CHAPTER III

QUEST FOR SELFHOOD
In recent Indian – English fiction we see that the female protagonists are quite sure of themselves, of their rights and of their place in society. They are aware of their existence and no longer submissive or living in silence. There is a marked difference in their attitude as compared to that of the females of earlier fiction writings. Till recent years our society was completely a male domain. As Jane Austen observed in Persuasion:

\[
\text{Men had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much of higher a degree, the pen has been in their hands.}
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(Austen, Persuasion, P. 7.)

But noting the recent emergence of women writers, who are telling their own story, we can say that the pen is no longer in the hands of men now-a-days. These days more and more women are becoming conscious of their rights. They are raising their voice against all kind of exploitation and injustice done to them and are busy in a quest for self-hood.

The struggle for self-hood or independence, the burden of foreign domination, the desire for self-rule and liberty remain a constant presence in most of Indian novels. According to Indira Nityanandam:

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\text{Freedom for Indian woman meant freedom not merely from British rule and its concomitant tyranny but simultaneously a release from centuries of male domination and male-ordained social and cultural norms. Though the Indian Woman did not have to struggle like her American counterparts for universal suffrage, she had to strive to attain recognition of her individuality and acceptance by society of an existence even beyond her gender – based roles. Patriarchy had compelled the Indian woman to be}
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totally subservient to the male in both the social and economic spheres. She now sought to change all this ... Instead she attempted to effect a slow but sure change within her own home.

(Nityanandam, Indian Woman Novelist, P.11.)

We observe this change in the Indian Woman that provides the main stay for much of the fiction written by women in post-independent India. If we compare earlier fiction, especially written by male novelists, women are presented as idealized characters and most of these women characters never approximated to the real woman of times. According to Ameeta Mulla,

These woman characters, like women writers themselves, belong to a womanhood that has been for centuries the sacred hearth, at once home-tomb-womb, a woman always being stilled into silence.

(Wattal, "Feminism in Common Wealth Literature" P.14.)

In old days women were suppressed. They had no courage to revolt but in modern age the independence movement brought the Indian woman out of her sheltered protected existence. It propelled her into the political and social scenario and she too began to experience the same position with man. Women in recent novels are no longer treated as objects but they have become the subject of these novels. Today novelists depict women with both their negative or positive attributes. We can see women in all her colours: the power of women, the deviousness of women the helplessness of women, the courage of women. Modern novelist portray “woman who
aspire, attempt and strive to be their true selves.” Meera, Woman in Indian English Fiction, P.138.)

Indian Fiction in English has a formidable line of women novelists – Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai etc. They are writing of Indian women, their conflicts and predicament against the background of contemporary society. While doing so, they have analysed the social cultural modes, its image and role towards themselves and society. They deal with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realise her freedom. Shashi Deshpande is one of the novelists who voices to arrive on the same. In all her novels, she depicts how her heroines bring them into configuration with the family, with the male world and the society in general. Deshpande realises that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it – that alone can bring harmony in life. Deshpande’s protagonists are the women struggling to find their own, and in spite of challenges and hostilities, remain uncrushed. Urmila in The Binding Vine, for example declares: “I am not going to break”, (19.) Deshpande’s novels are more or less a fictionalisation of personal experiences. Most of them present a typical, middle-class housewife’s life. Deshpande’s main concern is the urge to find oneself, to create a space for oneself to grow on one’s own. One striking thing about her novels is the recurrence of certain themes in them that woman should definitely have her own identity – ‘a room of her own’. But the predicament of women – specially those who are educated and belong to the middle class – has been most prominently dealt with. Many of her characters are persons who are frustrated either sexually or professionally. According to Betty Friedan:

For a woman, as for a man, the need for self-fulfillment – autonomy, self – realization, independence, individuality self – actualization - is as
important as the sexual need, with as serious consequences when it is thwarted. Women’s sexual problems, in this sense, by products of the suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfil her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminine fulfillment ignores.

(Betty, Feminism Mystique, P.282.)

Friedan also holds the view that women should have equal position like men. But it is misfortune of our society even after being educated women are insecure only because they are not having any financial ground under their feet.

Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists are generally educated females and they struggle to define and attain an autonomous selfhood. Her fiction is shorn of undue romantic embellishments and portrays women who – after a long, bitter struggle are able to overcome this syndrome and free themselves from the stultifying traditional constraints and can cherish a spontaneous towards life. Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors, Indu in Roots and Shadows, Sumi and Aru in A Matter of Time and Jaya in That Long Silence, Madhu in Small Remedies are some examples of this struggling woman. These characters categorically exhibit the belief that women should have an assertive and definite role in their lives, yet their economic and intellectual emancipation dose not negate their responsibility of nurturing various relationship which the society and their biological nature have imposed upon them. They maintain that women should not be confined to the relations they bears to man, but at the same time these relations should not be denied to them. Woman can enjoy various relationship, of wife, mother, friend, companion etc., and still learn to be themselves, without requiring a sheltering service of male presence behind them. Thus they can exhibit an energy which erases their conditioning and
free them from their psychic fears which are the results of bondage of centuries.

_**Roots and Shadows**_ is a novel which explores the inner struggle of Indu, who represents a set of those modern educated women who are very active in the society, dealing with critical problems of life like love, sex, marriage settlement and individuality. Indu, in this novel achieves “selfhood”, yet do not negate the family or the society. It can be observed that she is not feminist in the first stage but in the second. As Elaine Showalter calls:

The “female Phase” which is a phase of self discovery, a turning inward free from the dependence of opposition a search for identity.

(Elain, A Literature of their own, P.13.)

Second stage is a kind of enlightened reintegration into the society where she finds own voice; no longer being “other directed”. In this novel, Indu belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka (the mother surrogate in the novel). She returns to her ancestral house and discovers what her roots are – as an independent woman as a writer and what her shadows are – a daughter, a mother and commercial writer. She rebels against Akka, her conventional world, her rigid values and marries Jayant. Though after words, she realise the futility of her decisions:

Jayant and I .......... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I can not fantasize.

_(Deshpande, Roots, P. 14.)_

In order to attain freedom she seeks marriage as an alternative to the bondage inevitable in the parental family. She looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that casting herself in a new role will help her in
winning her identity. Her baffled longing to achieve a complete personhood is explicitly suggested:

This is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it... that was some where outside me, a part of me without which I remained incomplete. Then I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone.

(Deshpande, Roots, P.34.)

This emotional outburst from Indu proves that she has been exercising extreme control over herself to protest her marriage. It is difficult for her to accept her compromise in marriage. As P. Bhatnagar comments:

It baffled her to realize that she who had considered herself to be so independent, so intelligent, so clever; She who had been so proud of her logical and rational thinking; She who had been all set to reform Indian womanhood had fallen into the trap waiting for her.

(Bhatnagar, Indian Women Novelist, P.21.)

Throughout the novel, there are several examples which proves that Indu is very conscious of the unfairness prevailing in society with regard to women. There are so many small incidents in everyday life which we simply take for granted but Indu highlights these incidents and makes us look anew at them and wonder at the injustice. Men are not even aware of the drudgery and the disgust involved in the countless household chores performed regularly by women. One such scene is graphically described by Indu:
I went into the house avoiding the hall, ugly now with all the aftermath of an eaten meal. It disgusted me to see the strewn plates, the scattered remnants. And yet, for a whole lifetime, women patiently cleared up the mess with their bare hands after each meal. And women like kaki even ate off the same dirty plate their husbands had eaten in earlier. Martyrs, heroines, or just stupid fools.

(Deshpande, Roots, P.73.)

Domestic chores as Indu describes, can be terribly tiresome, boring and frustrating. This also observed by the same observation is also made by Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*:

Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition; the clean become soiled; the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time. She makes nothing simply perpetuates, the present.

( Beauvoir, The Second Sex, P.470.)

Indu represents new generation as she is aware of the prevailing injustice in society she has been a determined girl, who always wanted to be free and independent. The novel gains its feminist stance in the assertion of Indu; of her autonomy and her awareness that she exists as a person and not a dependent on Jayant. She has selfnowledge and learns to free herself of guilt, shame and humiliation. She takes firm decisions:

That I would at last do the king of writing I had always dreamed of doing. That would not, could not
enrich myself with Akka’s money, that I would on the other hand, pay for Mini’s wedding.

(*Deshpande, Roots, P. 205.*)

Indu has learnt to see not only her life full of possibilities for growth and grace but the very meaning of life itself: I felt as if I was watching life itself.... Endless, limitless, formless and full of grace. (* P. 202.*)

But now, a number of questions arise before her which leave her puzzled and baffled. India is a tradition-bound country and even the educated women are also bound by traditions. Indu is uncertain about the fact whether she has broken the stranglehold of family and tradition only to be dominated by love for her husband, this return attainment she feels, is not a true love. She realizes that she has accepted Jayant not for love as she used to think but because she wants to show her family that she has got the success. we can very well imagine about pathetic state of mind in the following lines when she confesses to herself:

The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this ... that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure, I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success.... And so I want on lying, even to myself.

(*Deshpande, Roots, 115.*)

Here, the writer has very rightly and minutely put forth the situation in which young modern women, who are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, leave behind the conventions and takes the initiative to join modernity, are entangled. In a time of introspection she asks to herself: “Is she her own self”? or “Is it her tragedy never to be free and complete”? (206.) But she gets no satisfactory answers of her questions that can make
her calm. Ultimately she goes back to her parents home to find out the roots but finds the shadows instead. Now it is a time of reckoning for her. She thinks about her own life her career, her love, the traditional concept of marriage based on love etc. According to Indu, one should listen to the dictates of one’s own conscience and be true to oneself in speech as well as action. As O.P. Bhatnagar says:

In the end, comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life.

(p.14.)

Indu has ambition to be perfect in herself. To achieve this perfection she violates old rules. In the novel, novelist has very artistically represents different phases of women in different roles. She juxtaposes two sets of women in the Indian set-up. One set-up is presented by Akka, Narmada, Sumitrakaki ,Kamalakaki,Atya SunandaAtya; and another is presented by Indu. If we compare new generation with old generation, we will find that, a women’s life meant nothing for old generation. As Deshpande Says: “But to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grand children”. (Roots, 128.)

Akka was so orthodox that she would not go to hospital because, “God knows what caste the nurses are or the doctors”. But unlike Akka, Indu represents new generation so she tries to listen the voice of her conscience and revolts. Right from her childhood, Indu has been the second place occupied women in the family. She remembers one incident of her childhood thus:

As a child they had told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl they had told me I must be
weak and submissive. Why? I had asked. “Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. And I ... I had watched them and found it to be true.” For a women intelligence was always a burden. They liked their women not to think. And when old uncle’s Saroja had wanted to learn music, Akka had put her foot down. What, learn music from a stranger 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 arti songs. What more does a girl from a decent family want?

(Deshpande, Roots, 158.)

Indu objects that why is she taught to be “weak and submissive”? why should she “accept everything. Even defeat with grace”? Only because she is a female. And not only this, they also told her that “it is the only way, for a female to live and survive”. Such a narrow thinking of males on the one hand and its thorough acceptance by the females on the other in the family, was a thing which she can never approve or rather understand by herself.

Indu represents all these supressions. She laughs at them. Her English education gives her courage to revolt against old norms and exposes her to modern time which sets her apart from the family. She swears that she will never pretend to be what she is not. And so it appears as if she has to be accumulating “I won’t” since her birth. She is bold so she always tried to revolt. Beside being an educated young women, Indu is very sensitive to the situations. She aspires to become independent and
complete in herself but find so many hurdles coming in her way. She finds dominant Akka and her family to be a great hindrance to her goal of attaining independence and completeness. So, later on, Indu leaves the house and meets to Jayant. She gets married to him with her own choice. We see that she leaves one house and enters another to be independent and complete, but ironically enough soon she realizes the futility of her decisions. Indu laughs at the idea of not calling one’s husband by his name as it shortens the age of the husband. Later she realizes that she too is not different from other women as she wants Jayant to be with her. This makes her to think that there is no difference between the other old ladies and herself. After marriage, she does all the activities which her husband would like. She herself meditates:

When I look in the mirror, I think of Jayant, when I dress I think of Jayant, When I undress I think of him. Always what he wants, what he would like, what would please him. And I can’t blame him. It is not he who has pressurized me into this. It is the way I want it to be..... Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own.

(Deshpande, Roots, 54.)

It is not only her marriage which makes her feel uneasy but her suppress writing capability which could not find the way after the marriage. When Indu tells Jayant about her decision of resignation, he asks her not to be silly:

We need the money, don’t we? Don’t forget, we have a long way to go. She wanted to ask him “go where” but dose not.

(Deshpande, Roots, P. 19.)
She does not tell him that she can see only ‘the dusty road’ ahead of her. But she hates herself for it and she wakes up each day with the feeling that she is trapped. She is bewildered to find that her desire to assert herself has driven her from affection to hypocrisy. And this destroys certainly her confidence and assurance. Whenever she wants to change the rules of life Jayant says:

Don’t be silly. That is life. What can one person do against the whole system? No point making yourself ridiculous with futile gestures.

(Deshpande, Roots, P. 20.)

It is at this time when she become oppressed by so many doubts and uncertainties that she receives summons from Akka. It is more than ten years when she left the family. She hesitates whether she should go. Jayant said: “why need you go”? After all it is only your father’s aunt rather a distant relation. Isn’t she?” 1 It sounds disloyal and treacherous. She decides to leave for ancestral house. It is only after coming back that she realizes what the family meant to her. As Seema Jena says:

.... the technique of withdrawal becomes a means by which a woman rediscovers her personality and digs up her hidden potential and learns not to repress her talents.

(Seema, Women’s writing, Narrative, Device in Women’s Writing, P. 10.)

Like Naren, she wants to be completely detached and non involved with the family but Akka has left a great responsibility on her shoulders that she would be heiress of her money. Indu feels completely baffled. She reconsiders her relationship with her husband and find out what is wrong in it. She is much drawn to Naren, whom she finds equally down to earth. She
thinks it a short of lack of courage which prevents her from going ahead. Naren is a challenge to her. She accepts it and let herself go. Suddenly she knows what has been wrong with her whole self but revealing only that which he wants to see. In doing so, she has committed wrong with both-her own self as well as with Jayant.

The old house seems like a trap to her. She must come out of it, It has already outlived its entire life. She reminds herself that she must not allow soft feelings to come in the way of doing what she think is right think to do. Towards the end, Indu does achieve her freedom, refusing to let herself be influenced by kaka, Atya or even Jayant. In her personal life also, she decides not to take the coward’s way. She goes back to Jayant and decides to resign her job and devotes herself to the kind of writing she has always dreamed of. Now she can make her own decision and recognize her strength. As Suman Bala says:

Indu’s uncompromising and paradoxical feminine self, that frantically longe for self-expression, finally finds its roots in the home and with her husband. Indu has confronted her real self and knows her roots.”

(Suman, Women in Novels of Deshpande, P.57.)

Thus, in the end she has achieved her freedom. Deshpande does her heroines choose security through reconciliation. The ethos in the novel is neither of victory nor of defeat but of harmony and understanding between two opposite ideals and conflicting selves. In this way, Indu has achieved her selfhood through many crisis that come in her way. Shashi Deshpande suggests through the character of Indu that happiness lies for women if they learn to conquer their fears and assert their individuality. The novel ends on a note of hope with the protagonist, Indu. According to Sunita Reddy:
Indu asserting herself as an individual and putting an end to her doubts about herself. That she is able to hold her own in a household full of tradition-bound men and women is proof of her individuality. In breaking traditional ground, she is also careful to delineate her presence on yet another dimension—as one who is qualified to defy the status quo with not only courage but also with the conviction of rationale and accountability.

(Sunita, Feminist Perspectives, P.47.)

Indu proves herself wholly a practical woman in the family who is not lured into relationship but enters into it fully aware of the consequences and confident that she is not stretching her moral obligations.

There are a number of Indian novels that deal with women’s problems. But the treatment is often peripheral and the novels end up glorifying the stereotypical virtues of the Indian women, like patience, devotion and object acceptance of whatever is meted out to her. The Dark Holds No Terrors by Shahi Deshpande is a totally different novel in the sense that it explores the myth of woman, a refreshingly new phenomenon in Indian English Fiction. It is a novel about a well-educated, economically independent women’s search for her identity which leads to uncover the dormant strength in human being. Deshpande’s novels contain feminist thought – women’s sexuality, the construction of gender role as wives and mother and self – discoveries. She also admits herself as a feminist in an interview. Her reply is very simple:

I now have no doubt at all in saying that I am a feminist. In my life, I mean. But not consciously as a novelist. I must also say that my feminism has come to me very slowly, very gradually and mainly out of my
own thinking and experiences and feelings. I started writing first and only then discovered my feminism. And it was much later that I actually read books about it.”

(Dickman, “In Conversation : Sue Dickman with Indian Women, P. 32.)

Shashi Deshpande feels that her brand of feminism is not the militant feminism adopted by western writer. The problems of her protagonists rise mostly from situations in the Indian context and differ from those of their western counterparts.

**The Dark Holds No Terrors** is the story of Sarita and her relationship with her parents and her husband and her agonizing search for herself. The novel reveals the life of Sarita who is always neglected and ignored in favour of her brother even though she acquires education and becomes a successful woman in her life but she is not successful in her marriage. According to Premila Paul:

She is a “two-in-one women” who in the daytime is a successful doctor and at night “a terrified trapped animal” in the hand of her husband, Manohar who is an English teacher in a third rate college.

(Premila, The fiction of Deshpande, P.30.)

The novel opens with Saru returning after fifteen years to her father’s house – a place she had once sworn never to return to finding herself to bear the sexual sadism of her husband. The story of the novel meanders between present and past. The stay in fathers house gives Sarita a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her dead mother, dead brother, Dhruva and her children Renu and Abhi. Though she remains unchanged till the end yet she could have a better understanding of herself
and of others in this state. This gives her courage to confront reality. The dark no longer holds any terror to her. Existing between two cultural polarities, Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, searches for herself and ultimately grows into an individual rather than an object pinned down by Indian Society to gender roles. Extricating herself from the clutches of Socio – cultural chains, Saru chooses the western education and becomes a doctor. Though Deshpande avoids the western obsession with feminism she still presents the Indian version of the modern woman who searches for her identity and establishes herself.

The entire novel depicts the emotional and spiritual conflicts of woman. The discriminating socio – cultural values, attitude and practices which cripple the personality of the female child are highlighted through the character of Saru. Ragini Ramchandra also observes this difference in her mother’s behaviour. She writes:

> The portrayal of Sarita’s mother who adored the son and neglected the daughter seems to be a weak point in the story. While one could accept a mother’s preferences amongst her children, it seems rather incredible that she should live and die with curses on her lips for her female child, especially in the Indian context. The mother’s monstrosity seems to serve as a rallying point for the novelist to bring her feminist ideas together. Hence the nagging feeling that the book has an axe to grind.

*(Ragini, The Literary Criticism, P.120.)*

A careful reading of the novel would enable one to refute the charge. The preference for the boys is blatantly acknowledged in most Indian homes. Saru also suffers from gender discriminating right from her birth. She remembers how she has always got second place in her family.
Her brother’s birthday and other religious rituals related to him are given top priority and celebrated with much pomp and fanfare, whereas her birthdays are barely acknowledged. Saru often wonders if her birth was a cause of displeasure to her mother, as she later recalls:

Birthday were not then the tremendous occasions. They are made out to be now but the excitement of having one, of being the centre of attraction never palled; but of my birth, my mother had said to me once..... “It rained heavily the day you were born. It was terrible.” And somehow, it seemed to me that it was my birth that was terrible for her, not the rain.

(Deshpande, The Dark Holds No Terrors, P.15)

She again finds the jubilation over her arrival of her brother Dhruva at the family as a reinforcement of her discrimination. She remembers when her brother was named:

They have named him Dhruva. I can remember, even now vaguely, faintly a state of joyous excitement that had been his naming day. The smell of flowers, the black grinding stone.

(Deshpande, The Dark, P. 152.)

The son is named after the mythogical ‘North Star’ Saru becomes an ‘asteroid’, as a prefigurement of women who are treated as the “eternal minor”(Biardear,The Anthropology,p.46.). Thus gender discrimination can be observed in all the novels of Shashi Deshpande. It is also a significant factor in the Indian social setup. According to the research conducted by S. Anandalakshmi, Director, Lady Irwin College, Delhi:
The supremacy of the male is so well established that the average Indian is surprised to even be queried about it. Whatever the ecology of the social group, even in communities where the women may be the bread winners, the male is considered superior. Within the family the sense of inferiority of the female is pervasive. The sex ratio is unfavorable for girl and forces us to conclude that the survival of the girl is a matter of indifferent in a considerable number of families in a considerable number of families. The birth of a son gives a women status and she invests herself in her son's fixture, creating a deep symbiotic bond.

_(AnandLaxmi, The Indian Journal of Social work, P.31.)_

It is no wonder that Saru's mother is left with no interest in living after her son's death. But Saru hates the favour shown to her brother by her parents. This is the reason that the struggle for female identity is seen in Saru when she thinks:

I must show Baba Something, 'anything'to take his attention away from Dhruvs Sitting on his lap. I must make him listen to me not to Dhruva. I must make him ignore Dhruva.

_(Deshpande, The Dark, P. 32.)_

When the untimely death snaches the boy away her mother says:

Saru has killed Dhruva; you did it, you killed him. Why did you not die? Why are you alive, when he is dead
Subsequently, Saru develops a sense of hatred towards her mother. Her mother is a symbol of Indian orthodoxy who hates Saru for being a girl and always comes a barrier in the way of her progress. She always restricts her daughter without understanding that the new generation is passing through a transitional period from tradition to modernity. Saru has also to put up with constant reminders from her mother that she is dark complexioned and should not step into the sun lest it should worsen her colour. In one of her recapitulations, Saru records her conversation with her mother:

“Don’t go out in the sun, you’ll get darker.”

“Who cares?”

“We have to care if you don’t. We have to get you married.”

“I don’t want to get married.”

“Will you live with us all your life?”

“Why not?”

“You can’t”

“And Dhruva?

“He is different. He is a boy.”

(Deshpande, The Dark, P.40.)

This statement is firmly implanted in Saru’s mind paving a way for her rebellious attitude in future. In this connection, Saru’s mother’s attitude is typical of most Indian mothers and a common phenomenon in the Indian Context. Thus Saru is always sandwiched between tradition and modernity.
The conflict between Saru and her mother thus presents the clash between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. When Saru expresses her desire to study medicine, her mother cannot sanction her go to Mumbai and stay in a hostel. Her argument is that Saru “is a girl;” (143) Saru resolves to be a doctor, hoping that a professional career could be “the key that would unlock the door out of this life” (126) With a deep seated hurt feeling, she tells her mother: You do not want me to have anything. You do not want me to do anything. You do not even want me to live. (142.)

Her final decision to join medical college is an act of rebellion, a step towards liberation from a traditional stereotyped existence and to find selfhood in her life. Her education invokes in her a consciousness which was not present in the older generation. In many cases as Maria Mies says:

The non – conforming conduct of the women is not the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and women but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their own lives.

(Maria, Indian Women and Patriarchy, P. 26.)

This is exactly what we see in the character of Saru representing the middle class working woman in India. She rebels against the traditions but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. When Saru becomes a doctor, it is like a sudden release to her from a prison of fears. The hostel life is a kind of rebirth into a totally different world where she does not have to stay outside for:
“Those three days”, she is no longer an untouchable, she can even talk about it, “oh, damn I must change again it’s like a tap, that’s what it is.

(Deshpande, The Dark, P.96.)

For the first time she feels proud of her female ‘identity’. She undergoes a great transformation after moving into the hostel on getting a seat in a medical college. She has a sense of freedom for the first time in her life. She acquires a degree of sophistication in her cosmopolitan company and, on the whole, gets an attractive picture. This enriches the interest of Manu in her and makes her feel wanted and loved. It is this feeling which is partly responsible for making her rush into marriage with Manu. She defies her mother once more to marry out of her caste. She recalls the conversation with her mother when she confronts her with her intention of marrying Manu:

“What caste is he?”

“I don’t know”

“A Brahmin”

“of course, not.”

“Then cruelly ..... his father keeps a cycle shop”

“Oh, so they are low – caste people, are they?” The word her mother had used, with the disgust, hatred and prejudice of centuries had so enlarged her that she had replied..... I hope so.

(Deshpande, The Dark, P.96.)
Saru revolts against her mother and the whole family and marries with Manu. The initial years of her marriage are sheer bliss when she thinks that she is the luckiest woman on earth. As S. P. Swain observes:

She marries to attain autonomy of the self and to secure the lost love in her parental home. Manu is her saviour, the ideal romantic hero who rescues her from her maternal home. Her marriage with Manu is an assertion on and affirmation of her feminine sensibility.

(Swain, The Indian Women Novelist, P.36.)

But happiness, as she soon discovers, is only an illusion and one is left with memories which are weighed with grief. As long as she is merely a medical student and her husband the breadwinner there is peace at home, even if ‘home’ is surrounded by filth and stench. The problem begins only when she gains recognition as a doctor. Shashi Deshpande proves that in the institution of marriage, an economically independent woman is still bound in shackles and must forever live in fear of hurting the ego of her husband. As saru observes bitterly:

\[ a + b \text{ they told us in mathematics is equal to } b + a. \text{ But here } a + b \text{ was not, definitely not equal to } b + a. \text{ It becomes a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible.} \]

(Deshpande, The Dark, P.42.)

In the next phase of Saru’s life, she is a successful doctor enjoying the recognition of her individual identity. On the other hand her husband is a lecturer in third Rate College. Manu is not satisfied with his job. When he hears the admiring attention of his neighbours who came for Saru regularly
for her advice and help, he feels jealous. While getting her identity Saru feels exhilarated with the dignity and importance that her status as a doctor seems to have given her. She could no longer admit the idea of being dependent but is happy to be independent herself. She can no longer live in silence now in which women generally feel trapped. According to Indira Nityanandam, as a lady doctor, listening to the complaints from her women patients, Sarita realizes the enormity of:

All the indignities of a woman’s life born silently and as long as possible.... Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them ..... going on with her tasks and destroying themselves in the bargain for nothing but a meaningless modesty they have schooled themselves to silence.

(Nityanandam, Three Great Indian Women Novelists, P.46.)

But even after getting recognition as a well known doctor Saru does not find herself completely satisfied and sometimes she still finds her inner feelings suppressed deviates between a successful doctor and an unsuccessful wife. She makes up an imagery speech which sarcastically sums up the conditions necessary for a successful marriage:

A wife must always be a few feet behind her husband. If he is an M.A., you should be a B. A. If he is 5’4” tall you should not be more than 5’3” tall. If he is earning five hundred rupees, you should never earn more than four hundred and ninety, if you want a happy marriage. Don’t ever try to reverse the doctor – nurse, executive – secretary, principle – teacher role. It can be traumatic, disastrous. And, I assure you, it is not worth it. He’ll suffer. You’ll suffer and so will the
children. Women's magazine will tell you that a marriage must be an 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 tilt in your favour, god help you, both of you.

(Deshpande, The Dark, P.137.)

Saru's bitter realization is that a women must necessarily remain a step behind her husband. Surprisingly enough, no less a person than John Ruskin holds a similar view:

A man ought to know any language or science he learns, thoroughly; while a women ought to know the same language or science only so far as many enable her to sympathize in her husband's pleasure, and in those of his best friends.

(Sexual Polities, P.74.)

In Indian culture, a women's identity is defined by other, in terms of her relationship with men, i.e. as daughter, as wife, as mother, for she does not have identity of her own. She can not have higher position than her husband. Saru has absolutely no respect for the abject acceptance of this dictum religiously practiced by the Indian wives. Saru belongs to modern generation and she wants to be the substance itself casting a shadow. She says: "It I cast no shadows I do no exist."(159)Saru has utter contempt for her friend Smita who is happy to even change her name to "Gitangali" just to please her husband.

The last phase of Sarita's life brings her face to face with her own self. In feminist terms, Saru's return to her parental home could be interpreted as what Kristeva calls, "The refusal of the temporal order and
the search for a landscape that would accommodate their need." (About Chinese.P.38.) The homecoming helps her to sortout her problem, analyse her life, to review and re- examine her crisis. Standing infront of her parental house, Saru feels like ragged Sudama standing at the palace gates. She is only vaguely aware of what she has come to ask for:It was not to comfort her father that she had come. It was for herself. What she had hoped to find. (P.58.)

The escape from all the demanding roles gives her a sense of relief and an opportunity to reflect on her life. She realizes how in her quest for freedom to be herself, she has merely exchanged one role for another and in this process has become "just a ventriloquist's dummy."(P. 18.) she knows that somewhere on the way she has lost contact with her real self which now lies obscure if not completely lost. She leaves home twice in the novel, once to establish her independence from her mother's suppression and next to establish her independent nature to her husband and children. When victimized by Manu, she starts on a quest for home :Home is the place where when you have to go there. They have to take you in ( P.391.) But this brief stay away from Manu and children provides Saru a chance to review her part, her own psychology, her own place in relation to other in the family and society around. With the self – realization emerges out the decision to confront the problems. Thus, she decides to face the problems of life fearlessly. This is the significant step in the revitalization of her relationship with her husband as Kamini Dinesh observes:

The emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon untapped inner reserves of strength. The wife in the end is, therefore not a rebel but a redeemed wife.... One who is no longer afraid of the dark.
The darkness of the shadow, of the light, of the fear leaves her. Saru resolves to face her life like Sudama who steps out into the word calmly and courageously. It is this point of enlightenment which brings to fore the lines of the Dhammapada given as an epigraph to the novel:

You are your own refuge;

There is no other refuge.

This refuge is hard to achieve.

(Deshpande, The Dark, P.1.)

Thus, Saru Thinks that a women’s life is her own and the time has come when a women must think as an individual. Shashi Deshpande carefully avoids the western feminist’s concept of emancipation and presents the Indian version of women who searches for the whole of her ‘Selfhood’. So, Saru realizes that she can not attain happiness through anyone else – be it a husband, a father or a child. She can attain peace of mind by her own efforts. No one can gives her peace rather at has to be created within herself Thus free from fears and pain, the final picture of Saru is appealing indeed when she confidently waits for what had been the greatest terror of her life, her husband. She is ready to face him. She is ready to face darkness of life without any terror. As Rajendra Prakash says that it is only at the end of the novel that Sarita realizes that:

She must peel away the multiple layers of roles in which she had swaddled herself before she can arrive the truth about herself.

(Rajendra, Indian English Fiction, P.87.)
In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande has depicted paradigms of modern Indian woman who is constantly trying to know herself. The silence of an Indian housewife is the major concern in this novel. The inner conflict of Jaya is effectively expressed in the novel by the novelist. Shashi Deshpande herself says about this novel:

> And then I wrote *That Long Silence*, almost entirely a woman’s novel, nevertheless, a book about the silencing of one – half of humanity. A lifetime of introspection went into this novel, the one closest to me personally; the thinking and ideas in this are closest to my own

*(Jasbir, Creative Theory, P. 210.)*

In this novel, Deshpande has presented not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later on reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt, but ultimately does not. Her image becomes like that of a bird that has got wings and knows that it can fly, but, somehow, does not. She always remains silent which indicates that the traditional roles of women still have primacy over all then newly – acquired professionals. As Maria Mies, after sociological survey, points out,

> The career woman has not only to face the opposition of her surroundings and to struggle against many objective obstacles, but she is often divided in herself because she also often subscribes to the Indian Idea of womanhood. Her problems arise, firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a new social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity.
Jaya recalls her married life with nostalgia. She was married to Mohan and lived with him at different places till he went away from her to clear himself of the charge of business malpractice. Jaya tries to come to terms with herself by trying to write about herself and family and is determined to break a ‘Long Silence’. She represents the image of contemporary women. Being an educated and cultured person, she wants to understand her own bare self, devoid of all embellishments, as that alone can prove to be a reservoir of strength in her tedious, lonely journey towards selfhood. As a wife she is expected to accomplish her destiny through her husband but she does not want to give up her individuality. In early days of her marriage, Jaya wants to create a gleaming fairytale home by shutting out her fears, ambiguities and suspicions. To come across as an ideal wife and mother, she suppresses her own emotional needs. She is afraid that a frank admission of her desires may disturb the delicate balance of her desires may disturb the delicate balance of her relationships. But the suppression of self respect and emotions, and her worry to keep the exterior smooth, gradually creates a strain in her. The repetitive nature of household chores and emotional loneliness generates monotony in her life and ultimately she finds family life undurable as she admits:

I had to admit the truth of myself that I had often found family life undurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony. I remember now how often I had signed for a catastrophe, a disaster, no, not a personal one, but anything to shake up out of our dull grooves.... Like the chorus of Greek Drama, we were distanced from suffering; for us there was just living – one foot in front of another, until death came to us in a natural form.
Jaya has taught herself to wait in silence, to accept her husband’s desires silently. The author has managed to overcome this difficulty by endowing her protagonist with abundant creative talent so that she can come out from her mental trauma. In the words of Vimala Rama Rao,

Jaya is one of the rare narrative voices in Indian English Fiction who possesses and displays a literary sensibility commensurate with her fictional role as a writer telling her own story, one whose college education and reading habits are in evidence in her speaking voice. This indeed is achievement.

(Vimala, Rev. of That Long Silence, p. 22.)

In this quotation Vimala Rama Rao portrays the conflict in the mind of the narrator between writer and housewife. In the vacant time, her previous life is laid bare before her mind. She realizes the futility of a life which is built around the fulfillment of her husband’s needs only:

The truth was that we had both lost the props of our lives. Deprived of his routine, his files, his telephone, his appointment, he seemed to be no more at all .... There was nothing he needed, so there was nothing I had to do. My own career as a wife in Jeopardy.

(Deshpande, Long Silence, P. 24.25.)

However, being free from her daily burden of repetitive chores, she also experiences a strange sense of undulated freedom, as the woman’s work with in the house dose not create anything permanent it dose not import her any freedom either. She is educated so she does not find full satisfaction in doing only house work. She wants to be creative so that she can express her own desires. She wants to achieve her own freedom as a wife and as a successful career woman. She thinks:
And yet I had a curious sense of freedom. There was nothing to be cleaned, nothing to be arranged or rearranged ... I was free, after years, of all those monsters that had ruled my life, gadget that had to be kept in order, the glassware that had to sparkle, the furniture, and curious that had to be kept spotless and dust free, and those clothes, God, all those never ending piles of clothes that had to be washed and ironed, so that they could be worn and washed and ironed once again.

(Deshpande. Long Silence, P.25.)

In the beginning of her married life Jaya suppresses her feelings of selfhood but later she has realized that she should not be silent. She starts writing light, humorous pieces on the trials of a middle-class housewife in a column titled “Seeta”. This receives a good response from the editors and readers and more importantly gets a nod of approval from her husband Mohan. Jaya states:

Seeta had been the means through which I had shut the door firmly on all these women who had invaded my being, screaming for attention; women I had known I could not write about, because they might, it were Just possible, resemble Mohan’s mother or aunt or my mother or aunt.

(Deshpande, Long Silence, P. 149.)

The statement effectively conveys the fact that women writers have all along abstained from telling the truth or rather giving greater credence to their roles as wives than as individuals. Kamat as a hard critic is contemptuous of such writing, knowing well that Jaya is capable of writing better stuff. He frankly tells her:

I can never imagine you writing this. This you, I mean, I can see the woman who writes this. She’s
plump, good humoured, pea brained, but shrewd. devious, skimming over life.

(That Long, P. 149.)

Adele King also observes the same view:

In a self-referential parody, Deshpande makes Jaya a writer of woman’s magazine fiction. In Jaya’s stories they lived happily ever after although she knows the falsity of the view of life. Also, the mixture of surrealism and fantasy in some of experiences the writer undergoes is an important aspect of the making and unmaking of fictions in That Long Silence.

(King Adele, The New Indian Novel in English, P. 166.)

Shashi Deshpande highlights the plight of the so-called educated women still bound firmly by the shackles of tradition and convention. As G.D. Barche observes:

Unhesitatingly the modern educated young woman’s crusade against years of slavery, suffering and suppression is a serious one. However, in the process of this crusade, we see her suffering from certain weakness and complexes which have been highlighted by the Indian women novelists. The first weakness she suffers from can be summed up in what Pope has said of Addison willing to wound, yet afraid to strike;

(Barch, Indian Women Novelist, P. 15.)

Though Jaya tries to achieve her individuality through her creative writing but there are several other factors which check her path. In her anxiety to perform her role as a perfect wife and a loving and caring mother, her identity is relegated to the background. To please her husband, she transforms her appearance to suit his idea of modern woman. Though Jaya is a representative of the urban, middle-class woman exposed to
liberal western ideas but she is unable to free herself entirely from the clutches of male chauvinist ideas. They have two different lives – Mohan of a dictator and Jaya of a silent follower. She wants to revolt against her husband but Vanitamami’s words that the husband is like a “Sheltering tree” (P.32.) constantly ring in her psyche. Hopelessly she cries,

I can’t cope, I can not manage. I can’t go on, - had been neatly smothered. As also the question that had confronted me everyday – ‘Is this all?’ The biggest question facing the woman of these diaries had obviously been: What shall I make for breakfast / lunch / tea / dinner? That had been the Leit motif of my life.

(*Deshpande, Long Silence, P.70.*)

This is the beginning of her silent revolt in her mind. She struggles alone with the trauma, and though it upsets her mental equilibrium, she emerges victorious. When she finally comes out of her emotional upheaval, she comes to terms with herself and her position. She pours out her fears, her doubts and everything. She had suppressed in her seventeen years of silence As Subhas Chandra comments,

By permitting her story, she has achieved articulation of her predicament, her constraints, her anguish and has thereby broken her silence.

(*Subhas, “Silence No More.”*)

(*Indian Women Novelist, P.155.*)

In this cathartic state, a realization downs on her.

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 a fragmentation is not possible. (*Deshpande, Long Silence, P.191.*)
She rejects the persistent image of “two bullocks yoked together.” (P.7.) she recollects that while studying Sanskrit she had learnt outrageously that women characters were not allowed to speak Sanskrit and had to use Prakrit. She realises now that she has been speaking Prakrit all along. She resolves to “plug that hole in the heart,” and to speak as well as listen, in order to erase silence. Though she is aware of her incompleteness yet has holistic approach towards life and thinks that one must be resilient in one’s approach,

We do not change overnight. It’s possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that life would be impossible. And if there is anything to know now it is this: life has always to be made possible.

(Deshpande, Long Silence, P.159.)

After her purgation, as Purabi Panwar says:

Jaya no longer wants to play the role of a passive wife. Perhaps, this is the hardness and ruthlessness that Deshpande talks about in the foreword. A man is conditioned to it right from the beginning, a woman learns through experience.

(Purbi, “Breaking The Silence” p.4.)

Thus, the novel ends with a resurgence of faith. Jaya learns through her experience and her decision to erase the silence which had defined and distorted her communication with her husband should be interpreted as the harbinger of a new hope. A woman’s desire to succeed like an individual is not incompatible with the desire for love and small pleasure of domesticity. Her independence without love can also exhaust her sensitivity in a constant tussle with the self and society. Jaya’s story proves that a balanced fulfilled life is not merely a utopian fancy for a woman if she decides to realize her creative energy and thus tries to make her free from psychic fear and bondage of centuries. In short, she thinks that self-hood is possible if a
woman decides to be herself, to exhibit the genuine significance of her free, innate and uninhibited personality in its totality. Jaya in *That Long Silence* shows progression as the protagonist undergoes a kind of transformation through self-recognition. Having realized her position, Jaya would not accept the earlier image of a pair of bullocks yoked together signaling a loveless couple:

Two bullocks yoked together – that was how I saw the two of us the day we came here, Mohan and I. Now I reject that image. It’s wrong. If I think of us in that way, I condemn myself to a life time of disbelief in over selves. I’ve always thought – there is only one life, no chance of a reprieve, no second chances. But in this life itself there are so many crossroads, so many choices.

*(Deshpande, Long Silence, P. 191-92.)*

The traditional Indian wisdom stands Jaya in good stead at this Juncture of life. The words from the Bhagavad-Gita: *‘Yathechasi tatha kur’* appeal to her after she gains knowledge and self-hood. Thus, she comes to realise that life can always be made possible without breaking traditions. Maria Mies also has the optimistic approach about Indian Women. She says:

In their reaction to role conflict in a patriarchal society, they show the strength to achieve their goals of self – realization. From a state of passive acceptance they move to one of active assertion. Without succumbing to societal pressures and without breaking away from accepted, traditional, social institutions, these protagonists succeed in being individuals.
(Mira, Indian Women and Patriarchy, P. 59.)

Shashi Deshpande's *The Binding Vine*, like the earlier novels, portrays her middle-class female protagonist's struggle for achieving selfhood in a male dominated society. It also depicts her search for love, and happiness in life a search for something to cling to in the strange world she has performed to live. Shashi Deshpande conjures up a woman’s vision of life which is expressed in the novel partly through the consciousness of Urmila, the female protagonist, and partly through the other female characters like Vanna, Urmila’s friend Mira, her mother-in-law and Shakutai.

*The Binding Vine* is a curious intermingling of three lives and is narrated by sharp-tongued Urmii. This novel will foreground the dimensional depth, not only of traditions involved, but also aspects of personality of characters as they undergo through a variety of situations, conflicts and resolutions of feminine self of Deshpande’s protagonists. The protagonist of this novel is a little different because earlier protagonist like Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows* and Jaya in *That Long Silence* think primarily about themselves and seek their own redemption, but Urmii in *Binding Vine* is preoccupied with the suffering of her long-dead mother-in-law subjected to rape in marriage and unmarried girl Kalpana – also a victim of rape. She realizes the responsibility of her own race - ‘the Stri Jati’ – and struggles to bring its truth before the society.

*The Binding Vine* deals with the multi-facetedness of its protagonist Urmii. The inner most recesses of a woman’s heart are brought to light through the perspective of Urmii. In this novel, she has challenged the patriarchal, chauvinistic and indifferent role of Indian male while the earlier heroines of Deshpande’s seek their own place and struggle with male to achieve selfhood. As we observe that Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* fights to bring the husband wife relationship of an equal footing where there are no “hierarchised oppositions” like superior or inferior, high
or low, and man and woman. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* is worried about her interactions with the various personalities in her large family and her resolutions to overcome her own personal crises. Jaya in *That Long Silence* copes with her own suffering, silence and surrender and wins her freedom as an individual. Contrasted with all these is Urmī who is concerned with the redemption of her own race. The effort of Urmī to publish Mīra’s poems at discovering the strangled voice articulating woman’s silent discourse, deciphering the coded language and liberating the imagination of woman from interior to exterior. According to Elaine Showalter:

This may be taken to mean that Deshpande converts a muted woman into a “talking woman” and provides the cause, will strength and means to articulate the silence of women. This may also mean that she is a “revisionist questioning the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures.

*(Elaine, “Feminist criticism in the wilderness*, P.333.)*

In this novel experience of the protagonist, Urmī, is minutely analyzed as a refreshing change from earlier novels. There are moments of revolt, deep felt anger, desire to set things right. The gradual process of self realization through darkness, revolt and reconciliation is what is traced through a narration of Urmī’s experiences. According to Indira Nityanandam:

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

(*Nityanandam, Indian women Novelist, P.66*)

Deshpande’s characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles of traditions. Urmila, perhaps, is the most rebellious of Deshpande’s female characters. Unlike the other protagonists who are aware of the inequalities in society but do not attempt to set right anything. Urmila takes up cudgels on behalf of the rape victim, Kalpana. She is used as an instrument in propagating the case and getting the police to investigate the matter and find the culprit. She encourages her friend, Vanna, to assert herself and stop behaving like a door mat. She also sets herself to the task of translating the poems written by her mother – in law in Kannada to English and motivates her in publishing them. All this has prompted Indira Nityanandam to write that:

*The Binding Vine* is a refreshing change from the three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonist here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact that though there are Miras and Kalpanas and Shakutas, we also have our Urmilas.

(*Nityandam, Indian Women Novelist, P.66*)

Though Urmila is sharp – tongued and self – willed woman but the happiness of her domestic life is marred by the unexpected death of her female baby, Anu. She fights with the memories and realizes that forgetting is betrayal as well:

I must reject these memories, I have to conquer them. There is one battle I have to win if I am to go on living. And yet my victory will carry with it the taint of betrayal. To forget it to betray.
She is also conscious about her responsibility of her son Kartik who needs her love and watches her anxiously. Commenting on her masochistic attitude, S. Indira writes:

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

*(Indira, Indian Women Novelist, P.222.)*

Though Urmila is sharp – tongued and self-willed woman but the happiness of her domestic life is marred by the unexpected death of her female baby, Anu. She fights with the memories and realizes that forgetting is betrayal:

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*(Binding Vine, P. 21.)*

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*(Indra, Indian Women novelist, P.222.)*
It is not that she takes the death of her Kith and Kin in the same way. When her father dies, she bears the shock easily. She says: "Papa is only a memory, a gentle memory." (P.27.) But Anu is different. Obsessed with the memories of her daughter, she comes across a photograph of her mother – in law Mira who loses her identity after marriage. She forgets her own suffering and tries to probe into Mira’s poetry to visualise the kind of trouble life she has lived.

Her poems and diaries connote molestation in marriage she is seen either as a wife or mother which in a way replaces her real self by an alien self. When Akka hands over little bits of Mira’s Jewellery, she says:

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

The differences made by Akka symbolizes that the poems and diaries are “self-actualizing, which need not any identification by men. Urmì feels the intensity of Mira’s suffering and meditates: the woman who wrote those poems in the solitude of an unhappy marriage, who died giving birth to her son at twenty – two. (P.48.) According to Urmì, Mira’s diaries are not a daily account of her routine life but a direct communion to her soul. But she dares not to revolt against society so she continues to write silently. But Urmì is modern woman with enough courage to revolt against odd ones. She wants to share these sufferings with Vanna, her childhood friend and now sister- in- law but she can not help her and says:

I can not speak of Mira, of Mira’s writing, of her. That is another pocket of silence between us. One can never see one’s parent as a sexual being; he or she merely a card board figure labelled parent.

(P.83.)
Urmı remembers one of the poems which is written in reaction to the exploitation of a man “who tries to possess another human being against her will.” (P.83) But in this tradition – bound society woman has no right to revolt against man’s desire. A woman is told to ‘obey’ only and to ‘submit’ herself in accordance with her husband’s desire without using ‘no’ to him. Then only she can enjoy a ‘paradise’ on earth:

Do not tread paths barred to you obey. never utter a ‘no’; submit and your life will be a paradise, she said and blessed me.

(P.83)

The same experience Saru, the protagonist of Shashi Deshpande’s 

The Dark Holds No Terrors has when she is hold:

A wife must be a few feet behind her husband…. That is the only rule to follow if you want a happy marriage. Do not ever try to oversee the doctor – nurse, executive – secretary, principal – teacher role.

(P.124.)

Urmı decodes Mira’s loneliness from the fact that the latter rarely mentions her family in her poems. This loneliness is a part of her own being. When she comes to her — in — laws house, she is christened Nirmala — the first estrangement from her identity, her known self. One of her poem is written in reaction to this horrible incident:

I 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 build without erasing the old? A tablet of rice, a pencil of gold. Can they make me Nirmala? I am Mira.

(P.115.)

But this strong assertion remains a private experience, it is never expressed publicly during her lifetime. Mira can not have courage to
express it to others expect through her poems. She choose pen as a weapon to express her suppressed desire in language. According to Cora Kaplan:

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

(Kaplan, Changes: Culture and Feminism. P.71.).

When Urmí reads those poems, she has filled with the excitement of a hunter and she decides to resurrect her by publishing them. She thinks “It is Mira who is now taking me by the hand and learning me.” (135.)

According to K.M. Pandey:

The centrality of Mira in the fictional world of The Blinding Vine is further conformed by the borrowing of the title of the novel from one of the poem of Mira which is about the womb-piercing joy of her pregnancy- the binding vine of love.

(Pandey, Women in the Novels of Deshpandý, P.117.)

Urmí Shares the anquish not only of her mother-in-law but also of Kalpana-a girl who become a prey to her own relative who molests her. Urmí is also a medical social worker and when she comes to know about this case, she wants to inform the police but Shakutai, Kalpa’s mother requests her not to inform the police because it will Spoil their reputation and create problems in her marriage. She Says:

No, No, No. Tel him, tæ it's not true, do not tell anyone, I’ll never be able to hold up my head again, who’ll marry the girl, we are decent people.

(p.50.)
Urmi is surprised to see Sakutal’s response whose husband has already deserted her for some younger women, worried about marriage of Kalpana who is in the word of doctor, “neither dead or alive”(87.). But Urmi realizes that traditional women like Shakutai finds security only in marriage whether it may be successful or failure. Thus Mira, Sakutai and Salu, whose husband molest kalpana, belong to the traditional Indian Society. They have no courage to go against the society. On the other hand Vanna and Urmi are modern and they have courage to show their self-hood but they have different style.

Through the character of Vanna and Urmi, two types of female are portrayed in the novel. Vanna, educated, cheerful and optimistic, is a social worker, who is submissive and willing to go along with her man. She is solicitous and caring and does not resent her household duties. She, in fact, is a female who is a symbol of love as well as a working woman. The following conversation between Vanna and Urmi throws light on their respective natures:

“How can’t Harish help?”

“He comes home so tired ...?”

“You know, Vanna, what you’re going to become, coping with everything the way you are?”

“What?”

“A superwoman.”

(Deshpande, Binding Vine, P.112.)

Urmi is different. She can manage her life systematically. She is educated modern woman who has confidence even to fight for others. On the first night, wants to assert herself and not crawl before him. She clutches on to the sanctity of womanhood and marriage. It is love which makes a woman vulnerable. Urmi loves Kishor even though the separation gives her an opportunity to think of another relationship but she discard it. Thus, Urmi is the most natural woman in The Binding Vine, who is revolting and finally adjusting herself into bondage of love. So The Binding
Vine is divided into four harmonious parts. Each part is preceded by short poetical epigraphs as extracts from the poems of Mira, who worked all along her short life in search of selfhood and personal identity. This novel has a multiplicity of complex themes. But predominant theme is that of agony caused by the death of Urmi’s daughter Anu, which is introduced in the beginning, runs through the death of Mira and Kalpana’s rape in the middle, and is conclude with the optimistic hope of Urmi. She has positive faith in life. She thinks it is love which is the binding vine of life:

“The most important need is to love. From the amount of our birth, we struggle to find something which we can anchor ourselves to this strange world we find ourselves in. Only when we love do we find this anchor. But love Makes you vulnerable.”

(137.)

Urmi finally realises that relationships bind one another and that “Each relationships, always imperfect, survives on hope” (141) The central theme of the novel is contained in the opening lines of the epigraph in Part Four:

Standing still I searched,  
Stretching out my arms,  
Sinking deep into the earth  
Like the banyan roots  
seeking the spring of life.

(Deshpande, Binding Vine, (P. 151.)

Thus, through the observation of other characters we find that in comparison to Mira and Kalpana, Urmi has self-confidence and a sense of individuality and selfhood in life through this novel Shashi Deshpande seems to convey the message that life has its own rewards in the form of love. Nisha Trivedi appreciates novelist’s this attempt by calling it ‘the right path’. She remarks:
Shashi Deshpande is capable of giving complete answer. She not only shows the path but the right path which is necessary to live a happy life, for modern, emancipated, educated and intelligent middle-class working women.

(Nisha, The Fiction of Shashi Deshpande P. 45.)

In most of her novels Shashi Deshpande has carved female characters, as a protagonists but for the first time, she makes a male the protagonist of her novel *A Matter of Time*. No doubt, the novel begins in a manner which is deceptively similar to her earlier novels and follows almost the same pattern. A close study of the novel reveals that Deshpande is deeply concerned as usual with the traumas suffered by women in a middle-class family in India, but as well this novel is a little different in its theme and presentation. It is women around human predicament having a fascinating story of three strong women representing three generations in the family with their pains, endurances, sufferings and love, understanding and support extended to one another. Subhash K. Jha also has same opinion when he says:

*A Matter of Time* contains a lot else which the author tries to convey through the idea of three women from three generation from the same family and how they respond to the tragedy that overpowers their lives.

(Subhas, “Knotty Problems” P.55.)

In this novel, Deshpande also portrays the inner conflict of a man’s mind, though it is sparingly used in parts of the novel. This novel proves that she is capable of sympathizing with her male protagonists too. As she says:

I wrote as I thought man would. I made my protagonist a man, I was pleased when a friend said of
a story “If I hadn’t known you’d written that story, I’d have thought it was a man who had written it.

(R.S. Pathak, The, Fiction of Shashi Deshpande, P.175.)

Sumi and Gopal have three young daughters from their love marriage Aru, Charu, Seema. One day Gopal’s announcement of leaving the house results into a shocked silence in Sumi while eighteen year-old Aru tries bitterly to search for her own reason for this calamity. Sumi, though immensely hurt by Gopal’s action, endures the pain within herself and tries to keep the things normal for her daughters she says:

I’ve begun to think that what Gopal has really done is to take sanyas. I’m surprised none of you have thought of that

(Deshpande, A Matter of Time, P.175.)

Vimala Rama Rao also thinks that the theme of the novel resolved round “a person assuming Sanyasa of a kind which is often encountered in our society.” Kirti Ramchandra also has the same opinion:

Gopal’s desertion of his family signifies the vedic renunciation freeing “himself of all bondage.

(Kirti, “of fate and Eternity”, P.21.)

Whatever is the reason of Gopal’s desertion of his family, a close study of whole issue revels that it does not tally with the Indian ideal of Sanyasa. Deshpande, who is an acknowledged master at expressing the problems and agony of gives a true picture of Sumi when Gopal leaves her. Sumi’s father takes her ‘Big House’ As soon as she recovers from the shocks, she picks up the threads of her life and tries to readiest her life style to suit the situation. Sumi, infact, is trying to cope up with the reality and wants her daughters to do the same. When her daughters are worried about his being dead or alive:

Sumi has no fear of his death, on the contrary, there is the certainty of his being alive, of his steadily
pursuing his own purposes. While the others are trying to find reasons for what he has done, she knows that the reasons lies inside him, the is him.

(Deshpande, A Matter P.24)

Without blaming Gopal Sumi has her own question to ask Gopal: how he has taken the decision to disown things and people in this age of acquisition and possession? She thinks:

If I meet Gopal I will ask him one question, just one. the question no one has thought of. What is it, Gopal…. That makes a man in this age of acquisition and possession walkout 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. How then can you, in this age, part of this society, turn your back on everything in your life? Will you be able to give me an answer to this?

(Deshpande, Matter, P.27.)

It is evident that there are no obvious reasons for Gopal walking out on his family. Gopal also reassures that Sumi is not be blamed for his decision. At times, it appears that even Gopal is not aware of the reasons for this momentous decision he has taken. Vague references to his past by Gopal reveal about his abnormal childhood. Infact that his father had married his brother’s widow, and he was born of that union prove to be quite unsettling for Gopal Later, his parents’ gruesome death leaves a void in his life But more than that, it is the realization, that his sister Sudha, and he dose not share the same father, shatters his equilibrium. As he later reflects: That was a betrayal that cut away at the foundations of my life (52.) Gopals desertion has affected his family Aru, Sumis elder daughter, is so upset but Sumi has courage to endure her life. She disagrees with Aru and says:I just want to get on with my life .... Let him go, Aru just let him go. This is not good for you. (61.)With these words she allows Gopal to
have his own decisions, to free himself from the bondage of love as he needs his freedom. Yet she feels loneliness but she has confidence that she can survive without him as she is educated and can earn bread and butter. Sumi also understands her young daughter’s desperate need of warmth and togetherness of the family so she speaks nothing about Gopal. This understanding makes their relationship a unique one in Deshpande’s fictional world. As S. Shinde observes:

All the man-women relationship in her novels are oppressive, strange, uncomfortable or silent. Sumi and Gopal stand out uniquely in spite of the fact that Gopal leaves them for something unattainable.

(Shinde, Women in the Novels of S.D., P132.)

When Sumi and Gopal, for the first time, meet after their separation, there are no tears, no abuses no question or explanation. When Sumi enters his room, Gopal is having his lunch and reading out of the window into the courtyard, she comes to realise the fact:

She hears his voice. He is responding to someone, perhaps a servant woman, offering to washup for him. The children call out to him and she hears his laugh. And as if his voice knits everything together, she can suddenly see the substance, the reality of his life apart from her and their children. All these lives, contiguous to his, spell out the actuality of their separation

(Deshpande, A Matter, P.84-85.)

It occurs to her with its finality that she can no longer live with him. She should choose her own way to live her life. She comes out from false illusion and meditates:

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

(Matter, P.85.)

This reality dawns upon her without even any exchange of words and Sumi understands and accept it. Her pride refuses to allow her to share her grief with Gopal. Thus, in a manner, quite similar to that of her counterparts, Indu, Saru, Jaya and Urmì, Sumi also reveals an independent nature. As Deshpande comments:

Sumi’s acceptance is not passive. She block out the unpleasantness. She has a good opinion of herself, she is more concerned with getting on with life. She does not want pity, she would do anything for pride. She distances even her husband. The point is, they are both unusual.

(Vimala, “In conversation with Shashi Deshpande,” P.258.)

Another character Kalyani is an intelligent girl in her childhood days but unfortunately she is married even without completing her education. After her marriage, once while she was going to her parental home, she lost her four-year-old mentally retarded son. In search of lost son, Shripati, Kalyani’s husband, goes about the city like a madman but to no avail. This brings Kalyani’s marital life to an end and shripati even stops speaking to his wife: he “has not spoken to her since the day it happened”—about thirty-five ago.(140.) Kalyani belongs to old generation so she has no courage to revolt against her husband and goes back to her parental house with her two remaining children. According to Shinde:

Since the day, their only mentally retarded son, Madhav, was lost from the railway platform, Shripati has inflicted this silence as a weapon and a
punishment on Kalyani, and she has endured it silently.

*(Shinde, *Women in the Novels of S.D.*, P.133.)*

Kalyani is quite upset when she comes to know about Gopal’s walking away from family. Naturally she will never approve the tragedy to her life to resurface in the case of her daughter too. She cries: “No.... no, my god, not again” pathetically sounding so much like an animal in pain.(133.)She takes the entire responsibility on Sumi’s carelessness on herself due to her unsuccessful married life. She takes it as her fault that Sumi could not adjust in her marital life. Infact, she could never learn how to be a good wife afterall, from Kalyani. She regrets:

But how could have known what being a good wife means when she never saw her mother being one? I taught her nothing, it’s my fault, Gopal, forgive me and don’t punish her for it

*(Matter, P.47.)*

Kalyani’s character is a faithful representation of self-sacrificing Indian women of the older generation. To them marriage is the most important happening in a women’s life. She also is keen on getting a good match for her grand daughter Aru. But Aru has no interest in marriage because she has observed two failure married life in her family she thinks: How can she, of all people think of marriage with enthusiasum? (124.) she belongs to new generation and has rebellious nature. She wants to file a case against her father when he left them without any information. Like a true modern women, she has full confidence in life. She says, “I just want to get on with my life.” (61.) That is the reason she is against marriage. She knows that after marriage, in Indian tradition, her life would be enslaved to her husband. She is not ready to accept any type of failure in her life. She takes marriage as a great deal while talking to Premi:

“I’ve been thinking to about marriage a great deal....
What’s there in it? I mean, look at Amma and how Sumi… what do you get out of it? .... ‘And look at Goda-Ajji and Bhaiji – Kaka – They’re always scrapping. At their age and after so many years of marriage.

(Deshpande, Matter, P. 138.)

Deshpande suggests that Aru Fails to appreciate the concept of marriage because of her want of maturity and her vicarious experience of marriages like those of Kalyani and Shripati, Sumi and Gopal and other. Thus, Aru represents the modern Indian women who individualized her life. She is shocked of her grandmother’s acceptance of such a life:

And when kalyani signs her name, carefully, spelling out ‘Kalayani bai Pandit, Aru is amazed. How can still have his name for god’s sake?

(Matter, 146.)

Aru is surprised by Kalyani’s behaviour because she is living without her husband but does not want to forget her identity of ‘Pandit’ which she has got after her marriage. She is living with her father’s family although she dose not want to forget her husband’s family. Sumi is also unable to comprehend the meaning of such existence. Thus, through Aru and Sumi, Deshpande delineates the different phase of life of Indian women. As Jasbir Jain Comments:

A Matter of Time, the author subtly debates
the whole issue of individual freedom. The novel has three parts – The House, The family, The River – and each title carries within its meaning. ‘The House’ is the body; it is also memory and lineage, the coming together of all different elements... ‘The family’ consists of three generations.... The third part ‘the river is about immersion in the river waters which clean and purify. It is also about the stream of life
which flows. Further she says, Deshpande’s novels are not about women but Social institution and nature of freedom .... Freedom when it comes brings with it its own burden. Gopal is aware that Sumi by not bringing in any legal action against him is giving him his freedom while at the same time leaning to built a sense of freedom for herself.

(Jasbir, “Positioning the ‘Post’ in Post Feminism” P.40-41.)

In A Matter of Time, Sumi and Aru after a lot of suffering and introspection, do come to terms with their present with an understanding and acceptance of their past and are ready now to go ahead with new acceptance of time. Unfortunately, Sumi dies in a sudden accidental death but before death she lives her life with creativity in her own style. One striking quality of Sumi is that without even a trace of bitterness, she forgives her husband’s behavior, who was the main cause of her suffering. Thus, she has achieved inner freedom with its knowledge of survival and human understanding.

In her latest novel, Small Remedies, Shashi Deshpande goes a step further and presents more strong female protagonists. In A Matter of Time Sumi becomes active after Gopal has walked out of her life. But in Small Remedies the rebellion, hidden earlier, finds a way out, so that the protagonists struggle against all odds to realize their inner – self. They are redefining their horizons to pursue professions they never did. These females are storming the male bastion with an enthusiasm that’s most refreshing indeed. Not only are they treading unfamiliar territories, their action are a testimony that what men do, women can do better. Madhu Saptrishi, in Small Remedies, is not much different from other counterparts like Indu, Sarita, Jaya, Urmi and Sumi in age, education and family background. In this novel, the protagonists belong to different
communities, profession and different level of society. Deshpande dares to write about a Goan Christian family and also mentions a Muslim Tabla player and briefly touches upon his life and the people surrounding him, notably his grand—daughter, Hasina. In a review, Meenakshi Mukherjee briefly sums up Deshpande’s this work and observes the noticeable change:

In small remedies, Deshpande is attempting much more than she did in her earlier novels—all five of them different from each other—but smaller than this in scope……. But none of them gathered up, as this new novel does, in one large sweep, the plurality, diversity and contradictions of our composite culture where an Anthony Gonsalves ("the reference to Amar Akbar Anthony" is deliberate), a Hamidabai and Joe can all be part of Madhu’s extended family, and the daughter of Gulam Saab can opt, though not very easily to get accepted as Shailaja Joshi.

(Minakshi, "On Her own Terms", 2000.)

In this novel, Deshpande works at different levels—personal, women’s right, communal violence, motherhood etc. So we observe different type of people from different communities. This novel is structured as a biography within a biography, with the writer, Mudhu, often in a dilemma about how to tell her story. In this novel, Madhu, Leela and Savitribai do not merely think but act out their role and bring about a concrete change in working class woman’s life. These characters are bold and successful in their life respectively. Deshpande gives the realistic picture of educated modern women who can do anything for achieving their individuality. They can leave their family as Savitribai has done when she elopes with her Muslim lover and accompanist, Gulam Saab, to pursue a career in music. Although she belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family but when she observes that her family would prove a hurdle in her career, she leaves them. Deshpande describes today’s woman who can not live in
boundaries. They are not satisfied with their household duties rather they have changed their way of thinking. Though in stepping out of their homes, they have to struggle more with their increasing liabilities; their role in the house as well outside the house. This novel focuses more on fascinating vocalist, Savitribai Indorekar. When Madhu starts to write a biography on Savitribai, she finds her too old now. Madhu remembers her childhood days when Bai, in Neemgaon, looked beautiful with fine dresses in her youth:

a small sized woman. Even from my child’s perspective she had seemed petite. Age and illness have so shrunk her that she’s a doll-sized woman now............ The skin is fine and delicate, even if it is crinkled like tissue paper. Her arms are slim and firm, but the hands, with their branching of veins, seem incongruously large for those delicate arms.

(Deshpande, Small Remedies, P.14)

She is, however imperious in her attitude to her servant and even her biographer. Madhu has to pay five visits to meet her finally for interview. Madhu comes to know about her birth in an orthodox family and how she could earn a name for herself in the field of classical music. Because at that time it was almost impossible for a female to opt or even think of such an untraditional career of singing. Madhu recalls how:

In Neemgaon she was ‘the singer’ woman and there was something derogatory about the words, yes I can see that now, about the way they said them.

(Small Remedies, P. 29.)

Madhu thinks that there are different yardsticks for man and woman in our society. So, obviously, Savitribai is rejected by conventional society. Because at that time in the village: each family has its place marked out for it according to religion, caste, money, family background etc. (P. 138.) S. Reddy also says that Bai has great courage to elope with Muslim:
For a woman with such a background to elope with a Muslim tabla player and live in a strange town among total strangers must have required immense courage.

(Sunita, Feminist Perspectives, P.125.)

In Indian society, woman can not be given that freedom which man avails because man is free from all bondages but woman is not. As we observe that Savitribai’s father – in – law, who has a mistress, a famous thumari singer. Everybody in the family knows this fact but there is never any outrage over the fact: that he has a mistress was accepted, a wife from one’s own class, a mistress from another – this was normal. ( p. 138.) Though Bai has the support of her father – in- law but she has to face anger and contempt from the other when she returns to her music class. She can imagine the rejection and hostility and the way she would cast aside like an untouchable. She says:

To be set apart from your own kind not to be able to confirm, to flout the rules laid down, is to lay yourself open to cruelty. Animal know this, they do it more openly, their cruelty towards the deviant is never concealed. But the subtle cruelty of persistence hostility leaves deeper wounds. There is always temptation to succumb to go back to the normal path and be accepted. To resist the temptation speaks of great courage.

(P. 221.)

In this way, Savitribai is not supported by society or even by her family. But she has courage and strong will to be successful and she achieves it. She leaves her husband and daughter for success. Madhu, who is aware of Savitribai’s past, is unable to digest the indifference to her daughter, more so, because Madhu herself a dating mother, grieving over the death of her son. Madhu feels that she can give Bai the immortality if
she is willing to pay the price of revealing her daughter to the world. She wonders how:

She gave that child the name ‘Indorkar’ the name she adopted as a singer not comprising either her maiden name or her married on. Meenakshi Indorekar, making her out as her child alone, not the child of her marriage, not the child of her lover. This surely is a statement I can not ignore.

(P.169.)

As a child Madhu recollects how Munni refuses to accept Ghulam Saab as her father and instead concocted stories about a lawyer father who lived in Pune. She also remembers how the girls in their neighborhood tormented her with questions:

What’s your name?
What’s your father’s name?
Where is your father?
Who is the man who lives with your mother?

(P.77.)

Munni hates her mother and after marriage she has changed her name ‘Shailaja Joshi’ so that no one can raise any question to her. In this way she wipes out all the connection with her past. Madhu has basic information about Bai’s birth, her parent’s marriage, music lessons and her years with Guruji, her rise to fame and success. But Madhu is left quite confused sometimes about Bai’s courage at other he lacking of it. Indira Nityanandam also remarks about her unconventional life:

She had undoubtedly, led the most unconventional life anyone in her society would ever imagine. But behind these acts of bravo was a woman who wanted to conform, to be accepted by society.
(Nityamandam. Three Great Indian Woman Novelist. P. 101.)

In the end of the novel, Madhu comes to know about the birth of Bai’s relation with her lover Ghulam Saab and birth of Munni by Hasina, Ghulam Saab’s grand daughter. Number of question comes in the mind of Madhu and she imagines about Bai, why she has left her husband and child and runaway with her lover and later when she has achieved success she also abandons her lover. Does she selfish woman? Does she only love her career and use man only to fulfill her purpose? She has many such questions in her mind. Madhu faces problem in writing about love story of Bai whether it should be successful story or a tragic one. Infact it is very difficult to judge whether she has lived a happy life or a tragic one because ultimately she has got name and fame and is called as ‘Doyen of Hindustani music’. Thus, we find that for a Indian woman, it is not easy to be a successful career woman. Savitribai has many hurdles in her way but later, she has achieved her selfhood in her life.

Apart from Savitribai, Madhu’s narrative also include the saga of another equally or perhaps remarkable woman, her aunt Leela. She is a independent woman and is strongly committed to the communist ideology. She is bold and financially independent and does not believe in cast system. This is the reason she is married with Joe, a Christian. She is a passionate believer in communist ideology. After putting in years of hard work, she is sidelined by party bosses and never reached the top of hierarchy. It is drawback of Indian society that for a female to rise on the top is too difficult because they have other liabilities. So they struggle with society to achieve their success.

Small Remedies is the story of the narrator Madhu herself. She is writing the biography of Savitribai. From her childhood she knows Bai’s relationship with Ghulam Saab and Munni. The novel also covers that period of her life when she is grieving over the death of her only child, Aditya. Madhu herself is a victim in the novel. Her husband leaves her
when her child is dead. In her childhood, she has been brought up by two
men – her father and Babu, a male servant. She has no mother from her
childhood. She felt pity for the children who seemed to be constantly
harassed by their mothers:

Motherless child that I am, motherhood is an unknown
world to me. The mothers I see in my childhood are
drab creatures, forever working, forever scolding their
children, certainly they are not the women to arouse a
sense of deprivation in me. *(Deshpande, Small
Remedies, P.182.)*

Deshpande spares no effort to present the picture of life it is without
conforming to stereotypes. She is obvious in her portrayal of motherhood
and says:

I get some images of motherhood in the movies I see
myself through the song that speak of ‘ma ka pyar’. But real life shows me something entirely different.
Munni’s mother who ignored her daughter; Ketaki’s
mother, stern, dictatorial and so partial to her son’s;
Sunanda, sweetly devious and manipulating. Som’s
mother, so demanding – none of them confirm to the
white – clad, sacrificing, sobbing mother of the
movies.

*(Deshpande, Small Remedies, P.183.)*

But Madhu herself, turns out to be a doting mother and ever
perceptive of her son’s every need. Therefore, it is very tragic when
Aditya, her son, dies in a bomb blast. He becomes an innocent victim of
communal riots. Thus Madhu too has a hard life when her mother dies in
childhood and in young age her husband leaves her and she also loses her
child. Unlike Savitribai and Leela, Madhu does not have to struggle much
to abrogate the authenticity of the center, but she certainly has to work hard
for appropriating her marginality, which she does through her writing.
Just as Deshpande has narrated Indu, in *Roots and Shadows*, as a liberatory figure for her family, similarly, Savitribai, Leela, Madhu becomes liberatory figure others in Small Remedies. Thus Savitribai’s art, Leela’s compassion and Madhu’s writing not only become the means of developing an independent identity for themselves but also for others. The protagonists in the earlier group of novels decide to alter their relationship with the persons they live with. But these women break old bonds and develop new ones; they do not try to run away from commitment. Thus, Savitribai, Leela, and Madhu become immortal through their work and achieve their selfhood in life. They become their own role models after having rejected traditional role – models. As Indira Nityanandam comments on their process of self – realization:

> These three protagonists attempt to have a life outside their hearth and home. All three of them go through a process of self – examination before they reach self – realization. Deshpande succeeds in creating stronger women who do not break under the weight of challenges of life. They possess both the spirit and determination to face life. As they are all women with no unusual character traits of eccentricities, they appear more life- like and more akin to the average, urban, Indian woman of today.

*(Nityanandam, Three Great Indian Women Novelist, P.101.)*