CHAPTER 3
3.1 JAYA’S JOURNEY FROM CRISIS TO AFFIRMATION

*That Long Silence*, acclaimed masterpiece of feminist writing in Indo-Anglian fiction raises the status of Shashi Deshpande among the writers of the present-day; the novel highlights the image of the middle class woman sandwiched between tradition and modernity.

The title *That Long Silence* is taken from the pronouncement of Elizabeth Robins: “If I were a man who cared for the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy - the weight of the long silence of one half the world⁰¹. A woman has to go beyond the society-ordained roles of mother/ sister/ wife etc., she has to find out that she is! Emancipation of women physically and mentally is the goal of feminists. The title also suggests the intention of the novelist to explore the female psyche during the quest of the protagonist for ‘self’. *That Long Silence* is the period of self-introspection of woman to explore her true identity.

Woman is not an appendage, she is a being; that too an autonomous being, and in the view of the writer, she has to find her own salvation. Deshpande never supported the radical view of ‘Amazon Utopias’, female realms where men have been relegated to secondary roles. The novelist moved a step ahead of the female dominated vision and portrayed the female psyche. The loneliness of a lady is no mental abnormality, but paved the way for the “New woman’s quest for self-discovery”.

In *That Long Silence* Shashi Deshpande delineates the delicate swings of mood, the see-saw moments of joy and despair, the fragments of feelings perceived and suppressed, the life of senses as well as the heart-wringing anguish of the narrator protagonist Jaya, a house wife and a failed writer. The
novel depicts the life of Jaya at the level of the silence and the unconscious. A sensitive and realistic dramatization of the married life of Jaya and her husband Mohan, it portrays an inquisitive critical appraisal to which the institution of marriage has been subjected to in recent years. It centers round the inner perception of the protagonist, a woman who is subtly drawn from inside, a woman who finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who really is. But could she?

The question, “who I am?” (24) Haunts her so obsessively that she fails to find herself. She is “An utter stranger, a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motives of her actions seemed impossible” (69). Hence her agonized cries- “I can’t hope, I can’t manage, I can’t go on” (70). In such a stifling and suffocating domestic ambience and patriarchal set-up, she finds her female identity effaced. Her feminine dilemma is expressed in her vacillating state of mind: “I could and couldn’t do, all the things that were womanly and unwomanly (…)” (83). Jaya is Suhasini and also “Seeta”, the pseudonym she assumes to write columns about the plights of the middle-class housewife. Both “Suhasini” and “Seeta” are as Jaya says, “The many selves waiting to be discovered (…) each self-attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other”(69). Hence if life is “To be made possible” (193), she is to live neither as “Suhasini” or “Jaya’, nor as “Seeta” or “Aunty-Kusum”. She is to live but not in fragments.

Jaya when required to face a traumatic situation temporarily seeks shelter in neurosis that evades her responsibility as an adult individual for her without her being aware of it. Her suffering has a beneficial effect on her. It
initiates the process of self-discovery in her, which leads in the last analysis to her fresh perception of life. She emerges at the end of the ordeal as a woman with certain willingness to compromise with life’s problems while earlier she showed a surprising lack of accommodation and expansiveness.

Jaya Kulkarni is an apparently satisfied housewife. Having married a responsible man, Mohan, and blessed with two children, Rahul and Rati, and a home and material comfort, she seems to have almost nothing to ask for in life. To achieve this stage of fulfillment as a woman Jaya has systematically suppressed every aspect of her personality that refused to fit into her image as wife and mother. Two such most important aspects are: her writing career and her friendship with Kamat; which need clear understanding at the very outset.

Jaya has been a short-story writer of moderate success. Although Mohan takes pride in the fact of being the husband of a writer he strongly objects to her themes, which he suspects to have strong autobiographical overtones. On a particular occasion he says: “They will all know now, all those people who read this and know us, they will know that these two persons are us, they will think I am this kind of man, they will think I am this man. How can I look anyone in the face again? And you, how could you write these things (...)”

She however feels that she has related her experience only after transmuting it into something entirely different. But she has been “Scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage”(144). So in spite of her best judgment she gives up writing fiction and settles down to writing “Middles” in newspapers which pose no problem to any one.
The crisis started in Jaya’s life when Jaya and her husband Mohan shifting from their well-settled, comfortable house to their old house in Dadar, Bombay, where they had stayed immediately after getting married when their financial condition was not good. They shift into their old apartment in order to escape the scene as Mohan has been caught in some business malpractice and an inquiry is in progress. Here, in a small old flat, Jaya gets out of touch with her daily schedule and becomes an introvert. She sits deep in contemplation, thinking of her childhood and tries to analyse herself. As Adele king in her review says: “Jaya finds her normal routine disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is”.

Not satisfied with her married life, Jaya recalls her past days, her upbringing, the environment in which she was brought up and the preaching that were thrust upon her when she was growing up e.g., she has been taught that “A husband is like a sheltering tree”.

Jaya is representative of the urban, middle class women exposed to liberal western ideas. But she is unable to free herself entirely from the clutches of male chauvinist ideas. These ideas are a part and parcel of her culture, thrust upon her by those around her. Her aunt, Vanita Mami; for instance, counsels her just before her wedding: “Remember Jaya, a husband is like a sheltering tree, keep the tree alive and flourishing, even if you have to water it with deceit and lies”(32). Vanita Mamis long suffering role of a martyred wife prompts Jaya at one time before marriage to think that may be, she too had been similarly counselled as bride, “If your husband has a mistress or two, ignore it. Take up a hobby instead, cats, may be, or your sister’s children”(32). In spite of her flippant attitude towards Vanita Mami’s advice,
however, Jaya proves that she is no different from her. When it comes to the question of a choice between her husband and family, and asserting herself as an independent individual, she chooses the former without hesitation. Although Jaya is influenced by modern thought of the West and other advanced countries and is herself a writer who had given up serious writing, and had taken up writing weekly column as Seeta, a plump, good humoured, pea brained but shrewd and devious woman, she still wants to compare herself with image of Sita, Draupadi, and other ideal mythological characters. She had always tried her best to keep balance between husband and wife: “Ours has been a delicately balanced relationship, so much so that we have even snipped off bits off ourselves to keep the scales on an even keel” (7).

On the occasion of Revati’s birthday, Jaya as well as her daughter, Rati, feel that Mohan loves his niece Revati more than his own daughter. But she does not say anything to Mohan as he only dismisses it as her “Writer’s imagination” and nothing more. She always wishes to proceed as per husband’s wish.

Generally, others define a woman’s identity, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e. as a daughter, as wife, as a mother etc. The question “what a woman does” is never asked, but “whom she belongs to” is always considered she doesn’t have an identity of her own. Subhash Chandra writes “No act to be done according to her own will by a young girl, a young woman, or even by an old woman, though in (their own) houses”5. Her name keeps changing according to the wishes of others. In That Long Silence, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini; Jaya, which means victory, is the name
given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini; the name given after her marriage which means "soft"; smiling, placid, motherly woman"(16). Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. The former symbolize revolt and the latter submission. The dreams of her childhood, to change the ascribed situation of woman resulting in achieving her goals, are shattered by environment, the surrounding, and above all by the society which imposes all sort of restrictions on women. She is absolutely helpless and is unable to do anything to improve her situation. Ultimately, she tries to adapt herself to the main current. She longs to be called an ideal wife. She revolts in silence. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and he calls it "strength": "He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender."(36).

Coming to physical relationship between husband and wife, it is again the case of a dominating husband and suffering wife. Even if the husband hurts the wife, she remains silent. Jaya, too, has been cast in the same mould. She can't say "yes" when her husband asks her whether he has hurt her. She has to tolerate everything: "The emotion that governed my behaviour to him, there was still the habit to being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him"(98).

In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, whether it is a love marriage or arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her. Whether the husband follows the right path or wrong one, she has to blindly follow in his footsteps. When Mohan is caught in an act of malpractice, Jaya had been content to follow the footsteps of the mythological role model of
Sita. At one time, she even tried to emulate the mythical Gandhari: “If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband be called an ideal wife, I was an ideal wife too. I bandaged my eyes tightly. I didn’t want to know anything. It was enough for me that we moved to Bombay; that we could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have the things we needed—decent clothes, a fridge, a gas connection, traveling I class” (61-62).

Though she is unwillingly to follow the examples of Sita and Savitri, paradoxically, she is compelled by the situations and circumstances to follow the principle that “Both are yoked together, so better to go to the same direction, different directions will be painful” (10).

Jaya’s husband, Mohan, always interprets things in relation to the effect it may have on the society. He unobtrusively likes to conform to the social norms even if they are strong. The success of Jaya’s novel depicting the relationship between man and woman is weighed in relation to what society would think in future. So, he wants to makes Jaya also think like him and induces her not to deliberate on such themes that would endanger their marriage. Jaya, a representative of the typical Indian woman, in the present context, wants to mould herself, as her husband wills. But all these male-chauvinistic ideas are not her own, but have been thrust upon her by society in general and her father in particular. Her father made her think that she was different from others and hence, she could not cope with her hostel mates and kept herself aloof from other girls.

In her childhood, she had been brought up in a loving and affectionate manner without any responsibility. But after her marriage, she changes automatically, her anger withers away: “She was a child who used to get angry
very soon. But after her marriage she tolerated her anger. She realized that to Mohan anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’.”(83) When Kamat asks her why she has not expressed the anger of woman in her writings, her reply is: “Because no woman can be angry. Have you ever heard of an angry young woman?”(147).

When she leaves her home after getting married, her father advises her to be always good to Mohan and she, at all times, tries her best to follow his advice. It is also throws light on her being closer to her father than to her mother. Even when her mother scolds her or questions her going out and returning home late, she complains against her mother to her father.

Social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man. Generally, a woman’s identity tends to be defined by others. Due to her sensitive nature, Jaya is very particular about molding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied. In the very beginning of the novel, we see that she tries to reason out with her father as to why she shouldn’t listen to the songs broadcast on the radio, but ultimately she keeps silent, suppressing her desire. Here, Deshpande has presented the theme of lack of communication. As she herself declares: “The themes of lack of communication may be over-familiar in Western fiction, but in extrovert India it is not much analyzed.”

In the novel under study, Shashi Deshpande presents the meanings of silence. As she herself puts it: “You learn a lot of tricks to get by in a relationship. Silence is one of them.... You never find a woman criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage the relationship.”
The novel is not an autobiography, except for certain parts dealing with the frustrations of an unsuccessful writer. Shashi Deshpande has presented an Indian woman as she is, in the India of the eighties and not as she should be. Veena Sheshadri says in her review;

"Why has the author chosen a "heroine" who only succeeds in evoking waves of irritation in the reader? Perhaps it is because a competent writer like her is never satisfied unless she is tackling new challenges. Also, she believes in presenting life as it is and not as it should be; and there must be thousands of self-centered women like Jaya, perennially griping about their fate, but unwilling to do anything that could result in their being tossed out of their comfortable ruts and into the big, bad world of reality, to fend for themselves."

To make the story authentic and appealing, Deshpande has used the device of first-person narrative to ensure its credibility by making the protagonist read her inner mind and thus representing the psyche of the modern middle-class learned woman.

Jaya is basically a modern woman rooted in tradition, whereas her husband, Mohan, is a traditionalist rooted in customs. The difference between their outlooks is so great that they fail, time and again, to understand each other. To Mohan, a woman sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot food is the real "strength" of a woman, but Jaya interprets it as nothing more than despair. The difference in their attitude is the main cause of their failure to understand each other.

A few of Jaya's recollections turn morbid at times. For instance, is the description of Mohan's mother's death. Mohan's sister Vimala describes the
scene graphically to her sister-in-law, Jaya something, which she was unable to discuss with her own brother:

"I was collecting my books when suddenly the thump of her hands as she beat out the bhakries came to a stop. I thought it was the usual * pause between two bhakries and I didn't bother until I heard her screams. I didn't even imagine it was her screaming at first, it was not like her voice at all. It was a thin ugly voice that scared me to death. And then as I watched, she began hitting herself on the face. Her hands were all floury, and wet too, and her face soon became white and floury, soon there were red patches as she went on and on hurting herself... There was ash from the fireplace on her hair and all that flour on her face - her face was swollen by now. With her eyes caved in she looked like a dead person, her face was the face of a dead woman. A week later she died. She went to a midwife and tried to get herself aborted." (38).

Looking at the framed photographs of Mohan’s parents in his brother’s house, Jaya thinks, “The mother looks like any other woman of her time, staring blank-faced at the world, the huge Kum-Kum on her forehead blotting out everything in that face but the blessed woman who died with her husband yet living”. (38). A generation later, Mohan’s sister Vimala, too, who is the victim of ovarian tumour, bleeds herself to death in silence rather than inform her mother-in-law about it. She, of course, realizes that it would be of no use to do so. Her mother-in-law’s response to her illness confirms this: “God knows what’s wrong with her. She’s been lying there on her bed for over a month now. Yes, take her away if you want to. I never of women going to
hospitals and doctors for such a thing. As if other women don’t have heavy periods. What a fuss. But these women who have never had any children are like that.” (39) We may say that this is a typically conditioned response in a patriarchal system.

Jeeja, Jaya’s maid-servant, is another typical example of the oppressed woman. She is battered about by her good-for-nothing drunken husband. Without a murmur of protest, she supports him and even provides him liquor with her hard-earned money. She is bears no grudge against him even when he takes up another woman. She justifies it by saying, “God didn’t give us any children. That was his misfortune As well as mine. How could I blame him for marrying again when I couldn’t give him any children?” (52) After the death of her husband and his mistress, she willingly brings up their son, Rajaram, who is a chip of the old block. He drinks and beats up his wife, Tara. Jeeja, however, does not allow Tara to even abuse or curse her husband. She admonishes her saying, “Stop that, and don’t forget, he keeps the Kum-Kum on your forehead. What is a woman without that?” (53). Subhash Chandra comments about Jeeja: “Manu could not have hoped for a more steadfast follower”. (152). There is also the character of Jaya’s grandmother, Ajji, who, once widowed, takes to an empty room, never to emerge again, and that of Mukta and Vanita Mami. Mukta is Jaya’s immediate neighbor at her Dadar flat. She is widowed at a young age and lives with her parents and rebellious daughter, Nilima. She is the sort who will go out of the way, to help people. She is deeply pious and Jaya cannot help but wonder at the utter uselessness of such self-torture, “If it wasn’t her Saturday it was ‘her Monday’ or ‘her Thursday’. Mukta had more days of fasts than days on which she could eat a
normal meal. Her self-mortification seemed to be the most positive thing about her. And yet her piety - surely it was that which promoted those fasts-seemed meaningless, since she had already forfeited the purpose of it, the purpose of all Hindu women’s fasts-the avoidance of widowhood”. (67). Jaya’s barren Vanita Mami too would perform numerous Pujas and fasts in the hope of being blessed with a child, “But she had gone on with her fasts, her ritual circumambulations of the Tulsi plants, of the Peepul tree, even when their aim had gone beyond her reach, when her uterus had shrivelled and her ovaries atrophied”(67).

Due to differences in attitude, their marital life grows shaky and gloomy. It becomes more of a compromise than love, based on social fear rather than on mutual need of each other. The cause may be rooted in their choice of a partner. For example, from the very beginning, Mohan wanted a wife who was well educated and cultured and never a loving one. He made up his mind to get married to Jaya when he saw her speaking fluently, sounding so much like a girl whom he had seen speaking English fluently. He tells Jaya: “You know, Jaya, the first day I met you at your Kamukaku’s house, you were talking to your brother, Dinkar, and somehow you sounded so much like that girl. I think it was at that moment that I decided I would marry you.”(90)

In her stream of thoughts, Jaya, too, looks at her marital relations where there is no conversation left between them. This unhappiness is reflected not only in her conjugal life, but also in social life. Her books, her stories lack anger and emotion. Publishers reject her writings. And when, finally, Mohan angrily walks out of the house, she feels that she has failed in her duty as a wife. She recalls the tradition of act and retribution and compares
herself to Kusum: "An act and retribution they followed each other naturally and inevitably" (128). When Mohan leaves the house without informing her, she feels that her husband is neglecting her. Jaya has related herself to Kusum who had killed herself by jumping into the well, and had died not by drowning but of a broken neck, as there was no water in the well. Jaya was sure of her sanity as long as Kusum had lived, because if Kusum was mad, then Jaya must has been "normal". After Kusum's suicide, Jaya does not know any more who she is. Is she just Mohan's wife who had fragmented herself, who had cut off the bits that had refused to be Mohan's wife?

Is she like the sparrow in the bedtime story of wise sparrow and the foolish crow, which she had heard as a kid? That story goes like this. There was a foolish crow that built his house of dung, and a wise sparrow that built hers of wax... And when it rained, the house of wax stood firm, while the crow's house was washed away. And the poor crow, shivering and sodden, went to the sparrow's house and knocked on the door, calling, "Let me in, sister let me in". And the sparrow called back, "Wait a minute, my baby has just woken up". After a while, the crow knocked again, pleading, "Let me in, sister, let me in". And the sparrow said, "Wait a minute, I'm feeding the baby". And so the story goes on, the foolish credulous crow standing out there in rain, begging to be let in, while sister sparrow spins out her excuses... till finally she says, "Come in, you're all wet aren't you, poor fellow?" And she points to the pan on which she has just made the chapattis. Warm you there," She says, and the silly crow hops on to it and is burnt to death. Deshpande uses this story to paint vividly how the life of a woman like Jaya is. She says that their life's basis can be summarized as, "Stay home, look after your
babies, keep out of the rest of the world, and you're safe”, For all outside appearances hers was a happy family, her husband was in a top position, they had two children—one boy and one girl—and she was yet another wife and mother whose life centered around her family and her home—nothing more.

She considers, like a rational individual, several options for dealing with the crisis such as suicide (11) and plain confession of the crime (31) and dismisses them all as impracticable and ultimately lets her psyche take its own measures to manage the crises. She lives several days in a traumatic state. Her thoughts go back and forth in time triggered by the slightest provocation but constantly return to the traumatic event. Traumatic neurosis is usually a result of an emotional shock wherein the subject feels his life threatened. Sometimes it acts as a precipitating factor and reveals an already existing neurotic structure. But mostly it manifests itself, in cases where the trauma is a decisive factor in itself, in the form of symptoms that incessantly strive to “blind” and re-enact the traumatic experience. On account of the low level of tolerance that Jaya is bestowed with, an earlier traumatic experience, that of her father Appa’s sudden death, is precipitated by the present exceptionally intense stimulus. Both have shattered her equilibrium. Appa meant a great deal for her and his death was premature and sudden and it occurred at a crucial time in her life—when she was writing her school final examinations. His death rendered Jaya’s family homeless and left her bereft of an emotional support. But at that time, although she took seriously ill, the comforting hand of her elder brother saved her from further psychic crisis. The present loss of her second home, which she has so carefully nurtured, apart from being of traumatic proportions, comes as a repetition of it. But now there is none whom
she can turn to, not even Kamat. She is required to grapple with the trauma all by herself even if it means an upset of her equilibrium and emotional poise and it must be said to her credit that she emerges triumphant, crowned with a new understanding of herself and the world, at the end.

The partial relaxation of the ego’s control over the working of her psyche, during this period, gives her a changed perspective of the nature of things and human relationships. The most important of them is a free play given to the super-ego, which can be equally disastrous as the id when not properly managed by the ego. After experiencing the trauma Jaya seems to become at once excessively concerned about the moral side of what she has done so far what she should have done but did not. Fred observes in this regard:

“Ill-luck - that is, external frustration - so greatly enhances the power of the conscience in the super-ego. As long as things go well with a man, his conscience is lenient and lets the ego do all sorts of things; but when misfortune befalls him, he searches his soul, acknowledges his sinfulness, heightens the demands of his conscience, imposes abstinences on himself and punishes himself with penances.”

Indeed Jaya pours out, during her neurotic spell, her innermost thoughts and makes an unqualified confession of her “Sinful” acts which she never confided in Mohan again for fear of jeopardizing marital security. She feels freshly guilty about her clandestine fictional endeavours:

I had written even after that confrontation with him. (145)
It hadn’t been Mohan’s fault at all. And it had been just a coincidence, though it had helped, that just then Mohan had propelled me into that other kind of writing (middles) (148).

Her soul-searching, occasioned by the enforced leisure and coupled with a neurotics spell, also makes her dig into the long forgotten past and feel sorry for such things as the third child which she has not let live. With the help of her brother she happened to secretly terminate her third pregnancy. She now comes to think about it as her “Great act of treachery against Mohan” (130). As she probes deep into this significant event of her life the guilt feelings assume greater sharpness and poignancy.

But now, as if it had been waiting for its cue all these years, a shadowy figure in the wings, guilt sprang out at me. I thought of the unborn child with dread and piercing sorrow. I invested her- yes, it would have been a girl - with all the qualities I missed in Rahul and Rati (131).

Jaya is almost convinced at a point that the misfortune that had suddenly engulfed her family is entirely of her making- of her failure as a wife and mother (185).

Apart from the unusual activation of the punitive elements of the super-ego Jaya’s psyche sets a wide variety of painful reactions in motion - something that is very much characteristic of traumatic neurosis - to naturalize and bind the flood of mobile instinctual energy. Ruminations on the traumatic event, insomnia and recurrent nightmares and dreams, feelings of detachment and disorientation, adverse somatic reaction and relative lack of control over one’s action are the readily available tools the psychic apparatus which are pressed into service in Jaya’s case. Every one of the defense strategies that
Jaya resorts to, emanates from, is structured around and finally returns to the single traumatic event of the sudden disintegration of her conjugal life.

Shashi Deshpande’s use of dreams as a literary device, comparable to that of Graham Greene in their subtlety and pointedness, allows her to describe in symbolic and artistic terms the reality about the life of her heroines. The partial relaxation of the ego’s control during sleep enables the dream work to symbolically present the unconscious motivation of the dreamer. Consciously Jaya tries to explain to herself hers and Mohan’s fugitive status in terms of the slightly bizarre image of village women hiding only their heads when found easing themselves in the open. But in her nightmares and dreams her desolate helplessness comes more poignantly alive. Jaya’s first nightmare, coming as it does at a crucial turning point in her neurotic reaction, reveals many conflicting tendencies within her. In the dream she sees Mohan and herself walking together. Soon she is left behind, and for some reason, has to pass through a house. A girl helps her into the house. Once she is in, she realizes with shock that she is alone, fearing that she will not be able to find Mohan any more. She is then led into a room where a number of girls are present. Although she feels that they sympathize with her none of them comes forward to help her. She feels ill and utterly helpless, and lies down like a corpse. The girls around her discuss her predicament in low tones. Not much later however, Mohan appears on the scene and asks her to hasten to a waiting taxi. But as she runs after him she realizes: That it is too late anyway, we will never be able to make it, we will never be able to get away, it is all my fault, all my fault (...)(86).
The dream presents, in a classic case of condensation and displacement, her entire marital experience, her present predicament and her unconscious wishes. The house she passes through is the marital edifice. She is led into it by society (symbolized here by the more acceptable and seemingly agreeable girl and later by a group of girls). Once, she is inside the house, no help comes forth. She has to make a home herself. She doesn’t even understand Mohan fully. And then comes the catastrophe of the enquiry into the charges of corruption. Society, which she has thought to be on her side suddenly, turns hostile. Her degradations discussed by everyone. (In fact she literally shivers at the mention of the enquiry by her younger brother Ravi (111) and her neighbor Mukta’s oblique references to her unusual long stay at the Dadar flat). She fervently wishes to get away from her present predicament. Tradition has it that a wife should seek her husband’s help. And Mohan appears there with a taxi. But her belief in Mohan’s ability of deliverance is not strong enough to blissfully give her into his care. She therefore thinks again that it is very late, the escape route is closed. She finds fault with herself because she is unable to do anything to help Mohan in his hour of need except neurotically rave and grieve.

While Jaya’s first dream is a sort of wish fulfillment, her second dream, occurring much later, is expressive of her utter frustration. By now Mohan has deserted her and she has already borne the resultant additional psychic conflict. She experiences a stab of anguish whenever her servant-maid, Narayana, makes direct references to her unenviable plight. It is at that specific point that Jaya recounts her “Crazy recurrent dream”.
I was looking for a toilet, I was desperate, I had to find one, and I'd disgrace myself if I didn't find one at once. And yes, there it was—the immense relief and then the over-powering shame as I realized I was in a public place surrounded by people staring at me steadily and silently (161).

Jaya and Mohan have hoped to escape publicity by moving to the Dadar flat. That such a thing is not possible is evidenced by Jaya's dream. She unconsciously perceives what is at the back of the mind of most of their acquaintances and it comes alive in the dream.

Feeling of detachment from the self, experience of split personality and a sense of disorientation too are expressive of neurotic conflict. The seeds of a split personality have always been present throughout her seventeen-year-old married life. Her name was changed to Suhasini by her in-laws soon after marriage. Eversince, "Suhasini" has been her marital identity. Now that this identity is in crisis she feels disoriented. On a secret visit to her posh Churchgate house, to which her marital identity has been almost fixed, she sees her divided self-clearly.

And now nothing seemed to connect me to this place, nothing bridges the chasm between the prowling woman and the woman who had lived here. I was conscious of a faint chagrin at her disappearance. Wasn't I who had painfully, laboriously created her? Perhaps, for that very reason, she could not evade me entirely, and she appeared to me, only a faint wraith of herself, standing near this table, hand poised over a vase of flowers (168).
As her conflict reaches climacteric proportion she makes an even more frank admission of “A feeling of total disorientation”(177) and experiences detachment “from everything”, even from her “own body”(177).

A relative lack of self-control over one’s actions is again quite in keeping with the logic of neurotic suffering. Jaya’s involuntary actions, “mad actions” in common parlance, are almost always precipitated by a specific incident in the present. But at the same time they can be easily traced back to the one great affliction, that of the shocking disintegration of her home the security of which she has uncritically taken for granted. The beginning of it is precipitated by Mohan’s own disappearance. She experiences a fine quivering in her abdomen, which has always been for her prelude to a panic. She doesn’t have Kamant now to assure her of her significance and sanity not the distant relative, mad Kusum, against whom to test her sanity. Inevitably therefore her “Sense of confusion” and turmoil meet her “with brutal force”(125).

I could feel myself gasping, drowning in the darkness, the wild, flailing, panic-stricken movements that I was making taking me lower and lower into the vortex (…).

Take your pain between your teeth, bite on it, and don’t let it escape…

I came floundering out of the depths, thinking-am I going crazy like Kusum? (125).

In spite of her categorical assertion of her sanity on the next page she indeed sacrifices some of it to relieve herself of the excruciating mental pain forced on her by circumstances. Apart from such apparently “crazy” actions as mumbling and speaking plain nonsense she experiences a brief spell of utter mental confusion as things move to a finale. This time it is triggered off by
her witnessing a cruel scene at the bus-stop. After the secret visit to the Churchgate house she waits for some time at the bus stop. It is raining heavily. She looks around and finds a very beautiful young girl smoking a reefer and two men roughly kneading her small breasts. Her imploration to stop the indecency evokes only a hearty laughter from the men. She feels so humiliated and helpless that she flees the scene as if pursued, in the pouring rain. In her unconscious she identifies the girl at the bus stop with her daughter Rati and the prospect of a similar future for Rati (a part of her secure home) drives her crazy. Somehow she returns home and deliriously goes on ringing the bell of her apartment and then bangs on the door. It is ultimately Mukta who takes the key from her bag and opens the door. All along Jaya keeps raving incoherently. She continues to be in delirium even the next day.

The impact of this specific incident coupled with the cumulative effect of the events of the past few days has been so deep on her that her psyche transfers some of its tension to her body, which reacts adversely under the pressure. She plunges headlong into high temperature. In fact she has always reacted in a similar manner whenever under great stress. She happened to fall dangerously ill following Appa’s death too.

She had learnt at an early age that a husband is like a tree, a protection, and a security. Even if there was darkness and disaster in the outer world you could always close your door and windows, switch on the lights and the darkness recedes.

Perhaps Mohan is the victim of his own doing – a crow who has not built his life on sound moral principles. Is this what Deshpande means: “let the male species shoulder the responsibilities and face the calamities of their
own creation”. This is not a real disaster for Jaya. Her real disaster is the
discovery of her relationship, her marriage, “This whole absurd exercise we
call life”. Out of this quagmire of doubts, only Mohan could pull her out,
Mohan’s going away without informing her has frightened her. She
remembers that Kusum, her alter ego, had escaped into madness and then
death. It is this very fear that Jaya suffers from. She wants to cling only to
Mohan. She does not want to be different from other common women. She
realizes that without Mohan there is no life for her. Jaya feels that she can
have her identity only if she has Mohan with her. Though her father always
thought that she was very special and quite unique. If she rejects her wife-role
and mother-role, what remains of her self? She realizes that without Mohan
there is no life for her. There is no meaning to her life. She finds herself in the
category of unwanted wives, deserted wives, and feels, she has nowhere to go.

Though brought up with a sense of her unique personality, at this stage
in life she realizes that she does not wish to belong to this special category.
Mohan’s going away stuns her and awakens her to her real place in life. What
place she could have except that of an unwanted woman? Life for her is to be
lived fully in relationship with others. Not like Anita Desai’s Monisha in
Voice In The City, who never wishes to be related to persons or things, who is
afraid of love, of relatedness, and thereby of losing her identity. Jaya feels that
she can have her identity only if she has Mohan with her. She journeys a full
circle, from searching her identity in loneliness to her relationship with Mohan
and her children. But though it is a full circle, it is not the same point to which
she returns.
On receiving Mohan’s telegram she becomes herself: “I’m not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I’m Mohan’s wife. I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible” (191).

She rejects even the image of two bullocks yoked together for she thinks that is condemning herself to a lifetime of disbelief. Now she has belief in herself—she can choose. The intense searching of the self has brought knowledge of life, which can’t be lived in a vacuum. She realizes that the fault is her own. She had not spoken so far. She resolves that she will be now at the receiving end. In a sense, it is her liberated self. Deshpande invokes the Bhagwad Geeta and refers to Arjuna’s knowledge imparted by Lord Krishna. It is for Arjun to make the choice. She must exercise her choice and give up using Prakrit language. For her, it is not “Women are victims” theory but women must assert and change themselves. One cannot remain where one is all one’s life. One must change and hope that men shall change also: “It’s possible, that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible. (193).

Deshpande has portrayed the feel and tone of Indian life, of ordinary problems to everyday life. A life of complete inwardness, of a subjective indulgence is not for Jaya. Nor is complete conforming and total draining out of individuality the proper way out of the dilemma. One cannot live in fragments; the absolute self and the relatedness must join hands and hope for the fuller enjoyment of life.
The use of the first-person point of view provides Deshpande with the control that gives shape and significance to the intense agony that Jaya experiences. The protagonist accepts the reality of the situation, her existence in relation to her family. She shifts from past to present like sand in an hourglass, in time. She tries to fathom her real role in life. Her awareness of her individuality is essentially healthy though she becomes physically ill. Of course this makes her feel on the one hand a sort of entrapment and she desires to be free, on the other hand it makes her visualize her life bereft of her man. The emotional atmosphere permeates the whole novel and the mood becomes the medium. The personal past, the experiences of Kusum, her own mother and aunts, Mohan’s mother and his sister and their silence in life pressurize her and mould her responses to the present situation. The idea of existing in an unrelated meaningless world, in a void is not acceptable to her. She seeks a re-orientation of her relationship and also Mohan’s new awareness of his relationship to her. From the safety of the “toy-boat in a bath existence”, she emerges through the tension between her two worlds as a determined strong-willed modern woman who is prepared to face life, accept her responsibilities squarely and not escape from or avoid them by committing suicide as some of Anita Desai’s women do. Her resolution is like Arjuna’s: “Fight back, with full knowledge.” Deshpande’s use of the myths of Seeta, Gandhari and Maitreyee sharply focuses the plight of the existence of Indian wife, at the same time revealing the Indian wife’s awareness of this existence and her acceptance not of Seeta-role and Gandhari-role but of Arjuna’s way of facing life.
Jaya reverts to the firm hold of marriage that has crushed her soul in the past. *That Long Silence* at last breaks with her story fully narrated and all her anguish articulated.

The process of self-discovery is illuminating and it is a cathartic experiment. It is a rebirth and resurrection of self. A new Jaya is born from out of an ‘agonizing and despairing Jaya.’ Self cannot be cut into pieces, a Jaya of Mohan or a Jaya of her own. She pledges to live a “Whole”. She decided to stand by him life retaining all that did not fit in the straight jacket of “Womanhood” she decides to give her own answers to Mohan, not the answers expected by him. The ending of the narrative with “life has always to be made possible “ (TLS193) is a note of hope and affirmation.

Shashi Deshpande is in the quest of creating a ‘New Woman’ out of her protagonists who belong to different culture, religious and linguistic backgrounds. The novelist is against the patriarchal establishments, which cripple the innate creativity of women. The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande enter into marriage with the hope that the marriage would provide them respect, security and status in the society but, unfortunately, they get disappointed and subsequently disillusioned. Deshpande celebrates the major exploration of her heroines by transcending the boundaries of the female gender; she creates initial revolters but final compromisers like Jaya in *That Long Silence*. Her characters experience the gravitational pull of patriarchy and tradition.

In the same manner, Shashi Deshpande allows one of her women characters to exercise her reproductive right by aborting an unwanted foetus. In *That Long Silence*, Vimla, the sister of Mohan speaks of her mother’s
unwanted pregnancies. She says “almost all my childhood, I remember her as being pregnant” (TLS 37). Because of the lack of information about safe methods of sex and facilities for safe abortion, Vimla’s mother like the other women in India, continues to bear in silence a series of unwanted pregnancies. She already has six living children and has lost four or five babies. Unsafe conditions of abortion carried out by untrained quacks unleash a whole range of problems to women. Yet Vimla’s mother “Went to a mid-wife and got herself aborted” (TLS38).

The ‘new woman’, despite the obstacles of poverty and the denial of formal education, identifies and uses her potential to emerge successful in life. The women characters of the novelist struggle to redefine their role and identity in the light of feminist theories. It is of paramount importance to see how each of these protagonists started to think and feel differently from other women and use their potentialities in a new perspective.

The concept and image of women has undergone a positive change. No society can ever progress without an active participation of women who are an integral part of human civilization in its over-all development. The present thesis attempts to interpret and record the reverberations of gender awareness revealed by Shashi Deshpande in her novel That Long Silence. She evinces keen interest in the empowerment of women in the multifaceted aspect of life. The women of Shashi Deshpande face formidable challenges to gain their rightful place in society. They are culture-specific and traditional. The major problems faced by Shashi Deshpande’s women characters are the psychological conditioning and the gender discrimination, which determine
the adult personality of the female child. Her educated middle-class women achieve this feminist consciousness.

Some of the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande in their quest for identity exercise certain autonomy within marriage.

Shashi Deshpande wants to transform the society and she realizes the necessity for women’s education and economic independence, which can eradicate poverty. She is concerned with the duties of a devoted wife’s ‘pativrata’ and with these women’s inner struggle to revolt against slavery. But her women come to the point of compromise and avoid all open fights. They practice non-violence and advocate that people should learn to negotiate disagreements and problems without fighting. This is seen at the end of That Long Silence where the protagonist, Jaya, decides to clarify the matter with her husband, on his return from his self-imposed exile. Shashi Deshpande brings out the guilt feelings from her protagonists and enables them to move in positive direction to maximize their potential.

Neither Jaya nor her creators Shashi Deshpande totally advocate western feminism. Still they are feminist-Indians in all respects, rooted to their conservative culture.
3.2 THE TRAUMA OF RAPE: MIRA AND KALPANA AS VICTIMS

In her fourth novel ‘The Binding Vine’ winner of the ‘Sahitya Akademi Award’ (1992) Deshpande attempts a bold theme hitherto untouched by Indian women novelists. She has deviated slightly here by introducing the rape victim within a marriage, and the consequents of agony of the victim - Mira.

Mira writes in her poem about the suffocation from which she is suffering.

“Huddle in my cocoon, a somnolent silk worm
Will I emerge a beauteous being?
Or will I, suffocating, cease to exist?”(65)

The ‘Binding Vine’ is narrated by Urmila, a character drawn almost in the same vein as the protagonist of Deshpande’s other novels. Shashi Deshpande’s earlier heroines have maintained a long silence and are able to unshackle themselves only within a limited purview of their own lives. Unlike the other heroines, the heroine of this novel Urmila has a supportive family, loves her husband Kishore and is happy being married to him. Protest comes easily to her. She decides to fight another woman’s battle.

Urmia is grieving over the death of her year old daughter Anu and in this condition she is highly sensitive to the suffering and despair of others. It is this sensitivity, which leads her to befriend Shakuntala, the mother of the rape victim. Urmila would never have associated herself with Shakuntala in the normal course of her life as she belonged to a different strata of society altogether. It is the same sensitivity that also makes her delve into the poems
of her long dead mother–in–law, Mira, and frantically try to understand the mind of Mira.

Urmii gets Mira’s poem out of the trunk, which had sat for decades in the attic, gathering dust, and starts reading them. It is while reading these poems written by college going teenager Mira, by a Mira who was married off to a man whom who she could not love, that Urmii realizes the various facts of pain that many a woman has to bear very often silently, mostly without having any options.

The healing process, which begins by reading Mira’s poems, continues when Urmii accidentally meets Shakutai in the hospital where Vanna works as a medical social worker. Shakutai’s eldest daughter Kalpana has been brought to the hospital after she was brutally beaten up and raped. Urmii feels compelled to help Shakutai, to listen on her, to keep her company. During the long wait in which Kalpana lies in coma, Urmii makes a bold, modern, and very humanistic statement, in that she tries to convince Shakutai that it was not Kalpana who did anything wrong, it is not that she invited trouble upon herself by dressing up, by painting her lips and nails, but it is Kalpana who is terribly wronged. For a long time Urmii herself does not understand her need to come and sit with Shakutai, whose world is so very different from her own.

The novel opens with Urmila trying to cope with the death of her daughter and the efforts of her friend and sister–in–law, Vanna, her brother Amrut and Inni, her mother to help her back to normalcy. Vanna’s pathetic attempts to remind Urmii of the great courage she had displayed in the incidents of their childhood are all dismissed by Urmii; who feels that they are too petty to be compared to her grief now. She, in fact, wants to cling on to her
grief and feels that she can’t betray her daughter’s memory by trying to blot her out of her mind commenting on her masochistic attitude, S. Indira writes:

“Instead of fighting her pain and sorrow, she holds on to it as she believes that to let go of that pain, to let it become a thing of the past would be a betrayal and would make her lose Anu completely. Like a masochist, she clings to her pain and allows her memories of Anu, every small incident to flood her with longing and a great sense of loss.”

It is in this state that Urmi meets Shakuntala, the mother of the rape victim. Kalpana on her visit to the hospital where Vanna works. Earlier the mother assumes that her daughter, who is now lying unconscious, has been injured in a car accident. On examination, the doctor informs her that she has been raped, in the process of which she is so badly injured that she is lying like vegetable neither dead nor alive. The mother’s reaction to this news is quite predictable. She tells Vanna hysterically, “It’s not true, and you people are trying to blackmail my daughter’s name”. Later on, catching a hint of the conversation between Vanna and Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge, she recoils in fear against the word, ‘report’ she cries: “No, no, no. Tell him, tai, its not true, don’t tell anyone. I’ll never be able to hold up my head again, who’ll marry the girl, we’re decent people, doctor,” she turns to him, “don’t tell the police.”(58)

Urmi fights in favour of the young rape victim Kalpana. It comes as shocking revelation to Urmila that everyone wants to hush up the rape case and the general reaction to it is “okay, she was raped. But publicizing it isn’t going to any one good. It’s going to mean trouble for everyone, the girl, her
family.” (88-89). Even the police officer dealing with the case is of the same opinion. According to him:

“What difference would it make whether the victim died of an accident or rape. We don’t like rape cases – they are messy and troublesome, never straightforward. But forget that and think of the girl and her family. Do you think it will do them any good to have it known the girl was raped? She’s unmarried, people are bound to talk, and her name would be smeared.” (88)

Even the mother of the victim does not want the case to be registered for she feels that it would blacken her daughter’s name and the fear as to who would marry her second daughter? They don’t want the rapist to be punished; instead they blame the girl for the beastly act. Kalpana’s mother says: “If you paint and flaunt yourself, do you think they’ll leave you alone…. It’s all her fault” (146-47). Kalpana’s mother also says Urmil that we have to keep our places, we can never step out. There are always people waiting to throw stone at us, our own people first of all. I warn Kalpana but she never listen me. “I am not afraid any one,” she used to say. That’s why this happen to her. Kalpana’s mother concludes by saying: “Women must know fear,” (148). But Urmila, unlike other women, does not want the man who has wronged Kalpana to get away easily.

In spite of the fact that Kalpana’s mother wishes for the death of her daughter, Urmila decided to fight her case.

The mother’s reaction, no doubt, is a reflection of the society we live in, governed by age-old patriarchal norms. There is a strict code of conduct to be followed by girls regarding their dress, speech and behavior in order not to
attract the attention of men. A girl is advised at every step to avoid behaving like a male and to establish her feminine identity. A lot of importance is attached to the way she carries herself, the way she sits, stands, talks and interacts with others. Taking long strides denotes masculinity, and so a girl is told to walk with soft steps, so soft that they are barely audible to the others. It is considered sacrilege for a girl to dress or move in such a way so as to bring the contours of her body into greater prominence and attract people’s attention.

If a girl is raped, then, according to the rules laid down by society, she is considered to be as much at fault as the rapist, if not more. Perhaps, there can be no greater injustice heaped on women than this. Worse still, the police whose duty to bring the culprit to book, prefer to record it as an accident as in the case of Kalpana. Dr. Bhaskar, the doctor in charge of the case, protests in outrage at the case being reported as an accident pointing out to the obvious signs of rape on the badly mauled Kalpana, he tells Urmì:

“What about the injuries, I asked him? I’d examined the girl damn it,” Bhaskar says angrily. “You could see the marks of his fingers on her arms where he had held her down. And there were huge contusions on her things- he must have pinned her down with his knees. And her lips bitten and chewed. Surely, I asked, no vehicle could have passed over her lips leaving teeth marks?”

In spite of all her sympathies, Urmì is unable to do anything for Kalpana. She remains a mute spectator until the hospital authorities decide to shift her to a suburban hospital as beds are in much demand in the crowded hospital. Urmì then decides to take the matter to the press so that Kalpana may
get justice. Urmí’s crusade for Kalpana doesn’t receive the approval of either
Vanna or Urmí’s mother. Nevertheless, Urmí pursues the case. Eventually, the
case reopened and the identity of the rapist is revealed only in the end.
However, a perpetuation of the tragedy can’t be avoided as the case draws to a
close. The rapist is discovered to be Shakutai’s sister Sulu’s husband, who, it
is later, revealed, had always, lusted after Kalpana.

Like Kalpana Mira is also raped but the difference is that Mira is raped
by her own husband after marriage by a brutal man. It is almost an entirely
untouched subject of marital rape – hitherto considered a taboo subject by
other Indian writers in English. But Shashi Deshpande has touched this subject
in her novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, in a different context. In *TheBinding
Vine*, however, Deshpande describes the obsession of a man with his wife and
her intense dislike for physical intimacy with him, which finds voice in a
series of poems discovered by the protagonist Urmí long after her death.

Many years after her marriage, Urmí is given an old trunk full of books
and other odds and ends belonging to her long dead mother-in-law, Mira, by
her husband’s step-mother, who is referred to as Akka, Akka also the mother
of her friend Vanna. While handling over the trunk to her, *Akka* tells her how
Urmí’s father-in-law had been attracted to Mira, a college student, and how he
had pursued and married her. Perusing the voluminous pile of writing left
behind by the young Mira, Urmí fathoms the extent of forced sexual activity
Mira was subjected to by her husband. The trunk is full of school notebooks,
which Mira had used as diaries, scribbling pads, untidy bundles of paper, a file
and an envelope full of photographs. Reading through the cryptic poems and
entries in her diary, Urmí is able to reconstruct the tragic tale of a sprightly girl
who was condemned to suffer in an incompatible marriage. After a careful
study she is able to decipher the essence of the thoughts, which Mira had,
perhaps, tried to put down on paper. From the book of poems presented to
Mira by her father, it is evident to Urmì that her father was proud of her talent.
Mira’s photographs and writings resurrect in Urmì’s mind an image of a
vivacious and intelligent young girl. Her desire to be a poet and her inhibitions
about expressing it aloud, her fear of being laughed at, are all obvious in her
poems.

Her innermost feeling find expression in her poems written in the
vernacular, Kannada.

Mira, perhaps, symbolizes the plight of countless women who face the
same situation but are unable to voice their suffering. The invasion of one’s
body even though sanctified by marriage, can be as traumatic as rape. We
come across a similar situation in Shashi Deshpande’s short story “Intrusion”
which describes the experiences of a honeymooning couple. It is a highly
sensitive story where the husband imposes himself on his yet unprepared wife.
Their experiences evocatively bring out the humiliation experienced by the
protagonist who feels her crass and insensitive husband has violated her body.
Even Kamala Das bemoans the lack of love and romance in her marriage life.

A husband imposing himself on his wife is, however, never publicized
at least among the Indians where the Puranas dictate that it is a wife’s duty to
please her husband in bed. Tradition demands that a perfect wife should
possess the following qualities:

Karyesi Dasi

Karyeshu Mantri
Loosely translated, these lines means that a wife should serve her husband like slave, give him proper advice, look as beautiful as goddess Laxmi, forgive all his sins however terrible they may be, feed him like a mother, and serve him like a prostitute in bed. These lines, often quoted as advice to wives, clearly show the injustice meted out to women who are expected to give top priority to their husband’s pleasure.

It is no wonder, then, that Urmi’s mother-in-law, Mira, had to put up in silence with the violation of the body. Her thoughts however, are recorded as poems for posterity. Urmi careful translation of the Kannada poems into English reveals the pathetic condition of Mira. One poem particularly brings home her tragic despair:

“But tell me friend,
did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels
round her finger and tremble,
fearing the coming of the dark-clouded engulfing night. (66)

Going through Mira’s diary, Urmi is convinced that she had written from her personal experience. “She observes that it runs through all her writing a strong, clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion for the man she married”(63). To prove her
point, Urmì narrates a passage where Mira had clearly put down on paper, the
relationship she shared with her husband and her feelings or lack of them for
him:

['Talk, he says to me, why don’t you say something, why don’t you
speak to me? What shall I talk about? I ask him stupidly. “What did you do
today, where did you go, what have you been thinking about all evening?” and
so he goes on, dragging my day, my whole self out of me. But I have my
defenses; 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, he holds me close, he begins to babble. And 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
terrible thing. I have learnt to say “no” at last, but it makes no difference, no
difference at all. What is it he wants from me? I look at myself in the mirror
and wonder, what is there in me? Why does it have to be me? Why can’t he
leave me alone? (67).

Urmì is able to feel her pain and anguish years later and connects her
sorrow to that of Shakutai’s who also has the same thing to say, “Why does
this have happen to me?” (67). Urmì alleviates her grief by discovering and
empathizing with the sorrow of these women. Since the beginning of time, it
had always been taken for granted that marriage provided a means for a man
to satisfy his sexual urge and to help in the task of procreation, and that
woman was only a tool to be used towards that end. While Deshpande’s Mira
represents women who are victims of marital rape, Anita Desai’s Maya, in
Cry, *The Peacock*, represents women whose husbands remain insensitive to their desires. Just as Mira silently subjects herself to nightly assaults of her husband, Maya turns a psychological wreck unable to get any solace from her unresponsive husband.

Husbands and wives are thus bound in an institution, which is being called marriage. Simone de Beauvoir observes:

"Marriage is obscene in principle insofar as it transforms into right and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore degrading character to the two bodies in dooming them to know each other in their general aspect as bodies, not as persons."

Going by this definition by Beauvoir, it would be no exaggeration to say that most Indian marriages are 'obscene; conducted as they are, taking caste, creed, community, financial and social status and everything else except the feelings of the prospective bride and groom into consideration. Countless generations of women have been victims of loveless marriages and several generations will continue to be so if society chooses to ignore the feelings of women.

Though the novel, *The Binding Vine*, essentially revolves around the individual tragedies of Urmī, Mira and Kalpana, Deshpande hints at the raw deal faced by most women at different levels—whether it is women from chawls like Shakutai and Sulu, or the urban, educated women like Urmī's mother, Inni, her friend Vanna and her mother-in-law, like *Akka*.

Mira had no room of her own and had never expected any recognition of her poetry. She is lonely and anguished and puts her desires into her diary
which she had locked in an old trunk for no body else to see for they would call her “mad” for being entranced by the seven colours in a single white ray of light passed through a prism.

Deshpande highlights the injustice meted out to women in the literary world where men dominate. This is not because women are not talented, but because men are considered creatively superior to women. Mira’s diary reveals that Venu, a poet, whom she idolized, was contemptuous of her writing. When she gave him some poems of hers to read, he replied: “why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men” (127).
3.3 FEMALE BONDING AND SOME SOLUTIONS

*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the earlier novels of Deshpande. The step forward, achieved in this novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one. Urmila draws society’s attention to the plight of rape victim and is determined to get Mira’s poems published. This is a positive development in the protagonist, for Sarita, Jaya and Indu were involved in fighting their own battles.

In this novel Urmia the protagonist of Deshpande’s novel is suffering from the death of her daughter Anu so a kind of apathy arouses in her heart towards Sakutai who is the mother of rape victim and towards Mira Urmia’s mother-in-law.

In the novel, one woman helps another less fortunate woman, as Vanna helps Urmia to come out from the death of her daughter, And Urmia helps Mira and Shakutai. It comes as a shocking revelation to Urmia that everybody wants to hush up the rape case and the general reaction to it is “okay, she was raped. But publicizing it isn’t going to do anyone good. It’s going to mean trouble for everyone, the girl, her family.” (88-89) Not only the police officers, but also her mother’s reaction was very strange. The same Shakutai; however, condemns her for the very things for which she praised her earlier:

“And I have to listen to such words because of the girl. She’s shamed us, we can never wipe off this blot. And Prakash blames me – what could I do? She was so self-willed. Cover yourself decently, I kept telling her, men are like animals. But she went her way. You should
have seen her walking out, head in the air caring for nobody. It’s all her fault, Urmila, all her fault. (14)

Urmil, however, is unable to see the point in blaming Kalpana. She is outraged that the rapist will be allowed to get away scot-free, if the case is not registered as a rape. She tries to reason with Shakutai: “She was hurt, she was injured, wronged by a man; she didn’t do anything wrong. Why can’t you see that? Are you blind? It’s not her fault, no, not her fault at all” (147). She is unable to convince Shakutai, who keeps saying, “But sometimes, I think the only thing that can help Kalpana now is death” (147), Shakutai, who keeps meandering between praising her daughter and criticizing her.

In spite of all her sympathies, Urmil is unable to do anything for Kalpana. She remains a mute spectator until the hospital authorities decide to shift her to a suburban hospital as beds are in much demand in the crowded hospital. Urmil then decides to take the matter to the press so that Kalpana may get justice. Eventually, the case is responded and the identity of the rapist is revealed only in the end.

Shashi Deshpande also deals with the problem of rape in marriage. Mira, Urmila’s mother-in-law had died in childbirth. She had four years of loveless marriage leading to her “dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical revulsion from the man she marries”. (63) Sex, to her, had become like “the sting of a scorpion”. Her husband had been least understanding and she could never speak to him of her wants. Leaving her with no other option but to express her desire in her poems, which she secretly wrote in her diary, Urmila wants to expose the evils of society and encourages women to express themselves strongly.
According to Urmila marriage, for women, is a necessity. Marriage is important because “You are safe from other men”. Even Kalpana’s mother who is suffering from constant poverty and the ill-treatment meted out to her by her drunken husband feels the same and wants to push her daughter into this kind of savagery. Urmila’s satisfactory marriage gives her the courage to fight for the cause of another woman who has not been that lucky and also to reject Bhasker’s overtures to her.

Difference in the attitude towards women as compared to that of men is another theme, which is dealt with in The Binding Vine. Urmila’s mother has never been a doting mother for she sends Urmila away to her grandparents’ house leaving her alone with Amurut, Urmila’s brother. At least this is what Urmila has always felt. Added to this is the fact the daughters do not want to be like their mothers. As Mira expresses her desire: “to make myself in your image was never the goal I sought”. (124). She had never wanted to repeat her mother’s history although she had no idea as to the happiness or unhappiness of her mother. Kalpana too does not want to live like her mother; she wants to choose her own life. Urmila has been luckier than these women for she was born in a family where she has had a choice to plan for herself and her daughter. She would not let anything fetter her daughter, not even her love and let her climb high and do whatever she would want to do. This is the reason why she mourns the death of her infant daughter and whereas Shakuntala, Kalpana’s mother, curses the birth of her daughter and wishes her dead. Thus we see that, Urmila’s desire to help a less fortunate woman, Kalpana, a rape victim and to get Mira’s poems published is a
positive development of a woman from the earlier novels of Shashi Deshpande.
Notes and references


3 Adele King, “*Effective Portrait*” Debonair, June 1988 p.97.


6 John Cunningham, “*Indian Writer’s Block*”, *The Indian past*, March 6,1988.

7 Ibid.


