Shashi Deshpande occupies a distinctive place in contemporary Indian English fiction because of her unequivocal feminist stance. Her novels deal with the female characters who occupy central position. As a novelist Deshpande has particular interest in analysing women characters and suggesting the unusual poignancy of their fate. Apart from various influences by Indian writers. She has also been influenced by some of the western feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer. In her interview with Vanmala Viswanath, Deshpande informs us that these feminists have not influenced her directly, but they have "helped to place ...... confusions and put them in order". These confusions should have presumably been about the choice of her subject-matter, its small or large canvas and about the leading role, and through her practice in short stories. She took no time deciding these vital issues. She made her novels, including That Long Silence (1988), women oriented, opting for the 'two inches of ivory' like Jane Austen and allowing the domineering role to her female protagonists. She confesses that "only a woman could write my books they
are written from the inside as it were". Thus Deshpande write from her own experiences of the educated middle-class Indian woman's predicament, and her novels and short stories tend to be gender-specific. She minutely analyses the unwholesome situation in which a sensitive woman has to live and move about, caught between the powerful currents of tradition and patriarchy of terror and suppression such a woman inescapably subjected to physical tortures and sexual assaults in society. Consequently, her personality is crushed, her voice is hushed up, and her instinct of self assertion gets catapulted.

Deshpande attempts to analyse man-woman relationships within the ambit of family and society, and usually concentrates on the experiences gained in life, recalling yet another instance of Jane Austen with her narrow range and limited knowledge. Like Jane Austen, again, she is primarily concerned with the intriguing problems and the suffocating environs of her female protagonists, who struggle hard in this cruel and callous male dominated world to discover their true identity as daughter wife, mother and above all, as human beings.

A search for 'self' necessarily implies an individual's quest for identity in this distracting world. It is a self analysis and a self probe into the existential problems of woman. In Deshpande's short stories, the traditional and taboo Indian society provides little scope for the independent growth of a
woman. Consequently, she has to undergo a number of restrictions and inhibitions, originating from her terribly controlled life during her childhood, youth and old age. A search for 'self' is a very valid point of departure for modern Indian women from the shackles of society, for it enables them to throw away the rotten customs and rituals and to instill a sense of dignity and self respect in their lives. It would be worth while to examine how far Shashi Deshpande has thrashed women's problems and situations in a fast changing social scenario.

When Shashi Deshpande's first volume of short stories, *The Legacy and other stories* (1978), appeared it captured the notice of readers and reviewers K.R. Srinivisa Iyengar considered this work along with Raji Narasimhan's *The Marriage of Bela* (1978) and Juliette Banerjee's *The Boy Friend* (1978) and remarked of them that these writers wrote about "the tears in things, the little upsets in life, the price one has to pay for one acute self awareness, and the loneliness that becomes more pronounced as one gets older and older."3

The first important story in *The Legacy* from the viewpoint of our discussion is "A Liberated woman", which brings out the temperamental and situational contrasts between a married couple - a successful lady doctor and a frustrated Lecturer devoted to his teaching, owing to their contrastive jobs and situations, they cannot pull on well, and things get out of control when a magazine interviewer humiliates him for
his inability to bear the financial burden of the family. He now
turns a sadist torturing her in bed at night in all possible ways
and inflicting bruises upon her tender body. The interviewer
calls her "a Liberated woman", but in reality, she is totally
helpless in the given situation. The story writer comments:

"But what really astonishes me is her feebleness, her
attitude of despairing indifference. Surely, she an educated,
earning, competent woman, has no right to behave this way
...... to plug all her escape routes herself and act like a rat in a
trap".

As regards the strange behavior of the husband towards
her, he is a suitable case for the psychiatrist to study. In this
story, the woman's predicament is similar to that of Sarita in
The Dark Holds No Terrors, where Manohar behaves in the
same abnormal fashion. Sarita feels utterly dispirited and
dejected in the face of nocturnal terrors and tortures. In her
spousal home she is no better than "a terrified, trapped
animal". Great desperation runs away to her father for respite
and succour.

Similarly, the fatty old woman portrayed in "The First
Lady" finds her life quite boring and meaningless, though she
is the wife of a Gandhian with three children and all the
comforts of modern life. Even the independence Day function
does not arouse any interest or zeal in her. She blurts out: "
Yes, I Love my comforts but for these comforts we've bartered

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away our immortal souls, and the whole price has not yet been paid."

The same sense of boredom and dissatisfaction grips the young married woman in "An Antidote to Boredom". She meets a young widower at her son's school and comes to feel that life can be lived at an intense level in the enjoyable company of that man. She develops, however, a feeling of guilt towards her son, though not towards her careless and indifferent husband. Another story called "Death of a child", deals with a woman's problem of having unwanted pregnancy and the abortion of the child.

The title-tale in *It was Dark* (1986) depicts the plight of an unmarried girl having been molested by an unknown young man, resulting in her illegal pregnancy and leading to a great shock. In this tale the 'man' is identified with 'the dark' or 'the evil', though the girl thinks that both of them are the engines of tyranny and forced submission: "There was no enemy but the dark, no fear but the fear of being alone."

Another story in this volume called "My Beloved charioteer" brings out the estranged relationship between a couple having two little daughters. "The Alien" highlights the predicament of a young, married Indian woman now shifted to England, the land of shopkeepers. Her man is out for most of the time, and she is left to watch T.V. and look after her baby. She cannot understand even the type of English the Britishers use. She feels totally lonely and dejected here: "the colour, she thought..."
bleakly, of hopelessness and despair. Even a fog would be better than this nothingness. Through the images of 'bleak colour' and 'fog', the woman's great disquietude, alienation and frustration are beautifully suggested in this story.

Another story in this volume entitled "The Window" has a lesbian touch about it. The bulky landlady whose husband is no more alive, living all alone in her two-storeyed building, lets out two rooms to a newly married couple, and when the man goes out to teach in a school. She opens the window with a fierce jerk and jumps into the young woman's room and pesters her with all sorts of odd questions. While going out of the room, the landlady blurts out: "you're pretty, very pretty, does he ever tell you that?" (p.50). She invites her upstairs, and the young woman starts crying aloud. A different kind of love affairs - romantic, filmi, villainous and gruesome -is portrayed in "Anatomy of a murder", where a young slum-dweller working as an assistant in a grocery shop and being very fond of movies, catches a glimpse of a white skinned, well educated and middle aged woman and instantly becomes infatuated with her. He misinterprets her smiles and takes a bag of provisions to her flat, and on being asked to close the door after him pounces upon her in a sudden spurt of emotions and throttless her then and there. Then he sits beside her "still and motionless" (p.58) without committing any act of robbery or rape. The story definitely demonstrates the
disastrous impact of romantic and melodramatic movies on young minds.

The fourth and till date the last volume of short stories opens with "The Miracle". It is more concerned with the miracle of worshipping a monkey called Raja (who does not die even after getting a dose of poison by a research-prone doctor) than with the question of self searching. But we discover a fairly good deal of seal searching in "I want ....", where a twenty seven old woman named Alka is subjected to "the insolent stares [and] the impertinent questions" by the groom's party. The young woman feels much uneasiness, consternation, and hopelessness. She ruminates: "The women in me was outraged and protested. I crushed her. She had no place there. None at all". She is terribly stirred within and remarks: "Sometimes I feel we are all doomed to be strangers to one another, forever sealed in separate glass jars we call 'self' " (p.36). What keeps Alka apart from the common women is a strong sense of 'self' that she wants to preserve at all costs. In a mood of self-preservation, she observes: "I had a shape and form I had to preserve. A self I had to treasure" (p.37). Clearly she is a woman of consciousness and wants to discover her integral identity. As regards marriage, she has little or no choice of her own; her parents are there to safeguard her interests. But Alka being a thinking woman, has her own desires to fulfill. Though she does not want a husband having a -figure salary or a car,
she still desires a man who "hears my voice even when I speak who understands me even when I don't" (p.42). In the end, she accepts the reassurances of her Baba. Another story "Madhu" narrates the wayward ways of a young girl of that name, driving her mother to fury and irritation and her father to the hospital with a severe heart-stroke. Her brother, Vinay, is away in Bombay doing his medical course. Towards the close of the story, Madhu realises that 'sacrifice' is a noble virtue in human beings, and in a mood of remorse remarks: "I'll sacrifice something, I like very much and maybe I'll get the other thing" (p.53). This is, of course, a vague realisation on her part, and a belated one too. But 'All's well that ends well'.

The search for 'self' is a recurrent theme in Shashi Deshpande's short stories and novels. One may keep her stories and novels side by side in order to realise their close concord in respect of subject-matter and treatment. In reality, one is an extension of the other in this regard. As we have seen in the stories Deshpande's women's are usually sensitive and thoughtful creatures, who ruminate over their fate and position in conservative society. They endeavour to know what they are, how menfolk behave with them, why they slump into insanity and desperation, and why they feel alienated and truncated. Obviously, Deshpande is at home in portraying her women characters in dismal and dreadful conditions. In this
matter, she reminds us of the disquietude, frustration and helplessness of the female protagonists in Anita Desai's novels.

The search for 'self' is so insistent in Deshpande's fictional world that one does not feel a change of thought or climate anywhere. Her first novel The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980) for example depicts Sarita as a person divided into two halves- a "two-in-one woman" who is hardly better than "a terrified trapped animal". As a conscious child, she marries Manohar out of her caste and against the wishes of her parents. But after a few years of happy married life they drift apart mentally and emotionally. The plight of totally terror-stricken, helpless and exhausted Sarita is beautifully brought out in the following passage:

The dream, the nightmare, whatever it was, continued changing now, like some protean monster, into the horror of rape. This was not to be death by strangulation; it was a monstrous invasion of my body. I tried to move twisting my body, wriggling under the weight that pinned it down. It was impossible; I was pinioned to a position of an object surrender of myself. I began, in sheer helplessness to make small whimpering sounds, piteous cries.

Getting no respite from his nocturnal tortures and terrors, Sarita goes away to her lonely father leaving behind her two children and husband only to return at the close of the novel, like Sita of Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer. Shashi Deshpande depicts the anxiety of the educated, independent, middleclass Indian women searching
for a balance between her traditional role as daughter, wife, and mother in a predominantly patriarchal society, and her new freedom and private space. Shashi Deshpande in her works defines freedom for the Indian woman within the Indian socio-cultural value system and institutions. She has steadfastly resisted the temptation of creating strong glorified female heroes, and presented the Indian woman as facing the very real dilemma of having to choose between modernity and convention. Deshpande bares the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operative within the institution of the family and the male centered Indian society at large. Deshpande's feminism does not uproot the woman from the background but tries to expose the different ideological elements that shape her. These include religious and cultural elements and social and psychological factors. The protagonists of Shashi Deshpande's are modern educated, independent women, roughly between the age of thirty and thirty five. Their search for freedom and self identity within marriage is a recurring theme.

Sarita's quest for self identity in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) leads her into her past in the course of which she comes to terms with a traumatic childhood experience and a problematic marital relationships. *Roots and Shadows* (1983) traces the attempts of Indu to resolve her personal crisis through a temporary return to the old house where she had grown up. Jaya interrogates her past in *That Long...*
Silence (1988) to arrive at a solution to her present predicament. Urmila in The Binding Vine delves into the past to redefine her relationships and her identity as an individual. Deshpande offers feminist critiques of the patriarchal Indian society. Deshpande's art lies in selecting situations with which most Indian women can identify. Her focus is on the woman within the marital, domestic relationship she seeks to expose the ideology by which a woman is trained to play her subservient role in society. Her novels employ the post modern technique of deconstructing patriarchal culture and customs and revealing these to be man-made constructs. Her first and foremost target is the girl child's socialization which is achieved by co-opting the women in the family. Sarita, the protagonist of The Dark Holds No Terrors grows up a victim of her mother's gender bias. As a child she is aware of her mother's preference for her brother, although she does not comprehend it fully. Returning to her parental home as an adult, Sarita recalls various incidents that emphasize the difference in the upbringing of her brother and herself. As an educated woman and feminist, she now rewrites her childhood with an awareness of gender injustice. She recalls that:

"There was always a puja on Dhruva's birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening. My Birthday's were almost the same but there was no puja". (169). It is obvious that Sarita's birthday, does not rate a puja, because she is a girl. Sarita also remembers that after
Dhruva's death, there were no celebrations in the family because she was only a girl; it would have been different if she had been a boy. In another incident, Sarita remembers the constant reminders a girl gets about her destiny to get married and leave home:

Don't go out into the sun. You'll get even darker.
Who cares?
We have to care even if you don't.
We have to get you married.
I don't want to get married.
Will you live with us all your life?
Why not?
You can't.
and Dhruva?
He's different. He's a boy (45).

The conversation reveals a mother's anxiety lest anything should mar her daughter's appearance or complexion and make it difficult to get her married. In the emphasis on a fair complexion, that must not grow dark and an appearance that should remain attractive (because men like it so) lies a concrete example of De Beauvoir's observation that a woman is defined reference to man. In the value that is subtly endowed upon a woman getting selected for the marriage also lies the fear of abandonment and rejection by man. Tillie Olsen sees in such socialization the origin of a girl/woman's silence or oppression because it is a slow, corrosive form of mental colonization and pacification.
“The leeching of belief, of will the damaging of capacity begin so early. Sparse is the literature on the way of denial to small girl children of the development of their endowment as born human: active vigorous, bodies, exercise of power to do to make to investigate, to invent, to conquer obstacles, to resist violations of the self.... Little has been written on the harms of instilling constant concern with appearance; the need to please......” (in Eagleton 54, italics added)

Through this dialogue between mother and daughter, Deshpande also foregrounds the ideological concept that the girl child is a temporary resident in her home, a burden, a liability and a responsibility to be passed on to the in laws. And when she is married, she is expected to surrender her natal identity.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels present before us a sensitive portrayal of Indian womanhood without ever seeming to be defensive about it. Though in one of her interview she has remarked that she does not possess any specific mission as a writer and has resisted the tag of a woman writer, her themes and motifs are based on the lives and problems of women only.13 Her work passionately concentrates on the predicament of women and men are pushed towards the periphery. Her plots and subplots provide a pointer to the catatonic status of women in the tradition bound male dominated middle class society of contemporary India in which they are struggling to overcome the constricting dilemmas of the prefixed definitions
and thus attempting to redefine their status. The attitudinal postures of Deshpande's protagonists confirm the theory of Julia Kristeva that the consideration of femininity as marginality offers a position and not the essence, as they exhibit the courage to transcend the marginality and activate their participation in life.¹⁴

Balzac wrote in "Physiology of marriage",

"Pay no attention to a woman's murmurs, her cries, her pains, nature has made her for our use and for bearing everything: children, sorrows, blows and pains inflicted by man. Do not accuse yourself of hardness. In all the codes of so-called civilized nations, man has written the laws that ranged woman's destiny under this bloody epigraph: "Vae victis" woe to the weak."¹⁵

The backdrop of most of Deshpande's novels has been prepared by women who are a victim of such pathogenic misogyny. These women have suffered the atrocities of men in silence and without protest, as they were not aware of protest as an option to change their world. Their inner turmoil, flabbergasted emotional resilience and relational bondage has been suggestively juxtaposed against the desperate struggle of her protagonists to define and obtain a self-hood, thus putting it in a sustained and sharpened focus to indicate the changing dynamics of man-woman relation. Deshpande's narratives bear the authenticity of a woman's signature. She has rejected the masculine dialect and the masculine
perception of virtue, relationship and content, and laid before us the subversive role of tradition in perpetuating the secondary role of women, emphasizing the need of discrediting its legacies if women have to emerge as liberated and emancipated beings.

In her march towards emancipation and self-hood, the contemporary Indian woman has to struggle against the insensitive fatality of options and the indoctrination of centuries which endeavour to fashion her into the mould of 'Womanhood' with a silent persistence. "The true woman", Simone De Beauvoir remarks, "is an artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made. Her presumed 'instincts' for coquetry, docility are indoctrinated, as is phallic pride in man".16 Shashi Deshpande has portrayed women who exhibit the results of this indoctrination in their psyche and behaviour. Her Ajis and Kakis are the women who could not have the opportunity to develop and grow except in home and family related roles and have surrendered to the traditional claptrap about the women's place at home only.

That Long Silence (1988) is Deshpande's fifth novel which repeats and reinforces the thematic approach taken by her in the previous four novels. The quotations from Elizabeth Robins which has been used as an epigraph in the novel presents it with a sharper focus. "If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a
shade uneasy - the weight of That Long Silence of one half the world".

Jaya was aware of an inner void, a hollowness in her life, even though it was shielded by the deceptively beautiful screen of her social graces and obligations. Her stream of consciousness makes it clear that even in the educated upper middle classes the intrinsic value of intelligent and capable woman is invariably affected by her social/married status, since the social treats her as an object or a possession never as an individual. There are moments when for Jaya, social and familial responsibilities do not remain a pleasure but become a bondage, because she is forced to accept these compulsively as a female. Her married life forces her to put herself on exhibition, but it did not enable her to understand herself successfully. Instead of taking her out of her isolation, it confirms her alienation from the personal and social worlds. Her inability to establish a normal relationship with her husband enhances her frustration. However, she overcomes the barrier of this unnatural silence after a bitter struggle and realises that negation of one's emotional needs never leads a woman towards self-hood an understanding of one's motives, accepting responsibilities for one's decisions and clear bilateral communication of priorities and decisions is required to obtain peace, harmony and fulfillment in life.
A major problem which the feminist studies and fiction face in terms of thematic clarity lies in the impossibility of a comprehensive representation of feminine problems within the Indian framework. Most of such work centres on the upper middle class urban society. It is considered that with better exposure to education and vocational opportunities the middle-class woman is learning to be vocal and assertive about her rights. Enhanced economic prosperity and nuclear family pattern have liberated her from the clutches of the "cruel family", and she is free to manage her household as she wills. It is perceived that owing to these reasons the role of tradition in perpetuating the bondage of women is gradually diminished. Such studies often ignore the plight of the rural/underprivileged women on the assumption that such women have always worked. This generalization ignores the socio-cultural realities as such women cannot choose not to work. That Long Silence underlines the fact that the drudgery and work does not liberate. Such women, it only reminds them of their economic and class oppression. Work does not constitute a choice in their life for Mukta, Jeeja and Nayana work is a financial compulsion.

Mukta is a widow caring for her old mother and teenage daughter Neelima. She is economically independent, firm and competent in her handling of strange situations, yet unable to overcome the superstitions. However she wants her daughter to be free of them. She does not riddle. Neelima with
innumerous fasts on Hartalika and other days. Her desolate life has not sapped away her compassion towards others. She recognizes Jaya's and also of Kamat's loneliness and sympathises with it. She comes across as a women who has decided to stoically circumvent social complexities in order to live. Jeeja, too has decided to live her life as it is given to her. Jaya is angry at her Silence, as it puts a gloss of placidity over her sufferings, but Jeeja has no hostility behind her silence. She has accepted ill-treatment at the hands of her husband, as she could not have a child. Yet she endures it with a patience and with visions of better future for her grandchildren. Nayana, the help maid, too views life with a dispassionate objectivity. She wants to have a son, not because she expects any help from him in her old age, but because she does not want her child, her daughter to be discriminated against by the society hands of her husband, as she could not have a child. Yet she endures it with a patience and with visions of better future for her grandchildren. Nayana, the help maid, too views life with a dispassionate objectivity. She wants to have a son, not because she expects any help from him in her old age, but because she does not want her child, her daughter to be discriminated against by the society. She knows that a boy shall at least have some effortless individuality, which is denied to a girl, “why give birth to a girl behnji who’ll only because of men all her life? No, no better to have a son” (28).
Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine* (1993), like the earlier novels, portrays her middleclass female protagonist's predicament in a male dominated society. It also shrines her search for love meaning and happiness in life, a search for something to cling in the strange world. She has preforce to live. Shashi Deshpande's conjures up a woman's vision of life which is expressed in the novel partly through the consciousness of Urmila, the female protagonist, and partly through the consciousness of other female characters like Vanna, Urmila's friend Mira, the mother in law, and Shakutai.

The middle class woman today is not merely educated; she is a breadwinner and supplements her husband's income to maintain the standard of living they aspire to provide for their children. She has thus assumed a new role herself in the wake of changing circumstances. This has however, not exonerated her from the traditional role and responsibility in the family which, in addition to her career-consciousness, has led to severe problems of adjustment and is the main cause of her agony. Today - children feel neglected in the absence of the mother from the following piece of conversation among Mandira, Urmila's niece and Urmila herself depicts the fact:

"You know, urmi auntie, when I grow up, I'm never going to leave my children to go to work"
"What will you do?"
"Stay at home and look after them"
"When they grow up, they'll go away and won't need you.
What
will you do then?"
"Then I'll go and work."
"Who'll give you a job when you're old?"
"I don't care, I'll never leave my children along." (72).

Mandira dislikes being left to the care of a maid servant:
"I don't want Hirabai, I want my mother" (72) later Mandira's mother also says to Urmila: "Urmia there was a time when all children and look after my family. I thought that was happiness" (73).

In view of the antagonism between the daughter and the mother, Vanaa feels that things would have been different if Harish, her husband, were a bit co-operative. She wonders: "Why is it nobody thinks of blaming Harish. He is never around" (75).

Urmila thinks that "it is women who take parenthood seriously, men don't to the same extent anyway" (76).

This is true of at least Urmila's Shakutai's and Sulu's husbands. Urmila's was a love marriage. There was a time when her life was full of ecstasy and she was fearless and confident as her love gave her immense strength. But now she realises that she has married a man "who flits into her life a few months in a year and flits out again leaving nothing of himself" (164). Instead of being confident she is now under a constant fear of losing him. Shakutai's husband, although a father of three children, has actually abandoned her and is living with another woman. Had he lived with Shakutai, her sister Sulu's husband would have never dared to touch Shakutai's daughter, Kalpana or cherished the dream of marrying her.
Being protectionless Kalpana is raped by him and fatally injured. Sulu, his wife, commits suicide. That man is shrewd enough to understand another man's weakness better than woman is made clear in the novel through Urmila's. She often wonders why as a child she was sent away by her parents to be brought up at her grandparent's house. She learns from her mother in the last section of the novel that her father could not trust his wife and thought she could not or would not look after Urmila properly. He had apprehensions about leaving the female child to the care of a male servant. He had said to his wife: "He's a man, Diwaker!" (199).

Woman pines for love and understanding in married life. Instead, she is made to suffer from her fear. Talking about Sulu, Shakutai says:

"After marriage she changed. She was frightened, always frightened. What if he doesn't like this, what if he wants that, what if he angry with me, what if he throws me out ....? Nobody should live like that, Urmila, so full of fears (196)."

Deshpande implies that a marriage based on fear can never be happy. That marriage in which the girl's feeling or choice is not taken into consideration can be equally disastrous is made clear through Mira's example. Mira, Urmila's mother in law, died after giving birth to Kishore, Urmila's husband. Her diary and poems discovered decades later, reveal to Urmila that her mother-in-law was subjected to rape in marriage. Urmila learns that Mira's husband had seen
her at a wedding ceremony and at once fallen in love with her. As he could not directly make her the marriage proposal, he got a mutual friend to do that. The proposal was accepted and the marriage was settled. It was however, a disaster for Mira. Her poetry becomes so pathetic at times that even Akka, her husband's second wife, is moved to tears after reading a poem about a newly married couple. Urmila wonders:

"Akka who hadn't cried when her husband died, who had been stoical while Vanna sobbed like a child when she went to Bombay to study, who had been calm even when Vanna got married and went away - why had she broken now? (48)."

From diary it becomes clear that she intensely disliked the sexual act with her husband; she felt a physical repulsion from the man. She married (65) she hated the very word 'love'. She writes in her diary:

"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. What is there in me? Why does it have to me? Why can't he leave alone? (65)."

Urmila realises that "what has happened to Kalpana happened to Mira too" (63). Mira was raped by her husband while Kalpana is raped by a man who is like her father. What pains Urmila is that such things are never reported to police. They are often treated as accidents for the sake of girls and her family's reputation or they are rigorously suppressed. Shakutai's remarks:

"If a girl's honour is lost, what's left? The girl doesn't have to do anything wrong .... People will themselves point a
finger at her... even if it is true, keep it to yourself, don't let anyone know of it. I have another daughter, what will become of her.....?(59)

Although Shakutai's shows so much concern for daughter, we also come across instances of gender discrimination in the novel. Recollecting the memories of childhood, Urmila remarks that Vanna always laughed at the jokes of her father "so that he would notice her. But he never did for him, there was only Kishore" (52). Later Vanna also accepts: "I wonder, whether he knows I exist" (53). The theme of discrimination between a male and a female child is more pronouncedly taken up in The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980).

Besides portraying gender discrimination and violence against woman, Shashi Deshpande makes severe attack on the arranged marriage. In an earlier novel called Roots and Shadows (1983), Indu reflects upon marriage, saying: "What was marriage after all, but two people brought together after the cold blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce so that the generations might continue "(3) in That Long Silence (1989) husband and wife are compared to "a pair of bullocks yoked together" (7). In The Binding Vine, to Urmila the back of the bride's neck, nervously waiting for the first night, looks "like a lamb's waiting for the butcher's knife to come down upon it" (63). Urmila calls arranged marriage an
absolutely cold blooded affair because in such a marriage the
girl's feelings are ignored and she suffers and remains
vanquished throughout her life. Unable to assert herself, she
keeps slaving for her husband and his family. Vanna's and
Shakutai's marriages are examples of this Urmila feels
irritated at Vanna's submissiveness before her husband:

"You let him get away with you too much I tell her ".
"What do you want me to do?"
"Assert yourself you don't have to crawl before him, do
you?"
"I don't crawl, I do what I want"
"No, you don't you're scared of him, yes you are. I've seen
you " (80).

Vanna is really unable to assert before her husband even
in matters where her say should be important. Soon after the
birth of the second daughter her husband decides to have no
more children although Vanna would have personally loved to
have a son. "You should have told Harish that " says Urmila
to Vanna, to which Vanna replies:

" I did. And he quoted population figures at me. And he
said, one surely I'm not the kind of woman who craves for
sons, am I? And two, what makes me think the next one
will be a boy? He is right, only ... I wouldn't have minded
taking a chance " (81).

It is Vanna's face when she says this that makes Urmila
furious, and she bursts out: "You let him bull dozer - you
crawl before him " (81). The servile attitude of Woman is hinted
at through Shakutai’s example also. Although she has been abandoned by her husband, she feels secret pleasure whenever he calls upon her. Dr Bhaskar wonders: "What has she got out of marriage - except for the children, of course? And yet she longing for her daughter’s marriages "(87). As a woman she knows that for a girl there is something in the marriage. It offers security to her and safeguards her from other men. Urmila is not pessimistic about marriage. She is aware of the changings times and knows that girls will no longer be so submissive and will not marry against their wishes. Kalpana laughs away Sulu’s proposal to her when Sulu’s says that her husband is desirous to have Kalpana as his second wife. She asks Sulu: Don’t you know, he can’t have a second wife now! He can go to Jail "(193). She opposes this marriage despite her mother’s approval of it.

Urmila feels appalled when Bhaskar tells her that his mother has made a list of eligible girls from his community and collected their photographs. Bhaskar is unable to understand Urmila’s dislike of it. He asks:

"Tell me what’s wrong with it? You believe in marriage - for love, you think only that is right?" (160). Urmila replies:

"It’s not that just .... this seems so cold blooded. As if all those girls are objects in a catalogue. You know what I mean"(160). Being a man, Bhaskar fails to see anything wrong in it and calls it sensible. Urmila has to tell him: "It leaves
out the girls. Girls aren't going to meekly accept any man their parents choose for them - not anymore" (160).

A Complacment man like Bhaskar fails to understand how any girls can reject a man like him who has money status and family reputation. Urmila tries to correct another presumption of men like her own brother that women do not want to be dominated. She tells her brother:

"No human being wants to be dominated. The most important need is to love. From the moments of our births, we struggle to find something with which we can anchor ourselves in only when we love do we find this anchor" (137).

This love is difficult from and need not be confused with sex: "Sex is only a temporary answer" (139). True love has redemptive power for ever. Urmila recalls some such moments of true love which act as "the spring of life":

"I think of Vanna, heavily pregnant sitting to me holding my hand during the pains before Kartik was born. I remember Kishore's face when he first saw Anu. I think of Akka crying for Mira, of Inni's grief when Papa told her about his illness, of Papa's anguished face watching her, of the touch of grace there was in Shakutai's hand when she covered me gently at night while I slept, of the love with which she speaks of her sister, of Sandhya..." (203)

The passage from Shashi Deshpande novel cited just above is reminiscent of a similar incident from Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975). The female protagonist, Sita says to her husband: "Do you know in all these years we've lived together, in bombay, I have known only one happy moment?" (146) When asked to describe it,
Sita recalls the sight of a "fatally anaemic or fatally tubercular" (146) pale young beautiful woman, her head lying in the tap of an old man and her face being tenderly caressed by him, "so tenderly, so tenderly, I have never seen such tender, such gentle movements" (146). Sita does not know whether the old man was that woman's father, or husband or a lover. She adds: "They were like a work of art - so apart from the rest of us. They were not like us ... so strange ... that love, that sadness, not like anything I've seen or known" (146-47).

Significantly enough, Urmila's memory of the happiest moments of tender love is related mostly to people other than her husband, which is highly suggestive of the estrangement of man-woman relationship. Shashi Deshpande's female characters are sharply and vividly drawn but her male characters are shadowy figures. Although Urmila, Mira, Vanna and Shakutai suffer from discontent, they do not rebel against the system probably because they have feeling that things are gradually improving although their pace is very slow. They do not feel alienated from their husbands: Mira escapes into the world of poetry and writing diary, and Urmila develops dislike for the money her husband sends her. When Vanna chides her for it, Urmila remarks:

"She doesn't understand that I intend to live on the money I earn, that I will use Kishore's money only when I have to" (94).
Shakutai's dislike of her husband is still stronger. One of her dreams was to have her mangalsutra made on gold. Then one day she thinks: "The man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this thing made in precious gold?" (110). She considers her marriage to that man the greatest misfortune of her life. Although Shashi Deshpande has tried to articulate the hurts and agonies of woman experienced in a male dominated society her vision of life is not pessimistic. This is evident from the "spring of life" Urmila searches for in The Binding Vine.

For ages, woman lived under the protection of either parents or husband or her children. The new educated has awakened to her real self. As a result of this she starts craving for independent and self reliant status in life.

The modern educated young woman questions the man's willful unconcern for woman's wishes, likes and dislikes. She not only earns money but also attends to her household chores. Undoubtedly, the modern, educated young woman's struggle against the age old slavery suffering and suppression is a welcome development. But this striving of the modern woman to be free and self reliant is often debilitated by her timidity and diffidence. In the course of this crusade, she suffers from certain weaknesses and complexes which have been very honestly highlighted by the Indian woman novelists. Their heroines are all along to retain their individuality in the
teeth of disintegrating and dislike forces that threaten their identity” (Swain: 86).

The new education has gradually made her conscious of futility or emptiness of the various long-preserved notions and taboos about the woman, and she has started opposing and breaking them. And this crusade at times make her feel alone and alienated.

This new woman is Indu, the woman protagonist of Shashi Deshpande’s first published novel, *Roots and Shadows*. Indu, an educated woman, is highly sensitive. She starts aspiring to become independent and complete in herself. She keeps aside all the age-old beliefs and superstitions prevalent in the society. As a motherless child, she was tended by the members of the joint family who never denied her any amount of care and affection. Old uncle, Kaka Atya and other family members always cushioned her position in the family. But now she finds the dominant Akka, a senior member and a mother surrogate in the novel, and even the family to be a hindrance in achieving her goal of attaining independence and completeness. Indu, from a very tender age, has always hated Akka, for her narrow-mindedness. She resents her not going to the hospital for as she says," God knows what caste the nurses are,... or the doctors. I couldn't drink a drop of water there " (21). Akka is like Mrs Quest of Doris lessings Maratha's Quest in forebidding Indu's meeting boys. Indu rebels against the suffocated authority of Akka and the
oppressive atmosphere of the family where women have no choice but to submit and accept their lot. Right from her childhood, it is dinned into Indu's mind by the women members of the family that she as a female and that she has to conform to the pattern of behaviour expected of females, but Indu resents this:

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

The exaggerated importance assigned to a woman in terms of virginity is also responsible to a great extent in enforcing strict restrictions on her movements as soon as she reaches the age of puberty and as the girl mature, her mother's authority weighs more heavily upon her. Indu bitterly recollects how crudely the idea of her womanhood was thrust upon her:

"My womanhood .... I had never thought of it until the knowledge had been thrust brutally, gracelessly on me the day I had grown up. " you're a woman now, Kaki had told me. " you can have babies yourself. I a woman? My mind had flung off the thoughts with an amazing swiftness. I was only a child. And then, she had gone on to tell me badly, crudely, how I could have a baby. And I who had all the child's unselfconsciousness about my own body had for the first time felt an immense hatred for it. And don't forget, she had ended,' for four days now you are unclean. You can't touch anyone or anything. '(79).
She starts fighting against her womanhood Indu. She hates the utter femininity of the girls hostel where she resides, and narrates the incidents that reveal the tactlessness of her relatives in that period of traumatic, pubertal transitions. The idea that the body is unclean has been planted in her mind Indu develops an aversion to the natural biological functions of the female as mother and her as an apathy towards bearing a child. She develops a vague sense of guilt and feels that her womanhood closes so many doors for her. Simone de Beauvoir observes:

"For an adolescent girl, her first menstruation reveals this meaning and her feeling of shame appear. If they were already present, and they are strengthened and exaggerated from this time on (Beauvoir:335)

Indu, on the other hand, rebels against the narrow conventions and more particularly, the tyrannical authority of Akka on matters of education, love and marriage. She reacts: "there was only one thing she wanted and that was to dominate" and for her it is "A Declaration of Independence" (68).

Defying the traditional role. Indu's seeks fulfillment in education and career. As Indu explains the reason for shift:

"Women, women, women...... I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the key. I couldn't go on". (78).
Indu strives to seek a new environment where nobody especially people like Akka, can exercise, their wills on her. She marries Jayant, a man of different caste but of her own choice and leaves her parental home.

Indu was brought up in a new family where tradition under the patriarchal roofs is strongly supported and straying it is considered a treacherous act. On the contrary, since, education and modernity are slowly creeping into the younger generation. Kaka tells Indu, “elders were to be feared; respected, obeyed we used to sit up when we went out;..... you youngsters now.... You’re a different breed altogether” (46). Indu knew how women in the patriarchal Society Set-Up are subjected to ill treatement and humiliation and how the situation becomes even-worse when unfortunately a woman loses her husband. The burden of widow-hood is forcibly thrust and violation of the set rules condemns the woman’s life to the position of outcasts. Indu’s decision to cut off the family ties is a conscious choice to break out of the confining cage of subordinate womanhood. She is cognizant of the fact that her female relations have succumbed to the dictates of male authority and she says:

“........ years of blind folding can obscure your vision so that you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you no hamper your movement so that you no more move out of your cage of no choices” (125).

She is made deeply aware of her own shortcomings in terms of being a complete woman in the eyes of those
conventional women who have their own standards of judging people.

"Nothing about me:... my academic distinctions, my career, my success, my money:... none of these would impress her. I was just a childless woman. To get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand children...They were still for them only success a woman could have. I had almost forgotten this breed of women since. I had left home (116).

She refuses to be mother of a child, though she acknowledges the truth of the maternal instinct. She does not welcome a child whole heartedly. Her non real marriage and non real love makes her feel trapped in a negative situation as it starts to shatter her positive struggle to be independent for self hood and intellectual Liberation. Female sexuality is feared as a threat which undermines a woman's own honour and that of her family. Religious tenets and cultural ethics have always emphasized the child bearing function of woman and condemned her pursuit of sexual pleasure. Woman, is therefore, enforced to be sexually passive and submissive even towards her own spouse. Finding her sexual personality repressed within her matrimonial relationship. Indu strives for expression and acceptance through an marital affair with her cousin, Naren:

"I can go back lie on my bed, I thought and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don't
need to erase anything I have done, I have told myself in a fit of bravado(152)"

While praising the Indu's bold decisions to cross the boundaries of traditional life P. Rama Moorthy observes:

"This sheds a brilliant light on Indu's awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu's exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of human existence"17.

But P. Bhatnagar has a totally different perspective. Infact what Indu has committed is never to be accepted in a traditional family set up. He says .......

"Indu's casual and matter of fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our mortals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of modern Indian woman?"18.

Shashi Deshpande answers the double standards adopted in our society, Where men alone take liberties seeking sexual pleasure even though they are married. According to Manu, a wife must ever remain devoted to her husband and always please him while he is alive. After his death, she should never think of any other man. Even though the
husband be of bad character and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be constantly worshipped as god by a faithful wife. A vicious husband must be worshipped, but bad wife may at any time be superceded by another wife. Though the widow is enjoined to remain faithful to her husband's memory, a husband after having lost his wife may marry again and again. In such a society, the sexual emancipation on the part of Indu is evidently an assertion of her individuality, her newly emerged identity.

Indu's search now is towards detachment. Her mind keeps in tune to the theme of 'detachment and loneliness'. In her hearts of hearts, she wonders whether she would ever reach the stage of no passions, no emotions and unruffled placidity. She realises that she has attached and involved herself in multiple ways like any other human being. She also yearns for the support of her family members. She expects others to show concern for her. When her father says that he has met Jayant she expects him to say that Jayant is pining for her, but her father's answer wonderful, Oh wonderful" (92)......... irritates her. Similarly when Naren says that he is going back to his work, the word echoes in her mind and she feels like a deserted and abandoned child. She tries to draw herself more towards the sense of detachment as was emphasized by Naren very often but realises painfully her failure and shakes off the feelings of detachment. She is aware that what she want is not "this is very not caring" but
involvement." I wanted involvement, not detachment" (89) She affirms:

"Now I felt clean as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges of myself. And free. But not detached I would, I knew, never hanker after detachment any more. The very word brought back Naren's eyes as he lay on the grass near the tank. Detachment... it was for the dead, not living.(186)"

In this context what P. Bhatnagar perceptively remarks:

"It was Naren who made her realise that she did not want, as she had believed earlier, detachment and non-involvement. Naren's detachment made it possible for him to remain unaffected by anything. He could never by anybody's husband or beloved. Her rejection of him had left him completely untouched, where as she knew she should shatter Jayant completely with her rejection which made Jayant so precious to her. No, she did not want detachment and non-involvement which are meant for the dead not for the living"

Indu now understands that her love is not a restricting but a uniting bond which shall lead her to lose herself to Jayant, so that their lives shall be full of harmony and peace. Indu's vision gets cleared as she decides to reveal to Jayant her whole self her weaknesses and her strengths, her virtues and vices as well. This understanding makes her position clear in her family. As Jayant says "But then, new Pillars take the place of the old. You're a pillar now yourself, don't you know? Am I? yes, that's true? (pg11)" Akka makes Indu her successor as she knows that among all her relatives, Indu is the only strong one who can bear the burden of responsibility that goes with the wealth. Indu realizes that she has to live up
to Akka's expectation and carry the burden of the reasonability that goes with the wealth. Indu realizes that she has to live up to Akka's expectation and carry the burden. She also realizes that Akka is not merely an interfering old woman, she is the prop of the family. Trying to establish her own identity, Indu ignores the letter from her husband advising her to leave the members of the family who do not bother about her for ten years and return home so that together they can make plans for their future with Akka's money. But Indu resolves to use it the right way. She decides to finance Mini's wedding instead of buying the old house which had already outlived its life. It pains her to think that the house, where she spent eighteen years of her life, would be demolished without a trace by its new owner Shankarappa. But Indu understands the truth when he says that the house had a good life, and now it should have a clean end and adds, even a man can't ask for more than that" (185).

The old house which Indu considers to be a trap, now gets ready to be disposed of to Shankarappa who wants to construct a big hotel. Through the decision making is painful for Indu, soon she overcomes the pain. She reminiscences the feelings and the emotions that are associated with the house in which she lived but not stayed. Though overcome by a sense of desolation and bereavement, she reminds herself that she must not allow soft feelings to come in her way doing what she thinks was the right thing to do...one era ends so that
other might being. But life will continue endless limitless formless and full of grace"\textsuperscript{20} (127)

Money plays an important role to bridge the gender gap and to raise one’s position. She decides to get Mini married to a better man and not to the chosen by Akka and pay for her wedding. She also understands the need to educate women. She acquires powers to change other “…how the darkness inside me was banished, replaced instead, by a gentle kindly down” (179).

Indu learns that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. She is happy when Jayant tells her that he is prepared to publish her work if no publisher comes forward. She cries, “Happiness, Indu knew it was made up of such little things” (13) Harmony and understanding of the mind that facilitates between conflicting selves and opposing ideals is the true basic Indian attitude. Indu is seen exercising her potential self to a fuller use by asserting herself as an individual pushing aside all her fears and doubts about herself. Moreover she continues to maintain her individuality in a house full of tradition bound men and women. Indu’s predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in contemporary Indian society where the society from old cultural transition moving along with new socio-economic forces acting effectively on the pattern of human lives. Indu represents any woman placed in transitional period who is torn between age old traditions and individual views she is
fully aware that these bonds are unreasonable and yet she wants to be bound by them as a typical traditional woman she knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realise that it would be an act of wisdom to keep the traditional family ties without losing her individuality.

With the realization that she loves and needs Jayant, she decides to get back to him taking care not to be influenced by him in career matters. She wants to restart her life built on the foundation of honesty and she decides to be her true self in her relationships with Jayant. She returns “home”, to Jayant, now equipped with that quality of courage “necessary to face the challenge of identity crisis that her marriage with Jayant had always posed –return to suffer, to question and to find roots” 21 Commenting on Indu’s decision to start writing according to her own wishes and not to use Akkas money to enrich herself, Usha Bande says that, “The important point is that she is making independent decision” 22.

Indu asserts her position as a human being equal to that of a man and does not want to submit herself to anyone’s dictates. This is the long and the short of her bitter struggle through conflicting trends between the age-old traditions and the emerging new ideas. The author seems to have carved out the character of Indu to effectively depict her own reflections on the travails of a modern Indian women passing through the contemporary transitional stage in the evolving social values. Sarabjit Sandhu aptly concludes in the following words:
"Deshpande has very exquisitely pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women through the character of Indu who has raised many basic questions regarding modern women who are rooted and shaped by the Indian customs but influenced by the scientific knowledge of the west."  

Indu's acceptance of a western values and her search for freedom with a precondition of unfettered growth and maturity of personality, despite the insidious conflict between the tradition and modernity, ultimately results in her emergence as a human being evolving basically as a woman of determination not yielding to the dictates of the patriarchal society. S.P. Swain appropriately sums up Indu's growth when he comments that the

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

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