions that Jaya uses - in the quotation from Karl Marx, the references to Cassandra, Noah's Ark, Sonia and Raskolnikov, Defoe, Graham Greene and so on. Deshpande has used the Indian
myths to portray Jaya's individuation. She is attributed the roles of Sita, Gandhari and finally Maitreyee. Leaving aside her role as the passive follower of her husband (Sita following Ram to exile) who never sees his wrongs (bandaging of the eye by Gandhari) she finally asserts herself (Maitreyee). Intertextuality functions as an important frame of reference that helps to interpret the text. When Mohan asks her what his next step should be, she recalls the scene of Sonia talking to Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. While pondering on the concepts of sin and retribution Jaya goes back to the Ramayana. Moreover she also uses folklores and myths in her self-introspection. The protagonist's final words allude to Concluding chapter of the Bhagavad Gita- “iti te jnanam akhyatam/ guhyad guhyataram maya/ vimrasyai ‘tad asesena/ yathe cchasi tatha kuru (do as thou choosest- 63). Recalling Adrienne Rich’s words we may say that –“Re-vision- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes of entering an old text from a new critical direction- is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. (Maggie Humm, *Feminist Criticism* 282).

The novel ends abruptly with a sense of open-endedness. The post-modern stance makes multiple layers of meaning and interpretation possible. D H Lawrence in his essay “Why the Novel Matters” affirmed-“The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble. Which is more than poetry, philosophy, science (85). No wonder, *That Long silence* creates a magic spell for the readers. It will be perhaps worth quoting at some length B K Das’s significant comment in this context:
That Long Silence depicts the plight of an educated Indian woman of our time. The significance of the novel depends on how far the reader is able to realize the situation and go along with the author in finding out the meaning.... The reader is free to interpret the heroine as a woman who failed her husband or otherwise. Alternatively he may also take her as a representative woman of the contemporary society who is all set to revolt against the husband. Jaya is both an individual and a type, and the reader is free to take her in any manner he likes. (131)

Dehpande creates Jaya anew by making her conscious of this possibility of power. Recovering the “self” from the roles of a dutiful wife, submissive wife and caring mother, the protagonist gets a new lease of life that empowers her and helps her to reconstruct her identity once again. Thus in Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence she positions two unforgettable heroines, Indu and Jaya respectively, within the matrix of the traditional, large extended family, though in very different locations with respect to individual achievement, personal freedom and power. It is interesting how the very modernist motifs of a self-conscious preoccupation with literature and creativity, especially in their juxtaposition with the more commercial forms of journalistic writing, something which both protagonists, both writers, actually perceive as commercial and vulgarized genres that they have to take recourse to against themselves for the sake of more secure and stable financial rewards, sacrificing, as it were, their aesthetic integrity in the process.
The renowned feminist theorists, Cixous and Kristeva, contend that patriarchy is a specifically cultural and historical context with power relations. Since language is based on binaries (male/female, presence/absence, etc.), it produces a patriarchal order which places the feminine as subordinate to the masculine. Strangely enough, the dominative discourse tells the story of half of humanity through the voice of the other half. Since writing is the place where subversive thought can germinate, it is specifically shameful that the phallocentric tradition succeeded in not giving woman her say. Woman therefore needed to invent another history which is outside the narratives of power, inequality and oppression:

If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man...it is time for her to dislocate this “within” to explode it, turn it around, and seize it, to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside. (Cixous, 257)

Woman's writing as Showalter points out, necessarily takes place within, rather than outside, a dominant male discourse, through acts of revision, appropriation and subversion. Female perspective makes it easier to articulate many an emotion not acknowledged in the body of literature hitherto. The Dark Holds No Terror as a feminist text questions the aesthetics of the traditional theoretical assumptions with a view to reassessing the relation between author, reader and language in order to subvert the phallogocentric discourse.
Gynofiction has evolved as aesthetics which is radically different from the aesthetics of male fiction and Deshpande's novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, employs a distinct kind of language in order to impart a new vision of reality. In this novel she takes up an "other" mode of discourse, the "écriture féminine", to authentically depict the working of the psyche of the central protagonist. This reminds us of Helene Cixous's view that writing is of the body and that a woman does not write like a man because she speaks with the body. She advocated that "woman must write her Self: must write about women and bring women to writing..." (320). Cixous celebrates woman as "excess" who speaks her body and threatens patriarchy. Throughout her writing, Kristeva too, theorized the connection between mind and body, culture and nature, psyche and soma, semiotic and symbolic. She is concerned with discourses that break identity. Shashi Deshpande, on the other hand, attempts to break the long silence of Indian woman in her writing by transforming a predominantly androcentric symbolic order into a feminine narration. While the textures of all her novels are suffused with feminine sensibility, the structures are also, by and large, feminine in the sense in which Irigaray uses the term. The linguistic features of the novels in regard to their phonological, morphological, syntactic structures reinforce their feminist qualities. Both the theories of Cixous and Kristeva can thus be contextualized in her works. Deshpande writes her body. That is why the feminine touch is unmistakable in her works. In her novel, *The Dark Holds No Terror*, she creates a space from where various voices find utterance breaking the long silence of ages. The narrative speaks with the many tongues that defy patriarchy's notion of there being a single unified woman,
"sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread... which acts for man as a surrogate umbilical cord" (Cixous, *Laugh of the Medusa*, 543). Deshpande's forceful and authentic use of technique and language gives a feminine touch to the novel and this makes *The Dark Holds no Terror* a rare specimen of gynofiction.

*The Dark Holds No Terror* depicts the life of a professionally successful lady doctor, Sarita (Saru). Unable to face the humiliation that she suffers almost each and every moment in her otherwise happily married life, she escapes to her father's house. Though she marries the charismatic poet Manohar facing all oppositions from her family, yet she faces the worst agony of marital rape years after her marriage. Manohar soon realizes that his career is going nowhere and that his wife has overtaken him professionally—she is not only the earner of bread but the butter as well—and he grows vicious. Saru comes back to her father whom she had left back years ago. But this association with her past also brings back for her the terrible memories of the cruel words of her mother who is now no more: "Why didn't you die? Why are you alive and he dead?" (14). In her death-bed also she had rejected Saru -"... Daughter? I don't have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless" (196). Away from her place of trauma, the protagonist undergoes the arduous journey into her Self and learns to free herself of guilt, shame, and humiliation. Now Saru feels it strongly that she is responsible for her own miserable, puppet like existence. Too much dependence on an institution like marriage has been sheer foolishness, rather she should be ready to face all the challenges and troubles of life. Saru's decision to go with Manu shows her confidence and courage in this direction. Obviously, the problem faced by Saru is the problem of hundreds of
such learned and professional women who become the victim of male atrocity in an androcentric society. The moment she realizes the importance of life, she determines to live with full gusto. She introspects philosophically and reaches to the conclusion that escaping the situation is never a solution. There is no refuge, other than one's own self. She realizes that as a woman she has a separate existence of her own:

They came to her then, all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife ... persons spiked with guilt. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. But if she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and much more. (220)

She can attain peace of mind only when she accepts all those selves which she had earlier rejected. Peace has to be created within. Thus, free from fears and pain, the final picture of Saru is appealing indeed, when she confidently waits for what used to be the greatest terror of her life, her husband. She is ready to face him. She is ready to face life. The epigraph of the novel, "You are your own refuge. There is no other refuge. This refuge is hard to achieve (The Dhammapada)" gains its total significance when Saru realizes that her parental home cannot be a refuge. She understands that neither her father nor her husband Manohar can be her refuge. She is her own refuge. She has to overcome herself; she has to kill the ghosts that haunt her; she has to find her own way to salvation. She tries hard to overcome her psychological fears and finally realizes that "The dark holds no terrors. The terrors
are inside us all the time. We carry them within us and like traitors they spring out, when we least expect them, to scratch and maul" (85).

As a narrator, Deshpande writes through her body “inventing the impregnable language that submerges, cuts through and gets beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse...” (Cixous, 256). The sentence structures are broken down and the limitations of punctuations are removed in an attempt to convey female experience and the way a woman’s mind works. Since her pre-occupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, Deshpande has tried to create a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the stream-of-consciousness of her central character. Full of innovative flourishes, it exudes a continuous urge for experimenting linguistically and creates a magic spell on the readers. An example will suffice- “And the signboard painted yellow, with words and figures in black. Here I hesitate. Somehow I feel, I know, that I have to turn right again and take the road leading to ... the road which will take me to ... that road...” (69). The text contains instances of continuous narrative where thought and action are seamlessly represented. Deshpande expresses meaning in both modes that Kristeva discusses- Symbolically, i.e., through the use of logical terms; and Semiotically, through a breathless flow of words that are more emotive than logical. The focus combines the sexual with the symbolic in order to “discover first the specificity of the feminine and then the specificity of each woman” (Kristeva, 210). Abandoning linear narration for endless digressions, fragmented interior monologues, movements back and forth in time following the course of the protagonist’s memories and brooding mind, in a sense strongly reminiscent of Kristeva’s ‘semiotic discourse’ Deshpande’s narrative
creates a gynocentric discourse challenging epistemological certitudes of dominant patriarchal order. The text abounds in brilliant and extensive use of neologisms, coded allusions, typographical breaks. An example will suffice— "Flames... her first thought when she had heard of her mother's death had been... who lit the pyre? She had no son to do that for her. Dhruva had been seven when he died. She never said his name after that. Except that once... when I woke up sobbing at night and she called out...Dhruba? Saru?" (21).

The author constructs a new, unmasked and uninhibited language and experience. It is a woman's version of her sense of the world, it tries to accommodate other view points, but they are oriented towards an overall design of a woman-narrative, as a 'multiple patchwork quilt' is basically a woman's art. Multiple narrative voices are heard; there is an awareness of a possible multiplicity of narrators. Deshpande’s language is characterized by its drives and rhythm, its suppleness and fluidity. Feminine desire is reflected in the language she employs, which echoes its rhythms and pulsations. It is non-linear, characterized by repetition, incompletion, disruption, and resistance to speech. The novelist takes up, to use Toril Moi's phrase, “a new, feminine language which ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes which phallocentrism in an effort to oppress and silence woman.” (Toril Moi, 84). In an interview to Kuortti, Deshpande rightly pointed out: “In Indian languages there is so much difference between men's language and women's language. Certain things are never said by women” (39). We find Saru’s true self only while she is un-knotting her mind through memories and dreams— "Once I found myself cutting piece of paper, telling myself..."
these are bits of my minds falling on the ground. And there was Nirmala's face looking at me on the door, saying in an astonished voice... What is it doctor?" (22). After she faces the barbaric torture of Manohar she feels helpless because she cannot voice her protest -"This hell of savagery and submission. But what if I carry my own hell within me? Then there is no hope for me at all. But that too I have to know." (28). But soon realization dawns on her and she questions the mores of this patriarchal society trying to find out her own answers.

Now she thought... who wrote that story? A man, of course.
Telling all women for all time ... your duty to ME comes first.
And women, poor fools, believed him. So that even today, Madhab's mother considers it a punishment to be deprived of a chance to serve her husband. And yet ... if I could believe in that ... if I could put my duty to my husband above all else...? (207)

Thus she learns to question the long standing myths of male superiority and the language that Deshpande makes her speak in clearly subverts the phallogocentric discourse. Thus the novelist makes Saru rediscover herself by demolishing the myths about woman and re-establish her as she is, unafraid of the patriarchal subordination of woman both in literary discourse and social interactions within the matrix of masculine customs.

Body has always been an important site for feminist discourse. Female body is most often rendered 'docile' under the domination of patriarchy. It becomes primarily a source of social control in an androcentric social order. Cowering under patriarchal
dominion and subjugation, it is never free. The body thus becomes the "practical, direct locus of social control" (*The Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, 2362). Silence becomes the ultimate reality when the bodies are subjugated and self-dignity is wounded. Saru fails even to utter a word of protest when she is brutally tortured by Manohar-

The beginning was abrupt. There had been no preparation for it. There were no preliminaries, either. At first it was a nightmare of hands. Questing hands that left a trail of pain. Hurting hands that brought me out of a cocoon of a blessed unreality... I'm-dreaming-this-is-not-real... into the savage reality of monstrous onslaught. And then, the nightmare was compounded of lips and teeth as well. Hands and teeth? No, hammers and pincers. I could taste blood on my lips.(11)

Until and unless women gain their bodily rights, the male-female equation is bound to be tilted and lop-sided. Luce Irigaray rightly claims that- "It is important for us to guard and keep our own bodies and at the same time make them emerge from the silence and subjugation" (421). Perhaps, what Deshpande is seeking in her novel is a response to the female body, that grants it the right to its own truth, its right to self possession.

The writers of Indian English gynofiction constitute a significant group as a class of writers who, directly or indirectly, are engaged in the vital task of formulating a new consciousness regarding women in our rapidly changing environment. In their
works, Indian English fiction has attained its utmost maturity both in respect of its theme, form and style. Gone are the inhibitions of the yesteryears and these writers speak freely about love, sex, gender inequalities and even same sex relationships. Gynofiction of this period voices a forceful protest against patriarchy and exhibits a new sense of freedom. Sonali Das makes an apt observation on the post-independence Indian English women novelists:

The fiction writers in the Post-Independence period are obsessed with new kinds of realism which determines the subjects of their fiction. R. P. Jhabvala, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and most of other women novelists have written boldly on man-woman relationship from woman's point of view. (161)

Deshpande speaks freely about love, sex, gender inequalities. Deshpande makes her protagonist speak on otherwise “taboo” subjects, boldly and freely. For Saru, menstruation is a personal living experience undergone by her with excruciating traumatic repercussion on her body. The first experience of menstruation is horrible for the daughter and the mother is there to frighten her with the fact that she would bleed for years and years. The mother does not allow her to enter the kitchen and the Puja-room. She is forced to sleep on a straw mat. A separate plate is provided to her to make her exclusion complete. She recalls her thoughts later: "Things fell, with a miraculous exactness, into place. I was a female. I was born that way, that was the way my body had to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that" (63). Thus the author tries ceaselessly to deconstruct the 'male' discourse:
to write what cannot be written. In depicting the inner psychic turmoils, the author
has indeed delved deep into her protagonist's mind.

The discourse abounds in images and metaphors relating to the feminine
experiences of sexual desires, agony and ecstasy of different biological experiences.
In an interview to Kuortti, Deshpande boldly asserts:

I started writing even about woman's sexuality- very few
women wrote about it... it was good to know that there is
such a thing as female sexuality and that you are not, need
not be ashamed to have that. (34)

Kristeva's “chora” is the Greek word for womb. It suits woman's notion of cyclical,
rather than linear time. Woman's subjectivity is associated with gestational and
childbearing and biological cycles that represent repetition. Therefore, the time runs
cyclical rather than linear (“Woman's Time”, Kristeva Reader 190). The writer uses
the metaphor of silence in many of her novels to justify the circular movement of her
women who move on only to come back from where they started. Sarita wonders:
"Why do we travel, not in straight lines but in circles? Do we come to the same point
again and again?" (22) “Woman's time” and “chora” refute the logic of syntax.
Deshpande makes her heroine speak in non-habitual ways- in starts, pauses, and
ellipses that break the normative syntax with its inbuilt structures of domination and
subordination. Saru speaks in fits and starts, and it is in these very pulsations that
the rhythms of the chora assert themselves. She breaks the walls of her silence and
learns the new alphabet of her body. The image of “multicoloured patchwork quilt"
the term used by the author in her Sahitya akademi award winning novel, *That Long Silence*, aptly sums up the narrative pattern. The narration is introspection in the stream of consciousness mode reminding the readers of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The novelist attempts to break the long silence of Indian women in her writing by transforming a predominantly androcentric symbolic order to a feminine narration. The beginning of the novel gives us a vision of how a cinematographic camera builds up a scene. The author uses segments of scenes and events from diverse time frames and pastes them one after another, forming a “collage”. The carefree handling of narration vis-à-vis the time and point of view, has an overwhelming lasting appeal on the readers. Codemixing or the use of more than one language in the execution of a speech is an important trait in Deshpande’s fiction. Inclusion of handful of regional words within the standard English version hybridizes the text. The novelist also makes her characters voice their joys and hopes by using rich and colourful expressions in regional tongue which add a cultural context to her narration. Deshpande is adept in handling simultaneously various devices that complement each other. The novel ends abruptly with a sense of open-endedness. The post-modern stance makes multiple layers of meaning and interpretation possible. Perhaps the worth of the novel lies in this refusal to adopt a simplistic, reductive approach; herein lies its richness.

Deshpande’s writing is strongly gendered in the sense that her novels could have been written only by a woman- “As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides only a woman could write
my books— they are written from the inside, as it were” (“On the Writing of a Novel”, 8). This reminds us of Sandra Gilbert who asks,

If a writer is a woman who has been raised as a woman— and I dare say only a very few biologically anomalous human females have not been raised as women – how can her sexual identity be split off from her literary energy? (117).

The novelist gets to the root of existence and gives vent to a kind of female subjectivity which refuses to reconcile and identify herself with a male dominated society. The female self, in order to emerge in its own right, has first to validate her existence on her own terms, without male protection and support. A woman as a living being negotiates her place interrogating the gender order in the patriarchal society. Social relations which govern individuals and groups are governed by gender. “Gender is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that brings reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes” (Connell 10).

Entrapped by deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes, women sometimes themselves impose these on other women. Sarita’s mother also thrusts on her daughter the fetters of social customs. She always kept two different measuring yards, one for the son and other for the daughter-

Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get even darker.

Who cares?

We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married.
I don't want to get married.

Will you live with us all your life? Why not?

You can't

And Dhruva?

He's different. He's a boy. (45)

Deshpande deconstructs “history” to reconstruct her story. Thus her writing is the literature of silence in two ways. First, its meaning lies in between the alphabets. Second, it seeks to express what has been submerged and suppressed. The novelist makes her protagonist question the age-old myths-

It was the Krishna Sudama story that suddenly came to her mind. That, and the illustration which had accompanied the story in one of her school texts, showing Krishna and his queen Rukmini running joyously to greet poor, raged Sudama standing at the palace gates. As she knocked at the door, softly at first, then harder, she wondered why the story had come back to her now. She herself was certainly no Sudama in rags, bare feet and humility. She had none of these (15).

Much like the great masters of the past, Deshpande also believes that “writing” is not only a means of self discovery and self learning but also a process in which the author has a definite role to play in the broader social context- “There never has been any huge enlightenment, only understanding of the fact that as we go on living,
we learn to cope, becoming each day a little more understanding of human frailty, a little more compassionate" (Writing from the Margin and Other Essays, 29).

Thus in The Dark Holds No Terror we hear a woman speak through her body, through her consciousness, and through her pen. Perhaps it will be worth recalling in this context Trinh T Minh-ha's comment: "In trying to tell something, a woman is told, shredding herself into opaque words while her voice dissolves on the walls of silence. Writing is a commitment of language. The web of her gestures, like all nodes of writing, denotes a historical solidarity (on the understanding that her story remains inseparable from history)" (246). Essentially, it germinates a feminine account and a feminist discourse that communicates by disrupting the earlier phallogocentric discourse in a new historical content, the emphasis now shifting on what has been marginalized earlier. As Cixous argues, the link between language, sexuality and the social construction of gender becomes effective only when, as a new discourse, it serves as a springboard for subversive thought and efforts a social and cultural change. Thus, Dehpande creates Saru anew by making her conscious of this possibility of power. Recovering the "self" from the roles of a dutiful wife, submissive wife and caring mother, the protagonist gets a new lease of life that empowers her and helps her to reconstruct her identity once again. To conclude, I may say that masculinity and femininity are both social ideals developed within the matrix of heterosexuality. Through her feminine discourse Deshpande challenges this matrix to make these social and cultural constructs of identities unstable and malleable.
The Binding Vine

_The Binding Vine_ highlights the status of contemporary Indian women and their resistances and submissions to the dictates of phallocentrism. It can perhaps be best understood vis-à-vis a broadly postcolonial-feminist framework. Various ideologically encoded binaries such as speech/silence, modernity/tradition, male/female, oppressor/victim, central/marginal, etc. are diffused within the body of this novel. The experiences of women under patriarchal domination and those of the colonized subjects are, in many ways, similar. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in their seminal volume, _The Post-Colonial Studies Reader_, rightly point out- “In many different societies, women, like colonized subjects, have been relegated to the position of ‘Other’, ‘colonized’ by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with colonized races and cultures an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression” (“Feminisms”, 233). Female body becomes the site of forced colonization which the male master uses and abuses according to his own sweet will. Deshpande uses her narrative to raise such important issues as a woman’s right to her body. Body has always been an important site for feminist discourse. Female body is most often rendered ‘docile’ under the domination of patriarchy. It becomes primarily a source of social control in an androcentric social order. Cringing under patriarchal domination and subjugation, it is never free. As Susan Bordo argues, the body is the “a practical, direct locus of social control” (2362). Silence becomes the ultimate reality when the bodies are subjugated and self-dignity is mutilated. Deshpande’s writing seeks to express what has been submerged and suppressed. Until and unless women gain their bodily rights, the
male-female equation is bound to be tilted and lop-sided. Luce Irigaray rightly claims that- “It is important for us to guard and keep our own bodies and at the same time make them emerge from the silence and subjugation” (421).

In *The Binding Vine* women belonging to different generations and sections of the society come together to write a new “herstory”. The need of female solidarity which was voiced by bell hooks in her epoch making essay “Sisterhood” -“when women actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity…. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs, and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood.”(67)- becomes a major theme of this novel. *The Binding Vine* focuses on this female bonding and camaraderie in a male dominated society. The novel celebrates the coming together of women from different strata of the society as friends and sharers of pain and sorrows. In this feeling of sympathy for one another, an identity is struck which ultimately forges the binding vine of sisterhood.

Interwoven with multiple plots, the narrative is in the stream-of-consciousness technique expressing the viewpoint of the narrator, Urmila. When Urmi encounters the shattering experience of the death of her own daughter, Anu, life almost stops for her. But she emerges from this inertia after meeting Kalpana, a teenager raped by her own uncle. As Kalpana lies in the hospital bed in the paralysed coma state, Urmi feels her helplessness and comforts her mother, Shakutai, and convinces her to voice the gross injustice done to her daughter. With
the advancement of the plot, several other accounts of exploitations unfold. Through
the ages, Indian woman's history of suffering and rebellion against patriarchal
dominance remains almost the same. There are old models and new models but the
paramount question of adjustment or rebellion in search of identity still remains.
Sexism is most often expressed in the form of male domination which leads to
women's subjugation, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. All the female
characters suffer either directly or indirectly because of this male dominance. This
common suffering creates a strong bond between them irrespective of class, caste,
social status and generation-gap and helps them to understand their plight. It will be
perhaps worth noting what Diana Brydon points out in this context— "a common
heritage of oppression .... To recognize what we hold it common is not under
estimate our differences, but to provide us with a context for understanding them
more clearly" (6).

The novel provides utterance to the subaltern voices of Kalpana, Shakutai
and Mira. Deshpande's attempt to voice the mutated gendered subalterns
constitutes part of the decolonizing feminist project. But who is exactly the
"subaltern" in the novel? While Urmi, Vanaa, Inni, Akka and Mira belong to the upper
class, Shakutai, Kalpana and Sulu are from the working class. But in their common
heritage of oppression and voicelessness they all are in a way the "gendered
subalterns". Spivak rightly contests that "both as object of colonialist historiography
and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male
dominant" (287)- making the females "subalterns". The author acknowledges that it
is a novel which belongs to several women-
Mira, the creative artist, who was denied her voice; Urmi, the superwoman, trying to be all things to all people and finding everything going to pieces after her baby's death; Shakutai, a woman I'd seen so often in Bombay struggling with a drunken husband and endless work. And Kalpana, the kind of girl I'd seen stepping out of chawls and slums of Bombay- spunky, confident, smart and well-dressed. (Writing From the Margin, 22)

Shakutai, Kalpana's mother, becomes the breadwinner of the family, looking after two daughters and a son because her husband never takes up a regular, permanent job. He has a mistress and has left his family for her. With Kalpana, Shakutai and Sulu we enter the threshold of the "subaltern" in the true sense of the term. Kalpana is raped not by a stranger but by Prabhakar, the husband of her aunt, Sulu. But Shakutai insists that the rape of her own daughter should not be placed on record because in the kind of society in which we live, virginity is the most cherished goal for a woman. She knows that if the truth about Kalpana is revealed, it will be impossible to get her married, even her younger daughter would not find a husband. Her words ring in the ears of the readers long after we finish reading this text- "No, no, no. Tell him, tai, it's not true, don't tell anyone, I'll never be able to hold up my head again, who'll marry the girl, we're decent people" (58). After all, it is the chastity of the body that is prioritized in marriage. She is aware of the injustice that has been done to Kalpana; yet she has to remain silent on account of social conditions. As she tells Urmi- "Women like you will never understand what it is like for us. There are always people waiting to throw stones at us, our own people first of all"(148). There is thus always this borderline between "them" and "us"- as Spivak insists. Although
Kalpana was aware of Prabhakar's intentions, she remained silent, fearing that her mother and Sulu will put the blame on her. After the incident even her own mother accuses her-"She was so self-willed, cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals....It's all her fault" (147). Even Sulu knew of her husband's wrong intentions. But out of fear and insecurity she tries to persuade Kalpana to marry Prabhakar so that she can at least continue to stay in the house. The man whom she married violated her personal integrity by exploiting her mentally and physically. As Shakutai laments- "After marriage she was changed. She was frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that? (195)" When Sulu comes to know that Prabhakar has raped Kalpana, she immolates herself. If Kalpana lying in an unconscious state represents the silent subaltern, Sulu is no less. Silence of the subaltern operates at different levels in this novel. In our society rape is just a slice of the entire range of humiliation of women that covers sexual extortion, spousal rape, sexual abuse and incest. Kalpana's rape was actually based on a real-life episode of a nurse being raped while on duty in a Bombay hospital and subsequently slipping in a coma. While the likes of Kalpana make the living easier for women who are economically more sound, they never have a voice of their own and their dreams remain unfulfilled. Be it Priti, Vanaa or Urmi- they have been able to become what they are because there has always been someone else to do the difficult and irritating household tasks. Urmila can go to the hospital every day and be with Shakutai because her mother and Rekha are there to look after the irritating daily routine chores. Vanaa can work in the hospital because there is a Hirabai to look after her children. As Priti acknowledges-: "I thank God everyday I can leave
this drudgery to someone else" (36). These are the people who are marginal and as silent in the narrative as the raped girl herself who lives a death-in-life existence—"...the girl who has the marks of a man's hand on her arms, of his knees on her thighs, ...and of his teeth on her lips" (89).

Mira is the mother of Kishore, Urmila's husband. While still in college she was married to a man for whom she was just a commodity. Mira's marriage resulted in reducing her to a mere body. Her aspirations of becoming a poet remained unfulfilled. Is this woman who was married to a man repulsive to her and died after giving birth to his son, a subaltern? The traumatic aspect of physical union has been depicted through the portrayal of rape within marriage as well in this novel. In case of Mira, the rape takes place within her own marital life. One of her poems bear testimony to this:

But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too,

twist brocade tassels round her fingers

and tremble, fearing the coming

of the dark-clouded, engulfing night? (56)

Mira's poems did not reach the public eye. They were testimonials to her tortured existence as a wife of a man whom she despised. Not only is she forced to suffer quietly, but even the act of writing, through which she gives an outlet to her suffering, has also to be carried out stealthily. Our society never encourages the creative spirit in women. This view was also voiced by the poet, Venu whom Mira had so much admired—"Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children" (127). In her marital home she has to get up at odd times in the night to write her poems and dairies. One remarkable thing about her writing is
that her diaries are in English and the poems in Kannada. The poems can be considered as figments of imagination but the diaries, on the other hand, are a records of facts; if they were read by anyone, she should have been in trouble, which is why she chooses English – a little known foreign language in her surroundings. While trying to search her mother-in-law’s garden Urmi says-

“Perhaps it was her writing that kept her going, that kept her alive. When and where did she write? Certainly she could never have had, in that house, a room of her own. Except at night” (127). Mira’s writing itself becomes a resistance towards patriarchal operations. Her articulation through her diaries and poems once again raises the vital question posed by Spivak- ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ The novel thus focuses on Mira’s muted struggle. Deshpande acknowledged that-“This was Mira’s novel as much as, or, maybe, more than it was Kalpana’s” (Writing From the Margin, 21).

After Mira’s death her husband had married Akka, Urmila’s mother-in-law and Vanaa’s mother. She got married at the age of twenty-seven when there was almost no hope left of her getting married. Her husband had married her because he wanted a mother for his dead wife’s son, Kishore. Akka had therefore entered this relationship not as a wife, but as a mother of some other woman’s child. Urmi is shocked to find this apparently stoic woman breaking into sobs after reading Mira’s poems- “What memories of her own life did this poem bring back of Akka? Did they say it of her and her husband too?”(66). Was it because of her unfulfilled marital life or something more fearful than that? Were her experiences akin to that of Mira’s? While Mira had rebelled- “no growing painfully within/ like a monster child was born” (83), Akka had accepted her fate uncomplainingly. Why has Mira been granted this
higher position of being a victim whereas Akka's normal marital life is never even doubted? Why there is no talk about 'rape in marriage' in the case of Akka? Perhaps Mira has been selected because of her ability to articulate: to write poetry, to write confidential dairies. It is this act of writing which makes the reader of those dairies her confidant. It is through this act of writing that the story of Mira gets preference over the story of Akka, who must have had a worse marriage. Mira's story is perhaps also the silenced story of Akka. While obsession was the cause of the Mira's suffering, negligence was the cause of Akka's grief. *The Binding Vine* abounds in examples of such muted figures and reminds the readers of a pertinent comment by one of the characters of the novel—"One Indira Gandhi in charge of the nation and a country full of women not allowed to take charge of their own lives..."(38).

In the process of coming to terms with the death of her small daughter, Urmi comes across different sections of women. Her narration is therefore interwoven with carefully selected stories of other women – some belonging to the family, some belonging to the larger society. Urmila is also a subaltern if we consider her as a gendered subject. But she actually occupies that in-between area where she is unable to talk because of her class, her education, her role as a college lecturer, and her unique position of being married and yet not married. Urmila takes upon herself the act of introspection, of speaking for Mira and Kalpana who are the women who cannot speak. But this speaking on behalf of others take place only after a crisis in her own life – the death of her daughter Anusha. Much like the Gopal in *A Matter of Time*, Urmi’s husband Kishore is also much detached in a way. When he leaves for his job, Urmi is left alone for months together. As she reflects, her marriage with
Kishore has always been like "marriage with a man who flits into my life a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind" (164). When he goes away, she is left with her own unfulfilled desires, passion and ‘bodily hunger’. She feels a bit irritated when she finds Vanaa's unconditional submission to her husband, Harish which makes the husband-wife relation lop-sided. She is not ready for such compliance- "...if I walk the way for submission once, I will walk that way forever" (82). What she fails to understand is that, this docility is almost a necessary condition for marital happiness in our patriarchal set-up. Vanaa, on the other hand has to single-handedly juggle with her job and family because her husband, Harish, is not at all keen in accepting the responsibilities of his home. But Vanaa never protests knowing full well that her doll’s house will crumble down once she becomes articulate. Inni is from several points of view also a deprived woman. Her husband had sent away her daughter Urmì to his parents’ house without even consulting Inni, thus displaying a lack of trust in her ability to bring up a daughter. She was deprived of the right to decide what would be best for her baby whom she had given birth to.

Entrapped by deeply entrenched attitudes, women themselves impose these on other women sometimes. Commenting on this issue Anita Desai rightly observes, that the widespread illiteracy and material dependence” make Indian women themselves connive at patriarchal morals” (“A Secret Connivance” 972). Shakutai had forced her daughter to marry her sister’s husband in spite of her daughters strong dislike of the man. Even after she was raped, the mother was not ready to
accept that she had no hands in the crime committed against her. Shakutai and Kalpana represent the working class women but their relationship as mother daughter is no different from their counterpart from middle class families like that of Inni and Urmi or Akka and Vanaa. Even Mira’s mother had presented the patriarchal outlook and her daughter never accepted her as a role model- “To make myself in your image/ was never the goal I sought” (124). Mira’s unhappy life was almost a repetition of her mothers’. In one of her poems she had written- “ ‘Mother’, I always wanted to ask, ‘Why do you want me to repeat your history when you so despair of your own?’” (126) She had advised her daughter to obey the dictates of patriarchy-

'Don't tread paths barred to you

Obey, never utter a “no”;

Submit and your life will be

a paradise, she said and blessed me. (83)

Urmi explains to Vanna that Mira’s poem and her experiences as a woman can not be for ever pushed under the carpet – “and we cant go on pushing it - what happened to them – under the carpet for ever because we’re afraid of disgrace” (174). She translates Mira’s poems into English, and finally makes up her mind to bring them to the world by publishing them. Thus she decides to let the world hear the muted voice of the subaltern. Silenced by patriarchy, Shakutai who had no courage no courage to fight the injustice done to her daughter, finally finds a voice and with the help of Urmi and informs the media of her daughters plight. Thus, both she becomes “articulate”. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan rightly observes that for women
to be articulate about rape is itself a measure of liberation, "a shift from serving as the object of voyeuristic discourse to the occupation of a subject position as 'master' of narrative" (78).

In her reading of the story of Echo, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says that the Subaltern woman is like Echo, who can never have a voice of her own. But by breaking the long silence, Urmi, in her own way, gives Echo a voice of her own.

While bonding Mira's past and Kalpana's present together, Urmi becomes more compassionate. The hurts of childhood are healed up and for the first time she sees her mother in a new light- "...it's as if I'm seeing that girl mother of long ago, kneeling before her husband for understanding, forgiveness" (200). It is only in their grief that Inni, Akka, Mira, Shakutai, Kalpana and Urmila share a bond of sisterhood which crosses the boundaries of caste and class. Thus Deshpande articulates and authenticates the female experiences inscribed on the female body. In their moments of intimacy and union, Urmila, Vanaa, Inni, Akka and Shakutai discover the binding vine of love which help them to overcome their own sense of personal loss and despair. Thus, this solidarity and sisterhood which Urmila is able to construct with love and sympathy function as a strategy of empowerment as well.

Shashi Deshpande is the only Indian English novelist, who has written a number of critical essays from women's point of view. She not only contests western feminist theory but also tries to read women from our epics from a different angle. Her novels are marked by authenticity as they are based on experience felt and acquired through learning Indian literature. Her women characters appeal to us in our
situation. To read her fiction is to see her characters enacting their tragic play on the stage- it is to see them inside out. Therein lies her strength as a novelist.
Works Cited


