CHAPTER III

THE STATUS OF MARRIED WOMEN IN INDIA

Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari deal with the importance given for marriage in Indian society, the rituals performed, man-woman relationship, the communication gap that thwarts the life of many women for centuries, the tolerance of ladies before two generations, the life style of widows and the impatience of educated modern middle class women in the gradually changing tradition bound Indian society in *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds no Terrors* and *Pālaṅga*. Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari project what is happening in the Indian society through their protagonists and make the readers to comprehend what is to be done to resolve the crisis and to provide a healthy living standard to the future generation of India. Their women develop the courage to encounter the problems after a deep analysis about the things to be executed and then solve the problems. In the end they turn out to be the master designer of their life.

Indians believe that marriage is inevitable in the life of a girl. Marriage is celebrated as a pious ritual in India. B.S.Nagi observes, “Marriage is considered as a sacrament in the Rigveda” (6). Hence the parents feel guilty, if they fail to fix the marriage for their daughters at the right time. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* states, “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married, or have been, or plan to be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution” (415). In India the right time of marriage varies with time. Few decades ago child marriage was the popular
custom. Even children at the age of seven were forced to marry. They were expected to be quiet, calm, obedient and dependent but masters of multi-tasking. They were well trained to manage all the house-hold chores. They were not admitted in schools, but were educated well to administer the house-hold chores and to adjust with their husbands, in-laws and other elders in the joint families. The girl children were compelled to encounter the day to day problems before the body and mind were ready for marriage. Such child marriages left a scar in the psyche of the girls. Anahita Mukherji states, “India marries off its daughters in such a hurry that they have little time to grow out of their teens is a fact that no longer raises eyebrows”.

Education has become a blessing in disguise in the life of women as it has introduced a gradual change in the minds of the girls. So they have started expressing their dissatisfaction about the existing set up and the customs that deny them their rights. In early days, women were not given freedom to think about their suppression. At present the economic independence induces them to think and act. When their rights are denied, they become upset. They revolt to revive their position in the family. They force the elders to consider their anxiety and expectation. They insist the society to offer them a healthy environment to bring forth a better breed of children. To engender healthier children, a number of Indian women novelists have made their debut and insisted the need for a change in their novels. They believe that literature will help to unlock the mind of their readers. Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari try to depict the true state of Indian society and its treatment of women. Both choose the situations with which most Indian women can identify themselves.
Shashi Deshpande deals with the middle class Indian woman who is a symbol of the majority of Indian women and her struggle to adjust in it rather than breaking away from the traditional life style. She focuses on the changing picture of the Indian middle class women by highlighting their economic independence, their inability to adapt to the established patterns of thought, their struggle to be passive, their unfulfilled objectives and aspirations. Her female characters analyse and compare their life style with their parents and grandparents. They never try to break away from the existing pattern but try to find a solution to their problems, and hope to lead a life of contentment when the problems are nailed down, without disturbing the marriage institution. Sabitha Ramachandran writes, “Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are stronger than her contemporary writers. They refuse to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of upholding the traditional role models laid down by society for women. But they attempt to resolve their problems by a process of temporary withdrawal” (3). Readers get a glimpse about the changing life style of more than three generations of women.

Sivasankari’s novels bring to limelight the life style of ladies, their passive submissiveness before seven to eight decades, and their grudging revolt against the customs that suppress them and the gradual changes in their life from time to time. Her characters are rebellious and discontented with the existing setup when young, but later they understand their role in the society and emerge as renewed and revived individuals. They seek new ways to deal with their problems, instead of escaping from them as they hope that the solutions lie within their limits. They solve the problems in a balanced way and their practical approach instills new hopes for a better future. Her characters demand change without deviating from Indian culture and tradition. Sivasankari insists that the
progressive attitude in one's thinking should bud out by never losing the touch with one's roots. Sivasankari believes that modernisation does not mean westernisation. She feels that over the years the Indian women have been culturally and negatively conditioned, to consider themselves inferior to men. To sacrifice, to burn away like the candle and lose herself in the service of the family has been the lot of many women. But in the century just gone by, a transition has taken place which induces women to gradually free themselves from the shackles.

Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari give a picture of the status of women from the early twentieth century to enable the readers to get a clear perspective about the consequences of child marriage, the work of women in the kitchen, the bitter experiences of widows and the communication gap between husband and wife. Dowry system, treating girl children inferior to male children, constant instructions given especially by elderly ladies, the dominance of elders in the family and the denial of property rights are the prevailing problems till date. Rather than by men folk, the girls are ill-treated by the mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. The main cause of suppression of women is another woman in a patriarchal society. So the girl children are taught by their mothers and grandmother to adjust with everyone. It is believed that the role of men is to take care of the family and govern society and the role of women is to bear and rear children. In The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir argues, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as the feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other" (273).
Though both the novelists are from different states in India, writing in two different languages, their longing is not to fight for women rights but to indirectly instruct about how to construct a healthy society. Before few decades women were not educated and they adjusted with utmost patience and continued their life with obedience. At present, women are educated and self-reliant but a lot of problems are still encountered by them. They can neither digest the traditional suppression like their parents and grandparents nor can break away from the factors that chain them. They become the poor insects trapped in a spider web. Both Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari make their protagonists to comprehend the intricacies of life and solve their problems rather than running away from it. Their protagonists find a path to walk after a long retrospection without breaking the strong conventional faith.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels *Roots and Shadows* and *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, and Sivasankari’s novels *Pālaṅgal* have vividly brought out the marital problems of their protagonists who are placed in different situations and belong to different sections of society. Both the writers deal with the position of women within the traditional family structures. Their protagonists are projected as strong, yet traditional women who assert the power of womanhood. Their strength is finally proved by their ability to distinguish and espouse right against the wrong. Their self-esteem is constantly reinforced by their emotional and physical experiences and they learn the knack of solving the crisis without losing the hope in the marriage institution. They question, dispute and disagree whenever they are not convinced and at times they bow down to the demands of powerful patriarchy.
In Indian society, the role of wife limits and confines women’s self-development as they are instructed from their childhood to take care of the domestic chores, elders in the family and children. It would be considered as a lovable task, if freedom of thought and work execution is given for women. On the other side, educated women are expected to attend the needs of the family as well as their profession. The work stress and the expectations from both the places disturb their balance. They gradually understand their predicament and try hard to come out of their struggle with an optimistic approach without losing their self. Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari are of the view that revolting and breaking the familial bonds are not the true solution to the existing problems. They like women to emerge as strong and influential individuals without escaping from their problems. Their characters try their best to understand the intricacies of life to lead a calm and harmonious life.

In *Roots and shadows* Shashi Deshpande shows the dilemma of the protagonist, Indu, an educated middle-class woman, in a joint family. Indu stands for the New Woman, who is learned and lives in the society blowing away all its narrow conventions. *Roots and Shadows* begins with the marriage of Mini, Indu’s cousin in their ancestral home. This makes Indu to muse over the events that had happened in her life after a long gap of eleven years. Akka, an old aunt of Indu who once was against Indu’s revolutionary ideas, makes Indu the only beneficiary of the whole property. Indu hears the sad tale of Akka after her demise through Narmada-atyaa, daughter of Indu’s grandfather. Akka was married to a man of thirty when she was twelve years old. Akka, suffered because of the betrayal of her husband.
She was just 12 when she was married. And he was well past 30.

Remember him still. He was a tall, bulky man with large, coarse features. And she ….was small and dainty, really pretty with her round face, fair skin, straight nose and curly hair. Six months after her marriage, she “grew up” and went to her husband’s home what she had to endure there, no one knows. She never told anyone. Our grandfather, her father, was a man who kept himself aloof. No one could approach him easily. And her mother, our grand-mother, died when she was a child. But I heard that twice she tried to run away ….. a girl of 13. Her mother–in-law, I heard, whipped her for that and locked her up for three days… When Atya told me the story, I absorbed only the words, the story and not the essences of Akka herself. That seeped into me later, minute drop by minute drop, so slowly, so imperceptibly that I never knew I had absorbed it. (76)

Through the character of Akka, Shashi Deshpande effectively portrays the powerlessness of the woman in the early twentieth century to raise a voice against the atrocities inflicted on her, in marriage. She lived in an age when no breathing space was provided for woman. She who had once longed to be freed from the marriage tie, on her return to her father’s house as a widow implements a rigid code of conduct on the other women in the household. P. Madhurima Reddy rightly observes:

The novel presents a typical facet of deprived womanhood through the character of Akka, who is the youngest sister of Indu’s grandfather. Akka returns to her parental home as a rich widow after the death of her husband
and starts looking after her nephews and nieces with the care and attention of a truly compassionate mother. She becomes the presiding deity of the family who confers peace and security on her willing subjects but deals ruthlessly with the rebellious and the recalcitrant. Akka’s authoritative nature never allows people to peep into her life and understands her. (1)

Akka believes that uttering the husband’s name would shorten his life span. Indu being an educated woman dislikes the strict codes and traditional practices that are adored by Akka. She is tossed between her exposure and the clutches of tradition imposed on her in a joint family by the elderly ladies. Akka belongs to the previous generation and hence she is passionately obsessed with caste and the moral conduct of girls. Later Indu realises that she is not different from the women in her house. Indu too wants the presence and the love of her husband though at times she struggles to adjust his views. Shashi Deshpande in her essay *Writing from the Margin and Other Essays* states, “No literary tradition could save us from being marginalized in India, because the literary tradition itself would exclude women. This is because of the very deeply ingrained belief, still very much practiced, that women have their own place” (154).

Even on her death bed Akka refuses to be admitted in the hospital because as she puts it, “God knows what caste the nurses are or the doctors. I could not drink a drop of water there” (24). She also restricted when Naren’s mother wanted to learn music by saying, “What learn music from a strange man! Sit and sing in front of strangers! Like THOSE women? Are we that kind of family? Isn’t it enough for you to sing one or two devotional songs, one or two aarti songs? What more does a girl from a decent family
need to know?” (55) Akka follows her own rigid laws and instructs everyone in the house not to cross the limitation to preserve the name and fame of their family in the society.

Though Akka was the prey of gender oppression when young, she denies the freedom of the people in the house. Akka knows that the present system has flaws. She does not want to take the risk of changing the shortcoming but instructs all to follow it. Everyone in India is aware of the problems in Indian marriages. Even Akka can understand how the flaws in Indian marriage institution have devastated the life of many including her, generations after generation. Raghuvir Sinha states, “Traditional Hindu marriage had been regarded as irrevocable and sacred, and could not be dissolved by individual will” (18). Akka resembles Periya Pappa’s grandmother and Mythili’s grandmother in Pālaṅgal and every elderly woman in the Indian society. All of them know that the existing set up has some flaws in it. Instead of changing the flaws they advice the younger generation to tune to the existing pattern, may be out of fear for changes or fear about their children’s healthy future. They hope that adapting to situation alone bring better standard of life. Their lives prove to be an example for the life of women who live in the middle of a vast diversity of discourses, and are simultaneously located in several sets of social relations. As Shashi Deshpande aptly remarks in Writing from the Margin and Other Essays, “The women in my novels, like the women in India today, or indeed like women or humans anywhere, have so many forces working on them – and all at the same time. There’s history and culture, there’s religion and customs, there are individual and family faiths and beliefs, family traditions and histories. And last not but the least, there are people around us and their expectations and our relationships with them” (160).
Indu marries Jayant against the wish of Akka and others. She compares her marriage with Akka’s child marriage, Narmada’s marriage with a mentally abnormal person and Mini’s marriage. Though she leads a better standard of life than them she too is dissatisfied in her marriage with Jayant. Jayant expects her to be inert during intercourse is a big blow for Indu. She is expected to be submissive, inactive and she is hurt.

Abhilash Nayak rightly assesses Indu’s position as:

While talking to Naren she frankly admits that she felt ‘hedged in’ by her sex and resented her womanhood as it closed so many doors to her and was linked with ‘uncleanliness’. She also doesn’t like to be initiated into the phase of motherhood as it would involve all the pains and problems of child-birth. She thinks both womanhood and motherhood to be the shackles that bind woman down to the ground and delimit their scope to be independent. She doesn’t even bother to remain confined to the boundaries defined by the society and brushes aside all narrow conventions. In spite of being married to Jayant, she doesn’t hesitate to use words like ‘kiss’, ‘rape’, ‘deflowered ’and ‘orgasm’ while talking to Naren. She even dares to have physical relationship with Naren more than once and is not at all apologetic about it. (5)

She gets ample time to ruminate over her problems in her ancestral house which helps her to come out of her distress. Mini’s confidence about her future, Narmada’s narration about her marriage and Akka’s child marriage infuses a hope in her to lead a life with Jayant.
The Dark Holds No Terrors begins with Saritha’s return to her father’s house after fifteen years. She returns as she is unable to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. Her stay in her father’s house gives Saritha a chance to assess her relationship with her father, husband and her dead mother. As a child Saru longed for affection and care from her mother. Before her brother’s death she fought against the preference given to a male child in the family. After the death of Dhruva, she could not bridge a gap between her and her mother as she was blamed as the sole reason for his death. Saru then thought, “And she never really cared. Not after Dhruva’s death. I just didn’t exist for her. I died long before I left home” (32). To divert her attention from the longing for care from her parents, she immersed herself in studies. She secured good grades and joined in Medical College against her mother’s wish. Saru wants to become a powerful dominant person in her life. Saru is fascinated by Manu’s popularity among girls at college. Saru falls in love with Manu and marries him. Dalvir Singh Gahlawat rightly observes, “A woman, for getting freedom, seeks marriage as an alternative to bondage created by the parental family. Saru resents the role of a daughter and looks forward to the role of a wife, in the hope that her changing role will help in getting her freedom” (5). Hearing her decision her mother speaks against inter-caste marriages. The recognition for Saru as a doctor and her fame depresses Manu and Saru is stunned. To escape from her nightmares she returns to her father to enquire about the sudden demise of her mother.

The Dark Holds no Terrors reveals Saru’s conflict that she has to face as a doctor and wife. During daytime she is a renowned lady doctor and in night she is trapped in the hands of her sadist husband, Manohar who is an English professor. Her neighbours know her profession, the day she returns back in a blood stained coat, after treating the victims
of an accident. She is recognised and respected by the neighbours who come frequently to consult her. The esteem that Saru gets disturbs the conventional equilibrium in her family. In an interview to a magazine, Manu is asked about his experience of marrying a doctor who earns not only butter but a major portion of bread as well. When she takes the job of a lady doctor, he is seen as her husband. The equation transforms and he becomes an aggressive husband. He cannot endure his wife’s better social status and it gradually destroys their marriage. Saru thinks, “The human personality has an infinite capacity for growth, and so the esteem with which I was surrounded made me inches taller. But perhaps, the same thing that made me inches taller made him inches shorter. He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (42).

In India, educated women enjoy economic independence and self-reliance but they are always assessed as women and their success in their profession is not celebrated. It is always expected that a woman should know that success in marriage means manipulating, sacrificing, adjusting and silently managing her relationship with her husband as dictated by the society. Their mental agony can be better understood through the poems of Mamta Kalia, one of the most creative Indo-Anglican poets. Mamta Kalia in her poem entitled “I Feel Like Crying All The Time” from Poems’79 expresses the mood of educated women, who are unsuccessful in adjusting the tradition bound Indian lifestyle in a joint family

I hate these people around

Related to me

Just because, they were born

To my husband’s mother’s
Brother’s daughter,

I don’t know who she was

I don’t know who anybody is. (32)

Saru’s displacement from her home results in her enlightenment. She assesses her relationship with everyone. Saru is completely absorbed in a sore experience of having done injustice to her mother, husband and to her brother. Her introspection helps her to release herself from the thoughts of guilt as a rebellious daughter to her parents, sister who was unsuccessful in saving her brother’s life and wife who buries the spirit of her husband Manu. Saru’s long hours of introspection into her marriage makes her to understand that her professional success has killed Manu’s spirit. She chooses to assert herself and realises that her life is her own which she will have to design. She is enlightened by the view that none can escape from reality by seeking refuge. She comprehends that there is no refuge, other than one’s own self. With this notion she self-assuredly waits to face life and decides to go back with Manu. Her rational analysis makes her to explore the problem. Earlier Manu’s inadequacy was not considered by her. Later she sees her own inability to unite roles as a daughter, sister, wife and mother. With self-realisation she regains her strength to confront the problems.

The wife Saru finds shelter in her profession as a doctor. It is hoped that the doctor Saru will assist the wife in her to heed her husband. Her profession offers a good hope to resolve all the awaiting problems. She likes to heal Manu’s despair caused by inferiority complex to bring harmony in her family life. She wanted to be a doctor to attain power and identity in the society when she was young. The same profession gives
her a solution to regain the lost spirit in her married life. Her profession has gifted her solace, hope, confidence, comfort and happiness in her personal life as well as in the life of her children. Saru realises that the aim of any marriage lies in understanding each other and mutual respect and not suppression. Saru’s aim would be made into reality by developing a better communication link between the husband and wife.

The novelist brings out effectively the emotional problem of an educated woman and discusses it inventively. The novel rises above feminine limitations and raises issues, to prove that the success of life lies in negotiation and not in contradictions. The novelist’s objective is to show that life can be full of merry if everyone is aware of the eternal truth that life is too short and it has to be lived in harmony. Everyone comes into this world alone and destined to leave it alone. There are only assumptions about the life after death. Saru decides to live this short life with a peace of mind. She thinks, “And all those ties we cherish as eternal and long lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop” (208). Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar considers the impact produced by the right choice of words:

Sarita strips herself of self deceptions, guilt complexes and emotive illusions, and Shashi Deshpande’s language itself flickers like a candle and blobs of remembrance melt and form icicles of furrowing thought. Sarita cannot forget her children or the sick needing her expert attention and so she decides to face her home again. In this unpredictable world, even total despair can open up a new spring of elemental self-confidence. (758)
The smart and learned protagonist enjoys a sense of bliss as soon as the clarity of thought is achieved. She decides to lead her life with a hope of bringing the same harmony in the mind of her husband and children. Indu and Saru have a balanced and practical approach towards life which makes them to realise the importance of marriage and family. Concentrating on traditional values Shashi Deshpande always shows her woman seeking the solution of their problems within marriage.

In *Pālaṅgal*, Sivasankari deals with the fascinating accounts of the life style of our elders. It is a saga of three generations of Tamil Brahmin women and the novel spans nearly a century. The women lived from 1907-1931, 1940-1964 and 1964-1985 have different life experiences and strength to react with courage and dignity to whatever life offers. Even the orthodox widow of the early twentieth century, with her blind acceptance of narrow-minded rituals, emerges as a strong personality in her own right. A sense of duty and devotional to family is underlying in her every action. Each succeeding generation of women is stronger and more emancipated than the previous one. But the child marriage, dowry system, the denial of right even to eat the freshly cooked food, the training given to children to adapt to situations, the denial of education and restrictions make them to raise their voice against the existing set up. *Pālaṅgal* is a captivating account of how slowly women acquire their right to education. Through the stories of women who belong to three different generations an immeasurable wealth of information is offered.

Sivasankari gives an account of Hindu tradition, rituals, customs and the life span of a woman Sivakammu from her child marriage at the age of seven to her husband’s demise in the first part of the story that spans around 1907-1931. The role of elders, the
workload of women from early morning to night, the difficulties faced by them because of child marriages, lack of awareness about family planning, the crude methods adapted by them to terminate the child in the womb, the domination of mothers-in-law over their daughters-in-law and the sufferings of widows allure the attention and carry all to 1907-1931. Sivasankari shows how women have been advised to admit masculine authority. They in turn, gives up criticising, investigating, judging for themselves, and leaves all this to the superior caste. In The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir states, “They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men – fathers or husbands – more firmly than they are to other women” (18). Simone de Beauvoir strongly believes that the humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but in relation to him. She is not regarded as an autonomous being. Women are forced to believe that man can think of himself without woman but she cannot think of herself without man. “Throughout history they have been submissive to man and it is not a result of a historical event or a social change – it was not something that occurred” (18).

While narrating the rich Indian rituals and the importance given to it, Sivasankari incorporates the minute details about the training given to young girls to prepare them for child marriage through Sivakamu, the workload of ladies through Sivakamu’s mother Pattamma and her sister-in-law during Sivakamu’s wedding ceremony, the rituals followed after the death of Sivakamu’s husband and the gradual revolt raised by Periya Pappa, her niece. Her grumbling to take bath after returning from school and demand for a toilet facility was viewed with a surprise by Sivakamu. As far as she was concerned, the next generation was privileged but for her niece Periya Pappa, her friends were. She
thought that her friends’ grandmothers were more modern than her orthodox grandmother.

Sivasankari portrays how women slowly peep through their nutshell and come out to educate themselves from the second part of the story that spans between 1940-1964. They start to learn music and dance in spite of the hurdles created by their grandmothers who belong to the previous generation. Mythili completes her S.S.L.C with the support of her parents. Anandham, Mythili’s grandmother insists her son to look for a bridegroom at the earliest. Mythili is permitted to learn music but not dance. It is a sign of the blooming of a new-fangled epoch. Her revolt against inviting people for puberty function, Mythili’s fear to pronounce the name of her husband Venkat and her acceptance to send her daughter Pappi for NSS camp for the Republic day celebration at New Delhi are depicted to inform the readers about the apparent changes in the society.

The lawyer Venkat’s argument against the habit of separating the matured girls aloof from others is the indication of the dawn of a new era for women. He further prevents all the ceremonies to his mother when she becomes a widow. But the grandmothers of Mythili and Pappi are strongly opposing the changes because throughout history women have always subordinated to men and hence their dependency and fear according to Simone de Beauvoir “is not the result of a historical event or a social change—it was not something that occurred” (78).

Charu applies for a divorce from her husband Suresh when he brings a prostitute home when Charu fails to adjust to his expectation in the story that happens from 1965 to 1985. Charu and Suresh are granted permission to discuss about their future before their
marriage by the elders. But Charu understands his sadism when her sweater is forcefully removed by him in the chill weather at Kashmir. Charu is shocked to see the naked pictures of women in his bedroom. When his tortures know no bound she decides to avoid him by living in a separate room. When he comes home with a prostitute, she seeks refuge at her father’s house. Even Suresh parents can do nothing against his brutality and asks Charu to apply for a divorce as his nature cannot be changed. The bold decision of Charu kindles the curiosity to dream about the revolutionary thoughts of Charu’s daughter Aparna and her granddaughter Bulbul. Charu applies for a divorce not because she loses hope in marriage institution but she cannot endure his sadism. She wholeheartedly gives permission for her daughter Aparna’s love marriage. Unfortunately he dies in an accident. After the death of her husband when she remarries she renders her support. Through Charu, Sivasankari points out how woman is heavily handicapped even at present, though her situation is beginning to change. Her legal status is yet to be recognised and the long-standing custom prevents all her privileges.

The striking resemblances between Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*, *The Dark Holds no Terrors* and Sivasankari’s *Pālaṅgal* kindle the curiosity of comparative readers as well as research scholars. A fiction is an image of life and it stimulates and gratifies our interest in life. As it is made out of the lore of life, new knowledge or increased understanding is made possible. A text can only come to life when it is read, examined and studied through the eyes of the reader. Wolfgang Iser in his article “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach” states, “…reader and author participate in a game of the imagination” (274) An in-depth investigation of their novels will bring to forum the many-sided crisis in the marriage institution which stagnate the
lives of many and the required steps to be taken to bring harmony and peace in the minds of women.

In Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows* Akka got married when she was twelve to a tall bulky man of thirty years. In Sivasankari’s *Pālaṅgal* the grandfather of Sivakamu declared that his granddaughter Sivakamu was seven years old and she could marry Suppini who was eleven years old. In those days girls were given in marriage to thirty to forty years old men as their second and third wives. So Pattamma, mother of Sivakamu felt happy about the proposal and thought that her daughter Sivakamu was clearly fortunate in attracting the attention of the family of Suppini. When Sivakamu’s grandfather asked Pattamma’s suggestion she accepted the proposal, not only for the respect that she had for her father-in-law but also she wanted her daughter to get married to a young boy. According to her he was the most eligible boy for her daughter. Sivakamu was fortunate when Sivakamu’s married life is compared with the life of Akka in Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*. Akka was given in marriage to a middle aged man and she did not have the maturity to suppress the exploding problems.

B.S. Nagi discusses how the law itself was in favour of child marriages until 1978 and it was also one of the reasons for such child marriages. Hindu Child marriage Act was passed in 1927. This bill states that no marriage of Hindu girl shall be valid unless she has on the day of her marriage completed her twelfth year and the boy fifteenth year. Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, popularly known as Sarda Act passed, raised the age at marriage to 14 years for girls and 18 years for boys and in 1978 it raised the legal age at marriage from 15 to 18 for girls and 18 to 21 for boys (5). Regarding child marriages in India B. S. Nagi says:
Marriages were taking place when both the partners, i.e., boy and girl were quite grown-up. Such a system of marriage existed till the 5th century B.C. Reference of post-puberty marriages is available even in Grihya Sutras. If we negate the existence of the custom of child marriage in India during the Vedic period, it will be very difficult to determine when this custom came into practice in India. Various theories as advanced by the students of history provide no definite answers to this. One of the factors that explains the custom of child marriage seems to be foreign invasions that took place after 300 B.C. Foreigners who invaded from North-West frontiers had no respect for the honour of Indian women. Under these social conditions it was more convenient for parents to get daughters married soon, even in childhood, so that the question of chastity did not arise. (6-7)

Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari analyse the way in which individuals are moulded and they comment on the social hierarchies to make the readers to comprehend how women were treated as underrepresented groups in Indian society.

Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari speak about the workload of women during festive occasions in the joint family set up. Both show how women voluntarily take up the job of preparing food for the guests and they work endlessly. Their willingness to work for the family should have come to them through the constant exercise and directions that they receive from the elders in the family. Indu in Roots and Shadows observes anxiously how women are made to work ceaselessly for Mini’s wedding. Though she belongs to that family, the life style of Indu becomes totally different after her education.
I could hear voices slurred with sleep coming from the courtyard behind the kitchen, and I knew the women hadn’t slept the whole night. They had been chopping, rolling, pounding, getting ready the festive lunch that would follow the puja that day…. Drovers of women worked continuously in the kitchen, against a deadline it seemed they couldn’t possibly meet, turning out mammoth quantities of food and endless cups of tea and coffee. (13-14)

Pattamma and her sister-in-law worked voraciously in the kitchen and served everyone with proper care to avoid any criticism about their reception for Sivakamu’s wedding in Pālaṅgal. Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari try to convey that women from early days to till date work without a complaining attitude because they consider it as their duty and not as their destiny. Child marriages and the work load in the kitchen for ladies get minimised in the Indian society but not eradicated entirely. Child marriages are reported by the newspapers though the law views at the crisis severely. Law can only assist but the society and people should take the necessary initiation.

Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari depict how the freedom of selecting a suitable husband is denied in the life of a girl because marriages are fixed after the horoscopes are reviewed and matched. In such a scenario, the society turns deaf to the wish of a girl. Mini’s wedding in Roots and Shadows and Sivakamu’s wedding and Sundaram’s daughter Mythili’s wedding in Pālaṅgal are fixed by the astrologers than by their parents. Moreover dowry is given and it is mandatory for the bride’s family to spend a huge sum of money.
In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu is dissatisfied with the choice of the bridegroom for Mini. He has heavy, coarse features and crude mannerisms. Indu is convinced as, “You know Padmini’s horoscope has a flaw in it” (51). When Indu refuses to accept their views Mini’s father tells Indu, “Padmini is past twenty-four now. And there’s her horoscope. And the problem of finding a family with a status comparable to ours. And when everything clicks, there’s the dowry hurdle. What am I to do? Let the girl stay unmarried? (55) He concludes, “May be the boy is a little ugly, may be a little stupid…but everything else is fine” (55). Their statements infuriate Indu and she asks Mini about her wish with the notion of helping her as she is sponsoring money for her wedding. But Indu is shocked to hear the process of selecting a girl for a wedding. The hurdle not only lies in the horoscope and dowry given but also in many other things. Mini discloses her experience to Indu in the following lines:

And if the horoscope matched, there was the meeting to be arranged. And mother and Atya slogging in the kitchen the whole day. And all those people coming…and staring and asking all kinds of questions. And if we heard they were old fashioned people, I would dress up in an old fashioned manner and they would say, ‘She’s not modern enough.’ And if I dressed up well because someone said the boy wanted a smart wife, they would say, ‘She’s too fashionable for us.’ Or too short. Or too tall. Or too dark. Or something. …And I, feeling as if I had committed a great crime by being born a girl…And then they would say, someone else in the family wants to see the girl. So we have to go through it all over again. And finally, if everything was fine, there was dowry. You know nothing of this
Indu. You’re lucky. You escaped all this. And now, when someone agreed, can I refuse and make Kaka go through all of it all over again? (118)

Indu is totally upset and asks about Mini’s wish. Mini says, “And I don’t care. He’ll look after me. And no one can say to me, ‘How old are you? And not married yet! What a pity!’ I’m tired Indu. I don’t care what kind of a man he is. Once we are married, and he becomes my husband, none of his flaws will matter” (118).

Shashi Deshpande conveys her idea through Indu about weddings at India in the following words. “The Indian way. The husband. A definite article. Permanent. Not only for now, but forever. To be accepted. Stop” (118). The duty of a writer is not only to narrate the crisis in the society but to make the readers realise the exact situation and to find a remedy. It is good to listen to the words of elders as they are experienced. But in the case of Mini, her father is handicapped without money, without a good income and he can do nothing. Shashi Deshpande indicates his failure as the failure of the society and the failure of the marriage institution itself. B.S. Nagi observes, “It has been found that the quantum of dowry increases with the age and educational level of the prospective brides. Some upper caste parents prefer to keep their daughters uneducated and marry them off young to avoid heavy dowry demand” (12).

Sivasankari in Pālaṅgal gives a vivid picture of the role of dowry in marriages. The custom of giving dowry started a long back and it exists even today. Sivasankari narrates the life of people in three eras in the novel. The marriages of Sivakamu, Mythili and Charu who belong to three different periods are fixed after the dowry is negotiated as
Mini’s wedding in *Roots and Shadows*. For Mythili’s wedding her father accepts to give a diamond ring, a wrist watch, a thousand-rupee suit of clothes and three thousand rupees in cash for the bridegroom, and jewels worth at least fifty gold sovereigns for the girl. Other demands include provision of a variety of silver and brass vessels for household purposes, and such obligatory items determined by tradition as gold-bordered Kanchipuram saris for the bridegroom’s mother and sister. It is also agreed that the wedding would be a grand affair, with fireworks, a reception, music recital and dinner. Charu’s father, though he belongs to the latest era buys silk saris and jewels for Charu, and deposits one lakh in the bank account. The parents of Suresh are delighted. The Hindu Succession Act, 1955, a woman was placed on equal footing with men, entitling them to have property rights. According to The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, if a person gives or takes dowry then he is liable to be punished for an imprisonment and fine. Among the social evils that prevail and plague Indian society, the dowry system plays the most devastating role. It has extended out its tentacles far and wide in the society distressing almost every section of the society. It requires sustained and concrete efforts in the right direction. Though many changing perspectives are seen in the life style of women in India, dowry system still exists. The system of dowry had its origin in the Vedic period which began only as a formal rite in the institution of marriage. Among the various types of Hindu marriages, ‘Kanyadan’ played a significant role in the evolution of the dowry system. Venu Singh in the article “Dowry in India: Practice or Ill Practice?” discusses about ‘The Dowry Prohibition Act’, 1961 (20th May, 1961) (Act no. 28 of 1961):
The ancient marriage rites in the Vedic period are associated with Kanyadan. It is laid down in Dharamshastara that the meritorious act of Kanyadan is not complete till the bridegroom was given a dakshina. So when a bride is given over to the bridegroom, he has to be given something in cash or kind which constitutes varadakshina. Thus Kanyadan became associated with varadakshina i.e. the cash or gifts in kind by the parents or guardian of the bride to the bridegroom. The varadakshina was offered out of affection and did not constitute any kind of compulsion or consideration for the marriage. It was a voluntary practice without any coercive overtones. In the course of time, the voluntary element in dowry has disappeared and the coercive element has crept in. it has taken deep roots not only in the marriage ceremony but also post-marital relationship. What was originally intended to be a taken dakshina for the bridegroom has now gone out of proportions and has assumed the nomenclature 'dowry'.

Many social reformers of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century have endeavoured hard for the elimination of a variety of social evils including the dowry system. The demand of dowry from the bride’s family is the main reason for the crime of female infanticide in India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian Renaissance tried to eradicate female infanticide before Indian independence in India. The threatening ratio between male to female in India is falling down everyday not because of unawareness but because of greediness. *The Economic Times* on March 31, 2011 in the article entitled “Census of India 2011: Child sex ratio drops to lowest since Independence” stated:
Indicating a continuing preference for boys in society, the child sex ratio in India has dropped to 914 females against 1,000 males - the lowest since Independence - in the provisional 2011 Census report released today. Despite a slew of laws to prevent female foeticide and schemes to encourage families to have girl child, the ratio has declined from 927 females against 1,000 males in 2001 to 914, which was described as a "matter of grave concern" by Census Commissioner of India C Chandramauli.

In spite of all these steps taken the evils of dowry system have taken an acute form in almost all parts of the country and in almost all the sections of society. Though both the writers are from different states of India, the problem faced by the people in their states Tamil Nadu and Karnataka is the same. They highlight the sufferings of women and their family in their novels. As a modern art is for the viewers to interpret, Shashi Deshpande’s and Sivasankari’s views in their novels are for the society.

Moreover Shashi Deshpande gives a picture of a unique custom in the state of Karnataka in India of changing the original names of the brides after marriages according to the taste of the husband and mother-in-law. A girl tends to lose her identity when her name is forcefully changed and paves way for many personality disorders. The target of changing names is to train her to the new situation and to the people around her. It indicates that she is no more the old self to have her own wishes. The new incarnation is not bestowing her any boon. On the other hand, it becomes a great burden on her young shoulders. In Shashi Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows, an old woman working in the kitchen for Mini’s wedding tells Indu, “I have not just one, but two good names. One
given to me by my father when I was born, and the other by my husband when I got married. Both holy, sacred names, mind you! (110)

Indu is surprised to see women who are proud of having their names changed by their husbands during their wedding ceremonies. In The Dark Holds no Terrors Saru’s friend Smita’s name is changed as Geetanjali. Smita happily says, “Oh, that’s my name now. Of course, you didn’t know. He chose it himself when we got married” (117). Saru is amazed at her expression and asks, “The drastic change of identity, changing both the names that identified you for so many years … how then do you know yourself, and who you are?” (118) Traditionally, women were seen as the property of their husbands, and a husband and wife were viewed legally as one entity and that entity was the husband. Even today, within religious or conservative cultures the husband is considered to be the authority in the family. Indu and Saru oppose the idea of changing names after marriage and retain their names even after their marriage because they marry without the consent of elders which is a remarkable changing aspect in Indian society.

Though this custom does not exist in Tamil Nadu, Sivasankari shocks the readers by narrating the custom of meeting their husbands only on festival days or auspicious days. In the early twentieth century women were not given proper education about family planning and pregnancies were terminated through a number of crude methods, including the administration of abortifacient herbs, the use of sharpened implements and the application of abdominal pressure. The women ate sesame soaked in Jaggery or camphor stuffed in coconut for four days to terminate the baby. Such crude methods tried by them to terminate the baby many times ended their lives. Their husbands remarried young girls
even at the age of thirty and forty as their second and third wives. Sivakamu advises her sister-in-law not to go for any rough method to terminate the baby as she had seen the suffering of her mother Pattamma when she had aborted a baby. At that juncture, her sister-in-law stated that though she met her husband once in a forte night, she could not avoid such situations. The situation remains the same even for ladies of the present age in joint families. In *Roots and Shadows* after seeing the some scars in the stomach of her Kaki Indu thinks, “I wondered what Kaka made of those disfiguring marks. Most probably, nothing. Husbands and wives…their worlds touched briefly only in the darkness of the night” (47).

The hectic work load in the house and the age difference between the husband and wife frame an unbridgeable communication gap. In Shashi Deshpande’s *Roots and Shadows*, Akka was twelve when she got married to a tall bulky man of thirty years. After six months she was sent to her house. Her mother-in-law whipped her and locked her up for three days without food for escaping from the husband’s room to avoid his tortures. When she was sent to his room again she cried and expressed her wish to be inside the locked room without food. During Narmada’s marriage Akka says, “Now your punishment begins, Narmada. You have to pay for all those saris and jewels” (70).

Akka’s husband had an illegal affair with a lady. The freedom to live with another lady in the same home town was accepted by Akka to escape from his tortures. She emerged as a strong individual when he was bed-ridden. She never left him without cared. But the cry from him for a chance to see the lady, with whom he had lived, did not move Akka. She denied his wish and said that that would be the real punishment for him. Till his death he was not given the right to see the lady with whom he had lived. At his death bed he
wanted to see her but Akka denied his wish. Jayant’s statement about Mini “the weak have their weapons, just as the strong” (17) suits for Akka too. In Sivasankari’s Pālaṅgal Suresh impresses Charu and her father through his behaviour. But she is shocked to see the naked pictures of ladies in his flat. He celebrates them as great works of art. Though Charu is an educated earning woman, she fails to come for a compromise with him. His sadism does not permit Charu to develop a better relationship with him. She leaves home when he brings a prostitute to the house and makes Charu as a witness to his action. Akka adjusted as she was a child and reliant on her husband whereas Charu walks out when her husband brings a prostitute to the house. The boldness of Charu is the boon of education and the economic independence sows the right seed for her to fight against the imposed evil which is another change in the life style of women in India.

Though Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari do not have any direct influence, they are totally influenced by the social pattern of living in the Indian society. Sivasankari narrates about how the husband and wife were permitted to meet only on occasions in Pālaṅgal through Sivakamu’s sister-in-law who belonged to late nineteen thirties. Shashi Deshpande too depicts the aunt and uncle of Indu never have a chance to meet during day time as they are living in a joint family. Shashi Deshpande depicts the tortures endured by Akka who was then a child. Sivasankari shows how Charu cannot bear the tortures of Suresh even though she is a modern educated and employed woman. In the above mentioned two cases, the same incident happens in the life of the characters of Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari. The right to meet the husband was prevented before sixty years for Sivakamu and her sister-in-law and the same situation occurs to Indu’s uncle and aunt at present as they are in a joint family. Akka was tortured before sixty years by
her husband and Charu who belongs to the present generation is also sadistically tortured. Though the problem remains the same the education imparts the courage to walk out of the tortures and to face the world. Both Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari try to state that marriages are celebrated as a festival in India but not the married life. The importance given for the occasion is not given to life. All the happiness vanishes off in one day.

Sex is hailed as a relief for stress by many but it turns out to be a nightmare for Saru in *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, Akka and Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Charu in *Pālaṅgal*. Saru thinks, “My wants are simple. To sleep peacefully the night through. To wake up without pain. To go through tomorrow without apprehension. Not to think, not to dream. Just to live” (27). Akka and Indu’s aunt Narmada too faced the same crisis and they could not withstand the marital pressure. Akka was even ready to undergo the tortures of her mother-in-law without food than spending a night with her husband. The sufferings of her marital life had gifted a powerful individuality which helped her to take care of the entire joint family later. She has gained the art of judging people from their speech and she knows whom to help. She remains influential till her death and even after her death she has made everyone in the family to long for the share from her property.

For Akka the problem was her child marriage with an adult. The age difference, the utter ignorance of girls about marital life and the non-co-operation from the men folk have shattered the lives of many. Akka, Narmada, the grandmother of Saru from early twentieth century and Saru and Charu who belong to the contemporary era are the typical victims. Saru and Charu know how to set the things right and try their best to balance without losing their equilibrium is another changing aspect.
Any child hailing from the traditional joint family set up in the early days was without proper sex education and the girl children were instructed not to talk with the males and even Indu was warned for speaking with her classmate in the school library when she was young. When she revolted she was advised to follow the advice of the elders. Shashi Deshpande leaps a step ahead by presenting yet another reason for the failure of marriages in the Indian scenario. When the women shine in their career it paves for inferiority complex as in the case of Saru. Saru, though educated, try to escape from the harsh cruel reality of her marital life. Saru is the victim of her husband Manu’s inferiority complex. Saru wants to prove her identity after being neglected by her mother. She has worked hard to emerge as a professional in the field of medicine as a doctor and marries against their parents wish. She thinks that she can regain all the lost glory of her life through her marriage with Manu who is hailed as a hero by many girls in the literary circle. Later Manu becomes sick with inferiority complex and Saru painfully thinks: “It’s my painful middle-class inhibitions, I told myself, making marriage the open sesame of all enjoyment for me” (40). Manu was very popular and Saru saw adoring circles around him when they were in love. But after their marriage her profession fetches her good recognition in the surroundings and she is admired. She thinks, “…when we walked out of our room, there were nods and smiles, murmured greetings and namastes. But they were all for me. There was nothing for him. He was almost totally ignored” (42).

The human personality has an infinite capacity for growth. Manu feels that the esteem with which Saru is surrounded made her inches taller and made him inches shorter. Saru expresses her agony in the following lines. “He had been the young man and I his bride. Now I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (42). She feels
depressed and dissatisfied with her husband because she cannot bear the pain caused by him. Even in her dreams she senses the hands of Manu. “The hands continued their quest for new areas of pain” (12). Abhilash Nayak writes, “Saru has a tough time during this period because Manu basks in her glory during the daytime but ill-treats her in the nights. Manu’s indifference to her becomes intolerable and she uses sex as a tool of revenge and final estrangement. With her responsibilities increasing outside home, she recoils from Manu’s love-making and he takes her rejection of sex as a rejection of himself” (4).

When Saru returns late after attending a patient, Manu is moody and she tries her best to pretend to be normal. She thinks, “Terror waited for me in our room. I could not escape it” (81). So she tells him that she wants to give up working. Manu asks her, “Can you bear to send the children to a third-rate school? To save and scrape and still have nothing after the first few days of the month? No, Saru, there can be no going back. We have to go on” (81). Saru compares her situation with her grandmother’s. When Saru’s grandmother was deserted by her husband, her father had taken the woman and her two little daughters, one of whom had been Saru’s mother. Her grandmother had never complained. Saru does not accept her grandmother’s condition as a fate as she knows it is a lie. In Roots and Shadows Indu’s aunt was married to a mentally disordered man but she passively accepted her condition and said, “It’s my luck, she said. My fate. It was written on my forehead” (81). Saru likes to set things right unlike the women of her previous generation without breaking away from her marriage with Manu.

The role of fathers in the life of the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari is to be noted. The moral and economic support from the father offers an immeasurable solace. Whenever the protagonists are placed in crucial situations the
father rescues her. It is interesting to note the support from the opposite sex than from the mothers. To escape from the harsh reality Saru visits her father to enquire about her mother’s demise. There is a lack of communication link between them after the death of her brother Dhruva. But in the end she reveals her suffering to her father. When her father enquires about the reason for Manu’s unusual behavior, Saru says that his tortures begin the day when she was interviewed for a magazine. The interviewer asked Manu, “How does it feel when your wife earns not only the butter but most of the bread as well?” (210) He attacked her like an animal that night. Both Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari communicate that though the girls are deserted by their husbands the strong support from the father’s side helps them to survive.

Saru’s father in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* failed to bridge the gap between her mother and Saru, but he helps her to solve the problem by asking her to speak to her husband. He has failed in giving a healthy childhood for Saru. He understands everything later and rescues her by giving her a good solution of meeting Manu when he comes to the village to see her. Though Saru knows and understands his mind set, she is also not ready for any compromise until her father takes the initiative. Her father’s confidence gives a good hope in Saru. Charu’s father in *Pālaṅgal* has gifted her freedom though her mother died when she was a baby. He is a widower and he with the help of her sister Vimala who is a spinster has given Charu a healthy and happy childhood memories. He spends a lot of money for her wedding. After one month of their wedding he wishes her for a happy life. When he knows the real nature of Suresh, Charu’s husband, he supports her by taking the baby Aparna with him to give Charu a relief. In *The Dark Holds No*
Terrors Saru’s grandfather had protected his two granddaughters, Saru is rightly guided by Saru’s father and Charu is given the hope of survival by her father.

In India inter-caste marriages are seen as a taboo. Shashi Deshapnde shows how women face the problem in inter-caste marriages and arranged marriages. In arranged marriages the dowry demands and the communication barrier are the drawback whereas in love marriages the misunderstanding and the inferiority complex shatters the pleasure of many. In Roots and Shadows Indu marries Jayant without getting the permission from her family members. Only her father and her uncle come to her marriage. Akka’s view about such inter-caste marriages is revealed by Indu’s aunt. “I can remember Akka saying, such marriages never work. Different castes, different languages…it’s alright for a while. Then they realize…” (69). Saru’s mother also reveals the same idea when Saru married Manu. “You won’t be happy with him. I know you won’t. A man of different caste, different community…what will you two have in common? (98)

Though love marriages and inter-caste marriages are detested by elders, the problem lies not in the pattern. The problems bud only from the inner self of the individual and the society. Arranged marriages like Akka’s marriage with a middle aged man of thirty when she was twelve years old, Indu’s aunt’s Narmada’s marriage with a mentally retarded man and Saru’s friend Smita’s marriage indicated the unhappy condition in marriages. Smita borrows money from Saru for presenting a gift to her brother’s family and promises her that she would return that at the earliest. When Saru asks her to keep the money for herself she feels relaxed. But their marriages are fixed by the elders after matching their horoscopes with their husbands by astrologers. On the
other hand, Indu and Saru married Jayant and Manu without the permission of the elders. Shashi Deshpande tries to insist that the necessity for a good communication link between a husband and a wife which in turn would transform any marriage into a success.

In *Roots and Shadows* Indu committed adultery with Naren, her cousin. Shashi Deshpande shocks the readers through her character Indu with the notion of informing the society to tune itself by encouraging the married pair to develop a good communication link. The tradition bound Indian society could no more suppress women as education bestows them the required self-reliance. Indu is ready to live with Jayant without revealing her relationship with Naren. Indu does not feel guilty of her adultery. Wolfgang Iser states,

> The unwritten aspects of apparently trivial scenes and the unspoken dialogue within the "turns and twists" not only draw the reader into the action but also lead him to shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situations, so that these take on a reality of their own. But as the reader's imagination animates these "outlines," they in turn will influence the effect of the written part of the text. Thus begins a whole dynamic process: the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications…(190)

Shashi Deshpande presents a real problem before the readers to motivate them to come out with a solution of their own. She leaves the readers to brood over and the unwritten part of the text to stimulate reader’s creative perception.
The parallel reading of Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari enable the readers to have a clear perspective about the condition of women in India and their fear for certain rituals that prohibit them to enjoy the flavour of life. Sivasankari describes the rituals and the life style of a widow through Sivakamu and the grandmother of Mythili in Pālaṅgal. The importance given for rituals was more in the life of Sivakamu from 1907 to 1931. After ten days of her husband’s death, four widows were asked to prepare her for her impending ordeal. Sivakamu’s brother draped one of the white saris to indicate that she was destined to wear only white saris. Married women were asked to leave the place when flowers were removed from Sivakamu’s hair. Her black blouse was torn. In the midnight she was asked to remove the sacred thali which had been tied around her neck when she was seven years old by her husband. Her hair was tonsured and she was asked to cover her bald head with her sari. The fear of Goda and Kalyani could not be understood by Sumi in A Matter of Time as she is not aware of the condition of a widow in the early days. But both the old ladies knew the rituals and they are chased by the fear of being tortured in the name of rituals. The involuntary shudder experienced by Goda while narrating the death of Vijayapati is a surprise to Sumi but for any comparative reader the fear of Goda is justified as Sivasankari explained in detail the torments underwent by ladies after the death of their husbands.

In Roots and Shadows, Narmada was saved by his elder brother from the crude rituals after the death of her husband as Venkat saved his mother in Pālaṅgal. The people who observe strict tradition consider Narmada as a second citizen in the world of widows and avoid the food prepared by her. Indu recollects, “I understood why Kaka had, when Atya was widowed, so stoutly resisted the idea of her becoming a shaven widow. He had
won but at the cost of Atya’s status. She was now a second class citizen in the kingdom of widows. The orthodox would not eat food cooked by her” (130). Narmada’s brother is not a social reformer but unconsciously he lays the foundation for a great change in the society.

In Pālaṅgal, Mythili’s grandmother is saved by her son Venkat and he prevents all the unwanted rituals for his mother. Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari explain that the gradual changes in the condition of women in India. The changes are introduced at a very slow pace and even at present widows are not permitted to take part in functions and marriages. Through the re-marriage of Archana, daughter of Aparna, Sivsankari brings to lime light the gradual changes in the Indian society and let the readers to expect the better changes in future. Bulbul the daughter of Archana, plans for a trekking trip with all her classmates and informs her mother about her plans. Her actions are disapproved by Aparna who then takes up the role of a grandmother. Though she divorced her husband boldly, she hesitates to approve the actions of her granddaughter.

Shashi Deshapnde and Sivasankari show how slowly changes have been initiated and the present generation is no longer passive and submissive through Saru, Indu, Aparna, Archana and Bulbul. They give due importance to familial relations and suggest their protagonists to untie the knots of the problem to lead a healthy life. They feel that no society can flourish at the sacrifice of some innocent victims. They insist on mutual understanding and co-operation among the members of the family. The ethos in their novels is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposite ideas and conflicting selves. They strongly feel that liberation and emancipation
of women will be beneficial not only for women but for all. It will result in improvement and betterment of family at large. Both writers express the opinion that married women are like birds whose wings have been cut-off but at present they are not prepared to suffer the fate of such birds. So, they break free off the cages to become rejuvenated to face all kinds of crisis. They deal with the issues of marriage, widowhood, the life of women and reflect how traditional Indian norms make life hell for many. While they do not endorse separation and divorce as the best choices, they do condemn those practices that hamper women’s lives.

Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari try to highlight the problems and inconsistencies within the society through their respective novels for all to think and act. Any novel written not only focuses on entertaining but as well it should educate the society. Rather than advising directly, the novelists are introducing their ideas in an indirect way which will get embedded in the minds of the readers. When the seeds for a change are sown simultaneously among many through their works, the society can harvest better results soon. The focus on women who were minorities and underrepresented groups in the early twentieth century and their experiences are recorded by them in a remarkable way along with the experience of modern educated women, her trials and her problem solving skills.

They try to state that life is a mystery and to taste it, it should be lived. In the journey some may find glorious experiences and others may face devastating results. Patience, analysing ability and problem solving skills to translate each episode of life into a contented experience are required. No one can predict the future and it carries a unique
suspense. If all the answers of life are known, the life will either lose its flavour or God may change the question paper. Such thoughts are promoted by Shashi Deshpande and Sivasankari. In the Interview conducted by Chandra Holm, when Chandra Holm pointed out that literature can open up the mind and his revelation after reading Virginia Wolff’s *A Room of One's Own*, Deshpande said, “… for me the book *The Second sex* by Simone de Beauvoir. That was also like a flash of light. Fortunately I read these books after I had started writing. The ideas and thoughts were already in my mind. Reading those books was like a sort of confirmation” (5). They show the gradual changes in the life of married women and insist the need for attending the wants of women through their works which deserves special appreciation.