6.1 GENDER DISCRIMINATION - I

Gender which Fowler dismisses as a grammatical term only (and most dictionaries follow suit) now has meaning beyond grammar. It is viewed as a culturally imposed role and as different from sex, which is biologically determined. Gender as differentiated from sex, has nothing to do with biology; gender is a social and cultural construct. A creation of patriarchy, it serves the male flair for domination, and is not based on mutuality but on oppression.

Socialization plays an important role in the construction of gender, and bares the link between social values and the paradigms of male domination. Socialization is a very powerful instrument; it has enormous influence in conditioning not only a girl’s but also a boy’s psyche since its influence begins early in childhood. Roles no doubt are an inalienable aspect of social living and relationship, but it is the abuse of socialization in conditioning the girl child so that she acquiesces to patriarchal paradigms that make it questionable. In literature one gets how a girl child is indoctrinated to withhold, conceal and suppress her real self. Myths that socialize and contain the Indian woman abound in ancient literature. A number of studies have analysed them for gender discriminatory values. The overall picture one gathers from literature is subordination, exploitation, violence and oppression, trapped in patriarchal cultural value and paradigms.

The growth of a girl in Indian society is seen mainly in relation to her attitude towards her family and her duty towards it. Coming into sharp conflict with the sense of family duty is the girl’s burgeoning feeling of self-identity. It is in the course of this conflict that the full identity of the girl is formed. The successful formation of this identity depends upon the delicate balance that the
girl maintains between submission and revolt. Growth into maturity and selfhood is frequently tested in family situation in the course of confrontation with adults.

The burden of the female child is more irksome than that of the male child because aspects of her body, the function of her femaleness intrude upon the growth of her personality. Not only the parents but also the society as a whole is influenced by physical appearance of the girl child. This is a great hindrance in the inner growth of the child. It is in the adjustment that the family makes to the changing biological processes, and the girls attitude towards the family and parents that the identity of a child gets defined and firmly established.

Down the ages, the place of women in the tradition bound, male dominated society has been very unenviable. Despite epoch-making changes the position of women - economic social and cultural - has not shown much change. A vast majority of women are reconciled to a life of humiliation in form of gender bias while performing the roles of wives, and mothers in a rigidly custom bound milieu they live in. Even women with liberal modern education, with an irrepressible yearning to break loose from time honoured crippling and inequitous social laws, do often lose their moorings and find themselves in perilously embarrassing situation. Even economically independent women have not been able to clear off the besetting pitfalls created by the custom and beliefs sedulously preserved in the tradition bound Indian society.

It is said that the literature of a country is the storehouse of the cultural and sociological aspect of its people. But literature all along has been turned to
the point of view of the male element. Woman is often ‘marginalized’
‘repressed’ or ‘silenced’ in literary work. The role of woman was restricted by
her womanhood and therefore, the experiences of the muted female forming
half of the society was not reflected in literature.

But with the rise of feminism, women became aware of the fact that
their inferiority is not ordained in heaven that gender is neither natural nor
immutable, because it is a creation of patriarchy and patriarchy is not given. It
is a construct, which can be deconstructed. Women realized that the system of
patriarchy which existed since a long time, no longer served the needs of the
rapidly changing society where women were trying to emancipate themselves
and define their potential. Revolting against their marginalization they have
started questioning the sexual politics and gender arrangement.

The emergence of women novelists has considerably influenced the
change in attitude. Their writing reflects a shift in the sensibility of the writers
as well as that of the reader. Shashi Deshpande portrays the new Indian
woman and her dilemma. She concerns herself with the plight of the modern
Indian woman trying to understand herself and to preserve her identity as wife,
mother and above all as a human being. Childhood considered so important a
period for the formation of character and for the emergence of a value
structure has largely been ignored as an area of human experience-specially
where girl characters are concerned. This reflects both a literary and a social
reality. Girls are silent part of the family and society. What they think or feel
about their social eclipse does not interest most writers or social thinkers. The
most formative years of the woman’s life-when she is growing up remains by
and large unexamined and unexplored. Shashi Deshpande is perhaps, one of
the few Indian English writers who have portrayed the girl child with deliberation. There is either one-girl child or there is a detailed examination of the girlhood of the protagonist who attempts to define her adult self-identity by analyzing her growing years. This process helps her realize that her personality has been determined by her family upbringing and socialization in childhood.

Deshpande unveils the subtle process of oppression and gender differentiation at work in the family and in the male oriented society. One of the features of their upbringing is their inculcation as girls into the socially defined roles as daughter/mother/wife. Deshpande shows great sensitivity and awareness of the ways and means through which a young girl is prepared for her future status in society. The factors that influence her include cultural aspects, social and psychological factors such as the family structure, woman’s position in it, female sexuality and the trauma of monthly cycle. Her major novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots And Shadows* and *That Long Silence* trace the quest for self-definition of women, who are educated and modern but who cannot quite shake off their background and the manner in which they have been brought up.

Gender roles are conceived, enacted and learnt within a complex of relationships. In the Indian family, there exists despite its patriarchal character, an independent community of women that evolves as a result of taboo and an interaction between the sexes. It is here that the female child is acculturated into her social role of daughter/wife/mother. Sarita the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* grows up as a victim of her mother’s sexist and gender based bias. Even as a child she remembers her mother’s preference for Dhruva
her brother and the importance attached to his birthdays. The birth of a son, after sixteen years, which should have embarrassed Kshama’s father in “Come Up and Be Dead”, fills him with pride, which bewilders her. In That Long Silence Jaya notices that her name had not been included in the family tree “How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family. You’re married (...) you have no place here”\(^1\) (143).

In The Dark Holds No Terrors Sarita is constantly reminded that she is a girl whose destiny is to get married and leave the house, while her brother need not do so. The mother is concerned about her daughter’s appearance, the colour of her skin. Should she grow dark it would be difficult to get her married:

Don’t go out into the sun, you’ll get darker.

Who cares?

We have to care even if you don’t. We have to get you married.\(^2\)

One is reminded of Kamala Das who in her My Story recounts how worried her grandmother was about the duskeness of her skin and rubbed raw turmeric every Tuesdays and Fridays before her oil bath.

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman- it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature (...) described as feminine”\(^3\) this idea becomes relevant when one sees the methods through which a girl is acculturated into femininity. Even daily household chores are set aside for girls- chores like setting the table, cleaning up after meals, helping in the kitchen, doing odd jobs. Boys are discouraged from doing them. In That Long Silence eyebrows are raised when one of the girls question angrily “why can’t one of the boys do it? Jaanu or Shridhar? Why does it have to be Veena or
me? (81). She had been answered by mocking smiles. Jaya’s husband Mohan is scandalized when she suggests that he should cook during her pregnancy.

Although this process of preparing the girl towards her ‘otherness’ begins in early childhood, it is intensified from the moment she attains puberty. As a girl grows up, she is made to feel different from her male siblings, made to feel conscious about revealing her femininity to the male members of the family: You should be careful now about how you behave. Don’t come out in your petticoat like that. Not even if it’s only your father who’s around. (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*).

And so the process of growing up becomes something to be furtive about. The concept of honour plays an important role in the repression of the girl’s sexuality. Any misbehavior on her part would bring shame both to herself and her family, resulting in decreased chances of a good match. She is groomed for the fulfillment of the desired goal of her existence-marriage. All the prayers and rituals of girl’s life are directed towards the procurement of a husband, his longevity and the propagation of his lineage through the birth of male offsprings. *In That Long Silence*, Jaya is told again that “a husband is like a sheltering tree,” (137) and that “the happiness of your husband and home depends entirely on you” (138).

Deshpande’s novel explores the quest for selfhood undertaken by women who come from such environment. They are caught between a traditional upbringing and the longing for freedom in the modern sense. A quest for identity forms the theme of *That Long Silence*. Jaya the protagonist, thinks of her past and tries to analyse herself to decide who she really is.
The fact her husband rechristened her Suhasini confuses her in her search for identity. The pen name under which she writes confuses her all the more. Jaya stood for victory and Suhasini for submission. Jaya rejects the name Suhasini, and it is significant since it is a manifestation of protest against such customs. Through the process of reliving the past in her mind, she gets guidance for her future. She decides to break her seventeen years of silence and gives up being a mere passive partner to Mohan, her husband. She decides to assert herself as an individual and also as a woman, wife and mother. Though she chooses to remain within the family a change has been wrought. She has come out of her confining slots allotted to her by the patriarchal society.

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* revolts against her mother’s oppressive dictates becomes a doctor and even marries a man of her choice. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* rebels in a similar fashion. A motherless child, her renegade father and Akka the strict and disapproving matriarchs of the family leave her to fend for herself in a traditional family. She manages a good education, a job and a husband. Indu, Sarita and Jaya despite their early rebelliousness, cannot quite free themselves from their early socialization and its effect upon their psyche. Indu finds herself becoming an ideal woman and becomes like her traditional aunts, Sarita’s victimization by her mother on the basis of gender causes her to become ruthlessly ambitious to the extent of undermining her husband’s confidence and making him impotent. Jaya, falls to assert herself sinking into apathy, neglecting even her talent for writing.

Inspired by the feminist movements of the West, misinterpreted freedom, made in total switch over to the other side, seeking freedom from
everything including their culture. Deshpande’s characters find freedom not in
the Western sense but in conformity with the society they live in without
drifting away from one’s culture. Jaya’s decision is not meek surrender to
circumstances, but a sensible compromise. Deshpande supports the view that
feminism is pro-woman but not antiman; she rejects a separatist stance. Aware
of the fact that breaking off the bonds of family would result in loneliness and
disintegration of the larger social set up, Jaya looks for happiness and
fulfillment within the family itself.

From Akka in Roots and Shadows, who was married at the age of
thirteen to Manda, Nilima and Sati in That Long Silence Deshpande traces the
pattern of socialization and the internalization of patriarchal norms and values.
While the older woman remains chained to traditional background, the
younger emerges confident. The type of family structure plays an important
role in the change. In an educated nuclear family without the orthodox patterns
of socialization and repressive tradition in a nuclear family they grow without
inhibitions regarding their being feminine as in the generation that was earlier
and in a joint family.
6.1 FEMALE SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE - II

‘Karyeshu Mantri, Karanaeshu Dassi,
Rupeeha Lakshmi, Kshamayaa Dharitri,
Bhojyeshu Mata, Shayanetu Rambha,
Shat Karma Yukta, Kula Dharma Patni.’

(Like a slave while serving; a minister when counselling, Goddess Lakshmi in her looks; the earth in forbearance; a mother while feeding; Rambha, the celestial prostitute in bed; these six are the true characteristics of an ideal wife.) 4(2-3)

Traditionally, in the Hindu marriage the position of husband and wife is clearly defined. The husband is expected to be the authoritarian figure whose will should always dominate the life of the wife. The wife should regard him as her master and should serve faithfully. Thus the traditional concept of superior husband and subordinate wife had been the guideline of Hindu marriage.

The Indian tradition considers the marriage ceremony as one in which the husband and wife become one however “that one is the husband.” In an Indian marriage it is understood that the wife will merge her name, personality, life style and in fact, her entire life into that of the husband.

Although the institution of marriage has been long enduring, it has undergone a number of changes. The process of industrialization, urbanization, Westernization has led to the breaking up of the traditional joint families. It also brought about politico-economic, cultural and socio-psychological changes in the life patterns and attitudes of the people of India, especially among the urban population. With the growing emphasis on
education, the Indian woman experienced freedom and struggle to improve her lot. Education brought economic independence of women, which in true changed their outlook, and the traditional equation of superior husband and inferior wife. The traditional concept of love marriage as sacrament and sex as a taboo is fast losing its importance. As Promilla Kapur, the renowned sociologist has concluded in her study love, Marriage and sex, that woman now aspire for “natural companionship, respect, material comforts, and satisfaction of emotional and physical needs, in marriage.”

The inability of the men to understand such needs and accept the individuality of women threatens their marriage. The traditional mindset to ignore woman’s sexuality and to consider a woman immoral and frivolous, if she gives expression to her pleasures in sex is changing with the attitude of woman. More and more women are now viewing sex as a physical need. In this regard Promilla Kapur concludes on the basis of her survey, “All these findings suggest that the negative attitude towards sex or that of condemnation has lost ground considerably and the positive attitude regarding sex as one of the needs of every human being is emerging.” (Kapur220)

Marriage and sexuality as a subject of study has been left unexplored by most of the early Indo-English novelists, as it was overshadowed by the various socio-political problems that dominated the milieu. The Big three, Manohar Malgaonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya and even Nayantara Sahgal talked of human relationships but in the light of social political or historical problems. But a man-woman relationship in isolation was rarely discussed as a theme. It was the novels of Anita Desai that concentrated on this theme and brought out the point of view of women for the
first time. Since then a number of women writers have explored this theme. As Anuradha Roy writes in her book *Pattern Of Feminist Consciousness* in *Indian Women writers*:

"Marital relationships have almost inevitably been the focal point of novels written by women. But there is a quantitative difference in tone and perception in novels, which adopt an explicit or implicit feminist stance. The emphasis is not on the development or mechanics of the relationship but on the forces, which work together to make the relationship a farcical exhibition of togetherness. Functioning along fixed parameters, marriages become an arid formality, devoid of contact." (Roy87-88)

Shashi Deshpande, an eminent novelist 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. Her novels reveal the man-made patriarchal traditions and the uneasiness of the modern Indian woman in being a part of them.

"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 Dhruba?
He’s different. He’s a boy.” (Deshpande. *The Dark* 45)

The predominance of marriage in a girl’s life, had never let Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, forget that she was a girl. Her mother, a woman rooted in tradition constantly reminded her of the difference between her and her brother, Dhruba. Her remark that she was nothing more than a burden, a responsibility that had to be transferred at the appropriate time, makes Saru detests the tradition, which limits the life of a girl to marriage.

The bitterness that had crept into their relationship after Dhruba’s death and her mother’s constant reminder that she is a girl, makes the growing Saru hate her sexuality. “You’re growing up she would say (...). And it became something shameful, this growing up, so that you had to be ashamed of yourself, even in the presence of your own father” (Deshpande *The Dark* 62).

Saru grows up hating her womanhood that consisted of feeling impure and ashamed of one’s sexuality and living with the sole purpose of getting married. She vows to rebel against such traditions and in spite of her mother’s objection joins a medical college in Bombay. It is here, while studying anatomy and physiology that she begins to accept her womanhood rather than detest it. She begins to enjoy her female identity and learns to dress and walk gracefully.

Her meeting with Manu brings back the memories of her old college days when she a student of first year and was fascinated by Manu, a postgraduate student. His multifaceted personality of a good student, secretary of literary association, an active member of the dramatic society, a budding
writer and a poet of promise, had made him a college hero. Even if their association with each other was brief, Manu’s good looks with “a firm chin, dark, thick straight eyebrows and full lips” had left an impression in her heart. However the approaching examination had brought the infatuation to an abrupt end.

Their second meeting triggers a romance and Manu with lost glory and declining future immediately responds to the now attractive Saru’s interest in him. However Saru still blinded by the image of the charismatic Manu of college days, fails to notice his present professional failure and wavering confidence. Her mother’s disapproval of the match because of Manu belonging to a lower caste brings back in Saru’s life the obstructions laid by tradition. Adamant not to yield to the traditional views of her mother, she marries Manu the day he acquires a room for them to live in. Hence Saru ignores her mother’s warning and overlooks the hierarchical difference between their caste and profession to marry Manu.

With marriage Saru experiences the joy of discovering her sexuality. For her marriage becomes a means to fulfill the love and affection she always longed for. Later she recalls, “I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted”7 (Deshpande. The Dark 40).

The Meager income that Manu gets from his job of a college lectures and their one room in a chawl does not interrupt their bliss. Basking in Manu’s love, Saru feels that she has achieved the traditional aim of being chosen by a “superior male”. But soon she realizes that Manu is no superior. Her neighbour become aware of her professional identity, the day she walks back
in a blood stained coat, after treating victims of an accident. Instantly her profession achieves for her a position superior to Manu’s. She is recognized and respected by the neighbours who come frequently to consult her. The respect that Saru gets disturbs the traditional equilibrium of the superior husband and inferior wife. Later analyzing her marital relationship she recalls:

“But now I know it was there it began (…) this terrible thing that has destroyed our marriage. I know this too (…) that the human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. And so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller, made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (Deshpande. The Dark 42).

Her newfound respect and recognition blinds her to Manu’s changing attitude. He becomes irritable and grows tired of being ignored everywhere and his wife getting all the attention and praise. His inability to accept the reversal of traditional roles makes him morose and Saru unaware of this considers his roughness in bed as, “the ardours of his love.”

Saru’s ambition and her desire to attain a comfortable life make her take help of Boozie, a senior doctor and a philanderer. She aims higher and responds to Boozie’s interest in her. He moulds her into a polished sophisticated urban woman and helps her career progresses in leaps and bounds. While her association with Boozie kills her reputation, Manu ignores the whole affair. However, she continues with the friendship as it helps Saru attain her ambition. As Y.S Reddy opines “Strictly speaking, there is nothing ‘physical’ in Saru’s affair with Boozie. To suit his own interests, Boozie
 openly flaunts his ‘relationship’ with Saru as a cover to his homosexuality” (Reddy 58).

Hence Saru finding a means to attain her dreams, moves forward while Manu retains his old position of a lecturer in a third grade college. This disparity deepens the rift in their relationship. But things change for the worse when a reporter from a woman’s magazine comes to interview Saru and asks Manu, “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (Deshpande. The Dark 200). This question makes Manu even more conscious of the reversed positions held by them. That night Manu attacks and physically assaults her in bed. This nightmarish incident is repeated and with increased brutality every time he is reminded of his inferior status. One such night Saru wakes up “(...) to darkness and an awareness of fear. Panic then pain. There it was, for the second time, what I had just lulled myself into believing was just a nightmare. The hurting hands, the savage teeth, the monstrous assault of a horribly familiar body. And above me, a face I could not recognize. Total noncomprehension, complete bewilderment, paralyzed me for a while. Then I began to struggle. But my body, hurt and painful, could do nothing against the fearful strength, which overwhelmed me. My mind, fluttering, threw itself despairingly on the walls of disbelief and came back staggering, bruised and spent. And then, mercifully, the end, the face still hovering over mine, changing as the body relaxed, becoming the familiar known one of my husband’s. The face and body both are moving away to become a familiar huddled shape by my side” (Deshpande. The dark 112).
Calling it "(...) a certain hallucinatory discovery on the part of the protagonist," (Mishra 84) Charu Chandra Mishra seems to overlook the very theme of the novel and undermine the suffering of a woman, however the bruises on Saru’s body and pains in the morning tell the tale of her nightly assault.

Saru’s efforts to confront Manu in the morning are often aborted by his normal behaviour and feigned ignorance about the rape. It leads to her doubting herself but the repeated rape and bruises on her body leave no doubt in her mind.

Later Saru recalls that Manu assaulted her whenever he was reminded of his economic dependence on her. When his colleague’s wife taunts her husband that even he could take a trip to Ooty if he had married a doctor, once again Manu is reminded of his modest income and luxuries, which he could afford with Saru’s money. The ingrained traditional values in Manu, which rigidly declared that it was the husband’s duty to provide for the wife and children, make him feel that he is a failure. The fact that Saru, his wife a subordinate member of the family, successfully retains his role infuriates and frustrates the egoistic man in him. To satisfy his pride he employs the only means through which he can assert his manhood. He subjugates Saru by physically assaulting and raping her, as he can find no other way to prove his superiority.

Saru, an intelligent and independent woman endures repeated rape because of shock and her love for her children. A woman in constant turmoil, she longs to talk about her miseries. Her effort to break the silence takes her to
a lawyer, but the thought of talking about it and the social stigma of divorce, unnerves her.

Realizing that her profession and economic superiority have become the cause of Manu’s frustrations she even talks to him of quitting her job but Manu quickly reminds her of the monetary loss and deterioration in lifestyle her decision would bring. Ironically, Manu’s pride is not hurt while enjoying the luxuries that Saru’s money provides. But a reminder of her success and his failure awakens a beast in him. Commenting on Saru’s decision to quit her job Charu Chandra Mishra opines, “Once a big catch, a handsome and virile man for husband, Manohar fails her in bed in satisfying her nymphomaniac urge. Now she is empowered to ride over him either by black mailing to resign her job or corner him to accept her domination as the bread-earner of the family” (Mishra 83).

This is certainly a prejudiced opinion. By suggesting ulterior motive in Saru’s sincere efforts to amend the wrongs in her marriage the critic fails to recognize the pain and helplessness of a woman, desperately seeking peace in life.

The regular violation of her body by the man she once love and the hypocrisy maintained by him makes Saru dislike everything about him. With her faith in love and marriage shattered, Saru grows to detest the very act of sex. Even Padmakar Rao, her old classmate’s efforts to establish a relationship with her fail to tempt her. Critics like R. Mala and Charu Chandra Mishra have questioned Saru’s character on the basis of her friendship with Boozie and Padma. But “Saru’s affair with Boozie (her boss) and Padmakar Rao (her collegemate) seem temporary for her unfulfilled marital life,” (Reddy 69) as
for her “Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway. And the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfillment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me sex was now a dirty word” (Deshpande. The Dark 133).

Saru’s sexuality is killed with marital rape she sees herself as nothing but “a dark, damp, smelly hole” (Deshpande. The Dark 29).

The news of her mother’s death and her own miserable condition makes Saru leave home for sometime, in search of peace. She pretends to leave in order to see her father but in reality she grabs the opportunity to escape her nightly tortures. Once at peace with Baba and Madhav she relishes the peaceful nights and the joy of waking up without aches and humiliations. She contemplates her childhood, and her relationship with her mother. In retrospect she is reminded of her mother’s words.” I know all these love marriages.” It’s love for a few days, and then quarrels all the time. Don’t come crying to us then.” And her own reply, “To you? God, that’s the one thing I’ll never do. Never!” (Deshpande. The Dark 69).

Because of the suffering she undergoes Saru even considers warning the young students of her friend, Nalu. She longs to tell them the rigid rules of tradition according to which,

“A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he’s an M.A, you should be a B.A. if he’s 5’4” tall you shouldn’t be more than 5’3” tall. If he’s earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety-nine rupees. That’s the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage (...). No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care it is unequal in the
favour of the husband. If the scales tilts in your favour, God help you, both of you” (Deshpande. The Dark\textsuperscript{137}).

Even her friend Smita, whose name was changed by her husband, reminds Saru that the patriarchal Indian society thrives on virtues like submission and self-effacement in women and employs no other means of happiness for them. Her friend, Nalu, a man-hater, feminist is seen as a rebel-a misfit in the traditional Indian society. In this context Y.S Sunita Reddy remarks, that through Smita and Nalu “Shashi Deshpande tries to repudiate the myth that women find fulfillment only in marriage. She, however, doesn’t go the other extreme of proclaiming that all unmarried women are destined to be happy”(Reddy 65)

Saru’s long hours of introspection into her marriage makes her realize that her professional success had killed Manu’s spirit. Actually her introspection helps her to free herself from the feelings of guilt that she has made Manu what he is. She decides that she would not endure any more humiliation because of Manu’s failure and her success.

The sudden news of Manu’s arrival agitates her and for the first time she breaks her silence and tells her father about her marriage. Scared to go back to those nightly tortures she is ready to escape as she is determined not to see Manu again. Her father’s advice that she must learn to face the problem rather than escape from it stops Saru. Left alone by her father the realization dawns upon Saru that she cannot run away from reality forever. She decides to assert herself and fight her own battle. She realizes that her life is her own which she will have to shape as well as face the events of her life. There is no refuge, other than one’s own self. With this in mind she confidently waits to
confront her husband. On this basis to conclude, “At the end of the novel, however, by implications she goes back to her home in Bombay,” would be presumptious. (Tripathi 45)\textsuperscript{10}

Disagreeing to such conclusions Deshpande had herself stated that: “(...) in The Dark, there was no doubt at all in my mind that Sarita is not going back. I am perpetually surprised that people haven’t understood that” (Holmstrom 247)\textsuperscript{11}.

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

A contrast to Saru’s marriage is that of her mother’s. Following the traditions, her mother led a life of self-effacement, as after her death when Saru enters the room she feels “It had been ‘their’ room, but it had always seemed only his, so successfully had she managed to efface her personality from her room” (Deshpande The Dark 19). However in reality Saru’s mother was a domineering woman who often over shadowed her husband. In retrospect Saru remembers that even as a child she had known that her father was feeble. No, worse than that, that he was a non-entity and didn’t matter” (Deshpande The Dark 29).

Born and brought up in a conventional family, Saru’s mother had learnt to blindly follow the tradition made by the society. Her husband’s timidity and her bold and outspoken nature makes her a dominant figure in the
family. She steps into the role of the head of the family who imposes the
traditions of a patriarchal society. Her blind faith in the righteousness of these
patriarchal norms makes her a strict ruler. Instead of creating a balance by her
authority she begins to rule over the lives of her husband and children. Only
once as Saru recalls, her father asserted his will and sent Saru to study
medicine. So reserved was the traditional role in her family that when Saru
returns after her mother’s death, she perceives tranquility in her father. She is
immediately reminded of an uneasy silence, which dominated her parent’s life.
Later her father regrets this lack of communication in their marriage and
confesses that silence had become a habit for them. So deadening was the
silence in their house that he never knew till late that his wife was ill and
dying of cancer. And she strictly obeying tradition of an uncomplaining wife
suffered but did not break her silence.

“A couple, the uneasiness or tension between them inspired the theme
of marital rape in the novel. And I knew that the man was not doing as well in
his career as the woman was, and I connected the two” (Holmstrom 224).

Deshpande, through this novel brings to light the fact that marriage is
the only option in a girl’s life. She even treads on the problem of career
women and their marital constraints. As the novel shows that Saru’s
professional success becomes the very cause of her crumbling marriage. The
issue of woman being professionally superior to the husband goes against the
traditional roles set by matrimony. Through the Saru-Manu relationship,
Deshpande raises the question of marital rape, which the Indian tradition does
not recognize. She shows that rape within marriage becomes the ultimate
means by which the husband subjugates his wife.
Indu, the heroine of Shashi Deshpande’s second novel *Roots and Shadows* is brought up in a traditional household run by the dominating Akka.

Akka is the most respected matriarch of the family. She single-handedly runs the house of her brother and with it the lives of his children and grandchildren too. A rich, childless widow she returned to her brother’s house after her traumatic marital life came to an end.

Akka’s story is an example of the suffering a girl undergoes due to traditional evils like child marriage. Married at the age of twelve to a man thrice her age and size, Akka becomes a victim of his lust. She fails to satisfy his fondness for woman and like feudal lords he had a number of mistresses. Akka’s attempt to escape her nightly tortures by running away from home is foiled by her mother-in-law who caught her and beat her up. In spite of being locked for days without food Akka would beg her mother-in-law in vain not to send her back to her husband’s room. Through Akka’s condition Deshpande brings out the brutish treatment of women especially young girls in the name of tradition, which compelled a wife to please her husband, no matter how brutal he was to her. She highlights the Indian tradition, which had denied a woman any 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.

Her tender age had made it difficult for her to give birth to a living child thus making her unable to fulfill the greatest purpose of a woman’s life. Adding to the misery of failed pregnancies and being ill treated by her mother-in-law, her husband’s debauchery took a new turn with his love for a particular mistress. In spite of regular ill-treatment, beastly assault and humiliation, Akka served her husband like a dutiful wife when he was carried home after a
stroke. However his cry for his mistress could not relent Akka’s heart, which was hardened by years of sufferings. Refusing to be humiliated again she told 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”(Deshpande, *Roots* 71).

In control of her life and situation for the first time, Akka asserts herself and refuses to be humiliated again. But her mournful tears at night tell the tale of a loveless and mortifying marriage. Her experience in marriage is an example of the condition of girls who are trapped in marriage even before they realize the need for it. The Hindu tradition, which has always adulated husband worshiping, self-effacement and subordination in a wife leaves girls like Akka with no choice but to endure in silence. Y.S Sunita Reddy opines that, “Sex as a punishment was perhaps, how it was viewed by such child brides who nevertheless did not raise any banner of revolt but on the other hand continued to suffer and helped to perpetuate such oppression” (Reddy 35). However, in Akka’s context some parts of this statement is most disagreeable as a close reading shows twice Akka a girl of thirteen tried to escape but was caught. Besides one should not forget the revolt against marriage was not acceptable and the woman who chose to do so was often treated an outcast. Thus girls like Akka had no choice but to endure.

Returning home a rich childless widow, the illiterate Akka takes over the family and enforces the same tradition, which had made her life a misery. Indu, the protagonist is brought to her care when Indu’s vagabond father leaves her, after her mother’s death. Brought up under the care of Atya, Kaka
and Akka, Indu from the beginning was expected to follow the traditions of the family. However, her intelligence, education and rebellious nature always brought her into conflict with Akka. Indu grows up questioning the conventions, which defined different patterns of behavior for girls and boys. Refusing to be meek, submissive and sacrificing which were traditionally expected of a girl, she was constantly at war with Akka.

The crude way in which her sexuality is introduced to her makes Indu resent it like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. The impurity attached to a girl’s puberty shocks her. In her desire to break free from such orthodox rules she decides to join a college in Bombay and stays in a hostel. She adheres to her decision not to go back to the traditional set up which suffocated her. Therefore, she stays in Bombay and takes up a job. However her meeting and subsequent marriage with Jayant brings her back in the framework of tradition which she had been running away from. She instantly falls in love with him and decides to marry him in spite of Akka’s objections. Her love for Jayant makes her propose marriage. But once married she realizes that Jayant’s expectations were the same as any stereotyped Indian male. His traditional belief that woman should be passive and not demonstrative of her love and emotions, surprises Indu. Her response to his love was unacceptable to him. “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” (Deshpande. *Roots* 83).

Juxtaposed to Indu is Saru of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, who develops an aversion to the sexual act because of marital rape. While Saru
silently bears the physical tortures and humiliation, Indu silently crushes her passion and desires to please Jayant.

Indu’s independent and assertive nature, which had made her rebel against various traditions, now fails to do so. She had laughed at the women of her family calling them “martyrs, heroines or just stupid fools?” but she herself starts adopting their ways bit by bit to avoid conflict in her marriage. The total suppression of her will makes her think:

“When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant. When I dress, I think of Jayant. When I undress, I think of him. Always what he wants what he would like? What would please him? And I can’t blame him. It’s not he who has pressurized me into this. It’s the way I want it to be. And one day I had thought (...) isn’t there anything I want at all?” (Deshpande. Roots 49).

Her love for him makes her endure the discontentedness she feels in her marital relationship. The process of self-negation makes her uncomfortable and uneasy even while Jayant sees no problem in their marriage. Tired of pretending Indu gets a “welcome reprieve” when she receive Akka’s summon. She decides to go in order “to avoid thinking about what was happening to me (...) to Jayant and me (...) and our life together” (Deshpande. Roots 18).

Her stay away from Jayant gives her the opportunity to analyse her marriage from a distance. She realizes that in loving Jayant and pleasing him she had become the self-denying and self-effacing traditional wife she always detested. Her realization of the problem in her marriage makes her confide in her cousin, Naren. Their growing intimacy draws them to each other. Indu’s troubled relationship with Jayant and her desire to break free from the
traditional role of a passive wife makes her use Naren as a means to unburden her suppressed passions. She consciously surrenders herself to passions. This move of Indu has been severely criticized by critics who feel that to assert herself an intelligent woman like Indu had to stoop so low. Attacking such allegations Y.S.Sunita Reddy remarks, “Perhaps this is Deshpande’s answer to the double standards practiced by our society where only men are allowed to take sexual liberties” (Reddy 43). Moreover Indu’s liaison with Naren also represents the assertion of her sexuality that was so rudely ignored and crushed by her husband.

A close reading of the text reveals that this relationship with Naren brings “A sudden relief in her” for suddenly she knew what was wrong with their marriage. Her suppressed feelings that were suffocating her had created uneasiness in their marital relationship. She realizes that her submission to Jayant’s will was to avoid conflict and prove to her family that her revolt against traditions actually brought her happiness. Her close association with Naren also shows her own faults, which were responsible for creating a rift between her and Jayant. Naren’s love for music and his ability to lose himself in it makes Indu realize that there was nothing shameful in her need for Jayant. She learns to accept her feelings without embarrassment. She understands that by losing herself in him she will be able to create a harmony in their lives. Her awareness that her love was the uniting bond, which will create this harmony, makes her give up the feeling of disgrace and pretence. She knows that she must reveal to Jayant her whole self with all her weakness as well as strengths. And he would have to accept her with her virtues and vices. That alone would make perfect understanding possible and give a better chance for happiness.
The fact that Indu is free from guilt and regrets, after her relationship with Naren, shows her detached and emotionless involvement with him. To her, emotions were of most importance in any relationship and her mind being pre-occupied with Jayant, she was unable to develop any such feelings for Naren. She realizes that she has to achieve an understanding with Jayant. Naren introduces her to her own need to be free. free to live without pretence and on her own terms.

Eventually she decides to return to Jayant with a view to be honest to him and to her. This makes her revolt against the traditions, which force a woman to suppress her desires and sexuality. Thus a changed Indu, not ashamed of her love and sexuality but proud of it, meets Jayant, with a challenge for him to accept her. In this context to say that “She is willing to wound but afraid to strike. As a result of this, instead of leaving Jayant, she goes back to him with the vain hope that things will change”\textsuperscript{13} (Sandhu\textsuperscript{34}) is unjust as the novel itself reveals that Jayant after sometime accepts the change in Indu with renewed respect. Her thoughts:

“Now I think he knows me better, my strengths, which I had hidden from me, as well as my weaknesses. Perhaps, because of this, we have a better chance. There is ease in our relationship that was not there before. If my feelings have cooled down to some extent (…) the fever is no longer there (…). I have gained something else in return. I no longer fight my need of him. I am not ashamed of it. I know it does not make me less of a human being” (Deshpande. Roots 14).

Thus Indu’s realization and assertion of her needs makes the novel end on a clear note of affirmation, to which Jayant greatly contributes. His
recognition of her true self helps Indu hope for a better chance of understanding and happiness in marriage.

Indu’s cousin, Padmini’s life is also instrumental in making Indu realize her good fortune to have found love in marriage. She realizes the value of love and decides to make it a boon rather than a burden.

Through the circumstances in Mini’s life, Shashi Deshpande highlights the socially accepted yet unjust traditions of the patriarchal Indian society. She shows the traditions according to which the average Indian girl is brought up, - her sole aim to get married but whose long wait to achieve it becomes a torturous experience. Her humiliating exhibition in front of prospective grooms and rejection on the basis of slight flaws or dowry or horoscope, speaks of the traditions, which treats daughters like commodities. Embittered by such experiences Mini tells Indu,

“You don’t know what it has been like. Watching Kaka and Hemant and even Madhav-Kaka running around after eligible men. And then, sending the horoscope and having it come back with the message, ‘it doesn’t match?’And if the horoscopes matched, there was the meeting to be arranged. And mother and Ataya slogging in the kitchen the whole day. And all those people coming (...) And staring and asking all kinds of questions. And if we heard they were old-fashioned people, I would dress up in an old fashioned manner and they would say, ‘She’s not modern enough’. And if I dressed up well because someone said the boy wanted a smart wife, they would say, ‘She’s too fashionable for us.’ Or too short. Or too tall. Or too dark. Or some thing” (Deshpande. Roots 126).
Thus the limitation of choice makes girls like Mini, uneducated and domesticated, marry whoever is willing, even if it is an illiterate fool. The hopelessness of Mini’s situation where she feels she’s “committed a great crime by being born a girl”, gives strength to Indu, to strive and preserve what she had fortunately acquired- love in marriage. However she questions the utility of marriages such as Mini’s and feels, “Behind the façade of romanticism, sentiment and tradition, what was marriage after all, but two people brought after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that generations might continue?”(Deshpande. Roots3).

That Long Silence, Shashi Deshpande’s most critically acclaimed novel is about the long silence that engulfs the marriage of Jaya and Mohan. Mohan’s demand of an English-speaking wife makes him tie the knot with Jaya, a well-educated girl. Jaya in turn marries Mohan out of defiance, as her mother disapproved of him. In spite of Mohan’s expectations he had a strong traditional background where he had grown up seeing his mother silently submit to every erratic demand of his father. With the roles of submissive wife and domineering husband deeply ingrained in his mind, he enters into matrimony with Jaya. Whereas Jaya, the only daughter of an unconventional family, adored by her father and brothers was brought up differently. The disparity in their background leads to a clash of expectations. The first conflict of ideas takes place when Jaya pregnant and repulsed with the odour of cooking oil asks Mohan to cook. Insulted by her demand to do something unmanly Mohan tries to laugh it off. Jaya’s insistence flares up into a fight in which Jaya responds in an equally bad temper, as she had always done at her father’s place. Mohan shocked at her display of anger, voices his
disapproval by, repeating, "How could you? I never thought my wife could say such things to me. You're my wife (...) (Deshpande. *Silence* 82).

Jaya's realization of that her anger had shattered him. It had broken the image of a traditional wife, which Mohan had in mind. The image, which was created by his mother, about whom he had proudly told her, "My mother never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her" (Deshpande. *Silence* 83). His mother had silently endured the moods of her drunkard husband and slogged to fulfill his irrational demands. This had set in Mohan's mind the qualities of endurance and sacrifices in a woman.

Jaya's realization of the depth of patriarchal traditional belief in Mohan makes her understand the cause of distaste on his face when she shouted and his refusal to speak to her till she realized her mistake. She realized that "to him anger made a woman 'unwomanly'" (Deshpande. *Silence* 83). Since then Jaya like a dutiful wife learnt not to annoy him lest it should affect her marriage. For the first time she becomes aware of the role of a wife and its limitations. She blames her parents and their easy life-style, which did not train her to be a perfect wife as she saw in the women at Mohan's house. Realizing that Mohan unobtrusively likes to follow the traditional pattern, she moulds herself according to it. As she feels:

"I had learnt to control my anger after that, to hold it on a leash. Terrified of his disapproval, I had learnt other things too, though much more slowly, less painfully. I had found out all the things I could and couldn't do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly. It was when I first visited his home that I discovered how sharply defined a woman's role was. They had been a revelation to me, the women in his
family, so definite about their roles, so well trained in their duties, so skilful in the right areas, so indifferent to everything else. I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before, and I had been entranced by it” (Deshpande. Silence83).

To become an ideal wife and mother Jaya learns to suppress her own desires and acts according to her husband’s wishes. With this “Suhasini” the name Mohan had given her at the time of marriage, begins to give shape to Jaya’s personality and becomes the antithesis of Jaya, the rebel. Jaya willingly accepts her new identity of Mohan’s wife, of Suhasini, and tries to become and remain a “smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped” (Deshpande. Silence16). As Suhasini she becomes the epitome of a happy woman, as traditional society perceives it self-centered and priggish. The story of the crow and the sparrow becomes an ironical symbol of her life, wherein the weak and the sensitive can be treated with the cruel carelessness by the more successful ones. Hence Jaya like the sparrow devotes her life to home and children. She adopts a life-style, which revolves around the needs and wishes of Mohan and her two children. She cuts her hair because Mohan wants her too. She entertains the people Mohan invites and befriends the wives of the men Mohan likes.

Jaya even gives up her creative writing as Mohan disapproved of the stories she wrote. On his suggestion she takes up writing non-controversial middle column called ‘Seeta’. Mohan takes pride in her column but to Jaya, an intelligent, woman, it was a frivolous piece, which satisfied everyone except her. The importance of Vanita Mami’s words “husband is like a sheltering tree which is to be kept alive and flourishing even if it meant by deceit and lies,”
sets in her mind and she adjusts her life to it. Thus begins the ‘Long Silence’, which dominates their life.

When the monotonous flow of their life is disrupted by Mohan’s malpractice, they send their children, Rahul and Rati, for a vacation with some friends. Jaya like an obedient wife, follows Mohan to their Dadar flat. She unquestioningly accompanies him for “he had assumed I would accompany him, had taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband’s travails (…)” (Deshpande. Silence).

For, years she had taught herself to wait in silence, to accept her husband’s desire mutely. The appalling banality of such a life dawns upon her when her busy routine is replaced by idle hours. Jaya feels, “There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife was in jeopardy” (Deshpande. silence 24-25). Living alone with Mohan in the Dadar flat Jaya reviews the sexual aspect of their marriage and the loss of desire and emotions in her. For her “sexual memories are the coldest.” They stirred up nothing in her. For her it had become more of a routine or a mechanical process without necessary emotions. She knew the whole process of his love making, which ended with Mohan’s question whether he had hurt her and her mechanical reply “No”. A lack of communication and absence of intimacy mars their relationships and they never discuss their feelings. Mohan never tries to know her expectations and desires and even Jaya never speaks of them.
Mohan’s upbringing which had made him insensitive to a woman’s needs reminds Jaya of Kamat, a caring and understanding man, who used to live upstairs, when Jaya and Mohan had first lived in this Dadar Flat. Jaya’s association with Kamat develops into a deep friendship based on communication. In him, Jaya finds the companion she missed in Mohan. She shares with Kamat her memories of her father and mostly her designs to become a writer. Kamat advises her helps her discover her talent as a writer but in the process he feels attracted towards her. Kamat’s gift of casual physical contact revives desire in Jaya and reminds her of her sexuality.

Regarding this R.K. Sharma concludes:

“Sex had always seemed such a momentous thing to her, but he made her feel it as just another part of the overall scheme of life, and certainly nothing to feel guilty about. And while they did have sex occasionally, and while sometimes she did feel an ‘overwhelming urge to respond to him bodily’¹⁴ (Sharma 114).

This seems to be a misinterpretation as a careful reading of the text reveals that Jaya never forgets her marital status and does not succumb to desire. Shashi Deshpande herself remarked in an interview “(...) I did bring in Kamat to serve a purpose: to show Jaya the kind of relationship that she could achieve with a man. She gets a kind of companionship with Kamat that she never gets from her husband. Yet that is marriage and this isn’t” (Holmstrom 247). Thus Kamat is brought in the novel as a foil to Mohan though Jaya’s intimacy with him does not lead to any physical relationship between the two. She walks out on Kamat when she finds him dead as she is aware that society
does not acknowledge any relationship between a woman and a man outside marriage, however innocent it may be.

Now, back in the Dadar flat with little work on her hands Jaya’s desire to write all about marriage, love and life revives. She notices the condition of married women around her and realizes the extent of suffering a woman has to undergo in marriage. She recalls the life of Mohan’s mother. Her never ending suffering had to be endured in marriage, as she had no choice. In a frustrated attempt to free herself of repeated pregnancies, she hit herself and tried to abort yet another unwanted child. In the process she met her painful death coupled with ignominy for she dared to go against tradition by aborting her unborn child.

Similarly Jaya’s old maid-servant Jeeja also experiences a turbulent marriage to a drunkard only to be abandoned for another woman. Jeeja blindly accepts the traditional belief that a married woman must give birth to children. Since she failed to do so, she accepts that she is of no importance to her husband and had every right to abandon her. Therefore she accepts his second wife and even looks after their son after their death.

Jaya’s analysis of her marriage makes her realize the limitations of the traditional wife. In retrospect, she is forced to accept the fact that, in seventeen years of marriage she had moulded herself according to Mohan’s wishes. The only assertion of herself she recalls was the abortion of her third child, which she had undergone without Mohan’s knowledge. Certain that Mohan would impose his will on her, Jaya had taken this bold step without informing him.

Regarding the rest of her life, she feels that she had unconsciously done what her family had advised her to do, “to keep Mohan happy”. She
realizes that she chose to do so because it was easy to conform, be guilt free and comfortable. But in the process her marital relationship had become like “Two bullocks yoked together (…). It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go different directions would be painful and what animal would voluntarily choose pain?” (Deshpande. Silence 11-12).

When Mohan with dwindling confidence seeks Jaya’s support, she fails to sympathize with him as her years of silence had made her indifferent. Feeling cheated, Mohan realizes for the first time that Jaya’s silence does not mean her unstinting support. His accusation that she was indifferent to him, a fact, he notices after seventeen long years amuse Jaya. She finally breaks her traditional silence by bursting into a hysterical laughter and Mohan, humiliated by her reaction, walks out of the house.

However Mohan’s walking out on her, makes her suddenly feels vulnerable and deserted. Jaya is overcome by the fear of being abandoned by her husband. Her awareness of Kusum her alter ego who had gone through a similar fear and committed suicide because of it, gives Jaya the courage to fight her fears. Deshpande had brought in the character of Kusum to highlight the silent acceptance of suppression by woman. Kusum’s state of distress and desperation leads to mental imbalance. In order not to face the humiliation of an abandoned wife she ends her life by jumping into a well. Kusum’s story helps Jaya, but in the process unable to bear so much mental strain Jaya collapses and falls seriously ill.

However, as she recovers, she realizes that Mohan cannot be solely held responsible for their troubled marriage. She begins to accept her own failure in establishing a normal reciprocal relationship with Mohan. Her
contemplation of their past life unravels to her, her own role in her suppression. She realizes she agreed to Mohan’s wishes because conforming to social norms was “safe, comfortable and unassailable.” Long hours of contemplation lead to her decision to give up the role of a silent and passive partner with a resurgence of faith, Jaya now decides to erase the silence that had defined and distorted her communication with her husband. In the end Jaya feels that:

“Two bullocks yoked together that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It’s wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a lifetime of disbelief in ourselves. I’ve 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.”(Deshpande. Silence192)

Lord Krishna’s sermon in Bhagwadgita, “I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire” (Deshpande. Silence 192) gives her the courage to assert her feelings. Mohan’s letter and her long hours of contemplation lead to her affirmative decision to give up her silence. Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists turn out to be most realistic and balanced in their view as, Jaya after a long deafening silence and seventeen years spent with an insensitive and rigid man, decides to change her own perspective and hopes to change that Mohan too. Anita Desai’s Maya in Cry, the Peacock loses her mental equilibrium because of her inability to analyse her husband’s insensitivity and her own troubled feelings.
With a hope to make Mohan understand her and her feelings, Jaya prepares to face life for "life has always to be made possible" (Deshpande. *Silence* 193).

*The Binding Vine*, Shashi Deshpande's fourth novel is her boldest statement of a woman's sexuality. As she herself said, one of the themes of the novel was "about controlling women's minds and bodies" (Deshpande. Women's 26). It begins with the life of Urmila, an intelligent, independent, outspoken woman who is trying to cope up with the grief of her daughter's death. Taking Urmi as the anchor, Shashi Deshpande has roped in the story of Mira and Kalpana and with them other characters to show the sexual wrongs done to women in patriarchal Indian society. In her despondency over Anu's death, Urmi stumbles over the diaries of Mira, her dead mother-in-law. Her venture into Mira's life introduces her to the traditionally guarded life of the Indian woman. Considering the woman as weak and dependent the Indian tradition had empowered the male members to take control of her life. Mira, is one such woman who becomes a victim of such traditions. A budding poet and an eager student, Mira loses her right to education because a man decides to marry her. With an obsessive love the man plots to get married to her, leaving her with no choice. Mira's unwillingness to marry and her interest in studies have no significance for the man, who nourishes the dream to possess her. Traditionally marriage is the only goal of a girl's life. Fearful that they may not get a better match, Mira's parents decide to marry her to man much older to her in age, instead of letting her discover her poetic talents or pursue studies. Her fear of marriage and the right it grants to a man over a woman's body is expressed in her verse:
But tell me friend did Laxmi too

twist brocade tassels round her fingers

And tremble, fearing the coming

Of the dark-clouded, engulfing night.

(Deshpande. *Vine* 66)

Emotionally immature and sensitive at heart, Mira could not accept her husband’s love and obsession that was limited to sex. She fails to accept him as her master and worship him. His imposition on her, which he saw as an expression of love, shatters the sensitive Mira, who creates a wall around her and recoils from establishing an emotional bond with him. Her inability to cope and his forced lovemaking makes her nurture a dislike for him. She realizes that the patriarchal Hindu society and its traditions do not acknowledge a woman’s feelings. Thus submitting to the traditional role of a wife she writes:

“I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings. He knows what I’m doing and he gets angry with me. I don’t mind his anger, it makes him leave me to myself, and it is bliss when he does that. But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, so it begins. ‘Please’, he says, ‘please’, I love you.’ And over and over again until he has done, ‘I love you.’ Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say ‘no’ at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all” (Deshpande. *Vine*67).

The frequent invasion of her physical space leaves her wanting for “a room of her own”. It is socially accepted that in marriage a husband has a right over his wife’s body and it is the duty of the wife to satisfy the physical needs
of her husband. This traditional negation of a woman’s right over her body and her own sexuality also forms the theme of Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and the short story *The Intrusion*. Shashi Deshpande through her novels has criticized the tradition that dictates that the husband has a right to satisfy his biological needs irrespective of the wife’s willingness, thus allowing a crime like marital rape.

As Indrani Jaisingh, an eminent lawyer opines: “It is assumed that by marring a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence (of rape) as her consent is assumed” (qtd. In Trivedi 147).

Mira too becomes a victim and endures the violation of her body in silence. But her feelings are expressed through her poetry in which she pours her bitter experiences. Urmil later observes “It runs through all her writing a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married “ (Deshpande. Vine63).

Mira’s untimely death in childbirth ends her cloistered existence with a man she could not love and people she had nothing in common with. But the untold experiences of her life revealed in her poems, disturb Urmil, who identifies Mira’s story with that of Kalpana’s, a lower middle class rape victim. Kalpana, a young and attractive girl becomes the victim of her uncle, Prabhakar’s lust. Urmil comes in contact with her and her mother Shakutai in a hospital and in the process of helping them she becomes involved in their problem. However, from Shakutai’s life Urmil becomes aware of the suppression and ill treatment of women in the lower strata of society.
Having waited for a year after her marriage, when Shakutai finally came to stay with her husband she found him jobless and homeless. Living in a room with his cousins, she joined him and worked all day without any complaint. But her husband’s insistence on sexual intercourse even when they had to sleep in the corridor, with men walking up and down, had been most humiliating for her. In spite of such experiences she even took up a job to support her three children and her useless husband. Shakutai however realizes the limitations of her choice because Indian society and its traditions do not allow a woman to walk out on marriage. In spite of her submission to a hopeless marriage, Shakutai receives a shock when her useless husband leaves her for a younger woman. Urtmi also realizes that for women like Shakutai, even if the husband is jobless and drunkard, marriage holds importance for it brings security. But Shakutai’s story also reveals the duality of society, which expects a woman to keep her marriage even if the husband is good for nothing whereas, it allows a man to walk out for no reason.

Shakutai’s sister, Sulu had been her only support in such times of trials. However, Sulu, the perfect housekeeper faces unhappiness in marriage as her husband, Prabhakar refuses to touch her because of her skin disease. As a favour he makes her realize that he does not abandon her but allows her to cook and clean for him. In turn he asks her to make Shakutai’s daughter, Kalpana marry him. Prabhakar’s desire for Kalpana dates back to the time Sulu and he brought Kalpana to their home with the idea to bring her up. But Kalpana’s molestation by Prabhakar made the young girl get away from him and loathe him for the rest of her life. Since then Prabhakar’s desire for Kalpana had grown into an obsession.
The so-called security of a marriage had made Sulu compromise with the situation and agrees to get Kalpana married to her husband. Her acceptance to a life of humiliation where she would serve Kalpana and her husband after their marriage shows her desperation and lack of choice. Thus the novel reveals that for women like Sulu there is no choice but to cling to a crumbling marriage. Sulu's desperation becomes the biggest cause of her exploitation where she submits to any injustice only to stay married. On the other hand, men like Prabhakar successfully fulfill their obsessive desire. As even if Kalpana rejected his offer of marriage Prabhakar was not deterred and he brutally rapes her.

Urmı realizes the limitations of choice for women in marriage. Her awareness also makes her analyse Akka, her husband's stepmother's marriage. Akka too had little choice but to marry the husband of dead Mira. Having outgrown the traditionally accepted marriageable age she had lost the opportunity to find a suitable husband. Therefore she was married to a man who was obsessed with his first wife. Thus she was forced to marry a man who wanted a mother for his beloved son more than a wife.

Analyzing the condition of women in marriage Urmı reviews her own marriage with Kishore. She had gone against her family and her friend, Vanna to marry Kishore, but she had walked out on him on the wedding night as Kishore felt trapped by marriage. Her intention in doing so was to prove that her love for him which, culminated in marriage, was not a binding, which will end his freedom. To prove him wrong she goes to sleep at her parent's house. Thus regardless of traditions, Urmı had dreamt of building her relationship with Kishore on companionship and understanding. But Kishore's job in the
Merchant Navy disrupts her dream of a normal life. She feels frustrated with his short visits, as she never finds time to develop an emotional relationship. The long separation from him often fills her with physical longing to have him permanently by her side. Every time he goes "the parting is like death" to Urmı but her hard exterior deceives even her mother, as she never lets her know her anger and grief. Her efforts to express these feelings to him are always answered by Kishore’s passionate love making. But Urmı remains disillusioned and unfulfilled because she realizes:

“(…) sex is only a temporary answer. I came out of it to find that the lights had come back (…) ‘Go to sleep’, he said. He was kneeling by me his face close to mine, but the closeness was only physical. His voice was cold I could see the goose bumps on his shoulders, his chest. I did not look into his face. I was afraid of what I see, I turned round and fell asleep” (Deshpande. Vine 139-40).

Often her sexual need makes her crave for Kishore’s presence and his absence leaves her better. Sometimes she finds it hard to control her desires and wishes, “I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out, intact and whole, when he returned” (Deshpande. Vine 164). In spite of her love for him Urmı asserts her financial independence. She rejects his money for she as a wife expected more than just monetary support. She longs for the emotional security a husband provides to a wife. But such needs leads to frustrations and she is never able to reach his spiritual centre. Some parts of Kishore evade her as she feels, “Kishore will never remove his armour, and there is something in him I will never reach. I have lived with the hope that some day I will” (Deshpande. Vine 141).
Urmi's deep dissatisfaction with the situation between her and Kishore leads to her revolt against the traditional limitations of a wife and assert her needs. In Dr. Bhaskar Jain she finds a friend who understands the emotional upheaval through which she is undergoing after Amu's death. Her husband, Kishore's absence had left her alone to cope with her grief. But Bhaskar, the patient listener understands her emotions and helps her accept her loss. His friendship, which gives Urmi the much-needed companionship, comes to an abrupt end with Bhaskar's open declaration of his love for her. His knowledge of the communication gap between Urmi and her husband makes him hopeful. Even if Urmi is tempted, she could not uproot herself from her traditional background. Besides, her love for Kishore has a firm hold on her marriage. The amount of hurt and trouble her affair with Bhaskar will cause, also makes her choose the simple and respectful life of fidelity. Overcoming her temptations she finds it much simpler "to just think of virtue and chastity and being a good wife" (Deshpande. Vine 166).

Her rejection of Bhasker for Kishore even if Kishore flits in and out of her life every few months proves that in spite of her dissatisfaction with her marriage she still loves Kishore. Unlike Indu in Roots and Shadows, Urmi does not give in to temptations to fulfill her physical needs. She is aware of the complications such a move can bring in her life. Thus she lives with the hope that her love for Kishore will bring down the barriers between them. As she feels, "Each relationship always imperfect survives on hope."

Urmi's friend and sister-in-law Vanna fails to understand Urmi's relationship with Bhasker. And Urmi totally objects to Vanaa's submission to Harish. Harish's rationality makes him ignore Vanaa's emotions. Like a
traditional woman Vanaa had learnt to obey her husband’s will. Therefore she accepts his decision not to have a third child in spite of her longings for a son. And Urmī who had always viewed understanding as the key to a happy marriage rebukes her by saying “you let him bulldozer— you crawl before him” (Deshpande. Vine 81).

Shashi Deshpande through the characters of Vanaa and Sulu presents the selfless life of women who live a life of servitude because tradition has taught them to do so. Urmī on the other hand, is a rebel who revolts against every tradition that subordinates a woman. She walks on the thin line to balance between tradition in which she was brought up and the freedom that attracts her. And in her marriage, her love makes her dream of achieving happiness.

A Matter of Time, Shashi Deshpande’s fifth novel is a story of four generations of women belonging to a middle class family. Manorama, the confident matriarch of the first generation came from a humble background. But her self-assurance and intelligence had led to her marriage with the rich Vithalrao. The sudden rise in her status had added to her confidence but she grew insecure when she could not produce a male heir to the family. Vithalrao, however never grudged the birth of his only daughter and no son. But Manorama’s knowledge of tradition which, allowed a husband to leave his wife if she gave birth only to daughters, made her fearful of being abandoned for another wife. This insecurity colours her life and as a result she fails to forge a meaningful relationship even with her only daughter, Kalyani.

Her disappointment in her daughter Kalyani, who was average in looks and intelligence, grew with Kalyani’s age. A boy’s interest in Kalyani
infuriates Manorama who in her domineering way decides to marry her daughter to her brother. Shripati, her youngest brother who was born after Manorama’s marriage and their mother died a year after his birth. Shripati’s intelligence and ambition had made Vithalrao finance his education and Shripati became a lawyer in Bombay. Manorama forces Shripati into a loveless marriage by appealing to his sense of gratitude to them. She coerces the two into matrimony to prevent the property from going to another family. Thus Kalyani is married to her unwilling maternal uncle, Shripati. And from the beginning there was “the hopelessness that lay within the relationship, that doomed it from the start”.

Kalyani’s little hope of finding fulfillment in marriage ends the day she lost her son on the railway platform. Unable to control three small children while Shripati had gone to check the train timings, Kalyani lost track of their mentally retarded son, Madhav. Shripati’s wild search for him that lasted for three months ended in vain. Abandoned by Shripati, Kalyani returned to her natal home with her two daughters, Sumi and Permi. She lived with her parents hoping to be reconciled to her husband. Manorama’s summon to Shripati from her death bed brings him back but the day Kalyani hears about the construction of a room upstairs she realizes the seriousness of Shripati’s anger. Manorama’s death does not unite the two and an eerie silence engulfs the house and its residents. Shripati agrees to stay in the house but upstairs, so as to end all communication and contact with Kalyani. Blaming her for letting their mentally challenged son walk away, Shripati punishes Kalyani by abandoning her and severing all relations with her. So deep was his resolve that he rarely came down and never interacted with Kalyani, who brought up
their two daughters alone. Shripati’s dissociation from his family because of his lost son can also be perceived as his way of rejecting a marriage he was forced into. But his means of getting even with his sister culminates in a lifelong suffering of the innocent Kalyani. The silence that he adopts as a means of punishing his wife also isolates him from his own family and a life of normalcy. For a time period as long as half a lifetime his only communication with his family was through the bell which he rang whenever he wanted something.

Kalyani, a woman rooted in tradition calls her husband’s obstinacy her fate and considers her situation better than widows. She was a married woman even if living in the same house she had not talked or communicated with her husband for last thirty years. Much to the bewilderment of her granddaughter, Arundhati, she carries her husband’s name and the mark of matrimony in spite of his desertion. Sumi, her daughter who also returns home after Gopal’s walkout questions Kalyani’s faith in marriage:

“Is it enough to have a husband, and never mind the act that he has not looked at your face for years, never mind the fact that he has not spoken to you for decades? Does this wifehood make up for everything, for the deprivation of man’s love, for the feel of his body against yours, the warmth of his breath on your face, the touch of his lips on yours, his hands on your breasts? Kalyani lost all this (had she ever had them?) but her Kumkum is intact and she can move in the company of women with the pride of a wife” (Deshpande. Matter 167).

Shripati’s death in an accident ends Kalyani’s hopeless marriage. But with him dies her hope of being reconciled. The heart shattering cry of
Kalyani, which Aru hears at night, speaks of the agony and despair of a lifetime wasted due to her husband’s stubborn rejection of her.

Gopal’s decision to withdraw from his responsibility wrecks the smooth life of Sumi and her three daughters. Helplessly she returns to her natal house to her mother, Kalyani who is shocked at their destinies.

Sumi unlike her mother had a love marriage. In her choice of Gopal Sumi had disappointed her father who had other plans for her life. But Gopal and Sumi find joy in their life together and their early marital life could bring no doubt of their compatibility. Recalling his physical union with Sumi Gopal thinks, “and I knew then that it was for this, this losing yourself in another human being, that men give up their dreams of freedom.” (Deshpande. Matter223) Physically and mentally compatible they started a relationship based on understanding and love. The contentment they found in each other’s company often makes Permi, Sumi’s sister consider theirs an ideal marriage. Gopal’s sudden alienation and desertion of the family hurts Sumi. But remembering their vow not to question each other when one felt the need to be free, Sumi accepts his decision in silence and returns home. Her stoical indifference makes Aru, her eldest daughter angry. But unlike the traditional gloom and despair that surrounds a deserted wife, Sumi does not crumble to pieces at the pain and humiliation inflicted on her. She blocks out the sorrow and with confidence she focuses on getting on with life. But it is not as if she is not hurt. She has a last look on her face and she tells Devaki, her cousin, “I’ve never been able to cry easily, you know that. And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don’t know why and may be doesn’t really know either? And that I’m angry and humiliated and confused (...)? Let that
be, we won't go into it now." (Deshpande. Matter 10) In spite of her rare breakdowns like this she admirably faces her disgrace but surrounds herself with a deathlike silence. Thus Sumi revolts against the traditions, which made a woman’s happiness dependent on marriage. She tries to bring back normalcy in the lives of her children for she wants them to enjoy life and not spite it. She is the only one who understands Gopal but she nourishes one desire:

“If I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one, the question no one has thought of. What is it Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in the age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because, and I remember this so clearly, it was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of. How then can you, in this age, a part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life?” (Deshpande. Matter 27).

These thoughts of Sumi question the traditionally approved Vanaprastha Ashram that permits a man to abandon his responsibility of a householder and embark on his call for renunciation. Sumi presents the inability of a wife to do so. Women who abandon their traditional life revolving around home and family are often characterized as outcasts. However a man’s shrinking from his responsibility was traditionally approved in the name of religion. The rejection of marital life by a man consequently leads to deprivation of the physical and emotional fulfillment of his wife. In this context, Y.S Sunita Reddy remarks:

“Episodes from history and mythology bear witness to men who were venerated for their selflessness while no thought was given to the silent suffering and martyrdom of their wives. Laksmana’s steadfastness and
devotion finds no parallel in Indian mythology, while Siddharta is hailed for spurning the luxury and comfort of princely life in pursuit of knowledge. Their respective spouses Urmila and Yashodhara, however, remain shadowy figures in the background, doomed to live a life of anonymity and insignificance” (Reddy 115-16).

Through Sumi’s writings also Deshpande has raised the issue of female sexuality. Sumi’s fascination with the mythical story of Surpanakha makes her question the negation of female sexuality in the patriarchal Indian society. As she says:

“Female sexuality. We’re ashamed of owing it, we can’t speak of it, not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not, she spoke of her desires, she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality, not frightened of displaying it- it is this Surpanakha I’m going to write about.” (Deshpande. Matter191).

She understands the physical needs of a woman as she herself longs for the assuring presence of Gopal and misses the familiar rustling by her side at night. Being alone with him again, when she visits his room she is overcome by a desire to re-establish their old relationship again. But the past months of separation had already brought a distance between them. Their relationship is marred by lack of communication and Sumi perceives an unconscious tension between them. To Sumi, the awareness of the end of their marriage sets as she feels:
"We can never be together again. All these days I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living, his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged, they now move separately, two different streams" (Deshpande. Matter 85).

With this knowledge Sumi revolts by refusing to grieve and starts a new phase of life. She puts her heart and soul into her job and her children. But, even if she is forced in such a situation the disgrace is hers as the society considers it a woman’s failure in keeping her husband interested at home. The traditional expectations from a wife are best expressed in the advice of Shankar’s mother to Sumi:

“When are you going back to your husband? (...) You should be with him. Look at his state. It’s all right to stay with your parents for a while, but that’s not your home. When my daughters come home, I don’t let them stay long. Go back to your husband, he’s a good man. If you’ve done wrong, he’ll forgive you. And if he has-women shouldn’t have any pride” (Deshpande. Matter 161)

Thus it is also assumed that Sumi is to blame for Gopal’s desertion. It is ingrained in the mind of a woman that marriage is her biggest asset and her worth is measured through her marital status. Therefore, Sumi instantly becomes a disgrace woman even if it is Gopal who is disillusioned with life and decides to go in search of his ‘self’. In spite of various speculations about Gopal’s desertion it is only Sumi who comes, closest to understanding Gopal. She loved and married Gopal when she was eighteen and she had always been aware of his disillusionment with relationship. She reminds Gopal of the
condition he put forth, when she came to his room and they decided to get married, “You said that at anytime if either of us wanted to be free, the other would let go. We are not going to be tied together, you said. No handcuffs, you said. And I agreed. I was only eighteen then and you were twenty-six” (Deshpande, Matter221).

Even though Sumi, a girl of eighteen, agreed to it, her love for him could hardly make her think of being separated from him. But Gopal’s insistence on leaving an option open for retreat made her realize that the ability to leave was always there in him. Therefore she tells him, she knew exactly when he began to move away and understood that she could not stop him. Their marriage based on perfect understanding shatters with Gopal’s alienation and any hope of reconciliation is gone with Sumi’s untimely death.

Aru, Sumi’s eldest daughter minutely observes the marriages of Manorama, Kalyani and Sumi. She sees Manorama as domineering. Kalyani as enduring and Sumi as indifferent in marriage. With the knowledge of their marital experiences, Aru steps into her womanhood, ready to take life as it comes.

Shashi Deshpande’s latest novel Small Remedies is the story of love, marriage and betrayal in the lives of three strong women. Madhu Saptarishi, the protagonist unravels for us the lives of Leela and Savitri Bai.

The death of her seventeen-year-old son, Aditya in a bomb blast leaves Madhu in a state of shock and confusion. When she is forced by her friend, Chandru to write a biography of the leading musician Savitri Bai Indorekar, she is unable to refuse. She shifts to Bhavanipur to meet Savitri Bai. Madhu’s association with Savitri Bai goes back to her childhood in
Neemgaon when Bai had come to live in the house next door. Bai’s life had
attracted publishers because she had set an example not only by her music but
also by her life.

Introduced to devotional songs by her mother, Savitri Bai’s initiation
into the world of music was prohibited by her father who reminded her mother
of the traditions of their Brahmin family. Married in an orthodox Brahmin
family before independence, Savitri Bai was encouraged by her father-in-law
to pursue her dream. In spite of furore in the family a female trainer was
arranged for Bai and soon a Muslim tabla player joined. But Bai soon realized
the limitations of her tutor, who could not help her in fulfilling her dreams of
becoming a professional singer. Bai revolts against the traditions by taking a
bold step and walking out of her marital home. Ghulam Saab, the Muailim
tabla player became her partner and they set up a home in Neemgaon. Much to
the shock of the community, Bai, a Brahmin married woman, lived with a
Muslim man, out of wedlock. Thus Bai, a revolutionary in her own right
defied traditions and chose to live a life of disgrace. Her decision to live with
Ghulam Saab made her immoral but the same tradition and society approved
of the mistress kept by Bai’s father-in-law and even the woman Madhu’s
father visited in Neemgaon. Through this Shashi Deshpande points at the
hypocrisy of our society in recognizing a man’s sexuality and negating the
same needs in a woman. Ghulam Saab and Bai have a daughter, Munni who
becomes the proof of their relationship. But Bai’s determination to pursue her
ambition even in disgrace shows her courage and strength, which did not fail
her even when her character was frequently questioned.
Bai’s revolt against her marriage was not because of any problem with her husband. Her dream to be a renowned singer, which could not be fulfilled while she remained the daughter-in-law of an affluent Brahmin family, had made her reject her husband for Ghulam Saab. Ghulam Saab, who recognized her talent and encouraged her, becomes a means for Bai to achieve her aim. As Madhu later recalls, their living together was never a relationship of equals. Ghulam Saab always held the secondary position in the house. Madhu recalls “I’ve seen the two of them together, she always a little ahead of him, she always the focus of attention” (Deshpande. Remedies 176). Bai’s interest dominated their life and he devoted his best years to help the woman he so ardently loved. As in the words of Hasina his daughter, “Ghulam Saab was the one who made Bai known. He met people on her behalf, he arranged her programmes, and he made the contacts for her. It was not easy for a woman to do these things then (...). Without Ghulam Saab, Bai would never have been able to manage this part of her professional life”18 (Deshpande. Remedies). Ghulam Saab’s sacrifice of his own ambition for the sake of Bai speaks of his love for her.

But Bai’s total ignorance of his contribution to her successes when she talks to Madhu shows her desire to attain the respectability she once renounced. Her denial of his help and love which saw he through the rough times makes Madhu, her biographer feel (...) “the other Bai Icsue as well, a calculating, ambitious woman, using the man for her own ends, abandoning him finally when her need for him is over” (Deshpande. Remedies).

Thus Bai after attaining success tried hard to regain her lost respectability which only marriage could provide in a traditional Indian
society. As Madhu notices after Ghulam Saab and Munni's disappearance from her life, Bai once again adorned herself with "Mangal Sutra," the symbol of matrimony and respectability for a woman.

Bai's life proves that a woman can never attain respectability by revolting against marriage. As it is a general belief "A woman who had left husband's home what morals would she have, anyway!" (Deshpande. Remedies 223). Whereas men like Ghulam Saab after their life with another woman and fathering a child out of wedlock can easily return to their family and deserted wives. And the wives of such men are often left with no choice but to take them back.

Bai's life makes Madhu compare her with her aunt, Leela. Born in a traditional Brahmin family Leela's interest in studies was taken as her defiance against the traditional role of a woman. As a punishment she was married to a man of average income. But her marriage proves to be a boon for her as her husband, Vasant encouraged her to study and fulfill her dreams. However, his sudden death closes all doors of happiness for Leela but once again she refuses to go back to her father's house and takes up a teaching job. While working for the patient of T.B. Leela meets Joe. In spite of their love for each other they wait for fifteen years because of Joe's daughter, Paula's hostility. His feelings for her that stood the test of time made him realize that, "Love is an adult emotion". Their decision to finally marry in spite of their age and their respective families shows the depth of their love. Thus Leela, a Brahmin widow dared to go against traditions and married a Christian. Her family reacts strongly against it and ostracized her. She becomes a rebel and
an example to be given to warn young girls from breaking the traditional norms.

In spite of their diverse backgrounds and interests Joe and Leela find happiness in each other. As Madhu recalls with wonder:

"The strangeness of Joe, a widower with two children, falling madly in love with this woman, a widow, who wore, as Phillo said, 'ayah saris'-cotton saris from the mills her husband had worked in, saris she was loyal to until the mills themselves closed down. A woman who could speak no English and knew nothing of literature or music, the two great forces in Joe's life, in addition to medicine. A woman who had, as Joe often said, 'no sense of humour at all' (Deshpande. Remedies).

Yet they shared a perfect life together with Joe's time devoted to his T.B. patients and Leela's to the freedom struggle and social work. The difference in their life style, career and religion did not come as an obstruction in their marriage. While Leela learnt to ignore Paula's hostility and accept Tony's love with open arms, Joe whole-heartedly welcomes Madhu, Leela's niece, in his family and even becomes a father figure for her. Together Joe and Leela create a magical relationship based on perfect understanding and respect for each other's needs and feelings. Madhu's contact with them left an impression on her as she speaks of it as, a "wonderful relationship," "that beautiful companionship" based on love, which transformed not only their lives but her's and Tony's too. Leela's marriage to Joe had brought emotional security to her and Joe. Therefore Joe's death leaves emptiness in Leela and as Madhu notices, "Something has gone out of Leela, though-a passion, a force, a fire" (Deshpande. Remedies 149).
Madhu’s association with Joe and Tony introduces her to Som, Joe’s student and Tony’s friend. Som’s regular visit to Madhu’s room with Tony and Chandru makes her a part of their friend circle. Som’s heart break after being rejected by the beautiful Neelam making him confide in Madhu and soon he begins to see the beautiful person in her. His words, “I want you to be my wife, I want to live my life with you, I want us to have children”, (Deshpande. Remedies 181) change Madhu’s life, for she enters the world of matrimony with him. Marriage brings passion in her life as she discovers her sexuality and her love for Som. Later she recalls, “My delight in him, in what he is doing to me, our delight in each other, the laughter and conversation we indulge in while we’re making love, his hands moving all the while, teasingly, tantalizingly over my body- this is passion. It’s love too” (Deshpande. Remedies 182). Confident and secure in Som’s love Madhu rejects the thought of agony and distress in love.

But the love, security and happiness she found with Som and her son, Aditya for seventeen years, is destroyed by her honest confession of an incident of pre-marital sex. A painting in an exhibition brings back to her memory the trauma she went through while her father was on his deathbed. Madhu then fifteen, was shocked to learn that her father, her only guardian in the world was breathing his last. In a state of shock and desolation, she finds comfort in the consoling embrace of one of her father’s friends. Guided by an uncontrollable they get carried away by the physical comfort in each other’s arms. And the man old enough to be her father later hangs himself due to guilt. Troubled by the knowledge of the man’s suicide because of her, Madhu after a nightmare confides her thoughts in Som. The revelation of this secret which
she had locked in the innermost recesses of her mind, shatters Som. Unable to accept his wife’s ruined chastity, Som hopes that she was an unwilling partner. But Madhu’s honesty in declaring that it was not a rape kills Som’s faith in her. Madhu’s anxiety over the man’s suicide loses its importance as she realizes:

“This is what I’m speaking of to Som, and this is what I’m sharing with him. But it’s the single act of sex that Som holds on to, it’s this fact that he can’t let go of, as if it’s been welded into his palm. Purity, chastity, and an intact hymen—these are the things Som is thinking of these are truths that matter. I know this when I see his face, when I feel the hurting grip of his hand”, when he says, “Tell me, go on, go on” (Deshpande. Remedies262).

Som’s obsession with this incident from her past destroys their relationship. Unable to understand that her physical intimacy with that man involved no emotions as she had even forgotten his existence, Som begins to doubt Madhu’s character. He questions her relationship with every man she was close to. To Madhu’s surprise Som changes from a generous and affectionate husband to “a sad and angry man, distraught, possessed by a madness that seemed to have no end.” (Deshapande. Remedies 257) Som’s allegations in spite of her repeated denial forces her to retreat into silence. His disappointment in loving and marrying girl who had lost her chastity is the result of his traditional beliefs. As N.k Jain points “(...) sexual purity both pre-marital virginal and marital fidelity (...) are cherished Indian values sanctified by tradition and particularly enjoined upon women”19 (Jain 12). Som’s disgust over Madhu’s past makes him savage in his lovemaking and
gradually he ceases to touch her. The physical gratification that they sought in each other also disappears and soon their relationship is marred by distrust as he tells her, “If you could keep such a thing from me, how can I believe anything you say, how can I ever believe you again?” (Deshpande. Remedies 259).

A brooding silence coupled with hatred replaces the love and understanding between them. Their violent fights trouble their teenage son, who, disgusted with the scene at home walks out, only to meet his death in a bomb blast. With their only son’s death, Som and Madhu experience a void in their lives. Their destroyed relationship stops them sharing their grief with each other. And both equally shattered by the loss, struggle to endure the burden of living. In this state of hopelessness Chandru forces Madhu, to write a biography of Savitri Bai. The year that she spends in Bhavanipur makes her accept her loss. The approaching death anniversary of Aditya and Som’s letter calling her back home makes Madhu realize that they have to be together to mourn Aditya. They have to live together because their best memories of Aditya can be recreated only by their remembering him together. Thus, Small Remedies ends with Madhu’s realization that they must recreate happy memories of their Aditya then may be they can overcome the anger that was threatening their marriage. Thus once again they decide to come together to face life with the maturity gained through sorrow.

Apart from the marriage of these three women the novel also explores the marital relationship of Lata and Hari and Tony and Rekha. Both the couples share an understanding that brings joy in their lives in spite of their different backgrounds. They continue their faith as Tony, a catholic and
Rekha, a staunch Hindu respect each other’s beliefs. Their recognition of the other’s individuality, feelings and aspiration helps them develop a harmony in their marriage.

Almost all of Shashi Deshpande’s novels begin with discord and disappointment in marital relationship. An analysis of these marriages reveals that most of the heroines entered into matrimony in order to be rescued from their life of suppression because of the traditional rules and restrictions imposed on the unmarried girls by their parents or guardians. The age-old dream of a girl being chosen by an ideal superior male attracts them to love and marriage. But the suppression in a patriarchal marriage disillusioned them. They feel disappointed as the myth of married life denoted by “(...) and they lived happily ever after” is shattered. To most of them love becomes a trap as Sarita, Jaya, Mira and Indu too reject the concept of love calling it “a big fraud, a hoax, that’s what it is (...)”. The sexual instinct (...) that’s true. The maternal instinct (...) that’s true too. Self-interest, self love (...) they are the basic truths”20 (Nityanandam 53).

Breaking the illusion of romantic love leading to happiness in life, Deshpande has explored the Indian middle class woman’s unhappiness in the institution of marriage. Through the lives of Jaya, Indu, Urmila and Sumi she has depicted the lack of understanding and communication that often mars the relationship. The changing attitude of these women who are educated and intelligent leads to disharmony in their marriage. The traditional male fails to see that the woman also needs to realize her potential outside the domestic sphere. As Mohan and Jayant fail to acknowledge their respective wives’ talent and creativity.
Even when not suppressed by dominating husbands, Urmil and Sumi feel an unbridgeable gap, created by their husband's indifference. Both realize that they are ignorant of a part of their husband's personality. If Kishore's life style makes Urmil feel unable to reach his soul, Sumi in spite of her knowledge of Gopal's capability to walk out is unable to understand the reason for his desertion. The lack of communication adds to the inability of the husband and wife to acknowledge each other's needs and this threatens their marriage. In a survey done by Outlook Magazine on "What woman want" the results show that to women what matters is "(...) how sensitive a man was to a woman's needs. She expects him to listen to her and treats her as an equal.

The sexual aspect of marriage has been delineated through the lives of Akka, Saru and Mira. It brings in the open Shashi Deshpande's belief that "men do use their power, their sexual power, in order to subjugate women" (Holmstrom 224). Even outside marriage sexual exploitation becomes the intimate means of suppressing women. As in the case of Manu and Prabhakar sexual violence becomes the only weapon to get even with the woman who hurt their pride. A visible boldness in the treatment of sexuality can be seen in Deshpande's novels as not only does she talk about sexual oppression in case of Saru, Mira, Kalpana, and Shakutai, but also focuses on the sexual needs of a woman. Indu, the most vocal of all her heroines speaks of her unfulfilled desires as the root cause of unhappiness in her marriage. Even Jaya and Urmil feel dissatisfied because of their incompatibility with their husbands in sex life. Outlook Magazine's survey on "What Women Want" apart from other findings also concludes:
“Good sex, however, was almost unanimously considered important for a good relationship—it was very important even for older women. But, intriguingly, while women expressed a desire for sex, even taking the initiative sexually, as many as fifty five percent of the respondents thought men should be virgin when they marry.” (outlook 43)

Deshpande’s main aim in depicting pre-marital or extra-marital sex is not to show the women seeking gratification outside marriage. Rather it stresses the fact that sex without emotional involvement is of little importance. Women seek emotional involvement in any relationship and when emotions are attached to their husbands, their intimacy with other men is just incidental. As Indu and Madhu refuse to give importance to such episodes in their life. Similarly Mira rejects her husband’s idea of love, which was limited to sexual gratification.

With the help of women like Kalyani, Sulu, Akka, Shakutai, Jeeja, Inni and Mohan’s mother, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed the condition of women who are confined to traditions and lead a life of self-denial and suffering. All these characters also depict the pre-dominance of marriage in a woman’s life. To retain their marital status women have to endure various kinds of suffering throughout their lives. Their lives present the endless sorrow caused by forced incompatible arranged marriages. In spite of the changing treads the options for such women are mostly limited in our society. The life of Savitri Bai shows her craving to attain the lost respectability again. A woman walking out on marriage is still not acceptable to the patriarchal Indian society. As Urmi tells Dr. Bhaskar that marriage even if it does not give
happiness of any kind it is preferred as it gives to the woman especially to those belonging to the lower strata.

Moreover, her novels also show the other side of woman in marriage. Her pre-occupation with the sufferings of middle class women has not blinded her against the power a woman can exercise in marriage. Manorama, Saru’s mother, even Jaya’s mother, and both her Aji’s, represent the domineering women who gradually break their image of suppressed wife and usurp the traditional superior place of their husbands. Even in their power they follow the patriarchal tradition and impose it on their family. The effect on the lives of their children and husbands show that a balance is to be maintained in any marriage. The domination of either can cause imbalance and unhappiness in the family.

Through her writings Shashi Deshpande aims to focus on the importance of family values. The tension created in the husband-wife relationship by the lack of understanding and mutual respect affects the familial relationship. The children often adopt strange behavioural pattern that confuses the estranged parents. Saru’s inability to connect with her daughter, Renu, and awareness of tension between her parents show the breaking up of the family unit. Jaya’s indifferent attitude as a result of her suppression leads to the alienation of her teenage son, Rahul. This makes her daughter, Rati self-centered. Gopal’s desertion of his family becomes the cause of alienation for his daughter, Aru, who is unable to accept the breaking up of their family. But Madhu and Som’s doomed marriage causes the most tragic effect on their teenage son, Aditya and the family heads towards self-destruction. Therefore, Deshpande repeatedly calls for understanding and balance in matrimony,
however not at the cost of one’s self-respect and individuality. Her novels based on submission and suffering of women do not necessarily end with their rejection of family values and marriage. Her bold and balanced heroines often face the challenges of life confidently. Mostly they return to their husbands with the realization that self-assertion and conformity to one’s given role are not necessarily contradictory, but can even be complementary. Thus, the end shows them as women aware of the importance of family and marriage, at the same time, accepting their need to discover their ‘self’. Her belief that caste based arranged marriages is not always the key to happiness is highlighted in most of her novels. Through the characters of Joe and Leela she quotes the greatest example of two people of diverse cultures uniting into a blissful bond. She advocates Joe’s view of love and calls it, “an adult emotion.” In this regard, a notable development in the attitude of her characters from the first novel to the last can be seen. Saru and Indu’s immature idea of love and marriage leads to their disillusionment. Whereas Jaya and Urmi seem to have comparatively better understanding of marriage and their own expectations. But Sumi and Madhu present a more adult attitude towards their problems in marital life. Neither do they go hysterical like Jaya nor live in mental turmoil like Saru. They do not succumb to their desires in their state of depression like Indu. their maturity and sensibility that can be also seen in Urmi, makes them deal with their sorrow with dignity.

Thus, Shashi Deshpande’s pre-occupation with man-woman relationship has led to her analysis of the institution of marriage in this age of transition. Analysis from a woman’s point of view, Deshpande depicts the uneasiness of woman in the traditional role, which expects her to be an
embodiment of sacrifice and suffering, a monument of patience and devotion and a selfless bestowed of love and affection.

In her novels Shashi Deshpande openly talks of a woman's sexuality as a normal aspect of a human being's life. She focuses on the duality in the social system that recognizes a man's biological needs but denies such in a woman.

The theme of marriage and sexuality as traced in Deshpande's novels shows a development from tradition to revolt to affirmation. Her women rebel and marry the man of their choice but ultimately succumb to traditions and the expectations of their husbands. The men often carry the old traditional image of a woman. Therefore they fail to understand the feeling and aspirations of their wives. The intelligent and educated protagonist soon begins to feel restricted in the traditional claustrophobic existence. In this regard Deshpande once remarked, "It is necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy" (Viswanathan 236). But their balanced and practical approach towards life of her heroines makes them realize the importance of marriage and family, concentrating on traditional values. Deshpande almost always shows her women seeking the solution of their problems within marriage. Like lord Krishna in Bhagwad Gita the novelist arms her characters with the knowledge of myriad problems to be faced in matrimony and leaves them to act on their own free will. Instead of walking out her women charged with the knowledge and confidence, strive to make changes in their lives.
Hence Shashi Deshpande’s heroines in spite of their conflict with traditions wish to live within the framework of family relationship. Intelligent and well aware of their own individuality, they strive to create a balance. In comparison Anita Desai’s over sensitive characters are driven by their loneliness and fail to forge a meaningful relationship. While Desai’s heroines succumb to their weakness and find solution in homicide or suicide, Nayantara Sahgal, another contemporary of Deshpande, shows her women defy traditional norms in search of emancipation. Only Deshpande through her works shows women willing to take their share of the blame of their sufferings and bravely face the situation. Through a process of introspection and self-analysis they find a positive solution in the end. Their realization of the importance of family that forms the center of all Deshpande’s novels leads them to the path of affirmation rather than rejection. As J.P. Tripathi opines, "(...) Anita Desai or Shobha De, who present disintegrated individualistic pictures of Indian social ethos, show the crumbling of familial bonds under pressures of modernity" (Tripathi 150).
6.2 A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF MOVING ON

In the course of writing the present thesis, I was delighted to discover that Sashi Despande had published her latest novel *Moving on* (2004). Since a study of the novel was, for obvious reasons beyond the store of the dissertation, I am including a brief analysis of the novel in the concluding chapter. Deshpande's novels are about the possibilities of exploring changes within oneself. Her women protagonists are always willing and receptive for redefining for attitudes and relationships. Shorn of undue romantic embellishments, they want to free themselves from the stultifying traditional concerns and cherish a spontaneous surge towards life. The spontaneity of life arrives only with a cessation of over-eager planning and openness to change - the commonality of this motif is discernible in all her novels. From Sara of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), to Madhu of *Small Remedies* (2000); or more recently, to Manjari of *Moving on* (2004); one can trace the struggle of a woman protagonist to eke out a meaningful definition for her life, to free oneself from the stultifying social constraints and cherish a spontaneous surge toward life.

Her women feel their emotions strongly, yet retain a constant value Judgement, about themselves as well as about other relationships they have to live through. Though they belong to conventional middle class families, they do possess an inner independence to experiment with their life. In the process, life yields self-knowledge, which impart them the strength of accepting that a woman's desire to succeed like an individual is not incompatible with her desire for love or small pleasures of domesticity and relationships within/outside marital frame. In *Moving On* also, she has taken up the theme
of problematic relationships ("the inability or refusal of people to communicate with each other, as marriage partners, parents, friends and lovers is underlined by the intricately meshed structure of novel") as well as of the certainty of change. Manjari comments, "I couldn't have survived if I hadn't changed."(69)

The story lines begin with Manjari's attempts to know about her parents, not as figures she had created in her childhood as pacifiers and comforters she could hug for security, but as real individuals. (21) Simultaneously, her hesitations about the impossibility of ever scrutinizing fully any individual also become apparent, "But can there be any one truth about people? People are complex, undecipherable, protean - there is no absolute about them." (21) In several of her novels, Deshpande has taken up the parent - child relationship. Her portrayal of the mother - daughter relationship can be interesting by juxtaposed against the portrayal of father - daughter relationship. Never eschewing the contemporary context, Deshpandey has shown how girls have to put up with victimization from their own mothers and get condemned to a life of bitterness (The Dark Holds No Terrors, Small Remedies). Her portrayal of father daughter relationship on the hand is sensitive and beautiful. Come Up and Be Dead, That Long Silence, Small Remedies and Moving On present a sensitive closeness between the father and the daughter, which imparts tenderness to the themes. Manjari is close to her father, " If Mai's ' no' withstood even Malu's pleas and blandishments, we would ask Baba to intercede for us. " (26)

In the "Family Stories," chapter three of the novel, Deshpande presents beautiful pictures of companionship and dependence Manjari has shared with
her father in her childhood. She is protective towards Malu ["I liked having her depend on me" (46)], rather tentative with Mai ["Yes, I always knew I had to work harder than Malu of I wanted to be loved (44)"]; but in the company of her father she felt only effervescent joy. The gradual distancing, "a tapering off of bonds, "had come later after Mai’s rejection of Shyam, her lover (47). After a long gap of estrangement with her family, Manjari comes to stay with her father during the last few moments of his life. His chemo sessions become the point around which the cycle of their days revolve (60). Life has Changed Manjari during these years. From a lanky teenager who needed everybody’s approval and was willing to do anything to please others, she has changed into an assertive middle-aged person, who had to struggle hard to raise her children. She has learnt to be clear about her needs also (70). The unforgivable lapse of the time does not allow the old camaraderie to flourish - absence of Mai and Malu reminds her of things she wanted to forget (60). Gradually however a routine builds up, only to be crumbled soon. Baba’s death leaves emptiness within her, compelling her to review the life her parents had led as individuals. In the process it also enables her to re-identify her own self, and place her relationships with her parents, others and self in a better perspective.

The figure of a woman writer, her struggles to publish and be accepted and her concerns about the limitations of her crafts, is again a common phenomenon in Deshpande’s novels. Jaya in That Long Silence, Indu in Roots and Shadows and Madhu in Small Remedies are some examples. In Moving on also, we have Mai as a writer, "If she recognized her own talent, she knew her limitations, her ability to write only a particular kind of story. Which she did, ensuring herself a steady readership." (126) Like the figures of women authors
in Despande's other novels, Mai also does not take her writing ostentatiously. Manjari recalls, "She never, as far I know, publicly proclaimed herself a writer. It was kind of secret business, an activity she did in private, something no one in the family ever spoke of." (121) She is shown as a popular fiction writer, creating images of happy romance, large families, satisfaction of living through conventional roles. One of her stories is converted into a movie also. Her behaviour through is dictated by the conventional gender stereotypes. She is always meticulous to give her husband a "paramount place in the house" mutterin "Annadata sukhi bhava" after every meal (122). In her essay "Masks and Disguises," Deshpandey has talked about the disguises women authors normally take up one of the disguises which Deshpande's own mother had taken up proudly was to keep nothing of herself in her writing". Making a cipher of herself is also the justification Mai has taken up for an activity which regarded perhaps "not only as being outside her domain, but worse something that could be called selfish and self-indulgent." "Thinking of Mai. Manjari always comes up against "a blank wall, an enigmatic silence" (102), she could manage the professionalism of sending her stories before the magazines' deadline. Through her readings of her father diaries, Manjari for the first time comes face to face with the writer self of her mother, and also comes to know of her sexual frigidity, her abhorrence for the naked flesh. Her mother was incapable of responding to her husband's sexual passions, and therefore found Manjari a complete mystery when she so desperately wanted Shyam. (109) Her father comments in one of his dairy entries, "But I understood Jiji, oh yes, I did . As a father, I found it hard to be a witness to the raw sexuality of my daughter's feelings for a man, something Jiji almost
flaunted. But as a man, I could understand her feelings for a man, something Jiji almost flaunted. But as a man I could understand her feelings only too well". (109) Insights gained from her forages into the past of her parents' need to be individuals: how valuable freedom from the role of 'aamchi Mai' was to her mother (125). It also helps her to correct her perspective about her own spurning of her parents after Shyam's suicide.

Moving On underlines the societal expectations from women while living through their various roles. Manjari's understanding of Mai, before she goes through the diarrhoea, is symptomatic of a social/stereotypical understanding of the image of a mother.

"The traditional Indian concept of motherhood easily translates into a willing tolerance of a life of sacrifice, suffering and exploitation. Traditions encourage mothers to sublimate "a whole series of natural urges or least believing that she should endeavour to do so. In their roles mothers and wives, women are expected to possess archetypal fortitude and follow an intensively rigid moral pattern of life. The possibility of individual choices is not discussed even theoretically. In Moving On too, the children's behaviour towards their mother is a product of this unconscious social conditioning. It is reflected not only in Manjari's attitude, but also in Sachi's attitude towards Manjari, "But Sachi, I remember, has always wanted me to be what I'm not, not to be what I am. Why can't you be like other mothers?" She'd asked me once." (209) Deshpande also depicts how marriage is treated as the final destiny for girls. Recalling her childhood Manjari comments, "we would all of us take the right path, leading us to our final destinies of becoming good wives and mothers."

(93) For a wife, self-effacing norms are exalted to create
an environment, which pressurize women to mould themselves according to their husband's needs. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu is afraid of becoming such as ideal wife. In *Moving On* we have figures of Kamla, Medha and Mangal - Kamla does not let BK indulge in Condes consiear any household chore. Soft, docile and silent (93), she even serves him drinks with averted face; Medna keeps pace with the widening social needs of Bharat Magal transforms herself into a mother figure to become the public face of her husband Laxman (171), silently putting up with beatings and ill - treatment (174). Gender conditioning makes women vulnerable and silent but it is a double - edged sword. Among men it generates an intolerance or condencension towards women's attempts at individuality. Patriarchal traditions make men aloof, occupying a privileged position, able to realize their potential within the total gamut of society, whereas women are expected to submit themselves passively, doing nothing outside their dependence on the breadwinner. Deep - rooted indoctrination of a patriarchal society corrupts the objectivity of psyche. Manjari's father, though a liberal person in many ways fails to empathize with her wife, and takes her work with a non - serious, nonchalance; treating it as a pas time to occupy her in her spare time (197). After Shyam's tragic death, Manjari spurns her parents. Through a minor character Roshan, Deshpande also hints at the possibility of overcoming social conditioning through the bonds of sisterhood among women themselves, a concept used by many African-American women writers effectively. Roshan helps Manjari to settle down in life, shaking her out of her apathy and hopelessness. (221)

In her novels, Deshpande has taken up the theme of women's sexuality, within and outside marriage. A friendly and intimate male-female relationship
outside marriage is often presented by Deshpande not as matter of choice, but of compulsion. In her interview with Pallavi Thakur Despande has commented that such relationship gives or woman the freedom to be herself and that it need not be necessarily an affair. In Moving On she has depicted a close relationship between Manjari and Raja, which has the openness and trust of mature friendship. Simultaneously she has portrayed Manjari's purely physical association with her tenant Rajan. To some extent it can be compared with the relationship of Indu and Naren in Roots and Shadows, where Indu had succumbed to her bodily desiries. Manjari is also crippled by her physical needs and wants to treat it "like drinking water when you're thirsty." But it also draws her into ethical dilemma, "Like a diabetic's craving for food. Nothing wrong with it. And yet, why do I bathe three times a day, why do I scrub myself when bathing as if I want to flay myself, why do I punish my body so angrily? The body and mind so much at variance with each other."

(259) This episode is dealt with at a purely physical level. When Raja confronts her with it, Manjari is quite open about her sexual hunger. Disclosure of Raman's criminal association compels her to put an end to this relationship.

Another recurring theme of Deshpande's novels, which has been repeated in Moving On also, is of introspection and confronting the past, as only after it the process of amelioration can begin. Manjari's stay at her father's house gives her precisely such an occasion. She constantly reminisces about Malu, Shyam, Mai, Baba, Raja, her children - above all she wants to find her own self, solve out her own inner intricate knots. She gets the same message in her father's diary, "I hope that some day the
poinlessness and emptiness of her life will force her into confronting her past. " (304) Ultimately she gets rid of her anger, guilt and loneliness, and learns to reach out to other human beings. She realizes that life carries its own truth within it, and in order to change one's circumstances, they have to be accepted. Deshpande emphasizes an analysis of one's predicament and overcoming it with rational resolutions. Manjari also reaches this conclusion towards the end: "There's always a fork in a road, there's always a choice we have make. It's no use going back, agonizing over the choice we made, imagining what would have happened if we'd taken the other road. " (311) She shares her tortuous past with Raja, forgives Shyam and decides to communicate freely about her past to the children - her son Anand and Malu's daughter Sachi. She realizes that life is a mixed yarn of happiness, tragedy and villainy; and this mixture alone imparts it a charm. The novel ends on a hopeful note. Like the protagonist of her other novels, Deshpande also concludes that chaos, fear and disintegration do not stop life; it simply moves on, "We know that the wicked stepmother and the bad fairy won't have it all their own way. We know that there's still one good fairy to come - the damage control mechanism at work, goodness coming back into the arena to fight wickedness. " (325) The search may be doomed to failure, yet "the search is what it's all about the search is the thing. " (343)
NOTES AND REFERENCES


24 Shashi Deshpande, "Masks and Disguises," p. 189.
