Chapter IV: THE TWILIGHT

4.1 That Long Silence
4.2 The Binding Vine
4.3 A Matter of Time
4.1 That Long Silence
Silence is one of the major themes in the feminist world. The new Indian woman is dissatisfied with the sexual roles assigned to her in the patriarchal ethos of Indian culture. She feels culturally and socially suppressed and attempts to rebel against them. But very soon she realizes her inability and limitations to reject her cultural and social background. She is oscillating like the pendulum between tradition and modernity and between her right and duties.

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is an expression of the silence of the modern Indian housewife. Although many women writers tried their hand at expressing this long silence that had turned woman into non-entities, they could only provide psychological depths to their characters. They either created unreal sentimental romances or finally succumbed to the temptation of mouthing feminist ideology. But Deshpande's success lies in her representation of real life experience. She realistically depicts the inner conflicts of Jaya and her quest for self identity.

Jaya, the central character in the novel, protests against the traditional sexual role that is assigned to a wife/woman. Deshpande does not consider herself, in the portrayal of the character of Jaya, a feminist writing about middle class woman. She is basically interested in the exploration of human relationship, particularly the relationship between husband and wife. It is Jaya's subordinate positions as a wife in the novel, which gives her a feeling of being marginalized and suppressed. She makes all possible efforts to reverse the binary of man/woman that has been traditionally and conventionally fixed by the society, as a paradigm of a cultured society. But, it is not a simple task for a woman like Jaya to achieve
this target. Truly speaking, Jaya is an autobiographical character Deshpande herself has confessed.

A life of introspection went into this novel, the most autobiographical of all my writings not in the personal details but in thinking and idea... it was with the articulation of all that had been in me through the years that I came to feminism, to consciousness of myself as a feminist (Indian Literature, 1996: 107).

Deshpande is not a feminist in the way of Virginia Wolf and Doris Lessing. Her feminism is not western oriented. She is primarily concerned with the predicaments of Indian women. What is so characteristically unique about Deshpande is that she mixes humanism with feminism. In fact, she delights to call herself a "humanist" (R. Mala, 1989: 43).

Deshpande's female protagonists are young women, career oriented, getting married, having children and then wondering what next. Jaya is a young woman, married to Mohan and living comfortably with her husband along with her children. Her predicament begins at the point when she tries to assert her individuality through her writings. Jaya's husband does not allow her to come out of the traditional role that is assigned to a woman. She got married to Mohan anticipating love, security and warmth from him, "My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan" (1988: 02).

Jaya redefines her life her role and her relationship with her husband, Mohan, after writing about her and him. She compares the process of writing with the process of childbirth. She feels that "self revelation is a cruel process... She does not write her story in a linear motion but as it comes her through memories. Hence past and present co-exist in her work" (Goel, 2007: 96). Jaya became disillusioned very soon with married because
it proved as a legal weapon to keep woman under control. Marriage was a significant contrivance in the patriarchal system to subjugate and suppress woman. After marriage Jaya is expected to follow her husband like a shadow. She has to go with her husband to a small flat at Dadar, leaving behind her comfortable Church Gate apartment. The flat at Dadar is,


Jaya dislikes the ambience of the new house but she has to compromise, as she is a wife. A wife is allowed minimum freedom of choice in the conjugal life. She is expected to play the role, model of Sita and Savitri. Jaya moves to the new house because she is obliged to do so as a matter of convention and tradition. She observes,

I remember now that he had assumed. I would accompany him taken for granted my acquiescence in his plans. So had I. Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging Death to reclaim her husband (11).

The traditional fabric of society is disposed to treat women as subordinate. Jaya lives in the Dadar flat as an introvert. The novel dramatizes the married life of Jaya and critically evaluates the institution of marriage. Marriage does not allow a woman to realize herself. Jaya is a married woman. The life of a married woman is so dull and insipid that it does not provides any opportunity to woman to explore herself. Jaya wants to assert herself. She wants to break away from the traditional social fabric. She is so disappointed with the traditional system of marriage that has so
ruthlessly suppressed the self of Jaya. She indulges in a kind of self-reflection to discover her true self;

And I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well. I can see her now, the Suhasini who was distinct from Jaya, a soft smiling, placid, motherly woman. A woman who lovingly nurtured her family. A woman who coped (1988: 15-16).

Jaya's name is changed to Suhasini after marriage. She finds that by changing her name, her real identity has been changed and masked. She tries to fit herself into the image of Suhasini. She tries to cut off these bits of Jaya, which did not fit into that Suhasini image. She does it because she has always been told that husbands are always superior and privileged. It is the duty of the wife to follow blindly the advice and orders of the husband. She has been told by Vaneeta Mami that, "husband is like a sheltering tree" (32).

Ramukaka has told her that the happiness of her family depends entirely on her. Jaya is also advised by Dada to: "Be good to Mohan" (138). Further, the society dictates a married woman to; "go home like a good girl" (115). Jaya is compelled to obey her husband because the cultural tradition set-up of the society tells her: "go back home and obey your husband. And never mind what ever it is he has done, he's your husband, after all, and a husband can do no wrong" (115). Husbands are projected to her as divine, Mohan her husband goes to the extent of telling her that losing a husband would imply losing one's prestige. In order to terrorize Jaya in to submission, Mohan tells her stories about the soldiers who were imprisoned or perished with exile and whose wives and children had to run from pillar to post for securing sustenance. Mohan firmly believes that husband and wife should care for each other. He says to Jaya,
A husband and wife care for each other live with each other until they are dead, parents care for their children and children in turn look after their parents, where they are needed. Marriages never end, they can not, they are a state of being (1988: 127).

Thus, Mohan has clearly a defined view about what a wife may do or may not. Jaya always followed what her husband told her, not because she was a coward or because she has been a woman without sense, but largely because her non-compliance would result in losing her husband. It was this fear of losing husband that has always spoiled her personal desire for projecting her self. Even after marriage, Jaya has stopped laughing because Mohan has felt so much hurt by her laughter. Jaya gradually learnt that his mood was best met with silence. Jaya has always been a bold and fearless person. But she tries to behave like Suhasini who is a nervous incompetent woman needing male support all the time. She does so to protect her married life.

Jaya is always worried about protecting her marriage. She does not want to bring about any damage to her married life. Sometimes she acts like the selfish sparrow that does not allow the crow to come in because she is trying to make her baby-sparrow sleep. She allows the crow to come in only after the latter has got fully drenched in rain and she advises the crow to dry himself by sitting himself on a hot pan. The crow dies, the moment it sits on the hot pan. Thus, Jaya always acts in a selfish manner, just in order to protect her married life. Jaya feels that the married life would never bring her the kind of happiness and pleasure she has always dreamt of. The married life will not bring her any freedom for the realization of her goal.
Rather, she has been assigned the traditional role of a woman after her marriage. She realizes,

It was when I first visited his home (Mohan's house) that I had discovered how sharply defined a woman's role was. They had been a revelation to me, the women in his family so definite about their roles, so well trained in their duties, so skilful in the right areas, so indifferent to everything else. I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before, and I had been entranced by it (1988: 83).

Jaya finds stagnation and hopelessness in married life. Her husband expects her to play a passive role. The married life appears to her so boring that she wonders why not some disaster befalls her family. The intensity of boredom and ennui can be understood from this statement of Jaya.

Worse than anything else had been the boredom of unchanging pattern, the unending monotony. I remember now how often I had sighed for a catastrophe, a disaster, no, not personal one, but anything to shake us out of our dull grooves. The eight-planet configuration, which they had said presaged, a disaster had roused my hopes once. Why was it, I had often wondered, that wars always took place in other countries, tidal waves and earthquakes occurred in far-off unknown places that murder, adultery and heroism had their places in other people's lives. Like the chorus of the Greek drama, were distanced from suffering; for us, there was just living—one foot in front of another, one foot in front of another, until death came to us in a natural form (04).

But there is no change in the life of Jaya. Even sexual life with Mohan gives her no satisfaction. She doesn't enjoy "silent wordless love making" (85). Sex with Mohan has become very mechanical and unendurable. She says: "I could stay apart from him without a twinge; I could sleep with him, too, without desire" (97). As a wife Jaya has to
surrender her desires to her husband. She knows that traditionally a woman is denied all the freedom in the matters of sex what a man has. A woman has no identity of her own and hence she has no right to enjoy the freedom of choice or freedom of expression of desire. She has been told that a wife must be skilled in keeping her husband pleased and satisfied. She has been told that it is the duty of a wife to "keep romance alive in a marriage" (1988: 96). Though in her novels the focus is mainly on the suffering of women within marriage,

yet we also get a glimpse of the attempts made condition her personality along sexist lines before marriage. Deshpande shows that the double standards and the dichotomous attitude which continue to operate throughout a woman's life start right in her parents home (Khan Nazueen, 2005: 57).

Thus, marriage makes woman responsible for sustaining peace and prosperity in the family. The husband is given full freedom. Mohan, the husband, decides what would please his wife and what would not. He even decided what kind of life Jaya had to live. Initially, Jaya used to comb her hair ritually before going to bed. The belief was that, the husband would shower more love on her. But this proved to be wrong. This ritual appeared to Jaya as quite: "ridiculous" (1988: 96). Later on what happens, her husband would sleep with her twice a week: "whether I creamed my face or not, whether I brushed my hair a hundred times or not, whether I wanted him to or not" (96). The choice of woman does not count. Jaya was taught to be a good wife and it becomes a duty of good wife to forsake her own identity and glorify the identity of her husband. Thus, the role of 'a good wife' comes into conflict with the problem of establishing her identity. Jaya is
unable to decide what her real identity is, whether she is Mohan's wife or not. That is why at the end of her narrative Jaya realizes that she has some enduring identity since her childhood,

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 fragmentation is not possible. The child, hands in pockets, has been with me through the years (1988: 191).

Throughout the novel Jaya's sense of her identity is never certain. She is torn between Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya is her adolescent self. Her father called her Jaya because Jaya meant victory and her father thought and told her that she could accomplish something in the world. But the dashing personality of Jaya comes into conflict with Suhasini, where Suhasini stands for the good wife. As Suhasini, Jaya is assigned certain roles, which comes as hindrance to the realization of her identity;

As if there is such a thing as one self, intact and whole, waiting to be discovered. On the other hand, there are so many, each self attached like a Siamese twin to a self of another person, neither able to exist without the other. Perhaps this is why I had been so confused when I heard, years later, from Kamalakaki that between me and Dada there had been a baby girl who had died soon after birth. I with an elder sister? I had felt an entirely different person at the thought (69).

Jaya's self as Mohan's wife is so much suppressed and camouflaged that she is unable to relate herself to the real world. As a result she sees herself in relation to her mad cousin: "Suddenly it occurs to me - as long as Kusum was there, I had known clearly who I was... I was not Kusum" (24). So, it was in relation to Kusum that perceives her existence. When Kusum
dies, her identity too becomes threatened. After Kusum’s death, Jaya is not certain that she is sane—“without Kusum my sanity seemed suspect” (1988:126).

The identity of Jaya is diminishing or reduced to Suhasini because the marriage obliges a woman to depend upon their husbands. What is important to note her is that marriage cannot bring happiness to both the spouses unless they surrender their ego and merge into each other. But neither Jaya nor Mohan remain emotionally united with each other. It is said that the lack of emotionality is the cause of disorder in the family. Mohan’s family is equally peaceful and united because Jaya has totally surrendered to Suhasini. But we find that the urges in woman, too, are equally strong and when an opportunity comes it becomes manifest. Jaya had never been understood by Mohan. It is not able that the main characters in Shashi Deshpande’s novels are not very expressive. They keep silent about the issues and at the same time they expect submissiveness from their spouses.

Deshpande makes us realize that we have moved from a world of orthodox ideas where to maintain a marital bliss women used to compose a silence about their bodies. Many marriages in the past flourished only in the name of marriages and meant the continuation of family life as extension of genealogical pattern. The body has its existence and it is the same for man as well as for woman. We cannot attend spiritual bliss at the cost of starving the body. As a writer, Deshpande also seems to hint that the ostentatious celebration of attaining salvation by making the body suffer is a misnomer (Mishra Binod, 2006: 58).

They do not feel it necessary to discuss the important matters with their spouses and they take the submissiveness of their wives to be granted.
Nayan Tara Sahgal also holds this view about the assured superiority of men-folk. In her novel *The Day In Shadow* Som does not discuss, important business matters with Simrit. Som takes it for granted that his wife would do what he says, in *That Long Silence* also Mohan takes it for granted that Jaya is going to follow his decisions. When Mohan caught in malpractice, he makes the wife and children responsible for it. Mohan says that he went out of his way to get the things done because of his wife and children – “I’ve always put you and the children first” (1988:121).

Mohan is assured of Jaya’s company but he never looks into her demands. Mohan sanctions Jaya’s demand for freedom keeping in view the fact that the male-domination is not undermined. He is shocked when he finds Jaya taking liberty; “How could you? Never thought my wife could say such things to me. You are my wife” (82).

Mohan even disliked Jaya’s laughter and her anger too. Anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’ in the eyes of Mohan. Jaya’s protest would be rejected and silenced by Mohan through the precepts that he used to site; “My mother never raised her voice against my father” (83). The relationship between Jaya and Mohan is totally mechanical, which is devoid of emotionality and of the sense of belongingness to each other. Jaya thinks that they are not made for each other rather they are different from each other, and they are like,

A pair of bullocks yoked together, a cleaver phrase but can it substitute for they reality? A man and woman married for seventeen years. A couple with two children a family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for the posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman (08).
The idea of pair of bullocks ‘yoked together’ is that Jaya is poised with her husband in the same way as two bullocks are put together who do their work without any sense of oneness and without any sense of love. The role of wife, which Jaya is taught to play, requires her to surrender her individuality, her creativity and finally herself. A great Indian philosopher Acharya Rajneesh, nicknamed ‘Osho’ makes the distinction between beloved and wife. Rajneesh says that the beloved is characterized by liveliness, change and uncertainty. A beloved is liked much because there is uncertainty about her. A beloved may stick to someone at one moment and at another moment; she can transfer her love to someone else. She is perpetually followed by the lover to prevent transfer of her love. The case with wife is different. Wife is treated like an object, like a possession. Her nature is characterized by dutifulness and loyalty. Her joy is mechanical. She has to act in the manner desired by her husband. Rajneesh says, there is no difference between wife and other non-living objects, like fan and any other machine. Put the switch on and the fan will move. Similarly command the machine and it will work. A wife works in the same mechanical way. Wife’s servility and her subjugation is taken for granted and therefore they are treated like non-human, non-living and non-entity. In the novel That Long Silence Jaya is granted the status of a wife and as such she has to live in a mechanical way.

A creative force inside Jaya is ruthlessly suppressed by Mohan. At first Mohan feels proud to own a wife who is a creative writer. Jaya writes stories, which win her the first prize and the stories, are published in the magazine. But very soon Mohan objects to the themes of her stories. He suspects that the stories have autobiographical overtones. Mohan 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 any one in the face again? And you, how could you write these things... (1988: 143-144).

Jaya however feels that she has related her experience in the story only after transmuting it into something different. Jaya is afraid that Mohan would become angry and he would shout at her, even, he may forbid her to write. Jaya was, "scared of hurting Mohan" (144), and therefore stopped writing as it may lead to disturbing her married life. "Scared of jeopardizing, the only career I had, my marriage (144). Jaya has to live as per the wishes of her husband because a wife cannot live, as she desires.

Thus, the novels of Deshpande are primarily concerned with the plight of modern Indian woman who is seeking to understand herself. She may have come out of the constraints of the traditional family but the roles into which she tries to fit her characters are stereotyped. Her female characters play a subordinate role. Men in the novels are usually respected. It is often a man who gives best advice. Kamat warns Jaya, "Beware of this, women are the victims' theory of yours. It will drag you down into a soft squish bog of self pity" (148).

Shashi Deshpande expresses, that is true and women in any culture are taught to value the role of men, particularly of those who accomplish thing in the real world. Her female characters seem both particularly passive and particularly willing to pay attention to the advice of men. In Deshpande's novel, Roots and Shadows, Indu had been told, since her childhood, that she should be weak and submissive and that a woman's life is nothing, "But to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then
grandchildren" (Roots, 1983: 116). An ideal woman is one, "Who sheds her identity in her husbands?" (49).

In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, the husband completely dominates over her. If the wife does not conform to the norms and ideals said by the husband, there is disharmony and tension. Mohan has also fixed some norms for Jaya. For example, she should not laugh, she should not be angry and that she should follow her husband blindly. Jaya is essentially a modern woman rooted in tradition whereas her husband; Mohan is a traditionalist, rooted in age-old customs. The difference between their outlooks is marked as they fail time and again to understand each other. As a result, there is lot of tension in their marital life. The relationship is more a kind of compromise than one based on love or mutual understanding. There grows a silence between husband and wife. Mohan leaves home without a word because Jaya unconsciously laughed at him. His absence shatters Jaya. Jaya thinks that the world would fall apart. She becomes very helpless and disappointed. Then, suddenly a situation changes. Mohan sends a telegram informing her that all is well. The corruption case in which Mohan is involved is settled without any harm to him. Thus, Jaya again finds her self-sleeping into the fold of the marital life.

But a change has come in her; she has broken her silence. Though, Jaya makes a compromise with Mohan; she does assert her identity. Jaya asserts her identity by way of keeping silence. Jaya knows pretty well that the best way to maintain relationship is to learn tricks, and, "silence is one of them.... You never find a woman criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it may damage her relationship" (John Cunningham, 1988: 06).
Jaya succumbs and surrenders to Mohan without revolting. She never says, 'Yes' when her husband asks her whether he has hurt her. She tolerates all kinds of oppressions silently, "In the emotion that governed but behaviour to him, there was still the habit of being a wife, of sustaining and supporting him" (That Long Silence, 1988: 48). The relationship between Mohan and Jaya is sort of - a dominating husband and a suffering wife. Jaya rebels but only passively. Her lamentations and protests are but ones in the wilderness; commenting on the nature of rebellion and suffering of Jaya, Veena Sheshadri says,

Why the author has chosen a heroine who only succeeds in evoking waves of irritation in the reader? Perhaps it is because of a component writes like her is never satisfied unless she is tackling new challenges. Also, she believes in presenting life as it is and 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 (Literature Alive, 1988: 94).

It has been rightly pointed out by a critic that the novel of Deshpande deals with the Indian women in disharmony with her sexual, cultural and natural roles. Deshpande's woman decides to assert herself not only as a woman, wife or mother but also as an individual. She does not allow herself to suffer stoically neither does she find a new radical way out of the problem. She rejects both the staunch rebellion and meek acceptance. Deshpande in her interview with S.M. Shanti, she herself characterizes her heroines as, "middle of the road-kind" (1989: 02).

The feminist tendencies of Jaya are revealed in her rebellion against the roles assigned by culture and nature. Culture allows a woman to be a
daughter or a sister or a wife or a mother. In addition, she has to play a professional role, if she is a working woman on the other hand; nature assigns her sex based role whether in she is limited biologically. Assigned the role culturally, she is only a subservient, secondary and marginal. She is expected to adhere to these role patterns quite strictly. Any reversal or change in the assigned roles is detested. Accordingly a typical Deshpande heroine can be only a daughter/sister/wife/mother/woman/professional but, never her real ‘she’. What she wants is the freedom to think and decide for herself and the liberation from her womanhood but the family in which she lives stifle her ‘womanly self’ and she feels oppressed, hence she tries to escape from her tailored roles. Jaya is a woman who adjusts and accommodates unlike the modern women.

So, Jaya dislikes being confined to the hearth like a woman of a traditional Indian society where woman was the follower and man the leader. She does not want, to be a: “Sita following her husband into exile” or a “Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband” or a “draupadi stoically sharing her husband’s travails” (1988: 11). She believes that there is pain in hostility and rebellion is anguish and agony. Hence she adopts a subaltern and subservient attitude.

No, what have I to do with these mythical women? I can’t fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together... it is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful and what animal would voluntarily choose pain? (11-12).

Jaya does not accept the traditional role of a woman, which she thinks, is not safe. Jaya thinks;
Stay at home, look after your babies. Keep out of the rest of the world you are safe. That poor idiotic woman Suhasini believed in this. I know better, now I know that safety is always unattainable. You are never safe (1988: 17).

After marrying Mohan, she has become more disillusioned with her long-cherished notions. She had believed that — “first there’s love, then there’s sex—that-that was how I had always imagined it to be. But after living with Mohan I had realized that it could so easily be the other way round” (95). Jaya experiences ‘sex’ before love. She is expected to play a passive role contrary to her rebellions nature. She succumbs to such an expectation as a result her relationship with Mohan changes. Her feeling for him moves beyond sex. Her idea of fulfillment through sex is destroyed. But she keeps terrified silence over it. Her silence intensifies the sexual statement. In the *Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru keeps silence against her sexual predicament. She says, “I could do nothing.” I can never do anything. I just endure” (1980: 182). Jaya, too analyses the illusory nature of love. “Love is a myth, without which sex with the same persons for the life time would be unendurable” (1988: 97).

Deshpande’s heroines are very critical of the institution of marriage. They view marriage as a euphemism for lust. Jaya thinks that marriage is like a children’s game of playing. Jaya sees stagnation and hopelessness in marital life in her contention that marriage makes a common ‘circumspect’ and that “marriages never end, they cannot — they are of state of being” (127). In her novel *Roots and Shadows*, marriage is considered as nothing but: “two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and produce so that generation might continue” (1983: 03). Indu also sees it as a tragic-comic picture of “a cage with two animals glaring hatred at
Each other" (1983: 61). Marriage subjugates and enslaves a woman. It leads a woman to; "aimless days indefinitely repeated life that slips away gently toward death without questioning its purpose" (Beauvoir, 1974: 500). Woman pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom and de Beauvoir emphasized that such a sacrifice on the part of a woman is too high for anyone because the kind of self contentment, serenity and security that marriage offers to woman drains her soul of its capacity for greatness.

she shuts behind her the doors of her new home, she was a girl, the whole country side was her homeland, the forests were hers. Now she is confined to a restricted space (Beauvoir, 501).

The role of a wife in Indian society is disposed to restrict and circumscribe woman's self-development. The role of a mother does it even more,

sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to; as because they have to in order to survive economically and/or psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing (Rosemare Tong, 1993: 208).

Jaya revolts against the traditional role of a wife, for her, "In this life itself, there are so many cross roads, so many choices" (R. Tong, 192). But a married woman has a few or practically no choice left to her save what her husband wills and desires.

Traditionally, a good woman is always synonymous to a good wife and a good wife must be chaste, faithful and virtuous. She should be modest, meek, obedient, pious and submissive. Jaya, the woman protagonist conforms to a traditional image of a good woman. She is meek docile and submissive. She is the typical Indian housewife following her husband, without any question, as a shadow. She follows her husband, Mohan to a
small shabby flat at Dadar, it is here in this small Dadar flat that Jaya starts discovering herself. She reflects upon her life. She discovers that the life she had been living so far did not belong to her, but to someone else.

I am wrong; I thought it isn't frightening meeting the ghost of your past self; its awkward, like having stranger thrusting herself on you. Claiming a relationship you are unwilling to allow. And just as I got rid of that house-proud woman who had been me, it came to me that the woman had had a name as well Suhasini (1988: 14).

Jaya, a name given to her by her father since her birth was changed to Suhasini, the change of name implied total subordination of the self of Jaya. From Jaya she becomes Suhasini “and I was Jaya. But I had been Suhasini as well. I can see her now the Suhasini, who was distinct from Jaya, a soft, smiling, and placid, motherly woman. A woman, who lovingly nurtured her family” (15-16).

She is expected to perform duties as a mother, as a wife. She believed in age-old notion; “stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world and you are safe” (17). Jaya and Suhasini slavishly follow the tradition, life became a set of routine; “There is only order and routine today, I have to change the sheets, tomorrow scrub the bathrooms, the day after, clean the fridge” (148). Jaya was an arrogant, self-willed, impulsive girl before her marriage who loses her identity after her marriage. She learns to suppress her own wishes and acts according to the wishes of her husband and also according to established social coeds,

It was when I first visited his (Mohan's) house that I discovered how sharply defined a woman's role was. They had been a revelation to me. The woman in his family, so definite about
their roles, so well trained in their duties, so skilful in the right areas, so indifferent to everything else. I had never seen so clear, so precise a pattern before, and I had been entranced by it (1988: 83).

Jaya decides to pattern herself like them, “These women of Mohan’s family were right. I had decided, I would pattern myself after them. That way lay-well, if not happiness, at least the consciousness of doing right, freedom from guilt” (84). Jaya blames her mother for not teaching her “duties of a woman” (83). She feels guilty when she sometimes goes wrong, like a button missing from Mohan’s shirt, or a meal getting delayed.

She understands that marriage is a trap, which negates her right to individuality, independence and self-realization. Jaya realizes her secondary position in marriage. So, it is against the pre-ordained role of a woman that Jaya revolts. She decides to activate the creative impulses, smothered within her artistic self. Kamini Dinesh observes, “The act of unburdening herself through self expression becomes for her creative process. It is not merely relieving of particular moments of the past but a coming to terms with herself” (1993: 88). Jaya’s creative urge and artistic zeal frees her from her cramped domestic and societal roles. She resolves to break that long silence by putting down on paper all that she had suppressed in her seventeen-year silence. She says,

I am not afraid any more. The panic has gone. I am 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 fragmentation is not possible. The child, hands in pocket, has been with me through the years. She is with me still (1988: 191).
This statement shows the novelist's concern with feminism. The novelist describes, the struggle of Jaya to assert her identity, Jaya wishes to write on many important issues but Mohan, her husband, expresses his displeasure and she immediately complies to his wishes,

I had relinquished them instead all those stories that had been taking shape in me because I had been scared-Scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardizing the only career I had, my marriage (1988: 144).

As soon as, Jaya over comes the fear of losing Mohan. She regains her identity and establishes herself as a writer. She takes herself very seriously. She follows the suggestion of Kamat very sincerely; “Take yourself seriously, woman. Don’t skulk behind a false name. And work-work if you want others to take you seriously” (148). It is rightly said that Kamat’s words is the message, Deshpande suggests through the story of That Long Silence. Kamat tells Jaya further not to be afraid of failure because it is the scare of failure that keeps women tethered to the secondary position in the society. Kamat says,

It’s so much easier to be the martyr, who’d have done so much if only, I had the time. But I’m wife and a mother first; my home and children come first to me... blah blah blah Pah! The fact is you are scared... scared of writing scared of failure (148).

To get a respectable position in their society, a woman has to fight; she has to give up her inhibition, her inaction, her fear. Jaya does that. She achieves her freedom because she is able to overcome her fear, she says; “I have achieved this, “am not afraid any more” (191).
The heroines of Deshpande achieve freedom, which is not only intellectual but also sexual one. Their sexual freedom comes through their recourse to extra marital sex. For example, Jaya’s affair with her neighbor, Kamat and in *Dark Holds No Terrors* Saru’s affair with Boozie and Padmakarrao are the examples. The Deshpande’s women protagonists treat sex quite abjectly. In *Dark Holds No Terrors*, Saru sees the sex as a “disease”, Jaya considers it as unnatural his breeding “only treachery, only deceit, only betrayal” (1988: 158). But the sexual freedom of the heroines of Deshpande has triggered off an unending debate. Moreover, Deshpande has transcended the limits fixed by the society. By giving sexual freedom to her heroines, she has also reversed the traditional triad of love-marriage-sex. But Deshpande does not want to rebel against the established tradition and mores. What the point she tries to drive home is that woman must never lose self-confidence. She suggests a kind of compromise, a kind of middle path between struggle and silence. The view expressed by Rashmi Sahi is quite appropriate,

The message which writes finally conveys is that a woman’s emancipation lies neither in suffering quietly like a fatalist nor in repudiating all claims of the family and society like a rebel. She must draw upon her inner strength, which education and knowledge has given her and bring about a reconciliation between tradition and modernity without losing her identity (2004: 35).

In *That Long Silence* Jaya’s husband Mohan, an extremely demanding and dominating character, is the ‘head’ the ‘Sturdy Oak’ of his family and enjoys the position and the authority that go with it. Mohan is a typical traditional Indian male. He has struggled hard to reach his present social position, coming as he does from a very poor deprived family Jaya tells us,
If ever he had spoken to me of those time, it had been only to emphasise how much, in spite of everything, he had achieved...
I had seen the thought in him whenever he met or spoke of an old school or college friend or of an earlier college who is only a Junior Engineer. Just imagine that, Jaya! or poor man, only a lecturer still (1988: 33).

Like Jayant in *Roots and Shadows*, Mohan is ambitious to become the ‘Big Whell’ and has typical middle-class aspirations. His choice of Jaya for a wife is of a piece with that. He had wanted to marry a girl who speaks good English make ‘an educated’ cultured wife and would be an assets to him in his climb towards success. Very deliberately, he sets about shaping her into the kind of wife that an engineer ought to have. He persuades her to cut her hair short offer the current trend. ‘Why don’t you,” he had said one day, cut your hair, up to here... you know, like Mehra’s wife” (96).

She has to conform to the accepted style of dressing “why don’t you make yourself a nice house coat... like the one the M.D.S. daughter wears...?” (61). He had even made her give up her original style of writing and adopt the one that was fashionable thought frivolous. Mohan is a conformist and sexist who believes that he and not his wife, knows what, is best for her because she ‘belongs’ to him their relationship is the typical power relationship between the superior and interior. Temperamentally, Mohan is authoritarian. He is particularly insensitive towards the suffering of women. His mother had been a victim of his father’s oppression and was killed over when unable to endure his cruelty and the pressures of continuous childbearing. Indifferent to her suffering, Mohan had called his mother ‘tough’ though Jaya as a woman had understood the desperation in her mother in laws life. Mohan’s attitude, though surprisingly is not usual because sons of harsh fathers often tend to model themselves after them.
Although he is not openly 'authoritarian' with Jaya, Mohan is a typical patriarchal husband. To him his wife is his property and therefore a status symbol to be flaunted. His image of a wife has been created by the submissive women that he has seen in his family during in his growing years, and he expected Jaya to behave in a similar manner. The only difference is that he had wanted an educated wife to be able to line up to the standards set by his peers. Even that is not for her development as an individual but for the furtherance of his own professional interests. Similarly he values Jaya’s ability to write not as a mark of her personality, but as an asset to his social status.

My wife is a writer-yes, that was something to be proud of, respectable hobby, something that set me (Jaya) apart from other women, gave me a status that added a bit to his. My wife is a writer, he had often introduced me... (1988: 119).

Mohan is externally status – conscious in trying to elevate (evaluate) himself he falls a prey to the temptation of making easy money. He gets involved in a messy deal at work. When an official enquiry in to the matter begins, he panics and goes in to exile in a dingy suburban apartment with Jaya locking up their posh city apartment that and sending the children away on a holiday. It is during this exile that Jaya considers her past life and realizes that she has been unduly passive and submissive to Mohan. She understands that her passive stance has fuddled, Mohan’s driving ambition for power. She had always followed the traditional maxim that, “A husband is like a sheltering tree” (32), and had willfully closed her eyes to all his doing. Right or wrong, she had never opposed him. She realizes now that
she might have even encouraged him with her indifference to his unethical decision to take bribe.

If Gandhari, who bandaged her eyes to become blind like her husband, could 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 could send Rahul and Rati to good schools, that I could have the thing we needed... decent clothes a fridge, a gas connection traveling first class... (1988: 61-62).

At first, she disclaims any responsibility for colluding with him in these decisions but later an objective and honest reassessment of their life together convinces her of her amoral and indirect collusion. Mohan had lived up to the image of the typical successful man the ambitious prosperous ‘provider’ of the family. He had conformed to the expectations that society associates with the male sex role. In addition, these had also been the factor of his poverty-stricken childhood that had unconsciously spurred him on in his ambition. Graying, middle-aged, bulky, Kamat in That Long Silence is Jaya’s friend. He had been her neighbor in the dingy Dadar apartment that she and Mohan had lived in before they had moved up the social ladder. He first makes Jaya aware of the connection between her passivity as a writer and as a woman.

Kamat makes Jaya realise that she lacks the courage to accept her failure as a writer, lacks the courage to write about women might resemble Mohan’s or aunt, or mother or aunt similarly makes her aware that it is her fault that she has compromised her individuality and given in to Mohan’s demand that she writes about subjects that were more acceptable in their social circle. Kamat’s egalitarian treatment of Jaya sets him apart, as set object. His relationship with her is that of a good friend. Jaya is pleasantly
surprised and intrigued by the discovery. Jaya is at first it had seemed strange to have,

a man talk so freely to me.... All the men I'd known till then had put on a different face, a different tone, a false smile when they spoke to me. It was always made clear that we were not on the same level. But this man.... It had been a revelation to me that two people, a man and a woman could talk this way, with man I had not been a woman. I had been just myself Jaya” (1988: 152-153).

In fact, initially it is Jaya who is uneasy with his lack of inhibitions. It is only gradually that she begins to appreciate his ability to threat her as a friend, as a sexual being. His solitonsness, then seems warm and comforting like – “Appas coat on a chilly night, like sitting before him on his bike” (156). However in this novel, Deshpande also hints at the complexity of any woman-man relationship, even a platonic one. Once when Jaya had finished telling Kamat about the trauma she had suffered as a schoolgirl at her father’s death and he had tried to comfort her, the comforting touch had suddenly changed especially for Jaya, in to a sexual awareness of the other. Confused Jaya had broken away from and rushed back home. Deshpande uses this incident to focus on the fragile live that divides a friendship from sexual attraction. A few days later, when Jaya ventured again into his apartment she found him dead on the floor. She rushed back to her house, picked up her bag, and left for her home in church gate, pretending she knew nothing, as she feared that her presence in his flat would cause a scandal. Deshpande also uses this incident to attack the social taboos in our society that inhibit a woman, especially a married one from openly having a male friend.
Deshpande's portrayal of Kamat presents him as the most liberated and prejudiced—free of all the men characters in her novels. He shows deep understanding of a women's predicament and advocates that every woman must assert and develop herself to her full potential; nowhere does he display a patriarchal bias towards Jaya. Kamat is deeply interested in Jaya's development as a human being and encourage her to express herself. Naren in *Roots and Shadows*, is also supportive to Indu, however, he is equally interested in her as a woman. Boozie in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is the flamboyant hero type, although his motives in encouraging her are not clear the certainly aids to her development. This quality, to inspire the protagonists to grow and evolve, to express and assert themselves, is present in all the three characters Naren, Boozie and Kamat—the friends of the protagonists.

By contrast this quality is absent in their husband. It is these attributes which make the friends serve as foils to the husband. The male friends are instrument in leading the women to redefine their lives within marriage. They are men who stand on the fringes of society. Challenging and undermining its patriarchal values, they are mouthpieces of an author who provides an alternative world view where men and women can co-exist as equals.

Jaya's father in *That Long Silence* also displays supportiveness towards his daughter which inspires her growth as an individual. He is quite unconventional for a man of his generation. He had married for love, out of his community and flouted by shifting out of the ancestral home with his bride. This had been a major step for him, especially since he was his mother's favorite and in those days it was not customary to set up an
unclear family. To Jaya, in retrospect this action seems to be a rebellion against the control that her grandmother exercised over her children. Jaya had been deeply attached to her father like all mother her mother had always shown a marked preference for her sons, and Jaya had grown up resenting this attitude. But her father rarely interfering in her upbringing or displaying his love for her openly. Jaya’s father on the other hand, would even encourage her short temper, a trait considered unbecoming in a girl. Her western education had given her an unconservative outlook. He was proud that, Jaya was different from her cousins. Jaya’s father is the most ‘Feminist’ among the fathers in Deshpande’s novels. He had never displayed any kind of gender bias towards his daughter. On the contrary, he had nurtured her to become an independent and individualistic person. His support and guidance are influential in developing Jaya’s fundamental attitudes and principles. Although that appears as a minor character in the narrative he is instrumental in molding her basic values and character.

By contrast, Mohan’s father in That Long Silence is an eloquent example of the oppression and domination that characterize patriarchy. His cruelty to his wife and children symbolizes the worst aspects of patriarchy. He is one of those men, who believe that the man of the house is like a demi-god, while his wife is his property a slave whose body is meant for sexual gratification. Mohan’s mother goes through several pregnancies which reduce her body to a skeleton, the following incident allows a double reading on the one hand, it reveals traditionally superior position of the father, and the wife’s considerably lower status. On the other, it deconstructs and subverts the myth that the father is the ‘head’ of the family and a ‘protector’ of his wife.
The woman crouching in front of the dying fire, sitting blank and motionless, the huddled bundles of sleeping children on the floor.... They had all had their food, except her.... He came in and went – to wash – she had his plate ready... sat down and then he pushed “why is there no fresh chutney today?” he asked, not looking at her (1988: 35).

She mumbled something, the next moment “he picked up his plate and threw it, not at her, but deliberately at the wall.... He stood up... and walked out of the house” (35). Jaya recalls the above incident during her stay at the Dadar flat. She resolves to assert herself in the face of oppression, rather than suffer mutely like Mohan’s mother, since there is distant echo of his father in Mohan who sees himself as the master of his household and expect Jaya to be submissive and passive like his mother.

In the fictional world of Deshpande silence has got the metaphor in women’s lives. Through that silence she is leading her life. Therefore silence becomes the good friend to her. She talks to the four – walls and obviously the four walls to her. She becomes a vine in the garden, who is binding towards the pole. The vine is talking to – the pole and pole to her. The same situation is faced by woman in her life.
WORKS CITED


---. *That Long Silence*. London: Virago, 1988 (All quotation have been taken from this edition).


4.2 The Binding Vine
Every human is either a man or a woman. But if we talk about a woman she has to perform several roles like daughter, wife, mother, grandmother etc. in the Indian culture. While performing their roles she offers equal justice to all the roles. But sometimes due to the unsaid reasons she fails to perform every role. Then the society puts her on the points of needle and raises many questions to her.

The Binding Vine deals with the multi-facetendedness of its protagonist Urmi. Her one-year-old daughter has died and she is unable to forget her because her memories haunt Urmi. She fights with the memories but also realises that forgotten is betrayal, “I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. This is one battle I have to win if I am going on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget is to betray” (1993: 21). She also realizes her responsibility to her living son Kartika who needs her love and watches her anxiously. It is not that she takes every death of her kith and kin in this way. When her father died she could bear the shock easily. She says that, “Papa is only a memory, a gentle memory” (27). But Anu is different. When Inni wants to have a framed photograph of Anu on the wall, she reacts bitterly, I don’t need a picture to remember her and I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life. How can you imagine I need a picture...? (68). But when her friend Lalita asks how many kids she has, she replies. “Only one, a Son” (106). And soon she realizes that she has done injustice to Anu,

One, one, a son... the words keep hammering in my mind. How could I, Oh God, could I? That was betrayal, treachery, how could I deny my Anu?... only one son... how could I? (106).
Obsessed with the memories of her daughter she comes across a photograph of her mother-in-law, Mira which is introduced as, “Kishor’s mother. Kartika’s grandmother” (1993: 42). She sees a group photograph of Mira and from the formality of the picture she conjectures that it was taken to mark, “an occasion – Mira’s wedding perhaps – a parting of ways for a group of friends. The end of chapter” (43). The trunk from which she gets the photograph contains many books and diaries of Mira. The poems of Mira are in Kannada and the diaries in English. Inquisitive to know more about her, she asks Akka about her. Akka tells her that her brother saw Mira at a wedding and fell in love with her. Since then he had “Single-minded pursuit of an object: marrying Mira” (47). He was suggested as a good match for Mira and in this way the marriage was arranged. Mira died while giving birth to Kishore. Urmi notices the difference in handing over of Mira’s property to her. When Akka hands over little bits of Mira’s jewelry, she says,

They are Kishore’s mother’s... I kept them for his wife. But when she hands over the books and diaries of Mira, she says, “Take this, it’s Mira’s.” She did not mention Kishore at all, as if she was now directly linking me with Mira (48).

This shows that a woman loses her identity after her marriage. She is seen either as a wife or mother who in a way erases her real self and imposes another alien self on her. The difference made by Akka symbolizes that the poems and diaries are “self-actualizing, whose identities are not dependent on men” (Wendy Martin, 1994-95: 10).

After reading the poems, Urmi realizes the suffering of Mira “the woman who wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage,
who died giving birth to her son at twenty-two” (1993: 48). In the eyes of Urmi Mira’s diary, “is not a daily account of her routine life but a communion with herself” (51). For the time-being she forgets her own suffering and tries to probe into Mira’s poetry to visualize the kind of troubled life she had lived. Taken together, the poems and the diary entries connote molestation in marriage. Take for example the following lines, “But tell me, friend, did Laxmi too twist brocade tassels round her fingers and tremble, fearing the coming of the dark-clouded, engulfing night?” (66). This is further denoted by the diary entries like the following,

But I have my defences: I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings... and so it begins. ‘please’ he says, ‘Please, I love you.’ And over and over again until he has done ‘I love you.’ How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing (67).

Such passages embody the psychological fears and physical suffering of Mira. Urmi wants to share this suffering with Vanna, her friend from childhood and now her sister-in-law but she can not, because “I cannot speak of Mitra, of Mitra’s writing, to her that is another pocket of silence between us. One can never see one’s parent as a sexual being; he or she is merely a cardboard figure labeled ‘parent’” (83). Urmi remembers the poem behind which lies the man “who tried to possess another human being against her will” (83), and the poem reads like this, “Don’t tread paths barred to you Obey, never utter a ‘no;’ Submit and your life will be A paradise, she said and blessed me” (83). The same kind of experience is conveyed by Saru, the protagonist of Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors.
A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband... That's the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor-nurse, executive-secretary, principal-teacher role (1980: 137).

Urmi decodes Mira's loneliness from the fact that the latter rarely mentions her family in her poems. This loneliness was a part of her being. When she came to her in-law's house, she was christened Nirmala—the first estrangement from her identity. One of her poems is written in reaction to this horrible incident,

A glittering ring gliding on the rice carefully traced a name 'Nirmala.' Who is this? None but I, My name hence bestowed upon me. Nirmala, they call, I stand statue still. Do you blind the new without razing the old? A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira (1993: 101).

But this strong assertion remains a private experience; it never becomes public in her lifetime. Urmi feels the burden of the dead on her. She had taken several things of the dead—Bai ajji's silver pins, her saris, and Mira's bangles—but none of these meant much to her. Contrasted with these Mira's poetry is "like a message being tapped on the wall by the prisoner in the next cell" (115). Urmi visualizes the moments when and where Mira could have written the poem. Certainly, she did not possess room of her own. Urmi says, "I can see her stealthily, soundlessly getting out of bed, sitting down on the floor by the window perhaps and forgetting everything while she wrote" (127).

Mira's diary also mentions her meeting with the rising poet Venu who later became a grand old man of Indian literature. When Mira gave some of her poems to read, he said, why do you need to write poetry? It is
enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is also a kind of brutality because "even to force your will another is to be brutal" (1993: 133). This reflects the agony of a creative woman writers in a male chauvinist society" (Mulk Raj Anand, 1994: 02). This is subordination by domestication. The same kind of anguish was given a vent by Kamala Das in her poem An Introduction. Dress in saris, be girl be wife, they said, be embroiderer, be cook, Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh belong, cried the categorizers" (1973: 27). This is a scheme of depriving woman of imagination and the power of communication. It would not be out to place to see what Kora Kaplan says in this context,

To be a woman and a poet presents many women poets with such a profound split between their social, sexual identity (their human identity) and there artistic practice that the split becomes the insistent subject, sometimes overt, often hidden or displaced, of much woman's poetry (Culture & Feminism, 1986: 70).

The silent effort of Mira to use language as a means to her redemption may be treated as "a demand for access to and parity within the law and myth-making groups in society" (Kaplan 71). She uses her pen as a weapon to save herself from abuse, anonymity and mutilation in the prison house for her husband.

It is ironical that Urmi reads Mira's poems as a hunter to find out the real self of Mira. Every time while reading the poems, she is filled with the excitement of hunter. But soon this relationship changes. "It is Mira who is now taking me by; the hand and leading me" (1993: 135). The centrality of Mira in the fictional world of the title of the novel from one of the poems of
Mira which is about the womb-piercing joy of her pregnancy, the binding vine of love.

The poems of Mira haunt Urmi so much that she decides to resurrect her by publishing them. But when Vanna comes to know about this plan, she is enraged. She feels that Urmi is traitor who will destroy the honour of the family by publishing the poems. “It is as if the knowledge of what her father did, of what he was, has threatened something, disturbed the inner rhythm of her being, so that there is a sense of disharmony about her” (1993: 181). In fact, male-oriented societies nourish women in such a way that they start looking at the world and interpreting it from male point of view. Mira fears the same entrapment that Irigaray speaks of, “I look at myself in you, you look at yourself in me” (Irigaray, 1981: 61). The daughter fears of being caught in the mother’s image, of not being able to establish her individual identity, of not being regarded as a distinct self. The petrifying image of the mother where she is seen as the nourishes and the caretaker is one of the most enigmatic images that haunt mother-daughter relationship.

You take care of me, you keep watch over me. You want me always in your sight in order to protect me. You fear that something will happen to me. Do you fear that something will happen? But what could happen that would be worse then the fact of my lying supine day and night? Already full grown and still in the cradle. Still dependant upon someone who carries me, who nurses me. Who carries me? Who nurses me? (Irigaray, 60-61).

Mira too poses the same question, though somewhat differently. The ‘supine’ nature of the daughter is reflected in imitating the mother blindly, in being full grown and still in the cradle. Mira, whose body revolts against
sexual advances and whose mind is intellectually alert, cannot obviously afford to be a mere shadow of her mother or the unsubstantial shadowy stature to which her mother had been forced to reduce herself. Urmi shares the anguish of not only her mother-in-law but also of Kalpana—a girl who becomes prey to her own relative who molests her. When her mother Shakutai approaches Urmi, and Vanna who is a medical social worker, the latter tells her that Kalpana has been wronged by someone. She has also undergone severe head injury and is on the verge of death. Her mother requests the doctor not to inform the police, “No, no, no. Tell him, tai, it’s not true, don’t tell anyone, I’ll never be able to hold up my head again, who’ll marry the girl, we’re decent people” (1993: 58).

She further requests Urmi “to tell him (the doctor) not to make that report” (62). Urmi is surprised to see Shakutai, whose husband has already deserted her for some other younger women, worried about the marriage of Kalpana who is, in the words of the doctor, “Neither dead nor alive” (86). But she soon realise that women like Kalpana’s mother finds security in marriage. At least they are “safe from other men” (88). Marriage in the life of such women acts as purdah or view, which serves a “provision of symbolic shelter” (Henna Papanke and Gail Minaults, 1982: 07).

Being a mother Shakutai was afraid of the boys of her Chawl because they; behave “like dogs panting after bitches” (1993: 146). She had even though of marrying Kalpana to Sulu’s husband Prabhakar who was ‘mad’ after her. Kalpana out rightly rejected the offer and ridiculed Sulu. When she decided to marry a boy of her own liking she was raped by Prabhakar. It’s significant to note that Sulu was compelled by her husband to make such proposal. When Sulu knows that her own husband has molested
Kalpana, she finishes her cooking, gives breakfast to her husband and then commits suicide because she wants to avoid telling a lie to save her husband from the police. Her suicide symbolises the anguish of the weakened soul of the typical traditional Indian woman. But what Mulk Raj Anand says about the plight of Indian women cannot be fully true,

No woman in our land is beyond the threat of rape, because of the suppressed energies of the male, through the taboos of patriarchy, which deny sex before marriage and make, male young-young into wanton animals who assault any possible victim, when possessed by lust (1994: 03).

Though Urmi is accused of being a ‘Traitor’ to Mira and Kalpana, she is resolute to break the silence of women, which come in different forms—sometimes in the name of the social taboos, sometimes in the name of the family honour. She justifies her stand because she sees these mishaps from the female point of view. Urmila in The Binding Vine is diametrically opposite to Jaya. She is aggressive, economically independent, takes her own decisions and her feminism borders on militancy, and prompts harshness in her equations with others. A lecture in a Bombay college, she lives with her mother, Yamini (Inni, for short) and her six years old son, Kartik. Hers is a love match with Kishore, a former neighbor now working with the Merchant Navy and away from home for long spells. Although she lives with her mother, her representation suggests the strong-willed single woman. In a way, she is like Indu, only stronger, more strident. In that respect, she is unlike any other of Deshpande’s protagonists. Deshpande who is dismissive of militancy in women has possibly created a radical feminist only to subvert such a character. The novelist reveals through the representation that expressing one’s needs, accepting one’s vulnerability are
not weaknesses but liberation, and that assertiveness and not aggressiveness is the desired ideal. This said Urmila has much strength. Her fiercely independent nature is first seen when at the age of fifteen, she chooses to stay alone with her grandfather Aju's dead body (Aju had hanged himself to death) while Kishore goes to fetch some other members of the family. Her rationale is, how could she leave until her father came?

Kishore, her husband later, is a very supportive and understanding partner. So, the crisis in her life is not caused by a girl, Anu. The novel is ostensibly about Urmila's coming to terms with her identity, values and choices with greater apprehension of her relationship with others, especially her husband.

The death of Anu is one event that reveals her at her most vulnerable. It is an event that causes her intense grief. Traumatized, she repeatedly asks, 'Why me?' Her distress sometimes manifests itself in psychosomatic attacks of asthma so that she is left gasping for breath. At other times she is driven into hurting herself masochistically to experience pain, as she explains. The underlying theme of the five dreams she describes in her narrative is helplessness and despair, emotions that are a typical of the strong Urmila.

I am running along the sea. There's someone else with me.... I can hear the footsteps, I can hear the heavy breathing, but I cannot see whoever it is.... I have to keep running.... Now it is becoming difficult; the sand, soft and squishy under my feet, keeps dragging me down.... I can't go on... I can't go... (1993: 16).

The feeling of failure, the unconscious death wish, the psychosomatic expressions of repressed grief are explicit in her dreams which she never
shares with the others around her. Her later self-disclosure made as a narrator, marks the growth that Deshpande envisions as strength in a woman. Unlike Deshpande's other protagonists who define themselves with respect to their usual gender roles, Urmila is out and out a feminist. Here is an egalitarian relationship with her husband. She believes in living on her own earnings and will not touch his if she can help it. Even Vanaa, her childhood friend and Kishore's sister cannot understand her adamancy,

\[\text{You're stupid, Vanaa tells me, letting all that money Kishore sends you pile up in the bank, while you agonize over trifles why don't you use it... (1993:94).}\]

Vanaa and Urmila have different perceptions about the wife-Husband relationship. Like Kishore, Vanaa's husband Harish, is a very understanding man and Vanaa admires him immensely. But her "constant refrain of Harish says" (80), infuriates Urmila who urges her to "assert" (80), and to stop being submissive. Vanaa's equation with Harish, however, is one of 'Willed' submission. "Assert yourself, you don't have to crawl before him do you?" "I don't crawl, I do what I want" (80). It intrigues Urmila that Vanaa is so contented in her marriage, playing second fiddle to Harish. She recalls having shocked Vanaa when she had walked out on Kishore on the wedding night both to challenge convention and to exhibit control over her own body. She is surprised that Harish and Vanaa share a subtle tender relationship as in the intimate scene where Urmila sights Vanaa's head on Harish's shoulder in their car. Urmila, on the other hand, with all her militancy, feels insecure in her relationship with Kishore.
Now there is fear—the fear of Kishore never returning home... the fear of his not wanting to come back to me. Yes that’s the thing, that’s what I am most afraid of (1993: 82).

As she introspects further, she betrays her secret wish to be like Vanaa and Inni. “I want to submit too. But I know that if I walk the way of submission once, I will walk that way forever” (82). A still further search within reveals that like the women she desires to be submissive, she is afraid to confront Kishore, “Yet I never ask him ‘why?’... (82). Although his equal, Urmila is unable to tell Kishore to change his job (as many Merchant Navy employees do) not because he won’t do it but because she lacks the courage to tell him that she needs his physical presence in her life. As her wish could be ignored or even thwarted. Playing the strong, independent woman while being vulnerable within is the cause of Urmila’s pain and disappointment in the book. “Each time you leave me, the parting is like death” (138), the words come to Urmila but she can never utter them to him.

Unlike Indu and Jayant, the sexual relationship between Urmila and Kishore is passionate and satisfying. Yet, after every intercourse, Urmila experienced an aching disappointment as Kishore withdraws into a world of his own – “there is something in him I will never reach” (141). That impermeable armour around him generates the fear of abandonment in her. It is the same primeval fear that the uneducated Sulu expresses when her husband threatens to remarry since she can’t bear him a child. This places the sophisticated, well-educated Urmila on the same plane as other oppressed Indian women in a patriarchal society. The roots of her fear of abandonment also lie in her childhood experience of having been sent to Ranidurg to be raised by her grandparents while her brother Amrut is not.

S. R. T. M. University Nanded
an experience that has scarred her psyche deeply. Perhaps it is defensiveness on her part, which prompts her to play the strong man, to conceal her weaknesses, to brook none in others. In one scene she brutally pulls down a picture of Anu’s framed and hung up on the wall by her mother, and admonishes her for believing that would keep Anu’s memory alive in the lives.

I don’t need a picture to remember her, I can remember every bit of her, every moment of her life. How can you imagine. I need a picture...? ...how dare Inni, how dare she think such a thing! A white hot age explores in me, blinding me, so that Inni’s face is blur. Then it comes into focus and I can see her – Kartik standing by her, holding on to her sari, the two faces alike in their expression of fear. I stop speaking (1993: 68).

Urmila realises how tyrannical she is becoming and stop short to apologize. Her mother’s quiet remark brings home to Urmila her mindless cruelty towards her.

You think you’re the only one who cares, you never think, you never imagine what it is like for me. I was with her the whole day, she played with me, she slept in my bed... (69).

It is in moments such as these that Urmila’s education as a human being is initiated. Secretly, she has been impressed by dominating men as are most other women socialised in a particular high society. For he, to give is to crawl, to be strong is never to yield. Her perception of relationships is too arithmetical and mechanical to give her depth as a person. Her vision is controlled more by logic than by feelings. In one instance, she shocks and Dr. Bhasker Jain when she declares that she pities table players since they most play “second fiddle all their lives” (118). A horrified Bhasker hastens to
correct her misconception. But that's not true.... The two (singer and tabalji) go together. Sometimes you can even command. Lead the singer by the nose, sort of (1993: 118).

Urmila is a strong woman but more aggressive than assertive. Her growth as a character in the book is marked by her gradual realization that to assert is not to deny others their rights, that assertion means to stand up for oneself without hurting others. As a protagonist, therefore, she stands at the other extreme of the spectrum from the rest of the protagonist who are initially passive and whose evolution towards self-assertion records their growth. Urmila’s growth is characterized by her evolution towards self-assertion from the opposite end, that is, aggressiveness.

On the positive side, Urmila’s strength is also very admirable. She stands up for her values and convictions as few Indian women do. In the midst of family censure, she continues her friendship with Bhasker Jain, exhibiting full responsibility for her decision. She also supports Kalpana, the raped young woman, and Shakutai, her mother, a domestic worker. She reaches the uneducated woman of the underclass to speak up so that her wronged daughter may get justice. She educates her not to live in fear, guilt or blame, which are the result of conditioning in Indian women. Reaching out and sharing the life with the opposed (unlike Jaya who turns a blind eye towards suffering women), she is enabled to overcome her grief for the dead Anu as she learns to give herself to the others. She is the most proactive of Deshpande’s protagonists.

The story of Deshpande’s protagonist always begins at the critical point where despite ‘total’ freedom and sometimes-total surrender to the expectations of their husbands (as in the case of Jaya) they are discontented
and unhappy. Therefore, they wish to re-define themselves. A woman must give expression to her inner space and self, at the same time, she need not repudiate the social institution of marriage and family (and the duties that accompany it) or her basic human values. His is what Deshpande's fiction tries to convey. Her protagonists are not her mouthpieces but emerge as living persons characteristics that set them apart from the other characters in her books and from one another. For example, Indu from \textit{Roots and Shadows} is described as a 'frail, little creature' who is actually 'indomitable.' Sarita in \textit{The Dark Holds No Terrors} is ambitious and mature, yet very feminine in other aspects, Jaya, in \textit{That Long Silence}, whose name is "small, sharp and clear, like her face...",(1988: 14) is, however, passive, and has silenced and muffled her voice consciously. She has the potential to re-define herself. Urmila in \textit{The Binding Vine} is the plain looking young woman who wears glasses, and blouses that don't match her saris. There are astonishing resemblances, too, among the protagonists – they are intrinsically definite and committed to oppose oppression. Together they represent the new, collective voice of dynamic young women who are not going to lead circumscribed lives.

Deshpande presents the conflicts of her protagonists without presenting simple solutions. She lets the different choices speak for themselves, the choice to conform or to break free. Sometimes she seems to be faintly echoing the sentiments of De Beauvoir, who, she admits, has influenced her, and according to whom it is women who "have to define, measure, and explore their special domain" (1972: 609). Deshpande believes that women have so deeply internalized the dominant mores that sometimes, despite being better endowed than most other Indian women, her protagonists cannot visualize in independent identity for themselves.
and so they become submissive. Perhaps, through their portrayals, Deshpande is also trying to explode the myth of ‘educated Indian woman,’ who, it is popularly assumed, is automatically liberated. Their education should have given them the freedom and the courage to do what they believe in. It should have given them the determination to assert themselves as individuals, to set limits with their partners. However, they had failed to utilize their education or benefit from its advantages because of a latent, patriarchal mind-set, ingrained in their childhood via socialization. Thus, Deshpande seems to be saying that it is the women themselves who have to exert and come out of the mire of patriarchal oppression, to emerge as individuals and as human beings in their own right. More than any one else, the educated Indian woman must do it so that she can light the path for her daughters. That seems to be Deshpande’s vision of the future.

Urmila’s husband Kishore in The Binding Vine makes an exceptionally egalitarian person. Born to middle class family with an austere life style, he shows none of the aggressive pursuit of material wealth that characterizes the husbands. He genuinely loves her and is close to his only surviving child, Kartik. Of a quiet disposition, he is represented as a strong character who, even as Urmila’s young neighbor, had respected her wishes. For example in the scene where he comes to her aid when Aju, her grandfather had bolted the house and hanged himself to death. Since he can’t break open the door, he decides to get some of the others. He asks her to accompany him home: “I refused and he didn’t argue” (1993: 163). She was the first to fall in love with him and believes that she must have “willed his feelings into being by the strength of my own” (164).
Urmila is struck by the quiet immensity of his mourning for their daughter on the night of Anu's death. Urmila sees tears pouring silently down his face, "I could have wiped his tears, but I didn't" (1993:14), perhaps no other husband in Deshpande's fiction shows the capacity to live with his 'vulnerability'. Affectionate and understanding, Kishore is an androgynous character. In many ways, Kishore is an ideal husband. He treats his wife as an equal, as a person with a mind and will of her own. It is also clear that the liberated Urmila would not have accepted anything else had Kishore been different. Kishore respects her wishes even when her decisions and actions are unorthodox, and yet emerges as a strong person. Two incidents stand out in this regard. The first occurs on their wedding night. The two of us in a closed room. He said, parodying the words of a popular film-song, "and we can't get out. That's marriage." And I walked out... (137). Urmila walks out not only to prove him wrong about marriage being imprisonment, but also because she doesn't like the "trapped" look in his face, the tremendous pressure on him to keep alive a certain convention. Kishore never asks her why she had walked out that night nor does she try to explain. This is the mark of an equal relationship.

The other incident occurs on the night Anu is taken ill. Kisore and Urmila have had an ardent night together and Kishore, after the act, lies smoking with one arm under his head, his face clear and calm. Urmila feels alienated and reduced to passivity. As he stubs the cigarette butt into the ashtray, the finality of the gesture provokes Urmila into rebellion gathering her nightdress out her, she runs out into the roaring wind and rain and gets completely drenched. His arm around her, Kishore brings her back and after her bath, puts her to bed. Kneeling by her bed, he urges her to go to sleep. The incident is not discussed by either of them. However, Urmila later
remembers that his closeness was only physical and his voice cold. And it triggers off despair in her. Her remark that,

Kishore will never remove his armour, there is something g in him I will never reach. I have lived with the hope that some day I will... Am I to give up this hope?... (1993: 141).

Signals a deep-rooted insecurity in her relationship with Kishore. Commenting on the feeling of insecurity in women a critic holds the opinion that man normally considers that after he has proved his love to a woman. She should stay away from man and should consider his love as permanent. This is a typical male's view for woman this view is almost a hard nut to crack. What a woman requires is consistent reassurance that she is very special worthy and loveable man on the other hand also requires this reassurance but he gets it, through the encouragement he receives for his work performance. But woman primarily needs this reassurance through her relationship with the man. In the novel Urmila fails to get this reassurance from Kishore and hence there is a deep rooted feeling of insecurity in her. Gray, an expert in interpersonal communication, is credited with the unique contribution that the difference between men and women is more than biological. According to Gray, men and women feel and respond differently, and for a sound relationship between wives and husbands a good understanding of the mental, emotional make-up of the two sexes is necessary, as also is learning the art of asserting and asking for fulfillment.

The character of Kishore serves to show that even when a husband is as liberated as he, the marital relationship can still become a troubled one for either spouse, unless each partner, especially the woman, learns to
communicate her needs and ask for fulfillment. Although Urmila is not submissive, she does not ask Kishore for more than what he gives her. Consequently, she tends to nurture and build up resentments which make her feel that despite a “love” (1993: 165) marriage, her adolescent dreams “of living happily ever after with Kishore” (165), have been modified their relationship shows up the vast scope for her to further develop the habit of asserting. Deshpande contrasts her depiction of the husbands with the protagonists’ lovers and male friends. Like the husbands, these characters, are analysed only in terms of their relationship with the protagonists.

Dr. Bhaskar Jain and Urmila in The Binding Vine are intellectual equals: so Bhaskar does not contribute to her growth and development as the male friends of the other protagonist do. However, like Kamat and Naren, Bhaskar is the good and dependable friend with whom a woman can freely share her innermost thoughts and emotions because she knows she won’t be misunderstood or evaluated by the usual patriarchal norms of society. Bhaskar enables her to talk about the loss of Anu, about Ranidurg, about Baiaji. The understanding male friend with whom the protagonist can share everything (but whom she does not marry), recurs in every novel of Deshpande’s. He stands for the ideal ‘companion’ that every woman seeks in a husband. As can be expected in Indian society, Urmila’s friendship with Bhaskar is frowned upon by her mother and Vanaa,

... Her uneasiness is palpable. She doesn’t like my going out with Bhaskar, not does Vanaa. “Do you expect me to live like a cloistered nun just because I’m married?” I asked Vanaa irritably. It’s not that, but...” she didn’t go on (115).
Unlike Jaya, who runs away from the dead Kamat to save her reputation, Urmila insists on continuing her friendship with Bhaskar openly. Taking a lift in his car occasionally, accepting a dinner date or going with him to his house to meet his mother, are simple expressions of a friendship between two professionals who enjoy each other's company.

However, once again, Deshpande problematise the male friend-married woman relationship as Bhaskar grows serious in his intentions towards Urmila. Typically, he surmises that a woman whose husband is away for several months and who never speaks of him couldn't be very happy in her marriage. His patriarchal expectation prompts him to express sexual interest in her,

...he leans forward and takes off my glasses. "What's that for? "I want to see your eyes. I want to see you without your shield." He says this with such feeling, he looks at me with such intensity... I'm frightened... (1993:161).

Insistently, he probes into her relationship with Kishore since "it's the most important thing to me right now" (161). Urmila feels 'cheated' and 'angry' cheated because she had never thought of Bhaskar as a lover, and angry because she ought to have expected this development. Although Urmila chooses to remain faithful to Kishore, there is momentary rebellion in her, as Indu-like, she wonder if she ought to have exorcised her disappointed in Kishore by giving to Bhaskar "what he wants" (165). The character of Bhaskar works largely to foreground her suppressed dissatisfaction with Kishore. It also enables her to recognize how deeply she loves her husband.
Fathers and uncles of the protagonists, although representative of the old order, also act as counterfoils to their husbands. They comprise the third category of males in Deshpande's novels. They represent the benevolent patriarch or the head-of-the family type. Sarita's father is an easy-going, traditional, non-interfering type of person who leaves the upbringing of his children to his wife who kept his distance from Sarita. She recalls,

We rarely spoke to each other, even then.... The reserve was perhaps part of an old-fashioned attitude that daughters are their mother's business... (1980: 105).

She adds: "He never took any interest in my school and college. He left it all to her (Mother)" (32). To Sarita, "he had always been... incapable of strong feelings" (30), having concerned himself only with that which his wife asked him to do. The distance between Sarita and her father had increased when her brother Dhruva had died accidentally. Hurt at her father's lack of demonstration of affection towards her, Sarita believes that he is a weak man who had allowed himself to be dominated by his wife.

However, in spite of his traditional background, he had supported Sarita against his wife in a few crucial situations. Among these, the most important had been his encouragement to Sarita in her wish to join medical college in Bombay, a decision that had proved to be turning point in Sarita's life. While her mother had vehemently opposed Sarita's ambition of becoming a doctor, since it would be difficult to marry off an 'overqualified' girl, her father had stood by her firmly. Out of his meager salary (He was a clerk in a bank), he had paid for her education and enabled her to realize her ambition. Later, when Sarita tells him about Manu's nightly sexual abuse, he listens carefully and patiently to her outpourings. Despite his
traditional outlook, he urges her to talk to Manu about the problem. He advises her against running away from Manu out of cowardice,

You can't run away this way, Saru..." "Give him a chance...
Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what's wrong... Don't turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them (1980: 216).

He tells her that she had been wrong to hide Manu's sexual aberration from him (Manu), she ought to have talked to Manu about it and tried to find a solution to the problem, instead of evading it. The unexpected censure from her father makes Sarita realise that the onus to set things right was upon her and that she would have to act in an assertive manner to resolve the conflict. Sarita's father thus proves to be an important force in Sarita's evolution. Though he had always remained in the background, preferring his wife to take the lead, he had supported Sarita at all crucial moments in her life. Although he is the typical Indian father—old-fashioned, conservative and reserved with his daughter—he had always tried to understand her problems and motivated her to solve them.

Indu's and Jaya’s father in Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence respectively are modern and broad-minded, and remarkably free of the dominant sexist, patriarchal ideology. Their attributes and values play an important role in shaping their daughter's personalities. Although portrayed somewhat sketchily, they are seen as having influenced their daughters in becoming independent women.

The conflict between Urmila and her mother Inni, in The Bending Vine is direct and frontal. Urmila's hostility towards her mother is felt in the angry tones and harsh language she uses when speaking with her or
about her to others. The earliest indirection of the conflict between mother and daughter is in Urmila’s disclosure to Vanna that as a child she had preferred the old-fashioned, ill-fitting dresses made to her by Baiaji, her grandmother, to be the expensive ones sent by Inni. She would keep the dresses sent by her mother in the cupboard, “until I could say – truthfully that they were too small for me” (1993: 09). The devious manners of repudiating her mother suggest the deep antagonism in Urmila towards her mother.

As a child Urmila has been sent away to Ranidurg to be raised by her grandparents. Somehow she had perceived this action as indicative of her mother’s rejection of her and nursed deep resentment and anger against her. Though a grown up woman now and a mother herself, Urmila had never asked Inni why she has sent her away and had continued to assume that it had been her mother’s decision. Rich has said: “Easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acing upon her” (1976: 235). That is true of Urmila too. Even though Amrut, her brother, tells her that her father had been a domineering person. Urmila conveniently ignores the information and continues to hold her mother responsible for the separation. Her behavior towards her mother veers from the unassertive (she is hurt and sulky) to the aggressive (she is angry and self-righteous), but not the assertive (where she can communicate openly and fearlessly with her mother).

Urmila callously rejects Inni’s solicitousness towards her after Amit’s death. “When has she ever acted the doing mother with me...? ... Even when all of you came to Ranidurg, it was I who looked after you...” (1993: 25). The implication here is that Urmila has to look after her mother of
crucial hours and that her mother never proved to be a perfect mother and a house maker. In this, Urmila resembles Jaya.

Deshpande’s portrayal of the mother also seems to be a reaction to the idealized depiction of the mother and motherhood in mythology and other Indian literature. She wants to depict woman as an individual rather than as cast in a particular mould or role. Deshpande’s protagonists seem closer to their fathers than to their mothers. Deshpande has stated that conflicts between mothers and daughters are natural (personal Interview). The daughter in a traditional family is considered the responsibility of the mother who imposes restrictions on her to prepare her for a harsher future as part of the process of socialization. Fathers are perceived as lenient by the daughters who feel oppressed by their mothers. Strictures of the fathers remain hidden as the women act on their behalf to condition the daughters. Since theirs (the father’s) is a remote control, the conflict between mother and daughter becomes direct. This is reflected in almost all the mother-daughter relationships in her work. In the course of their self exploration, however the protagonists analyse their relationships with their mothers with retrospective maturity and realise that their mothers too have been victims of patriarchal socialization and gender-based oppression. Only, while they had been trained to accept or to fight within, limit, the daughter had refused to conform.

They realise that their mothers were meaning but they rebel against their control because they want to be themselves. The daughters try to break free of their mothers only to discover that they are merely extensions of their mothers’ personalities. In many ways, Indu is akin to Akka. Both have an innate capacity to manage others’ lives and to lead. Indu, like Akka,
is used to having her own way. Both also have the urge to assert themselves, an urge which surfaces most during oppressive conditions. Akka's legacy gives Indu a sense of responsibility that had earlier been lacking in her. She realises that her former resentment of Akka had been a necessary part of growing up which she had carried too far. She now desists from ruminating and sulking over her own marital conflict and begins, for the first time, to view herself in relation to the others in the family. She confronts the reality that she has unnecessarily indulged in self-pity whereas she ought to have asserted herself. She would even like to emulate Akka for her strength. "I thought she was just an interfering old woman. But she was more than that. She was a prop. One of the strong" (Roots, 1983: 175). Akka's strength had come from her convictions: "Akka believe (d) in something and nothing... (Could) keep her from acting according to those beliefs" (203). This is precisely the quality that Indu herself has lacked in her own marriage. She has not asserted herself in situations where she ought to have.

The disposal of Akka's money poses a dilemma. However, Indu decides to finance her cousin Mini's marriage, just as Akka would have liked her to. Against the wishes of the others in the family, she decides not to pay for the maintenance of the old house and lets it be sold off. Akka's prime objective had been to hold the family together. But in doing so, she had unknowingly encouraged its members to become dependent and even parasitical. Indu, with her decision to sell the house, forces its inmates to become independent and to fend for themselves. Her efforts are aimed more at the younger generation. Further, unlike Akka who being traditionally brought up would never have done anything for someone outside the family, she decides to pay for an orphan's education. Asserting in the face of the family disapproval, Indu shows innate strength and determination, very
much in the manner of Akka herself. Indu epitomizes the modern way when she refuses to support her degenerate parasitical joint family and forces them to stand on their own feet. However, she fulfills her tradition obligations as a new 'head' by paying for Mini's wedding. Deshpande attempts a synthesis of both the old and new symbolized in Akka and Indu respectively. Unknown to both, Akka proves to be major factor in Indu's evolution and growth, and though she has been treated as a minor character. Akka remains a dominant figure in the novel, influencing the lives of nearly all the characters, particularly Indu's.

Like Indu, Sarita and Urmila learn to come to terms with their antagonism towards their mothers; this is the part of her discovery of them. The second category includes grandmothers and aunts. They fall into two types: the strong ones and the weak ones. The weak ones are defined with reference to the strong. A number of these characters appear in pairs - one strong and the other weak. Such doubling and contrasting of characters recur in Deshpande's novels.

Deshpande clearly and powerfully light on the spectrum of human relationships. We talk about this novel she discloses mother-daughter relationship against the backdrop of Indian ethos and milieu. In fact it is also as clear as crystal that these characters become puppet in the dominant hands of time. That plays the major part in their life. Sometimes time becomes the chief antagonist and protagonist in her narration. Therefore no one can deny the fact that time has the constructive as well as the destructive power in the human relationships.
WORKS CITED


4.3 A Matter of Time
him up and educated him to be a lawyer. Kalyani was coerced by her
dreaded mother to “accept a feared uncle as a husband” (1996: 143). All this
was responsible for “the hopelessness that lay within the relationship that
doomed it from the start” (143).

While going to Bangalore to her parental home, Kalyani lost her
four-year-old mentally retarded son. This happened at the railway station.
The son wandered away as she was attending to the crying baby and
Shripati had gone to check for reservations. Shripati in search of the lost son
“went about the city like a madman” (140), but to no avail. This brought
Kalyani’s marital life to an end. Shripati stopped speaking to his wife and
“has not spoken to her since the day it happened” (140), for about thirty-
five years (140). Even this oppressive silence could not kill Kalyani’s
affection to the other members of the family. She is an anchor in an ill-
starred family. Her daughter, Sumi recognized the great contribution of this,

self-punishing woman. In fact, noticing the complex net of
relationships that Kalyani has with so many people, She (Sumi)
is reminded of the spider, she had seen one morning, scuttling
from point to point, drawing silken threads out of itself,
weaving in the process a web with a beautiful design (185).

Kalyani is visible upset when she comes to know about Gopal’s
walking away on his wife and children. She will never like the tragedy of
her life to surface in the case of her daughter. “No... No, my God, not
again.” She crises pathetically, “sounding so much like an animal in pain”
(12). When she goes to meet Gopal she pleads him not to let it happen to
Sumi what had happened to her. She took the entire responsibility of Sumi’s
‘carelessness’ on herself she says,
Time is the best friend as well as the greatest enemy of human being. A man or woman, who realises the entities of time, he or she will get satisfaction in their life. If we get into consideration about woman, who grasps the heart-beat of time, but sometimes she fails to identify the need of this hour. At that point, she has to pay the heavy price. Therefore time plays quite important role in woman’s life.

Shashi Deshpande’s latest novel, A Matter of Time presents story of three generations of women in the same family who are living under the same roof. It is a narration about their own values and mindsets in particular their individual relationship with each other. The novel opens with sumi’s husband, Gopal’s walking away from home, which Meenakshi Mukherjee finds ‘inexplicable’, and a major part of it is devoted to attempts of the “relatives to find out why Gopal deserted his family so irresponsibly” (1997: 30).

Kalyani one of the most important characters, is presented as "a weak, feeble creature" (1996: 154), who returns to her parents’ home as a "deserted wife" and a "disgrace to the family" (154). Kalyani herself admits to have been "a great disappointment" (226), to her parents not, because she "was a girl" (226), but because she was "none of those things" which her mother "would have liked her daughter to be" (226). Kalyani’s marriage with Shripati, her maternal uncle, was arranged purely on account of an expediency – to prevent the poverty from going away. After their marriage, Manorama, Kalyani’s mother, “felt secure. The property would remain in the family now. Her family” (129). Shripati’s reluctance was softened by Manorama’s appeal to his gratitude. Discerning “both intelligence and ambition” (143), in him when he was a boy, Kalyani’s parents had brought
But how could she have known what being a good wife means when she never saw her mother being one? I taught her nothing, it’s all my fault, Gopala, forgive me and don’t punish her for it (1996: 47).

Kalyani’s character is a faithful representation of a self-sacrificing Indian woman of the old generation. To them marriage is the most important happening in a woman’s life. It is both a problem and solution to life’s problems. Kalyani is keen on getting a good match for her granddaughter, Aru, though they are “Amazed” (124), by her unusual interest in marriage, which was responsible for her own misfortune. “How can she, of all people, think of marriage with enthusiasm?” (124). Both Sumi and her husband, Gopal are called ‘unusual people.’ Sumi appears to be an epitome of silent suffering and passive resistance. But the novelist feels, she is made of different stuff. She does not ask any apparent reason. Even the one question she wanted to ask him remains unsaid,

... If I meet Gopal I will ask him one question no one has thought of what is it, Gopal, I will ask him, that makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walk out on his family and all that he owns? Because... It was you who said that we are shaped by the age we live in, by the society we are part of this society; turn your back on everything in your life. Will you be able to give me an answer to this? (27).

At the happening in the novel revolves round this very question. Sumi’s character has been “Beautiful, effortlessly, almost without wanting to, gathering friends around her.” “Grace and courage” (172), and her old vivacity (172). Gopal remembers when they meet later that her “body blocked out everything else” (223), about her. What is even more beautiful in her is a series of rare qualities, which she possesses. She has “no trace of
vanity" though "she is proud of her quickness and her memory" (1996: 212). After desertion by her husband she shows boundless patience. She accepts sympathy, loyalty and stupefied bewilderment after her tragedy with the same sense of equanimity, and her stoicism makes her "an enigma" (20). "Sumi is tantalized by a sense of déjà vu" (23), but remarkably maintains herself cool in all adversities. Gopal was amazed and awed by her "ease with strangers" (107). Her sister Premi speaks eloquently about Sumi's superiority over her. "She was ahead of me and I was forever trailing behind, never able to catch up with her" (17). Such is Sumi's nature that she cannot hate a person for long. She herself tells her daughter that she is "not a good hater" (194) and that she cannot sustain her anger or hatred for long. He is so self-centered that she would not even talk about Gopal's act of desertion. She tells Devaki,

I've never been able to cry easily, you know that. And what do I say, Devi? That my husband has left me and I don't know why and may be he doesn't really know, either? And that I am angry and humiliated and confused...? Let that be, we won't go into it now (107).

Not that Sumi does not feel, the wrench in fact sensitive and self respecting persons like her feel their misfortune more keenly. Even in her parental house, she "has the air of being lost and of having no place" (168). The purposeless extravagance about her movements and her 'stylized manner' of walking is indicative of her agony. But she fully realizes that trying a lacerated heart to ones wrist as it were and showing it to the world is meaningless. What she cannot help is to bear silently the absence of Gopal's reassuring presence, "that familiar rustling by my side at night" — and "feel cold without the presence of Gopal in my life" (168). Her silent
suffering assumes at times a heroic proportion. She is not unaware of the bliss of the human relationship, but she accepts the harsh facts of life badly, maintaining that Gopal is "going his way and I have to go mine" (1996: 161). She wants her daughter's life to be "easy and comfortable" (220), unchequered by unhappiness, "I want her to enjoy the good things in life, I want her to taste life; I want her to relish it and not spit it out because she finds it bitter" (220). Life, she knows, is not a bed of rouses, and what pays in life is sane and balanced attitude to it.

Another important thing about Sumi is her ability to relate herself to the world. After Gopal's walking away, her creativity gets revived. She writes a play entitled The Gardener's Son and proposes to write another. "It feels so good" (231). She admits, "and now suddenly I want to do so many things" (231). She also wants to rewrite the story of Surpanakha from an original point of view.

Female sexuality, we're ashamed of owning it. We can't speak of it not even to our own selves. But Surpanakha was not she spoke of her desires she flaunted them. And therefore, were the men, unused to such women, frightened? Did they feel threatened by her? I think so. Surpanakha, neither ugly nor hideous, but a woman charged with sexuality. Not frightened of displaying it — it is this Surpanakha I'm going to write about (191).

The above revision of the Surpanakha episode speaks of Sumi's eagerness to place man-woman relationships on a sound non-partisan footing and also of her modernity in thought. It is a pity that Sumi dies of an accident suddenly, just before her taking up a job to support herself and her daughters. The last section of the novel, as a reviewer points out, "seems to be least finished, with many loose threads hanging, almost like a first draft.
and certainly untouched by a publisher's editor” (Latha Ahantharanan, 1997: 76-77). By removing Sumi prematurely from the fictional scene the novelist has denied herself the opportunity of bringing in the important issue of women's economic empowerment. Interestingly, she herself is not unaware of this fact “Sumi without husband” (1996: 134). She said to Vimala Rama Rao, “the economics part of would be most important. Money is very important to me like Jane Austen” (1997: 134). The novel seems to have been written in a hurry, which has deprived the novelist of an opportunity of delineating Sumi’s character in a more comprehensive way.

Aru (or Arundhati) is to the novelist, she is the focal point in the novel. An “observer of the drama affecting entire family (1996: 133). She is endowed with “her innate sense of order” (12), and given to “withdrawal from all of them” (122). She is ready to go ahead with “a purely impersonal search” (122). She seems to be “holding a moral scale against which she had appeared to be measuring everyone, including herself” (227). Aru is the heroine of this story. The novelist declares, basing her evaluation on the norms prescribed in the Natya Sastra. She has youth and beauty and has the potential of having nobility and steadfastness. Above all she is “trying to make sense of what is happening, her consciousness moving outside herself and reaching out to the others as well, embracing in fact, the whole of what is happening” (185). It is hoped that true “understanding” would come to her in due course and her “ambivalence” (185), would disappear. Aru is empathy makes her the most sensitive character in the novel who silently reaches out to others and feels their predicament keenly.

Another distinguishing quality of Aru is her rebelliousness. The “desire to rebel” (11), is deeply ingrained in her Gopal’s walking away on his
family is according to her “not just a tragedy, it is both a shame and a disgrace” (1996: 13). Her reaction to her mother’s stoic acceptance of it is “violent and sharp” (21). Aru’s “hostility” is like “a weapon” or “an adversary” (49). She is no longer interested in Gopal’s answer, but she will not let him “get away Scot-free” (137). She says, “He can’t get away like this! He has to give us maintenance” (61). She is pained by the disintegration of the family, but her self-respect would not let her stoop to self-pity. Even after the death of her mother and grandfather she is not prepared to seek any help from Gopal. She “moves away from her father’s arms” and says to him “Yes Papa, you go, we’ll all right, we’ll be quite all right don’t worry about us” (246). She consoles Kalyani saying that she will be with the latter as her ‘Son’ (233), who is regarded as the ‘protector’ in the Indian context after the father’s death.

Marriage, which in India is considered to be the most coveted relationship, does not have a place in Aru’s scheme of things. “I’m never going to get married” (76). She declares. Her reading of Erica Jong has convinced her further of the futility of such human relationships. She is quick enough to perceive “new dimensions of betrayal and cruelty in the woman-man relationship” (145). She expresses her point of view to Premi thus,

I’ve been thinking about marriage a great deal... What's there in it? I mean, look at Amma and now Sumi... what do you get out of it?... “And look at Goda-ajji and Bhauji – Kaka... they're always scrapping. At their age and after so many years of marriage!” (138).

Aru, as the novelist suggests, fails to appreciate “the interplay of feelings” (138), in marriage, but this may be because of her want of maturity
and her vicarious experience of marriages like those of Kalyani and Shripati
Sumi and Gopal and others. Probably the most important point about Aru is
her finely individualized unconventional relationship with her
grandmother, Kalyani. The focus, says the novelist, is on “two human beings
(and) not on the relationship being defined” (1996: 132). Aru is said to have
had originally “a troubled relationship” (122) with Kalyani. With the
passage of time however she changes and comes to have an “altered
relationship” (197), with Kalyani. Later “It has suddenly become evident to
all of them that Aru and Kalyani have, at some time, without their having
noticed it forged a partnership” (197). Towards the end of the novel, Gopal
notices: “a curious resemblance” (246), between Aru and Kalyani: they both
have “the steady watchful look on their faces, (and) the smile of
encouragement” (246), for him.

The novel thus portrays the network of human bonds and affiliations
obtaining between several persons in general and Kalyani – Sumi – Aru in
particular. Other relationships are also there. There is for example, “the
queer relationship” (60), between Kalyani and Shripati and the one between
Hrishi and Charu, in which there is “nothing of the male-female in their
relationship” (125). There is also “a queer sense of disharmony... a discord, a
sense of something missing” (120), between Kalyani’s parents. But the
relationship that has been reiteratively emphasized is that between Kalyani
and Aru. Through Kalyani’s accounts Aru relates herself to their ancestors,
realizing that the people, Kalyani speaks about are a part of, Aru’s life. The
novelist has tried to show that human relationship tends to have a
continuity of corresponding with each other in certain significant respects.
It is this continuity of relationship that ultimately gives meaning to life in
the long run. Deshpande’s novels present at times a lonely and somber world. They reflect, according to Muriel Wasi,

"unhappy realities of Indian life" and the woman’s depressing, melancholic or claustrophobic" world “... It is time for Shashi Deshpande,” she concludes, “to open some of her windows and let the morning light fill her dark rooms” (20 March, 1993).

The realistic treatment of human predicament in Deshpande manner might appear to be depressing but the final impression of her works is a sense of balance in life. At the end of The Dark Holds No Terrors Saru, for example, goes back home with.

All those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... all person’s spiked with guilt. Yes she was all of them. She could not deny that how. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. But if she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and so much more (1980:220).

Although physical aspects of body have not been generally allowed to have a sway (Apparently, Shashi Deshpande seems to have a revulsion to normal physical functions of women such as menstruation, pregnancy and procreation). She has, however, remarked the following on this issue.

I have a very strong feeling that until recently women in our society has been looked upon just as breeding animals. They had no other role in life. I have a strong objection of treating any human being in that manner... The whole chronology of their
life centers on childbirth... The stress laid upon the feminine functions, at the cost of all your potentials as an individual, enraged me... may be too much of thinking has made me express a sort of dislike for the purely physical aspects of feminine life, making it seems as if I am totally against all feminine functions, which is not the truth at all (Indian communicator, 20 Nov, 1994).

Creditably enough the novelist is not oblivious of its legitimate claims. Apparently, her women characters seem to be rather lettered by the natural functions of the body. Growing into a man is to Saru of The Dark Holds No Terrors "something Shameful" and "torture" (1980: 25), conscious of the fact that the life revolves around her husband's "needs and desires." She ruminates. "We seemed to be left with nothing but our bodies and after we had a busy and full life was frightening" (25).

In A Matter of Time Sumi admits to have fallen in love with Gopal's "physical being first" (1996: 168). And Gopal says "The life of the body why do the saints disdain it so? It is through our bodies that we find our first connections to this world" (68). It is creditable that the novelist has not ignored body and its demands. Michel Foucault comments,

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power holds in check. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not as a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse... are linked to one another (1984: 68).

The time has come when woman's "body must be heard", "woman must uncensored herself, recover her goods, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under scald. She must throw off her guilt" (Raman seldom, 1989: 150-51).
Anything like this is yet to happen in Deshpande’s fiction, not withstanding anatomical descriptions and detailed specifications in her short stores, but the absence of reticence in this respect in her novels is a proof of the novelist’s comprehensive understanding of the grass root reality and woman’s plight in India. While remaining well within the bounds of the Indian middle-class respectability, the novelist has raised some significant questions pertaining to gender issues and the position of women in India.

In The Dark Holds No Terrors also Saru finds her marital condition unbearable and feels “the desperation of a trapped animal” (1980: 70). Her grandmother deserted by her husband. “Had never... complained” and had accepted her plight as her ‘luck’; believing that “It was written on my forehead” (70). And Saru’s mother did not have “a room of her own” and “silence had become a habit between her and her husband” (181). “Only the movies can elevate marriage,” maintains the latest novel, A Matter of Time, “to such a pedestal, making in the culminating event of a lifetime, of several lifetimes” (1996: 65). This is a bitter commentary of marriage and married life, which have lost their original sanctity and compatibility and are reduced to the level of a façade of shame. Even the paraphernalia associated with marriage has become meaningless. To cite a concrete case from The Binding Vine Sakutai, who had often wished to have her ‘mangalsutra’ made of gold, finally realizes the futility of the endeavor “The man himself is so worthless, why should I bother to have this things made in precious gold” (1993: 110).

The novelist is pained to notice ways of subordinating woman by male members of the society. She specifically mentions economic
deprivation and rape as two main instruments employed to curb the spontaneous growth of a woman. We are reminded in The Binding Vine "If a girl's honour is lost, what is left? The girl doesn't have to do anything wrong; people will always point a finger at her" (1993: 59). The role of wife in the present times is nothing less than walking on the razors edge. Realizing this fact, Saru was obliged to give the following ironical imaginary advice to future wives in Nalu's college.

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband... That's the only rule to follow if you want to happy marriage. Don't ever try to reverse the doctor, Nurse, executive secretary, principal. Teacher role... Women's magazines will tell you that a marriage should be equal partnership. That's nonsense rubbish. No partnership can ever be equal. It will always be unequal, but take care that it's unequal-in favour of your husband. If the scales till in your favour God help you both of you (Terrors, 1980:137).

What makes matter worse for Indian women is that there are no choices before them. Like marriage, their decisions are made in the heaven of their husband's mind. As it is written in Roots and Shadows:

Millions of girls have asked this question millions of times in this country... What choice do I have? Surely it is this fact that I can choose, that differentiates me from the animals. But years of blindfolding can obscure your vision so you no more see the choices. Years of shackling can hamper your movement so that you can no more move out or your cage of no – choices (1983: 125).

This is a sad commentary on the incompatibility in and hypocrisy of married life. It is creditable that despite her family background in particular her father's intellectual pursuits and her own philosophical orientation,
Deshpande has taken up for discussion some crucial aspects of woman's life such as sex, sexuality and her body. "Sex is only temporary answer" (1993: 139), she writes in The Binding Vine, but it is an answer nonetheless. The "pseudo – Puritanism, and 'shame," mentioned in That Long Silence (1988: 03), have to be set aside. Indu in Roots and Shadows resents her womanhood and as a woman feels "hedge in by my sex" (1983: 87). In a male dominated society a woman is expected to be passive and unresponsive; for it shocks people like Jayant "to find passion in a woman" (83), in this repressive atmosphere, Indu finds herself just "an anachronism."

"A woman who loves her husband too much. Too passionately. And is shamed of it” (83). The strong point about Deshpande’s novels is her delineation of the woman’s inner world. She herself admitted in an interview,

> We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and the universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as far as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it. And find it tremendously intriguing fascinating (Indian Communicated, 20 Nov, 1994).

Deshpande’s protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice and continuous in search to find themselves. But they "become fluid, with no shape, no form of … their own (Roots, 1983: 15). Jaya, in That Long Silence undertake a futile search for her self, but the real picture, “the real you never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look ten different mirrors show you ten different faces" (1988: 01). The experiences of Indu, in Roots and Shadows are not different. “This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in any self” (1983: 34). She
bewails. She thinks that she has found in Jayant, her husband, "the other part of my whole self", "but she comes to realize that this was an illusion. But can perfect understanding ever exists" (Roots, 1983: 34). She asks. That Deshpande has been genuinely interested in issue pertaining to the lot of women in India is irrefutable. Some of her views vented through her character may be referred to briefly. Matrimony is often regarded in India, as summon of woman's life. In many cases, however, it serves as a woman in hands of patriarchy to coerce and silence. Manju in If I Die Today summarizes the common predicament sufficiently:

A marriage you start off expecting so many things. And bit-by-bit, like dead leaves, the expectations fall off. But... two people who have shut themselves off in two separate glass jars. Who can see each other but can't communicate. Is this a marriage? (1982: 24).

But marriage, we are reminded in A Matter of Time "is not for everyone. The demand it makes - a lifetime of commitment - is not possible for all of us" (1996: 69). It is no longer a sacrament; it is a convenient arrangement always to the disadvantage of woman. The central character in Roots and Shadows observes. "What was marriage after all, but two people brought together after a cold-blooded bargaining to meet, make and reproduce so that generations might continue" (1983: 03). "It is a trap"... That's what marriage is A trap? Or a cage a case with two trapped animals 'slaring' hatred at each other... and it's not a joke but a tragedy" (59). To Urmila of The Binding Vine, the back of the bird's neck nervously awaiting the first-night onslaught, looks like a lamb's waiting for a butcher's knife to come down upon it. In That Long Silence also, a married couple is compared to "a pair of bullocks yoked together" (1988: 08). Despite imaginative flashes
and the role played by memory in her novels, Deshpande is, at her heart, a realist – see presents a plausible story of authentic character and not shadowy abstractions. Deshpande observes this kind of realism in her novels. Here is the India of the eighties. As Veena Shashadri remarks, “she believes in presenting life as it is and not as it is should be” (1988: 94), and like Jaya of That Long Silence many Indian wives keep on perennially groping about their fate, but unwilling to do anything that could result in their being tossed out of their comfortable ruts and also into the big, bad world of reality, to fend for themselves. The narrator in If I Die Today declares that these are “not characters by Agantha Christie” but “Real people” (1982: 166). The publication of That Long Silence by the Virago press made its own contribution to this belief. Deshpande herself regards the novel as ‘more meaningful’ than any other of the novels, for it “deals with a much longer issue—the long silence of women” (Indian Communicator, 1994: 11). Her apparently contradictory remarks to her interviewers lent further support to it whether she would like to call herself a feminist, she replied to Geeta Gangadharan,

Yes, I would. I am a feminist in the sense that, I think, we need to have a world, which we should recognize as a place for all of us human beings. There is no superior or inferior: we are two halves of one species (1994: 11).

Shashi Deshpande made it absolutely clear that she had nothing to do with feminism in the narrow sense. In her interview to Ashvini Sarpeshkar Tondon, for example, she declared: “I do not like to be branded this or that because life is more complex than that. My enduring concern is for human relationship” (Femina, May 1993). Deshpande is all for spontaneity in creative writing and believes that good literature and propaganda do not go
together. Being a woman herself, she sympathizes with women and "It offers to see something feminist is my writings" (Femina, 1993). She told in an interview. "I must say that it is not consciously done. It is because the world for women is like that and I am mirroring writers but only, to a small extent" (Femina). Feminism surfaced in the western world as a movement in support of the some rights and opportunities for women. By 'feminism' is meant "both the awareness of women's position in society as one of disadvantaged or inequality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those disadvantages" (The British Women's Indian Group, 1970: 03).

Deshpande has portrayed the new Indian woman and her dilemma, her efforts to understand her and to press for her identity as wife, mother and above all, as a human being in the tradition-bound, male dominated Indian society. Deshpande's novels contain so much that can be regarded as the staple material for feminist thought: women's sexuality, the gender identity, self-discovery and so all. But she can be called a 'feminist' if at all, only a certain specific sense.

I now have no doubts at all in saying that I am feminist. In my own life. I mean. But not consciously, as a novelist I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly. I started writing first, and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually red books about it (Wasafiri, 1983: 25-26).

To Deshpande's mind, no amount of theorizing will solve women's problems – especially in the Indian context elucidating her viewpoint she further remarked.
But to me feminism isn't a matter of theory; it is difficult to apply Kate Millett or Simon De Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in Indian. And then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realizing it (Indian Communicated, 1994: 36).

This is a highly sensible approach. Deshpande unlike hard-core feminists does not agree that being a wife or mother is something that is unnecessarily imposed on women. According to her –

It's needed.” She craves for “a greater sense of balance”. Self confessedly, she feels trapped in the women's world. She says, “may be I want to reach a stage where I can write about human beings and not about women or men... For don't believe in having a propagandist or sexist purpose to my writing.” If her writings present such a perspective, it is only a “coincidence (Literature Alive, 1987:1-3, 13-14).

In the writing in India, the concept of freedom is being worked out differently even when the fears may be similar. Freedom is worked out as recognition of sexuality, as working out the areas of privacy, as resisting the imposition of stereotypical traditional roles, specially that of motherhood. In fact mothers are seen in a variety of different ways. Urmi, the central character of Shashi Deshpande's in The Binding Vine is, at the opening of the novel, grieving over the death of her young daughter. It is this death, which leads her to analyze the images being imposed on her by other and her own unconscious. surrender to these images. Urmi works out her salvation in oblique terms, through the diaries and poems of her dead mother-in-law, Mira, who had been named Nirmals. Mira had felt trapped in adulthood, missed out on higher education, felt pursued and chased into
marriage and exposed to the trauma of the first night and a man's obsessive love. The physical act of love and attacked her privacy and idea of freedom.

The theme of this loveless relationship on a woman's part is reinforced through the rape scene in the movie that is being telecast, and through the court judgment which rejects a man's unquestioned right to have sex with his wife, thus giving the woman control over her body, through Mira's life and early death, through the rape committed upon Kalpana by her uncle. Together they de-romanticize the idea of love, redefined the idea of marriage, which need not confer anonymity, which is not ownership and possession and which is not valued only because of procreation and motherhood.

Deshpande questioned the closed structures of marriage and the control it gives men. Through Maria she recalls the Mira of the Bhakti movement who challenged the marriage tie and created an alternative relationship outside it through her devotion to Krishna, thus opting out of the sexual role. Mira, Urmi's mother-in-law, was not ready for marriage and least of all for childbearing. She resented the compulsory three-day isolation imposed upon her. Hedged in by these circumstances she wrote poems which read like "a massage being tapped in the wall by the prisoner in the next cell" (The Binding Vine, 1993: 115).

Similarly in Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* the household at 'Vishwas' is dominantly a female one with husband's and father's on the peripheries. They, through the act of excluding their wives, and daughters, have also excluded themselves from participation in family life. Men have rejected their wives and daughters or abdicated their responsibilities. Kalyani and her husband Shripati live in two different parts of the house,
and haven't spoken to each other for years. Their daughter Premi had never brought her friends to her house for fear of exposing this abnormality.” “What if they asked me about my father” what if they asked me – why does he ring a bell? Why does not he talk to you and your mother?” (1996: 135).

To this divided house come Sumi, their eldest child along with her three daughters when her husband, Gopal walks out on her without any explanation or reason. Motherhood, so inextricably mixed with wife – hood, has another dimension. Are women, the mothers of sons or of daughter? Kalyani's neglect of a male child has reduced her to an outcast. And Sumi has not given birth to a son. Does that matter? Gopal fear of his own “emptiness” (50) his tentative hold on his masculinity, do they in any way reflect his inability to have fathered a male child? Aru, Gopal and Sumi's eldest child, is both angry and bewildered. She wonders,

> my father a missing person? Do we put him among the juvenile delinquents, the retarded children and adults? And what do we say? Missing, a man of – forty-six? No, forty-seven. And but how tall is he? (13).

How does one describe one's father?. But even as the family lacks cohesion and each member goes off at a tangent, silent bonds begin to develop. Shripati begins to relate to his granddaughter and Aru to her grandmother, Kalyani. A Matter of Time is about women who are learning to live without men, not necessarily out of choice but out of compulsion. There are women of different generations and they respond to their circumstances differently, yet each is a survivor as she negotiates the fact of guilt or non-guilt.
Anita Desai's women on the other hand seek their personhood in different ways. In her early novels, *Cry, The Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* There is an obsession with father figures but in *Voices in The City* the need for Monisha is to distance herself from the mother. Similarly, Nanda kaul in Desai's *Fire On The Mountain* withdraws to a house at Kasault disillusioned with her roles as wife, mother and grandmother, roles in which, she is guided by the needs of others. Motherhood is prized, is giving the status of Godhood. Barren women live in fear of being abandoned or replaced. Such attitudes devalue a person and reduced her to a function. The interesting fictional narratives, which present dystopian visions of power relationship in the context of gender are Atwood in the *Handmaid's Tale* and Suniti Namjoshi's *Mother of Maya Diip* where childbearing and rearing are viewed as the sole concern of sexual roles. But one while Atwood's novel... reflects male control over women the other... Namjoshi's... reverses this in some measure and reflects women's control over their own bodies. In the patriarchal set up not only the wives but also the daughters are also subjected to discriminatory treatment by the father.

The novel describes the callous attitude of the father towards his family and particularly towards, the daughters. Deshpande appears to be very hostile to the system of patriarchy that has almost ruined the freedom of women. In the patriarchal set up, Deshpande thinks, women are accorded a very humiliating treatment even in the cases of closest kins. Gopal does not talk to his daughters freely and sympathetically till they attain maturity. Premi remembers how her father has treated her as a stranger and refused to talk to her or even allowed to remain with him. "My father did not speak to me until I was ten" (1996: 18). Her presence perhaps astonished him and
he asked her. "Why are you here?" (1996: 18). The stern rigid attitude of the father and his expressive concern for his autocratic status forbid him to become close to his own children. It would not have been an exaggeration to say that Deshpande designs him (father) as a great sexist. Therefore his attitude to his girl children is so conservative. Gopal asked her daughter whether she wanted to marry. He spoke only twice to her once when "she had completed her medical finals" (18), and secondly when he wanted to know her views about marriage. Premi does not find any warmth in her attachment with her father and so she feels that "Going to his room has been a formality" (18), this is how fathers behave with their girls children as if a girl is "An acquaintance" (18), even father's behaviour with Sumi is equally full of contempt and abhorrence Sumi remembers how she was snubbed by her father and she was asked by her father to go back "go back Sumi" (24). Sumi could not understand why her father behaved with her like that.

Deshpande depicts the male not without a pinch of salt. She appears to lash at the autocratic stances of male folk in the family. It may be construed that Deshpande creates her male characters as sort of people disowning their responsibility and accountability. Gopal vanishes from the family without giving any prior intimation. Being a university teacher he should have been sensible enough to the emotional and social needs of his family. But he behaves quite irresponsibly. What is intended by the novelist here is that men treat their women merely as objects. Women should recognize the vast potentials inherent in them. Kalyani, for example carries out her responsibilities very well, in the absence of her husband. Woman can struggle her way out if she desires so.
The novel portrays three generations of women each different from one another. Kalyani represents the traditional woman internalizing the ideologies created by men in the male dominated society. Sumi represents the class of women who are silent sufferers. She believes "Destiny is just us" (1996: 25). In the male dominated society the destiny of women decided by men. The novelist has truthfully depicted this issue and her depiction is very much real it is for this reason that R.S. Pathak says that "Deshpande is, at her heart a realist" (1999: 194).

She depicts the Indian society of the eighties. She does not paint her characters with emotionalism and sentimentalism. She does not either idealises her woman characters. As Veena Sheshadri remarks, "she believes in presenting life as it is not as it should be" (1988: 94).

The major female protagonists in the novels have to under-go sufferings and ordeals perpetrated on them by their male counterparts. Kalyani is victimized by her husband shripati. Sumi has to suffer at the hands of her husband Gopal who walks out from the house. Kalyani represents the women who suffer the male violence silently. Kalyani is self sacrificing woman. She is ready to sacrifice her person for restoring peace and prosperity of her daughter’s family. For women in India there is no alternative but to tolerate silently the tyranny of the males. According to Deshpande everybody has to live within relationship and there is no other way. She reiterates.

"It's necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are ridigly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing. What I don't agree with is the idealization of motherhood the false and sentimental notes that accompany it" (Literature Alive, 1987: 1/3, 13).
The novelist thinks that it is for this reason Kalyani suffers personally in the marital life of her daughter. She most humbly pleads to Gopal not to go. She is very much upset with Gopal’s decision to go out. She does not want Sumi to suffer the fate she herself has undergone. This is the best example of a self sacrificing nature of an Indian mother. Here it would be orth-while to contrast Kalyani with the mother of Asha Rani’s of Shobha De’s Starry Nights. Asha Rani’s mother is a modern mother. She deliberately pushes her daughter into blue film business hoping that it would fetch her lot of wealth and prosperity. In fact, Asha Rani’s mother does not, hesitate to thrive on her daughter’s earnings; Kalyani, on the contrary is traditional woman who is willing to annihilate herself for the cause of her daughter. However Aru the third generation woman in the novel has developed aversion to marriage. As she has seen the suffering of her mother and grandmother, she decides of her mother and grandmother. She decides not to marry... “I’m never going to get married” (1996: 76).

Deshpande’s women protagonists enjoy several privileges in her novels whereas the males are relegated to secondary position. The household at ‘Vishwas’ is dominantly a female one with husbands and fathers on the periphery. They, through the act of excluding their wives and daughters have also excluded themselves from participation in family life. Kalyani and her husband Shripati live in two different parts of the house and have not spoken to each other for several years. Their daughter premi has never brought her friends to her house for fear of exposing this abnormality. To this divided house comes Sumi with her three daughters when her husband Gopal walks out on her without any explanation and reason, Kalyani, her mother has been treated as an out-cast because due to her neglect a male child had died. And Sumi is neglected because she has not given birth to a
son. Deshpande ridicules the notion of superiority of the males in the family. The neglect of the females by the males is something not understandable to Aru. Here it appears that Deshpande is out and out a feminist as she puts in all her efforts to voice the sufferings and neglects of woman. The novelist desires that married women should live on equal footing. Man and woman are like two pillars of the society and slight imbalance may cause great damage to the whole structure of the society. But the question is would men accept, women as their equal other halves?

In *A Matter of Time* the women protagonists like Kalyani and Sumi are learning to live without men, not because they want so but because it is a compulsion. Kalyani has been forsaken by her husband and Sumi has been deserted by husband. The primacy of males in the society can not be questioned. Men want the females to be dependent on them. But most ironically the women protagonists in the novel have developed enough courage to live independently. The male characters are in-significant in the novel and this is very aptly reflected through the house named Vishwas which is dominated by women.

Sumi does not want to live in the house any longer because she says: “I want something of my own” (1996: 79). She detested being parasitic upon either husband or on her parents that is why she preferred a rented house as her house she says, “It belongs to my parents” (79). Search for a house is probably identical with search for identity. Sumi wants an identity of her own. But it is quite impossible for a woman to stand on her own. Therefore Sumi takes help of Nagraja. He has all sympathy for Sumi but like all males he tries to rectify her. He tells her not to disclose her person life to the people “Don’t tell people your husband is not living with you” (79).

In The Day in Shadow by Nayan Tara Sahgal Simrit goes to Raj for help and support. It appears that not only Deshpande but other women novelists also endorse the view that it is difficult for woman to live alone and that they constantly need the support of the males. In Anita Desai’s Where Shall We Go This Summer? Sita goes to her father’s place where, she thinks, she can prevent the child from being born. This male support appears to be an indispensable need for woman to stand on her own.

In A Matter of Time Sumi goes in search of house along with Nagaraja, who trains her into the art of being practical. Nagaraja advises her to tell the people that her husband has not left her but “he has been transferred. That he is working abroad” (79). Further it is very difficult for the woman, who has got three daughters; to live alone therefore Nagaraja shows her the house which may be suitable and secured for them. “I think it is right for you, very safe for you and your daughters” (80). The novelist certainly accepts the notion of insecurity and vulnerability of the woman in the man dominated society. Women, suffer from a kind of sense of perpetual threat of mans invasion upon them, the invasion may be physical and mental and it may be too strong to be resisted to by the women. The deal of the house is finalized but Sumi has to come back disgracefully because she suffered a great shock for not being the mother of a son. The landlords’ wife asks Sumi, “How many children do you have?” Sumi replies, three Sons? Daughters? Daughters. We have only one son” (81).
Sumi feels a prickling of her skin she thinks that something wrong has been done by her by not having mothered a son. The landlords' wife further tells that her son – “died three months back” (1996: 81). Sumi looses the balance of mind and instantly says, “I don't want the house” (81). And hurries, back her house. Sumi feels humiliated because she suffers from a kind of stigma for not being mother of a son and she finds the world uninhabitable Sumi is a compromising woman like Jaya. She does not want to raise the banner of revolution. Jaya was silenced by her husband and her artistic skill was foiled by her husband Mohan. Jaya accepted all this because she had to live in the company of her husband. Sumi does not revolt against the tyranny of her husband, Gopal who had walked on her fearing perhaps the social libel. She has learned to live without her husband and reconciliation between them is quite impossible.

We can never be together again. All these days, I have been thinking of him as if he has been suspended in space, in nothingness, since he left us. But he has gone on living; his life has moved on, it will go on without me. So has mine. Our lives have diverged; they now move lives have diverged, they now move separately, two different streams (85).

Sumi is constantly, advised by her daughters Aru and Charu, particularly Aru to fight against her father. Aru hates to call her mother worthless simply because she has been left by her husband. Aru says, “Just because Papa has left her, it doesn't give you the right to be rude to her, it doesn't mean she is worthless” (57). But Sumi reacts to the suggestion of her daughter “shut up, Aru, just shut up, will you!” (57). Aru, a revolutionary modern generation woman thinks a husband has no right to renounce his family like this. She is of the opinion that a wife has every right to claim
maintenance from her husband who has wronged his wife. "He's our father, Ma, he's your husband. How can you dismiss it so lightly. I don't understand you at all" (1996: 61). But Sumi doesn't respond to her. Aru goes to her father Gopal who is now working with Shankar's printing press. She tries to persuade her father to reconcile with her mother. She also threatens him with legal action, if he does not come on track but Gopal refuses to listen. Aru tries to protect her mother from all sides. Aru symbolizes new woman in A Matter of Time who does not hate defy traditions and conventions of the society. The three generations of women depicted in A Matter of Time respond differently to their circumstance. Anita Desai's women's, on the other hand, seek that their personhood in different ways. In her early novels Cry, the Peacock and Where Shall We Go This Summer? there is an obsession with father figures, but in voices in the city, the need for Manisha is to distance herself from the mother.

Similarly In Fire on the Moutain Nanda Kaul with dreams of a house at carigneuo distances herself from her roles as wife, mother, and grandmother, roles as which she is guided by the needs of other's. motherhood fear of being abandoned or replaced in Kamala Markandaya Nectar in a Sieve. Ira is abandoned by her husband because of barrenness, such attitudes devalue a person and reduce her to a function but in A Matter of Time, Sumi is not deserted for her barrenness but for the wantonness on the part of her husband. Kalyani is ostracized because she lost her son. In case of Sumi on the other hand, there is a sense of importunity to produce a male child. Deshpande attempts to strike a balance between two sexes and that is why for Aru her father's absence has not created only an empty space in the family but it has amounted to total disintegration of the family.
And Gopal has gone. To Aru, it has not meant merely an empty space in the family, but the disintegration of it. There is no family left. We are five separate individuals, all of us going our different ways. Five units that don't add upto a whole (1996: 184).

Deshpande is neutral figure like a judge in the court, who tries to offer the justice with one eye. In her fictional world she bring out the varied colours of pains and pleasures regarding sacred Indian institute, marriage. She puts forth the right picture and puts the decision on the part of her readers. But it is true that her characters and themes are lifelike. Therefore every Indian feels that this is the story of them. That is the secret of her pen.
WORKS CITED


