CHAPTER FOUR
MANIFESTATION OF EMPOWERED WOMEN

You don’t have to be anti-man to be pro-woman.

Jane Galvin Lewis

Women are God’s greatest gift to humanity. They are the power of creation. There is a popular saying that behind every successful man there is a woman. Unfortunately, today women are more considered as the objects for sex, reproduction, and sensual pleasures. They are considered as delicate, and their mild behaviour, and nature is seen as a negative point.

Women’s suppression is rooted in the very fabric of Indian society – in traditions, in religious doctrine, and practices, within the education, and legal systems, and within families. Traditionally, women bear primary responsibility for the well being of their families. Yet they are discriminated systematically, and deprived of access to resources such as education, health care services, job, training, etc.

In Women in Manu and his Seven Commentators, Das had expressed this status of women:

If you women would only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full use of it for mankind you will make it much better than what it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slaves and the slave holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. (102)

Women have to be conscious, and aware to feel, and realize at every step of their life that they are builders of their nation. Empowerment of women will not be
imposed on them, it will grow systematically from the bottom upwards. It is worthwhile to note here that literature plays a vital role in empowering women. The rise of the novel in India was not purely a literary phenomenon. It was a social phenomenon as much, rather the fulfilment of a social need. It was associated with social, political, and economic conditions. Beena Agarwal in Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande understands that:

The modern world demands novels, just as it demands films and television programmes. Indeed, it is only through the novel that literature, the unglamorous written word without colour or illusion is able to compete with its brash competitors of the screen. (43)

The Indian novel, whether in English or in any other Indian language, has an individual quality, a distinctiveness which calls for serious critical attention, and the Indian novel in English has this distinctiveness much more than the novels in other languages of the country, a distinctiveness which transcends all the peculiar characteristics of different linguistic, and cultural milieus. It has emerged as a separate entity for the study of the rapid change, and development in social, economic, political, and psychological facets of Indian society.

It is remarkable that Indian English novel has gained a challenging position. The prose fiction in English written by Indians is undoubtedly the most popular vehicle for the transmission of Indian ideas to the wider speaking world. As observed, in Indian English novels, women writings presented typical Indian feminine sensibility, and of certain emotional aesthetic propensities, and predilections which are shared by all Indian women writers writing in English till our own day. There are many women writers who have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring,
self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized, and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980 onwards assert themselves, and defy marriage, and motherhood. Commenting on the vast number of women writing Shiv K. Kumar in *Contemporary Indian Literature in English* says:

> In fact, it seems that in this vast corpus of Indian fiction written during the past two decades or so, women novelists appear to have disintegrated themselves for their boldness in presenting man-woman relationship, and for their sensitive manipulation of language. Only recently we have been able to have a real insight into the psyche of the Indian female. No longer is woman portrayed as a mere tool in the hands of her male partner, because she is now a full-blooded creature with a will of her own. (17)

A number of Indian women novelists made their debut in the 1990s, producing novels which revealed the true state of Indian society, and its treatment of women. One such important writer is Shashi Deshpande. She writes about human beings many of whom happen to be women. She presents the Indian woman as placed between two contrasting ideas – tradition and modernity, family and profession, culture and nature.

Deshpande writes about things which she sees around her. She depicts her women with greater self-consciousness, a deeper sense of involvement, and often with a sense of outrage. She never starts working on the novels with a readymade theme in mind. Her themes build up gradually, and occur on their own. She discovers the theme when she reaches the crisis, which according to her is very exciting. Most
often themes of loss, and grief permeate her writings. Another theme which recurs in many of her works is rape—both as a random violent act outside marriage, and within marriage. Deshpande does not approve of the roles of women as mothers, and wives, and the value of women sacrificing themselves, and their needs. She is ashamed of female stereotypes such as the fat, coy, happy married woman, totally devoted to her husband, and the thin matter-of-fact, embittered spinster. She explores a world darkened by the despair, and unhappiness of women trying to get out of their predefined roles. She deplores the wretchedness of Indian women who feel buffeted between traditional, and modern ideas of womanhood. Many of her characters learn to break free from the constraints of a traditional family, and a stereotypical woman as mother, and wife sacrificing her need, her values, and her own self. The characters’ view of family is cold, and rational. They want to escape from social commitments, and familial bonds.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande deal with the problems of alienation, adjustment, and accommodation. In this context, Ramamoorthi in *Indian Women Novelists* opines, “Deshpande’s novels are concerned with a woman’s quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche, and understanding of the mysteries of life, and the protagonist’s place in it” (116). Her female protagonists display a psychic transformation traversing, and evolving gradually but firmly through the respective stages of imitation of tradition, protest, and advocacy of rights, and eventually introspection leading to self-discovery. This self-discovery metamorphoses them into strong, independent, expeditious women willing to encounter the onslaughts of life not merely as a minority group but with the cognizance of being powerful sustaining force for society as a whole.
Shashi Deshpande takes steps in empowering women by creating very strong, rebellious protagonists who struggle against all odds to realize their inner-self. Shashi Deshpande’s works reinforce the fact that her women struggle to obtain self-hood by dissolving their pessimism, and by inculcating the strength to survive with dignity, and analyzing their problems rationally. Her women characters refuse to surrender before anxieties, indoctrination, social conditioning, resultant oppression, and display determination to face the riddles of life boldly.

According to Shashi Deshpande, women empowerment in literature is essentially manifestation of women in society. Women empowerment always meant representation of freedom of women’s mind, spirit, and body. One of the primary concerns of women’s empowerment is to declare that a woman is a being. She is not an appendage or a subordinate of man. Rather she is an autonomous being capable of trial, and error, finding her own way to salvation.

The following paragraphs will explore how her protagonist is empowered in the novel *Moving On*. In this novel, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the Indian society which has gone through a lot of changes in recent times regarding women’s position. New situations demand women’s active participation in various roles. While making choices, women experience various problems, which create opportunity for them to go beyond their traditional role. Shashi Deshpande in this novel explores the prevailing conditions on the developmental phases of women.

Shashi Deshpande as a writer takes it as her concern to set a direction for the modern Indian women to gain confidence to make her own choices. In this novel *Moving On*, she concentrates on four major issues that are necessary for the liberation of woman: education, financial dependence, control over her sexuality, and the moral
choice. This novel is basically a family story of intimate spaces, of emotional pains, and of such intrusions that are completely unexpected. The two voices, distinct, and separate, are those of Manjari, the narrator, and Baba her father.

Shashi Deshpande explores Manjari’s ‘double consciousness’, who tells her own story, and also narrates about the ‘writings’ written by her parents. Manjari, has the double function of participating, and narrating. She has the insider’s knowledge of events, and also tells the story from her own perspective. There are two stories that travel parallel to each other, and intersect each other - one is a man’s story, and the other is that of a woman’s. The significance in the novel, is the narrative voice, and its location, and the narrator’s identity as an individual, a daughter, and a woman.

The novel *Moving On*, starts with Baba’s diary, and gradually Manjari is introduced, remembering her old home, her dead parents. She is a young woman, thirty-five plus, a prematurely widowed, she is left alone, parents are now dead, her grown-up children are away. She is left alone with her own world, and her own sexuality. Manjari, along with narration, is also a reader, for she reads her father’s diary, she visits her parents’ past, and wonderfully discovers the hidden twists, and curves of their lives. Manjari is not an affectionate reader of her father’s diary, but a serious reader.

The researcher here analyses how women characters in this novel like Gayatri, Mai, grandmother, Jiji, and Sachi portray the developmental phases of women at the turn of the twenty-first century. Deshpande also examines the negative factors in their environment that incapacitate the Indian women’s efforts towards empowerment. For a long time, women were not treated equally, and considered only as secondary to men. Baba’s grandmother is portrayed as a typical example of the status of Indian
women before independence. Her helpless situation is clearly portrayed when her son who was expected to enhance the family’s prestige with his foreign degree came back not only as a Gandhian but also decided to marry a Harijan girl. His father threatened, his mother wept, the family was in turmoil “. . . but my father remained firm. He walked out . . . There was a complete severance between my father, and his family; not even his mother could find any excuse for what he had done” (6).

Baba’s father married an orphan Harijan girl, but he was bound by principle which did not encourage men to address their wives by name. There were also other traditional ways which discouraged women from developing their individuality. While this situation continues even today in most parts of the country, Indian independence has brought with it many changes among various classes of people, especially in towns, and cities in India.

Even after independence women have to go by the dictum of traditional norms. Though Gayatri, and Mai have their own individuality in thinking, society suppressed their feelings, and they had to be part of the familial bonds. Mai, and Gayatri experience the power of freedom because their father has brought them up imbibing in them a desire for freedom. “The greater freedom our father permitted us made it possible for us to have a mixed group of boys and girls” (9). In this changing situation, where commotion is created between traditional expectations, and new challenges in the role performances of women, Gayatri opts for the traditional expectations. Gayatri decides to quit her education for her husband’s family. Like a tradition-bound woman, Gayatri sacrifices her happiness for the sake of the well-being of the family. Though she receives support from parental home as well as her husband, she denies all freedom for herself, and decides herself to perform her role as
a tradition-bound ‘good’ wife, and a ‘good’ daughter-in-law. The age-old cultural beliefs have made Indian woman the most patient, obedient, and loving woman in the world. Gayatri, unlike Baba’s grandmother, comes out with her desires, making positive signs towards herself as individual. Unlike Gayatri, Mai, by her writings, comes out of her daily chores, and develops her contact with the reading public. Among Mai, and Baba, Baba was the admirer, and she was the one who let him admire her. He always behaved as, “I am the master in my house, and I have wife’s permission to say so” (26).

Mai’s profession did not affect her family routine. Her boldness, and thirst for freedom portrays clearly that she is being caught in the roads of change in a society, which is undergoing the birth pangs of transition from tradition to modernity. She tries to unshackle herself from the centuries of bondage to social norms, and doomed roles. Through Mai’s character Deshpande portrays that women have the capacity to determine their priorities for self-discovery, and still weave the fabric of family harmony. After Mai’s death, Baba proved to be a man of emptiness, in the world of nothingness. “Yet without her I was incomplete” (112).

Accordingly through the characters of Gayatri, and Mai, Shashi Deshpande shows that even after independence, the impact of society, and tradition inclined them much on their individuality. At the turn of the twenty-first century Jiji seems to go by Deshpande’s vision that women must assert. They must not give way to the pressures of patriarchy in the domestic arena. Jiji disowns a ritualistic, and tradition-bound life in order to explore her true self concerned with a woman’s external quest for an authentic selfhood, and understanding of the existential problems of life. Once she
decides her future, she stays firm even when it is against her parents wish. Transcending her long-established role is only to redefine a new identity.

Jiji is the eldest child of Mai, and Baba. Her real name is Manjari Ahuja. Her life before marriage with her parents is full of enjoyment, and satisfaction. Jiji’s marriage with Shyam makes her position in the family upside down. “But that Jiji was part of the ‘Baba-Mai-Malu-and-I’ entity. Once that disappeared, the old Jiji vanished too” (40). Neglecting all the support of the family she decides her own life at the displeasure of her parents. She never surrenders herself to fate, and stands all alone. “Yet, I wanted Shyam too, Shyam above all things, Shyam more than anyone else” (99). Though Mai disagrees, she remains rigid in her verdict. Even after Shyam’s death she does not accept any support from her parents, and manages to live alone, and to take care of her own children.

Shashi Deshpande frankly portrays Manjari’s sexuality. What makes Manjari’s sexuality explicit is the betrayal of her body. Her husband’s betrayal, and his illegitimate relationship with her sister have already made her frustrated. On the other hand, her long aloofness with a male body arouses her desire. As a result, she sleeps with her tenant who is much younger than her. It is absolutely her physical desire; the mind has nothing to do with it. “Only the body, his body, only my body, and my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensations” (257). According to Beena Agarwal in Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande:

If literature, if art has any purpose then it is to show one, bravely and uncompromisingly, the plain face of truth… Once you have told the truth, you have broken free of society, of its prisons. You have entered the realm of freedom. (77)
Manjari being entangled cannot easily unshackle herself, and to move on, for her own experience, was similar to the experience of others. The real, and imaginary gets mixed up, and challenge the idea of autonomy. To become autonomous is a problematic one, but Manjari, a rebellious daughter, and having tried at some point in her life, to be on her own, can be seen as a radical feminist.

Following Baba’s death there is only blankness in her life. In the quest for survival she says, “Yes, I want to live” (167). She says that she has never regretted for anything in her life. “You’ll regret it, Baba said. I never did, no never. There’s at least this left among the ruins: I never regretted anything” (235). In the journey into herself to a termination, she learns to free herself of guilt, shame, disgrace, and she is also initiated into the mystery of human existence.

Manjari decides to face life alone, without anybody’s support either morally or financially. When she hears about her mother’s death, she comes back to her father. She has outgrown all kinds of hesitations. She drinks uninhibitedly in front of her father, and in the company of her cousin Raja.

Even when Raja desires to marry Jiji, she decides never to go into the situation of marriage again, staking everything, her life, and her future. She turns down his proposals, and makes two establishments. One, because marriage without the foundation of love, and only as a means of social protection for a single woman is not acceptable to her. Secondly, she is too familiar with the carves of his body to feel erotically aroused, for they grew up together. Since, she firmly decides not to get into marriage again, neither influence nor other considerations - physical, financial, emotional - can prevail on her.
According to Chaman Nahal in *Indian Women Novelists*:

I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome; whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes. (30)

Manjari learns to drive her car, and even runs it as a taxi, by installing, and operating a computer at home, and typing out the manuscripts for others, as a means of self-employment when she fails to get a satisfying job - she really shocks Raja, who is the upholder of patriarchal norms. Thus Shashi Deshpande portrays that in recent times the status of women has received considerable attention owing to modernization of the society, and female economic participation. The employment of the wife in a professional occupation empowers her with resources, and higher levels of prestige.

The protagonist Manjari faces real test of her life when she is been visited by strangers, and receives anonymous phone calls from the mafia underworld. This gives her a lot of mental pressure, and forces her to sell out her ancestral house. When she does not respond to the threat, she is physically assaulted, almost on the verge of rape, only to sell the house. She becomes more stubborn, and decides to stay, and fight, she does not listen to Raja’s concern, and his advice, and refuses to submit to the pressures either from the mafia world or from Raja, her cousin. “This is what they want they’re trying to reduce me to this shivering cowardly mass of fear. I won’t be scared” (167).
Manjari even goes to the extent of disapproving Raja’s role of protecting male in her life. “I want the brakes under my feet, not someone else. I don’t want a dual control, the control showed be mine, mine alone” (88). She dismisses the car driver saying, “I’m quite capable of looking after myself” (88). Her two children want her to marry her cousin Raja, for she has become a widow, when she was hardly twenty-one years, but she refuses her children’s desire by saying that she feels she has gone too far, from when she can’t go back.

Jiji perceives marriage as an alternative to the bondage imposed by parental family, and when opting for marriage, she realizes that one restrictive setup is replaced by another. She finally frees herself from the centuries of bondage to social norms, and inevitable roles. She takes a lesson out of her life, and finds solace for her own problems. Haider in his work Empowerment of Women – A Mis-Construct comments:

Furthermore, there is an element of ‘agency’, meaning that the women themselves are actors in the process. A process that would benefit the women incidentally, like the effects of an economic upturn, would therefore not truly be called ‘empowerment’. This does not mean that the empowerment cannot be brought about by other actors – like a government designing gender - concerned legislation – but the action must be specifically targeted to promote women’s interest, gender equality and ultimately, women must figure as actors. (32)

Shashi Deshpande’s novels, featuring female protagonists, reconstruct aspects of women’s experience, and attempt to give voice to muted ideologies, registering resistance. In her novels she charts the inner landscapes of women, where she
provides her women characters a context to understand themselves. Deshpande consistently explores the nature of the female world, and reconstructs the concealed records of female experience. She constructs contexts, representing different facets of the trapped female psyche, and attempts to empower their status. These narratives function as modes of women’s experience underlining its resistance, and simultaneously subverting it, which opens up a space.

Shashi Deshpande with her women characters present that every individual is a matured human being full of potential. With the support of family, and men, these potentialities which remained mute without any encouragement could come out, and determine a new identity. After breaking from traditional roles, women characters engage in creating a new self-hood. Thus the new space that Shashi Deshpande has created gives ample scope for Indian women to assert their self, find their identity, extend their concern to the society, excel in performances, and enjoy the freedom, and responsibility.

Today Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytsis Theory that was dominant in American psychoanalytic thought for so many years, has been significantly modified, and is also currently strongly influenced by the developing countries like India. Many psychoanalysts in India believe that the human experience can be best accounted for by using this theory. Freud’s Psycho analytic tool, Intrapersonal psychotheraphy is used in the following section, to interpret the protagonists’ self-realization. Manjari of Moving On, unconsciously undergo Intrapersonal Psychotherapy. The theory behind intrapersonal psychotherapy is instead of dealing with outside forces in their life, the protagonist focus on her internal structure of consciousness. Therefore, instead of
focusing on why people around her are doing her harm, the protagonist takes the situational conflict intrapersonally, and defines her own choice.

Manjari’s struggle for freedom, and for being autonomous is theoretically a challenge to patriarchy, not confronting it headlong but in discovering one’s own strength as a woman. She has to move on, and live her own life, without getting dictated by anyone. The novel ends symbolically when she starts the car, and is back on the road again to be free. Manjari, as the survivor, is the new woman, who redefines freedom, and also relationships. She is thus a model practitioner of relational autonomy, situated in family, and bound by relationships, an affectionate daughter, a loving sister, a caring mother, and a good friend. She is hardly imposing or demanding, and is not dependent on anyone. She is not over protective of her children, and allows them their own space. Her activities with life adopt a middle path - be yourself, and allow others to be; live on your own terms, and let others live on their own. The analysis of the self enables her to understand, and solve her problems.

*Moving On* ends hopefully by the self-realization of Manjari, thereby stressing the need for women’s emancipation. In an interview with Prasanna Sree, published as *Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, Shashi Deshpande comments that:

I don’t consider that the revolution comes out of escaping the situation, but facing the situation with a different idea of “What I am” . . . this is to me the biggest revolution. I know what I am now, I am going to live my life knowing what I am. There is no greater revolution than that.

(146)
Shashi Deshpande portrays her protagonist as an empowered modern, educated woman in the novel *In the Country of Deceit*. In her march towards emancipation, and self-hood, the contemporary Indian woman has to struggle against the insensitive fatality of options, and the indoctrination of centuries which endeavour to fashion her into the mould of ‘womanhood’ with a silent persistence. The author has portrayed women who exhibit the results of this indoctrination in their psyche, and behaviour.

Interestingly, this novel *In the Country of Deceit* is markedly different from Deshpande’s previous novels, and portrays Devayani who is unmarried, and enters into the country of deceit via having an affair with Ashok Chinappa who is married, and eventually moving out of it of her own volition. *In the Country of Deceit* is built around Devayani who is twenty six, and unmarried. Her parents have died, and she lives in Rajnur. Once when she comes in contact with Ashok Chinappa, a District Superintendent of Police, she falls in love with him despite the fact that Ashok is much older, and married. She knows from the very beginning that it is a relationship without a future as Ashok tells her on the very first meeting that “I can promise you nothing” (114).

Without heeding societal code, Devayani declares her love for Ashok before her sister, and her brother-in-law. She is not demanding in her relationship, and does not want Ashok to walk away from his family comprising wife, and daughter. Devayani is independent in her thoughts, and actions. She is self-willed, self-driven, and independent enough to step out of this relationship after she realises that it cannot go any further.
Devayani is independent, and bold enough to share the family responsibilities. After her parents’ death, she is not clear as to what direction her life is going to take. Meeting Ashok at Rani, a film actor’s place, Devayani’s life changes for all times to come. She gets the best out of this relationship but her conscience keeps pricking her as she has a constant realisation of the fact that what she is doing is wrong: “I knew it was wrong; nothing could make it not wrong. And yet, I had rushed into it. Why had I done it?” (142).

After entering the ‘country of deceit’, she gradually realizes that she has lost the streak of forthrightness, and candour in her behaviour with her loved ones: “I could no longer be open and honest with people I loved; I had to deceive them” (147). Sense of compunction weighs heavy on her mind as she feels ‘cheap’, and like an ‘adulteress’ (148). Her inner strife deepens further due to her love for Ashok, and the impossibility of their togetherness. As such she has no option but to sever her bond with Ashok: “I must stop this, we can’t go on. We must stop, I won’t go on with this; I must tell Ashok I can’t go on, I will tell him it’s over” (162). It is clear that women’s empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of women to make choices, and to transform these choices into desired actions, and outcomes. This is true in the case of Devayani. She is convinced of her hopeless future, and she walks out of it.

Despite being modern in outlook, sensitive, educated, and bold, Devayani is introspective. She exhibits remarkable understanding of the situation she is in along with the world around. She is straight in her dealings with her family members, and that is the reason that her mother calls her “Transparent as a clean piece of glass” (147). Unlike her sister, Savi, Devayani never eschews family responsibilities as
endorsed by her aunt, Sindhu. Audacious as she is, Devayani does not heed societal norms, and consciously decides to love Ashok. She overcomes her inhibited mindset, and realises that only Ashok could make her experience bliss:

Only this man [Ashok] could give me such ecstasy, only he could give me such joy with his love making. Ananda, Sindhu had called it. Yes, more than joy. Bliss. And he could give it to me with a touch, with a word. It was this man, not the sex. This man’s love, not the sex. And yet, the sex too. (193)

Devayani tries to trace thin line of demarcation between ‘love’, and ‘sex’ but ends up experiencing both with a degree of simultaneity. She spurns hypocrisy, and double standards of the society. She does not allow sense of guilt overwhelm her mind as she holds Ashok equally responsible for this extra-marital affair: “I’m not doing anything wrong. It’s you - you are committed, you are . . . you are married. And I thought of marriage and I wondered - how can you do this?” (130).

Devayani is mature, and aware of her biological needs, and that is the reason why she does not rationalise what she has done:

And then I thought of what I had done, I thought, . . . I knew it was wrong . . . And yet I had rushed into it. . . Why had I done it? I knew the answer . . . I did it because I wanted him, I wanted to be with him, I wanted to be in his company. I wanted to sleep with him, I wanted this relationship . . . (142)
Satbir Kaur in *Shashi Deshpande: A Feministic Interpretation* reveals that:

Eastern women need two types of liberation, one is from financial slavery and the other from the restrictions imposed on female sexuality. Women are always victims; while men are oppressors. I believe in the theory that woman’s body is a woman’s right. (66)

Devayani’s understanding of the notion of love is inclusive as well as integral, and her love for Ashok seems to be a natural extension of the same. She makes it clear when she tells:

. . . there are no boundaries for love, that you cannot draw a line and say ‘I will not go beyond this line.’ It makes nonsense of what love is, of what it means.’ Your *Ajji* loved Savi and me as much as she loved Bakula and you, she loved my mother like a daughter. She didn’t draw lines, did she? (199)

As such, for Devayani, love is not divisive as it binds us all. Her relationship with Ashok is much more than mere sex. According to Devayani:

. . . there’s so much more. We talk, we laugh, I can say to him what I’ve never said to anyone, he listens to me the way no one has listened to me before, making each word of mine a precious jewel. I don’t know how many couples get this, but for me—I never expected this; this complete sharing of everything, it’s like a miracle”. (199-200)

Even the epigraph to the novel as highlighted in this book by J. Krishnamurti throws light on the non-physical aspect of love: “Love is not mere pleasure, a thing of memory, it is a state of intense vulnerability and beauty” (i). Krishnamurti’s
understanding of love has a ring of purity, and vulnerability. It does not emanate from the past, nor does it have anything to do with the future. It is a happening in the immediate present leaving no scope for memory or expectation to creep in. Attaining such state of love is not easy as you cannot hold on to anything except the present moment in all its glory.

Devayani seems to have at least partial if not complete knowledge of this kind of understanding of love if we analyse her maturity in the moment of eventual separation from Ashok. She has the strength of mind to tackle every situation in life. This experience of deep sharing, and companionship with Ashok helps her overcome the grief of her dead mother also as she becomes livelier, more vibrant “seeing, feeling, and loving” (143). The world around her has a different light. For Devayani, body is an important means to actualise the deeper aspect of love. Therefore, she expresses her desire for physical union which is the “most complete union, two human beings can achieve” (226).

Devayani has no confusion about her relationship with Ashok, and that is why she does not lay any claim over him. When Ashok tells her that he cannot lose his daughter, Devayani lets him go without any feeling of rancour. She acknowledges that she has experienced bliss with him, and that letting him go will be like death but they will have to live out their respective futures. She has her practical perspective intact, and has the capacity to take a balanced view of the situation she finds herself in. One observes a shift in Deshpande’s stance in portraying Devayani who despite being woman crosses all socio-cultural barriers by loving Ashok whose portrayal, on the contrary, is ironical as he is scared of society despite his deep fascination for her.
Devayani’s sister Savi becomes livid upon knowing about Devayani’s affair with Ashok as she doubts his integrity. She doubts that he has done it merely for ‘sex’ whereas Devayani has true love for him. Devayani candidly shares her feelings about Ashok:

There is no one else in the world about whom I can feel in the same way, no one with whom I can feel so right. And he - he loves me. I cannot doubt that, I can never doubt that. I have only to think of his face when he looks at me, a look for which there’s no single word. All the words that come to my mind - fond, hopeful, tender, yearning, desiring, above all loving, passionately loving - are not enough, they cannot encompass what I see on his face. (200)

Ashok also assures Savi that Devayani is very precious for him, and that he will never hurt her or betray her trust. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, Devayani is able to understand Ashok’s dilemma of getting caught between his love, and family responsibilities.

Devayani experiences a commixture of the feelings of regret, and joyous satiation as she wonders:

... if we had never met, I would never have got all this ... What do I call it? Joy? Yes, I would never have known the joy, the experience of loving, being loved, of becoming one with other human being. I wonder whether this union is what we long for all our lives. And you and I were lucky to have it. But we can’t go on, that is the truth, however precious this is to us, we can’t go on. (237-238)
Thus the ultimate realisation, which was the very basis of this relationship, dawns upon Devayani, and lets Ashok go with grace, and pain of parting in her heart. She feels a blank in her mind as there will be “Nothing to wait for, nothing to fear, nothing to rejoice over” (255). She feels nearly dead to imagine her life without Ashok. The weight of separation is indubitably crushing for Devayani but her aunt, Sindhu’s words soothe her deeply: “Nothing remains unchanged. Love gets diluted, hate is forgotten, and friendship, and enmity keep shifting all the time” (257).

Devayani knows now that she cannot give in like that, and is in agreement with Rani, and Sindhu’s opinion that “things pass, things change” (258), but has the realization that her love for Ashok will never change as he symbolizes her past experiences which filled her with bliss, and sense of completion.

Devayani does not even want to forget it; in fact, she cannot, as Ashok is a part of her being. She wonders at one point:

And what about the feel of his skin against mine, of his hand against my back, the touch of his lips, his fingers, the words he murmured when he loved me, the sound of his love . . . Should I forget these things? . . . No, I don’t want to forget, I want to remember, . . . Is this what my life is going to be like from now - a constant struggle between trying to forget and wanting to remember? (258-259).

Nevertheless, she knows that she has set Ashok free for all times to come, and also knows that her inner individual space is nobody’s business wherein Ashok will remain simply because he has become individualized essence of her psyche.
Thus, Devayani emerges as a woman who not only sees reality as it is but can also outgrow it as time passes. As far as her love for Ashok is concerned, it touches timeless dimension as she says that it will never change. Their love, in fact, has caused deep inner transmutation in her psyche which endows her with the capacity to understand the world more clearly, and deal with relationships in a mature manner. From the viewpoint of emergence of selfhood, Devayani’s decision to enter the country of deceit is critical. Even though hers is a conscious decision, it is not without problems. For instance, she undergoes the crisis of conscience, and is briefly rattled by deep sense of compunction.

Nevertheless, Devayani refuses to give in, and becomes more acutely aware of what she wants, and how her love for Ashok benefits her. She keenly observes her experiences, and shares them with Savi, and Shree who scarcely break the conventional mould of their thought, and perception. She makes her own choices not only in relation to Ashok but also the rest of the characters in the novel. She is emotional but not to the point that the clarity of her vision gets blurred. Devayani presents a beautiful blend of the head, and the heart particularly in emotionally charged, and unnerving situations. She is the one who has carefully thought over the whole problematic, and the socio-cultural implication of transgression as she moves into the country of deceit. Upon fulfilment, Devayani, who seems to have been portrayed as an exception to patriarchal norms, emerges stronger despite constantly nagging sense of compunction at the back of her mind.

Devayani’s sense of self is unsettling as she is self-willed, self-driven, self-questioning, self-rectifying, and self-sufficient unlike most of Deshpande’s female protagonists. She profoundly realises two dimensions of love as mentioned by A. K. Ramanujan in the epigraphs to the novel namely love as a ‘fantasy feast’, and love as
a state of ‘intense vulnerability and beauty’ rather than being mere pleasure, and a thing of memory as mentioned by J. Krishnamurti. Having experienced the beauty, and vulnerability of love along with living fully its physical, and celebratory aspect, Devayani knows towards the end of the novel as to how ‘love’ becomes ‘atonement’ (257), and how the disastrous emanates from the miraculous, and wondrous aspect of love. Therefore, she does not want to forget it ever:

Must I forget his tenderness, the gentleness of his touch, the urgency of his passion? And why, yes, why must I forget that I too had a moment, a very brief moment, when I raised my arms and my fingertips brushed the sky? . . . it is not remembering, but forgetting that will be my greatest enemy. (259)

Devayani’s clear, and emphatic choice to remember her past in all its tender, gentle, and passionate aspect affirms her evolution into a woman who can meaningfully deal with the emptiness within her with the realisation that she has to keep going. Not that she has arrived but she is better equipped to deal with her life to come as she has had her “moment, a very brief moment, when I raised my arms, and my fingertips brushed the sky” (259).

Analysis of Devayani’s character shows that she has undergone a stage of transformation thereby keeping her individual standpoint intact. Deshpande has been very cautious in building the narrative of In the Country of Deceit. Viewed structurally, there is nothing that could be viewed in the sense of formal closure novel. Every single narrative strand has been kept open ended. In this sense, each experience of Devayani has been envisioned, and executed in a dynamic mode. Not that she is through with love once Ashok returns to his family, or that she is in any sense
alienated. Through the novel *In the Country of Deceit*, Deshpande dares to break certain conventional attitudes that are never questioned in our society. She has confronted squarely the various facets of the taboo subject of female sexuality in unequivocal terms. In the first person narrative Devayani expresses her erotic urges like a man in a powerful language. Throughout the book, Devayani herself struggles with the desires, and demands of her body.

For the modern women writers, the female body is also the celebratory positive source of abundant energy, desire, pleasure, agency, and innovation allowing the women to tread the trajectory of resistance, rebellion, conflict, emancipation, and empowerment to assert their identities as women. Deshpande in her novel *In the Country of Deceit* rebels against conventional sexual restrictions, and shows that women are becoming conscious of their sexual needs. The protagonist celebrates her sexuality, feminine freedom, and individuality. For Deshpande, the statement of emancipation seems to lie in the freedom, and responsibility of choice.

In the words of the novelist as reflected by Usha Tambe in the work *Shashi Deshpande as a Feminist and a Novelist*, "they are not allowed to wallow in the victimhood, and come to realize that they made traditional, regressive choices when other options were open to them" (124). In the interview to Joel Kuortti, published in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 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)
In all her novels published so far, this Sahitya Academy award winning novelist explores what happened in the psyche of her heroines as they go through the complex process of self-realization. Through her writings she makes the readers question their everyday existence, and helps them to visualize, through the evolution of her well-sketched characters, the frailties, and possibilities of human life. Thus, she creates a familiar world, a new in which authentic experiences of the inner psyche of Indian women is powerfully projected. A distinct kind of language, and imagery used in her novels imparts a new vision of reality.

It is possible to connect Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic tool ‘Self-Realization’ to better understand the character Devayani. In an interview to Joel Kurotti, published in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Deshpande once said, “My books go into the female mind, and the psychology of the human female which a textbook may tell you about, but a living human being you create in a book can tell you much better” (34).

Devayani is assertive, and she has the courage to make her own decisions. It is said by Viktor Frankl in After the Darkest Hour:

Real suffering is an authentic and realistic response to the ragged wounds of living a human life. It’s also unavoidable and an essential part of every human life. Illness, loss of loved ones, disappointment, decline, death, limitations, and imperfections startle and shake us. But they awaken us to find meaning, dignity, and significance in our lives. They open the heart to pure compassion and newfound creative energy. Real suffering is useful. It propels us to new levels of consciousness and self-knowledge. (75)
Devayani, as a new woman shows patience, courage, and an enviable spirit to face life as it comes on her way. Deshpande in this novel shows 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 words to Vrinda Nabar as reflected in *Caste as Woman*, the novelist pointed out:

What women need is the strength to deal with the problems of quotidian life, a sense of having the power to deal with everyday problems, as well as large ones. The power to take their own decisions, without being constrained by traditional ideas of honour or sacrifice, an ability to see beyond these ideas, so see things with their own eyes, with their own minds. (319)

Shashi Deshpande’s novel, will outlive the ravages of time because it inspires us to move on. She says in her *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays*, “Sometimes a book, through a kind of identification can spark off an understanding of herself in the reader, which becomes part of the process of healing, of moving on” (33).

In Shashi Deshpande’s thought provoking essay, *Of Concerns, Of Anxieties*, she 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.
Shashi Deshpande adds that by being a feminist, she believed that the female of the species has the same right to be born, and survive, and to fulfil 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. Devayani, too, has her supreme joy out of her moment of self-realization. In her interview with Ranjan Harish, published as *In Conversation with Shashi Deshpande*, Deshpande asserted:

No awareness, no knowledge can be required without going through some pain. To know also means to let go of some earlier knowledge or ideas which perhaps cushioned us and made us more comfortable with the world and with ourselves. (60)

Shashi Deshpande makes her position regarding the status of women quite clear in her novels through the portrayal of her protagonists’ inner, and outer journeys. In the words of her, as reflected by Usha Tambe in the work *Shashi Deshpande as a Feminist and a Novelist*, “Until women get over the handicaps imposed by society, outside, and inner conditioning, the human race will not realize its full potential” (128).

The empowerment of the protagonist in Shashi Deshpande’s latest novel *Ships That Pass* is explored in the following paragraphs. This is a mystery novel, that goes deep into relationships that travel through marital discord, and frustration, but it ends on a note of hope. The central theme of this book is marriage, and the author’s reflections on the same. This novel tries to discuss the psychic disturbance of a
married woman caused due to the infidelity of her husband. Woman, and madness seem to be synonymous in the male dominated society. They are emotionally fragile, and prone to the mental problems. 'Madness' is the height of depression caused due to the deprivation of psychological, social or financial help. It is sometimes never identified, and never cured like physical problems as if mind is not connected to the body. Moreover madness is extremely stigmatized in our society.

Shashi Deshpande in the author’s note of her novel Ships That Pass said, “Though the world has changed, India has changed, the decades did not seem to matter because human beings are the same and the mystery of the human mind still remains the greatest mystery of all” (viii).

Shashi Deshpande is a genius in exploring the great mystery of the human psyche. Ships That Pass is a suspense thriller novel which revolves round a marriage where a couple hide themselves in silence. Shashi Deshpande uses the tool kit of the crime novel to take us into literary heartland - the complexity, the impossibility even of human communication.

The story Ships That Pass was conceived thirty years back, and was realized in Evis Weekly in 1980. Now it has come in the form of a novel, and as a saga of love, and marriage. It becomes very interesting due to the contrasting shades of love, trust, and marriage of two siblings Tara, and Radhika. Tara is married to Shaan. Radhika is fascinated, and wants to design her life with marriage. After the completion of her graduation she feels bored, and has nothing special she wants to do in life. To her, marriage, as the society often points out, seems like a perfect solution.
While the other girls in her group were busy chalk ing out their future plans post their graduation, Radhika was sure what she wanted from life. On an impulse she urges her parents to find a match for her because she feels it is best to get married.

One of the certainties of life was marriage. . . An arranged marriage seemed sensible and practical; uncertainties, all the facts laid bare. His father is so-and-so, his family is such-and- such, he does this for a living, he earns precisely this much money, he has one sister, two brothers. (9-10).

Radhika was not so close to her sister because of their age difference. But she did not have any complex regarding the exceptional beauty of her ‘Akka’ who looked like a Mughal miniature, with large lustrous eyes, straight nose, perfectly shaped face with high cheek bones, and a delicate jaw line. Radhika started to think about arranged marriages where the couple behaved like lovers. She had felt that her Akka had luck to have her man.

In any case everyone cannot have Akka and Shaan's luck to fall in love the way they had done and to be so sure of each other, to know with absolute certainty that this was the person with whom you wanted to live the rest of your life. How easy that would make things. But the other way could work too - - - Like millions of other couples, we would start off as strangers and soon become lovers. (24)

Radhika was engaged to Ghanshyam who was selected by her parents. After going out twice with him, and talking to him Radhika becomes confused, and she is unable to decide whether Ghanshyam was wrong or marriage. She was not able to
talk to him frankly, and honestly. “What a fool I'd been to think that marriage was the solution, the answer to everything. I'd felt so sure of myself full of doubts. I couldn't call it off either”(23). She feels that it is not sensible to marry the young man GhanShyam selected by her parents. At her sister’s house she meets Ram Mohan, her sister’s old friend, and loyal admirer. Gradually Radhika finds herself turning to him, and relying on his judgement than that of any others. Further she realizes:

Ghanshyam, I had come to realize, was a man on his way up, he was determined and ambitious. Whereas this man had obviously done with ambition. Not that he had ever said so to me (he never told anything about himself; surely, reason enough for me to stop thinking of him?) but I could guess that he was neither ambitious. . . I could never feel sorry for Ram Mohan. (70)

Radhika grapples with the crumbling relationship between her brother-in-law, and sister. She finds herself becoming closer to her sister, whom she had always been envious of. Closer up, she realizes her sister’s life had been far from easy, and completely different from what everyone else had expected or anticipated it to be. From outside, her sister’s marriage looked perfect. Except that from inside, there was nothing left, not even anger, bitterness or indifference. It was like an empty box. Tara tells Radhika,”You can’t know him even after years. It’s all a big gamble, Radhu. If you’re lucky you win, otherwise......” (32). Thus through Tara, Shashi Deshpande severely attacks the conventional way of marriage system of our Indian society.

Radhika feels disappointed by the luke warm reaction between Tara, and Shaan. She tries to understand about ideal marriage, and how it has come undone.
She comes to know about the social construct on marriage in an Indian society. One of the profound statements that underlies the core of this novel reads like this:

Marriage is a very strange thing. It’s a very public institution, it’s meant to tell the world that two people are going to live together, to declare that their children will be legal, that these children can inherit their property. It’s meant for social living, to ensure that some rules are observed so that men and women don’t cross the lines that are drawn for them. At the same time, marriage is an intensely private affair. No outsider will ever know what goes on in a marriage, no outsider will ever know the state of someone else’s marriage. It’s a closed room, a locked room. (60-61)

Tara advises Radhika to take a good decision about her marriage:

Things were different in Aai’s days. They didn’t want anything of their own. To be married was the final goal of their lives. To have children and look after your husband and kids, maybe even your in-laws – that was all there was to life. But now . . . (90)

Tara adds, “Never, never marry a man who doesn’t seem right to you” (91). “But do what you want, not what others think you should do” (92).

The tragedy strikes. Tara is found dead in mysterious circumstances, and all the fingers are pointed towards Shaan. He is arrested for the murder of his wife. There is a mystery around the murder which is intriguing for everyone. Nobody can believe that Shaan could murder his wife but there were many rumours about his
mistress. Radhika had seen a lot to deny that. But there was a possibility that Tara had committed suicide.

Ghanshyam's father tactfully withdraws the marriage proposal, and it is clear that they are not interested further to connect with the family having murder background. Finally Radhika gets a paper where Akka has scribbled in a very large hand, “I can't go in, I can't go on” (117) scrawled just over, and over again. Ram wants to use it as a suicide note and hide Tara's diary. Ram does not believe Shaan might have killed his wife, and Radhika cannot believe that her Akka would commit a suicide but for the sake of Abhi she heeds to Ram's words that “In any case, Shaan matters more now. Abhi needs him. Abhi doesn’t need to have a dead mother and a father who killed her as his parents. Didn’t you say it yourself, that the living matter more than the dead? (121).

Shaan gets released but he remains stoic for the arrest, and for the release. It was the departing time with Ram, and she said what she wanted to say. Radha expresses her desire to marry Ram Mohan openly but later she comes to know that Ram had already spoken with her Dada regarding their marriage.

It is a simple register marriage but she is happy that she has married a right man. She had full freedom to make choice, and had planned to continue her education. She knows that with Ram she can be herself. She says “after Shaan and Akka, that I had lost faith in love. But no, I haven't. I believe in love - if friendship is part of it” (136). Aiyappan has rightly said in Society in India: “A happy marriage has in it all the pleasures of friendships, all the enjoyment of sense and reason - and indeed all the sweets of life” (23). Shaan had gone out of his own life. He didn't even come to Radhika, and Ram's marriage. He didn't like to cast a gloom over their
wedding. When Radhika had called he had said that he would be back as soon as he knew that he was fit to live with Abhi.

*Ships That Pass* is a heart rendering story. It is not clear if Tara kills herself or it is a lust murder by her husband as both remain silent. But it is evident that Tara is killed due to her husband's infidelity. In our conservative society it is even a taboo to talk about extra marital affairs so our women folks are ready to ignore it, and suffer alone as our society would blame a woman for everything. It is always a fault of woman even if her husband wrongs her.

Tara deliberately remains silent about her husband's extra marital affair. She loves him so much that she is unable to leave him, and wants to safeguard her marriage but Shaan has changed his love, and is ready to kill Tara for another woman. Tara is not insane but to cover up his deeds Shaan has projected Tara as a psychosomatic. Normally a man who indulges in an affair tries to portray himself as a decent person to the society. Even though he is aware of the consequences of his actions, he continues with the relationship, with or without the feelings of guilt. He justifies his affair by accusing his loyal, and ever faithful wife with any negative, and unforgivable behaviour. This is done intentionally to gain sympathy for his patience, and endurance which he has suffered throughout the entire marriage. Even Shaan is not an exception from this.

Shashi Deshpande has dealt with the theme of madness in this novel. Silence, and surrender are the expected ornaments of our Indian women so that they can be easily crushed in the name of custom, and tradition. The insanity of Tara explores the deeper psychic, and reality of women, who are pushed into hysteria, madness, and neurotic behaviour due to their inability to cope with the pressure of patriarchy.
Madness is a psychic rebellion, and an extremity of depression. It is a war within a self where an attempt is made to rise. The theme of madness is linked with the theme of self-identity. Women are sexually oppressed. Indian culture has enslaved women for ages while men enjoy within, and outside the marriage. All norms, and conditions for women if followed she is respected or else called as reckless. As Hall in *Women and Empowerment* puts it:

> Masculine and feminine qualities are acquired by suppressing some and developing some. Men become masculine by suppressing their potential for nurturing and intuition. While women become feminine by suppressing their potential for controlling and rationality. (23)

*Ships That Pass* sets a mirror to the couples in troubled marriages, throwing light on the extra marital affair which destroys the peace, and sanctity of marriage. Healing of the wound of infidelity by a spouse is not that easy. Suspicions, and dark thoughts, and fear for the future ruin life. More of concern to Deshpande is the exploration of how communication breaks down in relationships. Thus, a perfectly good marriage degenerates into a relationship where the partners just do not understand each other, and even fear each other’s actions, and reactions, and pass into a state of unknowingness. The title which has been taken from Longfellow’s poem, *Tales of a Wayside Inn: The Theologian’s Tale*, also reads the same:

> Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,

> Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness:

> So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another:

> Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence. (V)

The novel *Ships That Pass* novel is beautifully written, emotionally provocative, and gives perfect details that constructs the institution of marriage as it
happens among Indians. This novel deals with the confusion, and disappointment that can build behind the façade of a middle class marriage. *Ships That Pass* sails through turbulent seas but still remains a perfect journey. Kaur in his work *Shashi Deshpande: A Feministic Interpretation* says that:

Deshpande sees the need to harmonize the man-woman relationship as equal partners. There is no victory in the subjugation and destruction of the male. The need is to see each other’s need for space, freedom of expression and love. (24)

The researcher argues with the lines of Beena Agarwal from the work *Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande* that, “the fictional world of Shashi Deshpande is not directed towards the annihilation of the existing order, but it seeks a reorientation of society where a more balanced relationship might have been possible” (217).

The works of Shashi Deshpande under study mark the emergence of the new Indian woman, conscious of her otherness, of a need to speak out, to map out a space for herself, and anxious to impose her image on those empty spaces in the social map. Shashi Deshpande’s novels may be called as the novels of self-realization. It is possible to trace out the psychic behaviour of Radhika by making use of Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic tool ‘Intrapersonal Psychotherapy’. It is said by Sandler, a Neo Freudian in *Development of Psycho-analysis in India*:

Consciousness is awareness and self-knowledge. The expansion of consciousness leads to - the search for meaning. Once an individual’s search for meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering. Real suffering cannot be avoided. (56)
Life of Radhika changes after Akka's death. Radhika understands that “I had thought of my life as a piece of clay I could mould into any shape I wanted. Now, I was understanding that it was actually the other way round; we are shaped by the things that happen to us” (109). For all the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande self-realization is not an isolated act but is interwoven with their actions. The novels conclude by the self-realization of their protagonists as they realize their potential, and achieve what they wish, within reasonable boundaries. It is said by Sufi Master in his *Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory: The Art of Personality*:

> The art of personality fulfil the purpose of life, and that we are all born with such a personality - But even a diamond must be cut. It has the light in it, yet cutting is required: it cannot show that glow and that brilliance before it has been cut. The same thing applies to personality.

(46)

Thus a careful study of the novels of Shashi Deshpande gives a clear picture of our culture. Her novels have faithfully recorded the challenges, and confrontation of values, and the process of transition, and transformation going on in the Indian society. In particular, her novels have been written, underlining the essential dignity of man in the changing scenario, and there is a strong affinity of her works with the best in world literature. In all her novels Shashi Deshpande’s central issue remains unchanged. She has been always keen on self-assertion, and freedom of self. Her real concern is exploring the human psyche. She documents Indian middle class women with Indian settings, Indian culture, and Indian background. It is evident that all the characters belonging to the old, and new generation adhere to the Indian culture. All her protagonists rebel the traditional roles forced on Indian woman but refuse to come
out of the marital institution. Though all her novels are open-ended, the protagonists would be transformed new women with a new attitude in the end.

One of the major aspects of women empowerment in India is to change the attitude of society towards women. The problem in India is that the society never worked on the premise of gender equality from a long-long time. Atrocities, and discrimination against women is a way of daily life in Indian society. There is an attitude which still prevails in India where women are considered to be only worthwhile of household activities, and managing the children. The veil system, child marriage, and dowry system are testimonies to this truth. Women have never been part of the mainstream society in India, and they are still considered as a great liability. Majority of women in India are poor, uneducated, and insufficiently trained. They often end up in the daily struggle of managing an ill equipped family, and are not in a position to propel out themselves of the oppressive, and regressive social, and economic conditions.

Women's empowerment cannot take place unless women come together, and decide to self-empower themselves. Self-empowerment should be all round in nature. Self-empowerment can begin by addressing day to day issues faced by individual women, and tackling them with a mindset of improving the overall living conditions of women at every level, and strata of the society. A movement has to be build which awakens the individual self in each, and every woman for creative, and generative action. In this regard progressive, and resourceful women in the society need to come forward to help their less privileged sisters in as many ways as possible. This shall help sow the seed for real women empowerment in India.
Batliwal has given a full length commentary on the plight of women today in the work *Empowerment of Women in South Asia.* It is worthwhile to quote the author on this subject:

The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of feminity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human being. Reared by women, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still, economic and social foundation. (77)

The fact has to be accepted that things are not going to change overnight but because of this we cannot stop taking action either. At this juncture the most important step is to initiate ground level actions however small they might be seen. The ground level actions should be focussed towards changing the social attitude, and practices prevalent in the society which are highly biased against women. This can be initiated by working with the women at the root level, and focusing on increasing women's access, and control over resources, and increasing their control over decision making.

Further working on the aspect of enhanced mobility, and social interaction of women in the society would positively influence all round development, and empowerment of women in India. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi addressed the All India Women’s Conference in 1980.
The following lines said by her are taken from *Status of Women in India – A Synopsis of the Report of the National Women’s Committee*:

Women since the beginning of history, have been dominated over and discriminated against in social custom and in-laws… To be liberated, a woman must feel free to be herself, not in rivalry to man, but in the context of her own capacity and her personality. We need women to be more interested, more alive and more active, not because they are women, but because they do comprise half the human race. Whether they like it, or not, they cannot escape their responsibility nor should they be denied its benefits. Indian women are traditionally conservatives but they also have the genius of synthesis to adapt and absorb. That is what gives them resilience to face suffering and to meet upheavals with a degree of calm, to change constantly and yet remain changeless which is the quality of India herself. (42)

In any society, the process of change is painful. Someone has to pay the price, and in India, women are being forced to pay the price for this change. But in the long run, it will be worth. Because future generation will be the beneficiaries. There are miles to go to achieve our cherished goal to empower women. Let the pursuit of power be not only aim of the women empowerment. It should be total emancipation.