The term a ‘woman writer’ implies that the ‘gender’ of the writer is foregrounded. Shashi Deshpande in her article “Writing from the Margin” pours out her resentment at the discriminative approach towards a woman writer. She points out that classifying ‘writers’ into ‘writers’ and ‘women writers’ is illogical (145). When the tag ‘woman’ is attached to something it gets down-sized and assumes a pejorative connotation. A ‘woman’ in a patriarchal society is apparently an end product of a female child subjected to grooming by various factors. This explains that ‘gender’ is a psycho-socio-cultural ‘construct’, and a woman is primarily a gendered being. Hence a woman writer cannot shake off the awareness of her gendered role. The baggage of her subordinate status gets always consciously or otherwise loaded in her writing. Her self-expression, her writing, thus, becomes undeniably gendered. This authenticates the fact that a woman writer problematizes her relationship to art in her writing. In other words, the conflicts a woman-as writer faces in relation to her art are consequent upon the conflicts she faces in her personal life as a woman. To be precise, the hindrances to the ‘becoming’ of a woman are but
the hindrances to her ‘being’ as well, thus, deconstructing the binary polarity of ‘being / becoming’.

Writing has been considered a male prerogative and, hence the play of ‘sexual politics’ when women writers lay a stake. This chapter attempts to explore the politics of creativity or the politics of gender in the world of letters as reflected in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Margaret Laurence. The women writer-characters of Deshpande and Laurence are hampered free expression of their creative talents. A probe into their problematized writing discloses their restrained personal life and the resultant constraints on self-actualisation.

Deshpande’s writer-characters, Indu in Roots and Shadows, Jaya in That Long Silence, Mira in The Binding Vine, Sumi in A Matter of Time, Madhu in Small Remedies and Vasu and Jiji in Moving On, and Laurence’s Morag Gunn in The Diviners and Vanessa McLeod in A Bird in the House bring to light how the heavy hand of patriarchy has been weighing down on them. Deshpande and Laurence have reconceptualised ‘woman’ by defying the ‘traditional dualistic pattern’ that defines woman only in opposition to man, and which relegates her to a position of ‘otherness’, inferiority, powerlessness and invisibility. This chapter, thus, essays to analyse the various ways in which the patriarchal yoke stifles female creativity as depicted in the selected novels.

Exclusion from the world of letters has been, perhaps, the most serious injustice women have to set aright. They have been pinned down as inferior creations on the ground that they are primarily meant for reproductive purpose. In “God Made You Different, Nature Made Us Different”, the first chapter of her
theoretical work *Gender*, V. Geetha states that world religions invariably picture woman as the embodiment of evil, and with the advance of science little does her status differ, for the focus continues to be her body. Thus, her bodily functions not only make her immanent but also bar her way into the world of letters with the signboard ‘anatomy is destiny’.

Shashi Deshpande in *The Binding Vine* condemns patriarchal society for rigidly defining sex roles that relegate women to breeding machines, and for barring them from phallologos. The denigrating remarks of Venu, a popular poet, to Mira, a budding female poet can be cited as an instance. He claims that writing poetry is a male prerogative whereas women’s forte is reproduction. “Why do you need to write poetry? It is enough for a young woman like you to give birth to children. That is your poetry. Leave the other poetry to us men” (*Vine* 127).

Adrienne Rich’s enlightenments regarding female artistry provide us with some insights into Venu’s chauvinistic character. She elucidates the stifling of female creativity in her work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. She states that the “ancient continuing envy, awe, and dread of the male for the female capacity to create life” usually takes “the form of hatred for every other aspect of female creativity” (40). Since it is not practical to forbid pregnancy, female artistry is instead suppressed and ridiculed. She notes: “Not only have women been told to stick to motherhood, but we have been told that our intellectual or aesthetic creations were inappropriate, inconsequential, or scandalous . . .” (40). This theory certainly helps to explain the attraction of male writers for the metaphor of giving birth as a description of their writing: As Erica Jong writes, “perhaps the male artist’s desire to equate the two [pregnancy and creativity] arises out of his
envy of the female ability to generate life” (qtd. in Lundberg 29). It could indeed be said that the male envy of the female capacity to bear a child results in the appropriation of the metaphor: the urge to compare and equate his own acts of artistic creation with the creation of new life.

*The Binding Vine* underscores the rebuff a woman writer receives in the phallocratic world. It is is an enormous task to make the ‘private’ female voices heard amidst the competing ‘public’ voices of men. By the act of writing women seek to claim a share of the public space that has historically been denied to them. Instead of encouraging Mira, Venu ridicules her poetic attempts. Venu’s words, echoing the Freudian notion ‘anatomy is destiny’, highlights male arrogance, reminding women of the exclusive purpose behind their creation, that is, in Margaret Atwood’s words, they are “two legged wombs, that’s all” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 146).

Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), challenges the male-defined world of letters and ideas, interrogating who made man the exclusive judge to decide what is best for woman, what is valid, and what is not (qtd. in Spender 139). Venu, a symbol of male chauvinism, silences the poet in Mira for the reason that she is a woman. Mira is a victim of the misogynic world of letters. Unable to withstand the contempt of the phallogocentric world, explicit in Venu’s words, Mira turns a recluse, not showing anyone her poems thereafter. She pours out her frustration in the poems she pens secretly in her diary. Her husband is also insensate to her wants. Thus, unable to claim ‘a room of her own’, and not receiving recognition from any quarter, Mira’s anguished, solitary soul finds an outlet in her poems and the diary which she locks up in an old trunk, fearing the stigma of a ‘mad woman in the attic’.
Analysing female creativity and the metaphor of literary paternity, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their groundbreaking work, *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, cite from Anne Finch’s poem “Introduction” to explain the hostility of the phallocratic world towards women writers:

> Alas! A woman that attempts the pen  
> Such an intruder on the rights of men,  
> Such a presumptuous Creature is esteem’d  
> The fault can by no vertue [sic] be redeem’d. (3)

Finch complains that the ‘pen’ is defined essentially, and not just accidentally, as a male “tool”, and therefore, is not only inappropriate but actually alien to women. Hence a woman that attempts the pen is not only an intrusive and “presumptuous Creature,” but she becomes absolutely unredeemable: no virtue can outweigh the “fault” of her presumption because she has grotesquely crossed boundaries dictated by Nature, point out Gilbert and Gubar (8). Mira’s case is analogous to Finch’s, and that explains for the misogyny of Venu as Mira too becomes a co-aspirant in the field of poetry.

Nonetheless, the ‘poet-fire’ Mira feels within prompts her to develop strategies to overcome the “anxiety of authorship” (49), which Gilbert and Gubar identify as underlying women’s writing. “Huddled in my cocoon, a somnolent silkworm / Will I emerge a beauteous being? / Or will I suffocating, cease to exist?” (Vine 65) Mira’s fears and anxiety as she treads the forbidden territory are evident in her lines. Dissecting women’s writing of the nineteenth century, Gilbert and Gubar discern that certain phenomena of inferiorization mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition:
. . . the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about impropriety of female invention . . . (50)

What we notice is that women writers cannot suppress their urge to express themselves, despite the fact that patriarchy muzzles them. To ease their frenzied minds they write stealthily, and the act of creation obviously imparts an ecstatic experience. It is writing that sustains them against their insensitive husbands or other odds in their lives. In their writing they demystify the docile, ‘doormat’ wife, and also challenge the notion that a woman’s anatomy is destined for sheer reproductive purpose. The stifling of female creativity echoes in many women’s writings. A reference to the short stories of Chandramathi (“The Story of a Poem”) and Alice Walker (“Really, Doesn’t Crime Pay?”) may be apt here as they give us a better insight into the misogyny prevalent in the phallocratic world. In Chandramathi’s story Reghuraman, a typical patriarch, follows the double standard of morality, and is insensitive to the needs of his gifted wife, Sushama and grants her no space. As a result of which the ‘heaven-inspired’ words jotted down stealthily by the budding poet see no daylight. In Walker’s short story Ruel Johnson, who has adopted the cult of true ‘womanhood’, reduces Myrna to the status a mere housewife. He considers writing a male prerogative, and women’s writing inferior on the assumption that biological creativity directly rivals the aesthetic creativity of writing (as Venu does in The Binding Vine) . . .
What we infer from the secret attempts of these writer-characters (Sushama, Myrna, Mira, Jaya, etc.) to write and publish their works is that writing is the most powerful tool to erase woman’s invisibility and inscribe a revalorized ‘self’. The persistence and perseverance with which women continue to write against all odds attests their perception of writing as a virtual lifeline. In her work *Between Spaces of Silence: Women Creative Writers* Kamini Dinesh says that since categorizing is responsible for the man / woman split and the implicit assumption of male superiority, a woman aspirant to the world of letters becomes obsessed with the “right to write” and discover a voice for herself. She quotes Kamala Das to show how significant writing is to a woman writer: “It voices my joys, my longings, my/ Hopes, and it is to useful to me as cawing / Is to crows or roaring to the lions . . .” (22).

Taking into consideration the social context in which Mira is portrayed, Mukta Atrey and Viney Kirpal call her, a “social misfit” (83). Mira’s portrait provides us an idea of the hostility that the early women writers had to bear with in the phallocentric world. The reaction to women writers brings to mind Dr. Johnson’s disparaging remark about a woman preacher: a dog walking on its hind legs (Nambisan X). It is ironical to note that ‘woman’ appears in the writing of men as the Muse – the idealised inspiration for the male writer, says Jewish American writer, Cynthia Ozick (qtd. in Singh 65). The same sentiment has been expressed by Virginia Woolf who is astounded at the ironical and oppressive status of women in history:

> Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history....Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in
real life she could hardly read, could hardly spell, and was the property of her husband. (*Room 51*)

Thus, we see, though women burn like beacons kindling man’s imagination they are but denied themselves a space for their own imagination.

Through Mira’s portrait Deshpande highlights the male dictatorship in literary practices. We are reminded of the satirical portrait of Atticus (Addison), a literary monarch who cannot stand a rival, drawn by Alexander Pope in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, as it is analogous to this context where women writers are deliberately ‘excluded’ to make it ‘male stream’ literature. Altering the original words ‘brother’, ‘him’ for ‘sister’, ‘her’ respectively, and with an emphasis on ‘man’ these lines of Pope seem quite apt here.

Shou’d such a *man*, too fond to rule alone,

Bear . . . no [sister] near the throne,

View [her] with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,

And hate for Arts that caus’d himself to rise; (197-200)

Keeping women at bay is a prequisite to perpetuating patriarchy, and hence all strategies are resorted to for the same. Gendered censorship is one strategy, and the secret purpose lying beneath this gendered censorship as well as the toughness intackling it becomes quite apparent from the report on the workshop on ‘gender and censorship’ prepared by Asmita. It states:

*[G]ender-based censorship, embedded as it is in a range of social and cultural mechanisms that invalidate women’s experience and exclude them from political discourse, is far more pervasive and far more difficult to confront than official suppression. . . [T]he silencing of*
women, and the use of systemic force to ensure that silence, is to the maintenance and perpetuation of patriarchal power. (4)

Anita Desai’s *In Custody* also throws light on male-biased literary practices. Her character Intiaz Begum (a woman poet, set in a much later time frame than of Mira’s) lashes against the androcentric world, which condemns her as a ‘dancing girl,’ and marginalises and trivialises her poetry. She underscores the misogyny of the phallocratic world through the portrait of Begum’s husband, Nur who is an Urdu poet. Once at Begum’s recital Nur feigns illness and leaves the room. Begum taunts him: “‘You couldn’t accept the evidence of my success. You couldn’t bear the sight of someone else regaling a large audience with poetry – the same poetry you used to mouth – ’” (89). Begum vehemently criticises the constraints on women writers. The fear that women might eclipse men in their gifts or outstrip them is one of the reasons for relegating women to “the grotesque world of hysterics, termagants, viragos, the demented and the outcast” (197).

Begum becomes Desai’s mouthpiece: the male artists / writers fear women may outshine them, and as the fear of women’s success haunts them, they always try to keep women under reins. This evokes the portrait of Judith, the imaginary sister of William Shakespeare, drawn by Woolf as she discusses the paucity of female writers in *A Room of One’s Own*. Woolf cites the historical, social, political, and even economic dynamics that influence the society’s outlook on the ‘women sector’: women should not enjoy the freedom that men do. Examining the miserable plight of women in general and women writers in particular down the ages, the pathetic tale of Judith Shakespeare cannot be considered a far-fetched one.
Attempts to stifle female creativity and thereby ascertain the removal of threat to the phallogos can also be seen in Laurence’s *The Diviners*. Morag Gunn, the narrator-protagonist marries Brooke Skelton, a professor of English at Winnipeg University, for he represents to her “the prestige, the security, the intellectual fulfilment and the glamour” (Thomas 151) that she has been in quest of, leaving her disreputable past in Manawaka. Brooke is attracted to the intelligent and passionate Morag. Nevertheless, he looks down upon the prairie girl’s language which consists of weird expressions such as “frog in the throat” (163), “Up Galloping Mountain way” (156). He fails to regard her as a gifted ‘wordsmith’, and appreciate the nuances of the colloquial style of the earthy characters of the small town, Manawaka. But after marriage she becomes aware of his overbearing attitude, and his attempts to smother her creativity. Clara Thomas foresees the signs of break up; she notes in *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence* thus:

From the start of their relationship, however, warnings are built into the text: Brooke’s calling Morag “Little one”, the condescension of his attitudes to her, his own deep-rooted insecurity and, because of that, his unwillingness to have a child; and always, underneath the final time-bomb: not only does he not take Morag’s writing . . . seriously . . . he also feels obscurely, but definitely, threatened by it. (151)

When Brooke learns that Morag has not only ignored his recommendations to redo the portrait of Lilac, the protagonist of her first novel, *Spear of Innocence*, but also has struck a deal with a publisher, proving her business acumen, he becomes furious. Envious of her powers, as he realises that she can well manage things by herself without his assistance, he taunts her that she may even take over
him in teaching the course in Contemporary Novel as well, for she has mastered the
topics and the poetics of creative writing.

The down-sized image that Brooke has of a ‘woman’, prompts him to call
Morag ‘my little one’, ‘my child’, despite her dislike in being greeted so. Seemingly
out of affection, what he expresses is that she has the immaturity of a child. Brooke
conforms to the Western thought, evident in Judaeo-Christian and Greek philosophy
and the present day political concepts and cultural heritage that women are rationally
and ethically inferior and unstable, and therefore, are in need of care and control
(Beasley 6). When she realises that he intends to keep her in a ‘child-like’ state, she
begins a novel “Prospero’s Child” in which the young woman writer must break
with her English husband-professor (the coloniser) and the dominance of English
literature (the ‘male’ canon) that he represents – to assert herself as a woman and a
Canadian writer. Morag not only continues to write in her distinctive way but also
publishes her novel, to his great shock, in her ‘birth name’. She resists his attempts
to suppress her creativity even as her marriage crumbles.

The stamp of triviality slammed on women’s writing is obviously a reason for
disregarding women’s works as literary canons. Deshpande and Laurence expose the
working of the manipulative practices of the literary world where the male iron hand
 crushes the sentiments and potential of women, on the pretext of being inferior. The
above cited cases of Morag Gunn and Brooke Skelton, and Mira and Venu where men
make belittling remarks on women’s writing bare the prevailing notion that what
women write is trash. They condemn women for focusing on “small-scale domestic
themes” and “tiny family dramas” (Deshpande, “Lingering” 1+)
Brooke Skelton is very much a part of the Establishment of society. Despite Morag’s intense desire to become a serious writer and a devoted mother, he takes out of her hands the opportunities for both. Morag’s dual attraction to Brooke – as a potential father to her children and as a valuable aid to and supporter of her own writing (due to his status as an English professor and a literary critic) – becomes ironic, since he fails to support her in either pursuit. “Brooke patronizes Morag as a woman and as a writer” states Kristina Ann Lundberg quoting J.A. Wainwright from “Art and Life in TheDiviners” (26)). He regards women’s writing as trivial. That is why he fails to understand the torments Morag suffers as a writer. Marsha Stanfield Bordner in her dissertation on “The Woman as Artist in Twentieth-Century Fiction” notes: “Brooke’s tendency to regard Morag as a child is reflected in his attitude towards her writing” (qtd. in Lundberg 28). He dreads her success as a writer, like her capacity to have a child, would upset the balance of the adult-child (teacher-student) relationship that is comfortable for him.

As Morag becomes increasingly self-aware, she moves further from Brooke, and spends her day mostly writing. But by evenings he gets ready for Brooke’s arrival, preparing his dinner and dressing up alluringly with her hair done the way he likes it. Gradually, it is seen, she gets so engrossed in writing that she forgets it is time for Brooke’s arrival, and when he appears she is shocked and blurts out “The dinner isn’t ready . . . It isn’t even begun.” Brooke who finds her shaking as she speaks takes her to be ill. She explains that she is all right but has reached “a kind of crucial point . . . with her novel”. To this Brooke laughs, saying: “Is that it? Heavens, I thought you’d been suddenly stricken with something serious.” Morag who feels aggressively defensive is now ashamed to say: “I have. I have.” The
earnestness that Morag as a writer experiences in sketching her characters is incomprehensible to Brooke. Although he encourages Morag to write, he assumes her writing is nothing more than a pleasant pastime, not a serious pursuit or calling. His biased outlook on women writers is evident as he slights her attempts at novel writing. Morag empathises with her protagonist (Lilac), feels all the pain she suffers while attempting an abortive operation. “It is no different with fiction – more so, may be, because [she] has felt Lilac’s feelings. The blood is no less real for being invisible to the external eye” (Diviners 188), she wants to explain, but does not. We understand that Brooke underestimates Morag’s powers. He criticises her overambition and overconfidence to leap from the narrow base of a short story to the wider canvas and complex structure of novel writing. Morag feels offended when he disregards her as a writer. Brooke even suggests that he may edit her writing. Though she hungers for his love and appreciation, she shows the stories rather reluctantly. Skimming through them he sarcastically remarks: “I think these are quite good . . . . They certainly need a little polishing, and I’m not sure of the plausibility of either ending, to tell you the truth, but – yes, they’re definitely worth working on, I’d say”. The reluctance to accommodate women’s writing into the phallogenos is apparent. Offended, Morag can only admit “they aren’t any good. They are trivial and superficial” (Diviners 182). Later she sends her novel, Spear of Innocence out to publishers without effecting any of the suggested changes. She explodes in anger when Brooke refuses to accept that she has some intuitive knowledge about creative writing, “something different from reading or teaching” (213). His attempts to keep her dependent: by speaking to her as if she were a child, and ‘correcting’ her attempts at writing short stories and novels, highlight his disregard for a woman writer. All these lead to their falling-out.
The conventional ideas that women’s writing is a worthless activity and women need spend time for traditional chores are contradicted by Morag. When the need of cultivating a vegetable garden is being discussed by Morag, A-Okay and the Smiths, Morag airs her view that she cannot afford to spare time for that; she needs time for writing, for that is her “real work” (*Diviners* 47). “Look at this way,” she tells A-Okay Smith, who teases her about the overgrown state of her garden. “If I spent all my time gardening, how in hell could I get my writing done? No great loss, you may say, but it’d be a loss to me . . .” (*Diviners* 46).

*That Long Silence* also provides instances to prove that the phallocratic world does not consider women’s writing worth to be noted. Mohan’s outlook on Jaya, his writer-wife is ambivalent. He proudly introduces her to others as a writer, but does not want her to write any serious stuff. She is allowed to write only middles. He regards her as a showpiece. He bars her from making personal allusions in her stories. Jaya hesitates to explain neither her stand nor the process of literary creation to him, for it will be attributing importance to her writing, when he just regards it a pastime. It is apparent that Mohan’s ‘trivialising’ attitude towards women’s writing is hardly different from Venu’s (*Vine*) or Skelton’s (*Diviners*) who attempts to exclude women writers entirely from the arena.

Making women writers feel inferior and incompetent apparently is a phallogocentric strategy to fight them off. Kamala Das, drawing attention to the censure of women’s writing in her short story entitled “In Quest of Stories”, says that the charge of ‘triviality’ inhibits women from writing. Traditionally, women’s writings have been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. This prejudice is partially due to the fact that women
mostly write about their experience within the enclosed domestic space. Consequently, it is assumed that their work will normally rank below the works of male writers who deal with ‘weightier’ themes. We notice that not only women but all other marginalised groups like blacks, dalits, etc., have been brainwashed into a ‘low self-image’. They are incapacitated to use their minds, and are regarded as second class members in the society.

Attempts to denigrate women and everything associated with them, barring motherhood, perhaps, have been a premeditated move down the ages. The result of which Indu (Roots) observes women have “no choice but to submit, to accept.” She wonders if women, especially in her ancestral home, have been “born without wills, or have their wills atrophied through a lifetime of disuse?” (Roots 6) Anamika, a Hindi writer, also admits that, searching for role models in the early women writers and the women in her own family, she discovered that the values of forbearance and patience, of restraint and refinement have paralysed them (Joseph et al. 191). Old Uncle (Roots) tells Indu that they do not like their women to think. In order to debilitate thinking women the androcentric society disseminates the idea that women are dunces whereas men are sagacious. Woolf cites the educational reformer and historian, Oscar Browning who is infamous for his dogmatic views on women: “the best woman was intellectually the inferior of the worst man” (Room 60). In Moving On, when Jiji starts living on her own, she realises the notion that men are intellectually superior to women is but an illusion, and that women like Mai, Gayatri, and Kamala are just pretending to be dull to keep up domestic peace (179).

Women’s works are generally criticised for dealing with themes of very narrow range. Hence we find in Roots and Shadows, the writer-character (journalist), Indu hates
writing on issues exclusive to women or subscribing to women’s magazines, as it creates a ghettoised feeling, a feeling of being branded inferior. “Women, women, women. . . I got sick of it. There was nothing else. It was a kind of narcissism. And as if we had locked ourselves in a cage and thrown away the key” (Roots 78), complains Indu to Naren, a bohemian character and distant relative of hers.

Growing up in a tradition-bound family, Indu has observed how a woman’s life is hedged by her sex. Therefore, she hates staying in the girls’ hostel; its utter femininity stifles her. She recalls how the knowledge of her womanhood has been “brutally, gracelessly” (Roots 79) thrust on her. She explains why she prefers working with the present magazine (though Naren calls it soulless) to the previous one, a women’s magazine. She felt the atmosphere of the former rather stifling. This is why most women writers dislike being labelled feminists, as it would lead to ghettoisation and a very limited readership, which entails not only that the writer’s message fails to reach the masses but the name of the writer is smeared as well. Thus the phallocentric world not only ghettoises women writers but also succeeds in demoralising and silencing them from voicing their concern about ‘broader’ human activities. Carol Pateman, a contemporary British feminist and political theorist, says feminist writers are the ones who are typically perceived as interested in an overly specialised field without ‘broader’ applications . . . (qtd. in Beasley 4). Deshpande makes Indu rebel against this ghettoisation and voice her protest against it.

Owing to lack of publicity women’s writings fail to draw appropriate attention. Writing is a private affair for most women mainly because of the restrictions of the patriarchal society. The suppression or scoff the woman writer suffers compels her to seek other means to express herself. Jaya (Silence), curbed by
Mohan, writes stealthily, and uses Kamat’s address; Mira (Vine), snubbed by the misogynist poet Venu and disheartened by an early marriage to an insensitive man, scribbles her poems secretly in a notebook. But Vasu (Moving) is not restrained in this sense. In her case no one pays her the due respect that she deserves as a writer. This is because the tag ‘inferior’ is embedded in the very term ‘woman.’ And aware of this she “never spoke of her own writing; she never . . . publicly proclaimed herself as a writer.” For her it is “a kind of secret business, an activity she did in private, something no one in the family ever spoke of.” RK was an exception; he was proud of her being a writer, even if he had never read her. To him she was that “august being – A Writer.” It is interesting to note that RK is not a reader and critic of Vasu’s writings, but he regards the profession of a writer as noble, irrespective of the writer’s gender. It becomes evident that the promotive prospects for a woman writer are dim. The pressures of family life also prompt Vasu to keep a very low profile: she has no room of her own; she is careful not to be an intruder into the privileges of others. And as a conventional wife she acknowledges Baba’s role as a breadwinner. We note here a difference: Baba’s profession is a “loud fact” (Moving 121); he proclaims it in every possible way. Whereas Vasu’s vocation is devalued as it bears the stamp of the author’s sex.

Deshpande’s portrayal of Vasu, as a writer in an uncongenial atmosphere, clearly illustrates the life of the early women writers, especially the nineteenth century novelists. As Woolf examines the reasons for the growth of the genre ‘novel’ in A Room of One’s Own, she explains why almost all the women writers during this period embraced this new form. The middle class family in the early nineteenth century possessed only a single sitting room between them. If a woman
wrote she would have to write in the common sitting room, subject to all kinds of
casual interruptions, for she had no separate study to retire to (Woolf also cites
Florence Nightingale’s vehement complaint that women never had even half an hour
that they could call their own). Moreover, the woman writer was careful that
servants or visitors or any persons beyond her own family did not suspect her
occupation (73). Reviewing Woolf’s analysis of the nineteenth century English social
scenario in the context of the present study of Deshpande’s novels, it becomes
evident that the situation has hardly changed in the second half of twentieth century
India. The unconducive social atmosphere in which Jane Austen wrote persists even
now as manifested in Vasu’s life in Deshpande’s 2004 novel, Moving On.

Writers /artists, especially if they are women, are being regarded as
unrealistic and romantic. For instance, in That Long Silence Mohan reckons Jaya’s
talk to be nonsensical, and he becomes impatient with her. Once when she remarks
that Mohan is hostile to Rahul, their son, he angrily exclaims: “‘Don’t for God’s
sake bring that habit of exaggerating into our life, keep it for your stories’” (79).
This shows that the phallocratic world has stamped women’s writing as trivial,
unrealistic and exaggerated. It smothers the artist in Jaya. The case being such, she
does not say a word when Mohan’s soft spot for his niece Revati becomes manifest
on the occasion of her birthday. Jaya fears Mohan may mock her: “That’s your
writer’s imagination running away with you” (79). He thinks that writers being
highly imaginative dwell in an unreal world.

The politics of sex is evidently the determining factor in the publishing
world, controlling the readers’ and the critics’ views, and ultimately appraising a
writer’s career. This is apparently stated in TheDiviners when the writer-
character Morag Gunn, tells of her arduous experiences of getting her novel published. She is beside herself with embarrassment and fury seeing the dust jacket of her first novel, *Spear of Innocence* which shows “a spear, proper, piercing a human heart, valentine.” She tries to pacify herself at the thought now that it is published “she ought not to experience quirks or qualms about such trivia.” Going through the reviews, clipped out and sent by the publishers, she realises that they are a gender-based evaluation, for most of them do not refer to the novel or point out any flaw. So she is confused and cannot believe even the few comments she would like to believe.

“A first novel of some wit and perception, marred by the author’s too obvious playing upon the fashionable theme of homosexuality.”

“A tale of a primitive lumber town.”

“A dreary novel about—yawn—a goodhearted tart.”

“A piquant and exciting novel about abortion.”

“Lilac Stonehouse with her nonchalant vulgarity, will live on in the head for some time.” (214)

Deshapnde depicts the dampening responses of the man-dominated publishing world towards women’s writing mainly in two of her works, *That Long Silence* and *Roots and Shadows*. The editor’s response to Jaya’s story highlights the patriarchal stance towards women’s issues and concerns. Jaya, quite certain her story is a substantial and down-to-earth one, since it is based on a real life incident, feels
terribly hurt and offended when it is rejected one after another by all the magazines to which she sent it. Then she personally visits an editor with the story, but she scoffs at her: “‘Why don’t you try a women’s magazine? . . . . This middle-class stuff, women’s problems . . . it’s too distanced from real life, real problems . . . . Send this to a women’s magazine’” (Silence 146-7). The words rating women’s writing as trivial – “Irrelevant, middle-class, bourgeoisie” (Silence 147), echo and re-echo in her ears, and with each word Jaya feels herself dwindling. Jaya is indignant at the egoistic attitude of men that women’s experiences are of interest only to women. The ‘triviality’ of women’s writing emanates from the ‘small-scale’ picture of women drawn and imprinted by men.

In Roots and Shadows Indu shares with Naren the male-oriented publishing world’s cold shouldered attitude towards women writers. A particular story that immensely impressed Naren had been rejected by four publishers before it was accepted by the fifth. She recalls an editor’s remark that it can hardly be called a story after all, for a story should entertain, educate, or have a moral. What becomes obvious is off-beat writing is often turned down, and acerbic remarks dampen the spirits of creative writers, especially, women. Moreover, time factor – an unmanageable one – is an impediment to creative writing, especially if one has some other work also to attend to, as in the case of women who have to do the household chores and be the bread-winner too. Indu points out that it may take three months or up to three years to complete a story, and then if it is not accepted by a publisher, the writer is blighted.

The responses of Venu (Vine) condemning Mira’s attempts at poetry writing is already discussed in this chapter. Venu who ought to have mentored Mira nips the
budding poet. Had he appreciated her poetry and given her valuable suggestions she would have blossomed into a great poet.

Since women writers are not accorded serious treatment, and equality of circumstance in writing, that is, to be able to write ‘as author only’ (unsex-consciously and freely), they camouflage themselves under male pen names or neutral initials as a way of coping with a double literary standard, notes Tillie Olsen (Silences 248). In the context of coining a term for woman-as-writer as distinct from woman-as-reader, feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter in her essay “Towards a Feminist Poetics” points out that, considering the significance of the male pseudonym in the history of women’s writing, ‘georgics’, is an alternative suggestion to ‘la: gynocritique’ (23). This throws light on the fact that dozens of women writers have resorted to a masculine disguise in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture. It is a strategy women devise to deal with male hostilities, jealousy and even resistance within the family, disapproval of readership and publishing industry. Or, in other words, it is to transcend the limitation imposed on them as ‘despised social group’ that they don the cloak of maleness (Olsen 248-251). The ‘male-identified’ woman writer feels that she can walk more freely about the provinces of literature that are otherwise forbidden to them, move vigorously away from the ‘lesser subjects’ and ‘lesser lives’ which have constrained their foremothers.

Deshpande brings up this issue of masquerade chiefly in Roots and Shadows and That Long Silence. The experiences of Indu and Jaya attest that gender identity is a major stumbling block in women’s self-expression. They try to escape the stigma attached to them as a ‘dismal category’ through the disguise of a man. They are
The choice of theme, thus, is restricted and certain topics like sex, religion and politics are more or less taboo for women to tackle. The difficulties of writing on issues, experiences, thoughts and feelings related to sex and sexuality are evident in Indu’s outcry. Indu finds the ‘good girl’ syndrome operative in women’s writing. Naren urges the ‘rebellious’ Indu to celebrate her ‘difference.’ Constrained thus, Indu disowns her womanhood and disguises herself under a male pseudonym. She knows that her writing will not otherwise be approved of, since a woman's writing is judged not by its quality, but by the value attached to her ‘sex’. She swells with pride when once a friend comments on her writing that it is difficult to make out the gender of the author.
Indu’s complex becomes clear to us when we consider what Dale Spender, has observed in her endeavour to discover the ‘mothers of the novel.’ Dale finds that more than a hundred good women writers before Jane Austen have been obliterated. Here she notes that “from the advent of the first woman novelist we have a value system which automatically places women’s concerns and the literature which reflects them, in a subordinate position” (qtd. in Miles 6). Hence it is only logical that Indu develops a George Eliot complex as she realises that her writing is viewed as a gendered activity. Craig Owens, who delves into the link between femininity and masculine guise in the article “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism” (1983), opines thus: “In order to speak, to represent herself, a woman assumes a masculine position; perhaps this is why femininity is frequently associated with masquerade, false representation, with simulation and seduction” (2).

It is apparent that the inequities entailing the unequal gender status, the repression of the feminine urge, the hypocrisy women are constrained to practise, etc., drive women writers to self-disgust that they disown womanhood and embrace maleness. Kamala Das says that she used to publish her poems in *The Illustrated Weekly* under the name K. Das lest the editor be prejudiced against women writers (*My Story* 137). Showalter in an article entitled “Women Who Write Are Women” (1984) explains why several twentieth century women writers fight shy of the label itself. They are, in fact, unhappy with any sexual links with themselves and their work, equally unwilling to be associated with the woman reader too.

Laurence does not make her heroine compromise with her rights; she allows her to desert the man who stands in the way of her creative pursuits. Brook Skelton’s ego as a professor of English, cannot accept Morag’s inborn flair for creative writing.
As typical of a patriarch, he reminds her that she is primarily a wife and not a writer. Whereas the other men Christie Logan, her foster father, Jules Skinner Tonnerre and Dan McRaith, the alternative romantic heroes do not interfere with the growth of Morag’s career. Indeed, they help her to develop as a writer. They are her mentors. Logan’s tales of bravery not only fire her imagination but also fortify her personal life. Jules teaches her about the relationship between history and invention in fiction as he relates the Tonnerre stories, and McRaith shares his work with her and allows her to share hers. Beyond this, these men do not take up a good deal of the time Morag needs to spend on her career. Morag, although she hungers for male companionship throughout the novel, admits that perhaps this is best when her time is not being divided. “If he were here all the time,” she thinks of Dan McRaith, “[I] suspect [I] would become impatient with him, resentful of anyone’s constant presence. No doubt under those circumstances, too, [I] would be expected to make the meals and do the laundry for him as well as for [myself] and Pique” (Diviners 310). Yet neither McRaith nor Jules Tonnerre asks these things of her, and so they do not pose major threats to her writing (Ward184). Different from Deshpande’s heroines, Laurence’s Morag has female mentors also to her writing: Miss. Melrose at Manawaka School who teaches her the rudiments of writing and encourages her to write, Mrs. Gerson who shows her that a woman can nurture and be strong at the same time, and Ella Gerson who encourages her to fight to achieve her desired vocation.

The question of a woman writer’s integrity becomes pertinent as she engages in simulation. Kamat urges Jaya to review her career. He visualises the woman who has authored the middles: “‘plump, good humoured, pea brained but shrewd, devious, skimming over life . . .’” (149). “‘You know something – I never can
imagine you writing this. This you, I mean . . .' (149). Shocked at the way Jaya has condescended to write such trifles, Kamat warns her not to saddle him with the burden of fathering that obnoxious creation ‘Seeta’. Yet, surprisingly, ‘Seeta’ is a popular column with everyone – Mohan, the editors, and the readers. We notice that women writers are popular when they abide by the patriarchal guideline as it is manifest in the cases of Jaya in That Long Silence and Vasu in Moving On. Vasu falls from the pedestal once she disregards it in her story “Blackout.” Gujarati writer, Ila Arab Mehta endorses this when she says: “The family is proud of your ‘artistic’ achievements as long as your super fast train stops at the junctions; the moment you venture on to the road less travelled censorship begins” (qtd. in Joseph et al. 11).

Many women writers compromise with their writing when they prioritise their roles as guardians of familial honour and torchbearers of culture. Deshpande’s writer-characters are no exception. They close their eyes to the social inequities around them. They are aware of their gross negligence. But they shield themselves beneath the popular (patriarchal) brand of writing. Because to challenge patriarchal society requires tremendous courage, and often women writers fail in this. They would rather abide by the society. Jaya knows that she is safe and free from assault while writing ‘Seeta’. ‘Seeta’ is a hole to crawl in and hide. When Kamat points it out, Jaya defends herself: she is only conforming to the societal rules:

And for me, she [‘Seeta’] had been the means through which I had shut the door, firmly, on all those other women who had invaded my being, screaming for attention; women I had known I could not write about, because they might – it was just possible – resemble Mohan’s mother, or aunt, or my mother or aunt. Seeta was safer. I didn’t have
to come out of the safe hole I’d crawled into to write about Seeta. I could stay there, warm and snug”. *(Silence 149)*

This fake security fades away. She is smoked out of the ‘safe hole’. Crisis develops in her life and career, and the world of self-deception crumbles. She realises that no retreat is possible. Her self-identity is linked to society. Hence she has to fulfil her duty to the society. She has to depict the wretched lives of women, even if they resemble her relatives and the family honour is at stake.

Silence imposed on and imbibed by women render them non-existent: no voice, no validation. ‘Self-effacement’ has erased her ‘self’ and the ‘artist in her. Gilbert and Gubar are of the opinion that the nature and difference of women’s writing lie in its troubled and even tormented relationship to its female identity; the woman writer experiences her own gender as “a painful obstacle or even a debilitating inadequacy” (qtd. in Showalter 257).

The words of Ujwala Patil, a critic of Indian Writing in English, may be cited here to illustrate that gender alienates the self from a woman, and consequently the writer from her own self, freezing the free flow of creativity. In her article entitled “The Theme of Marriage and Selfhood in *Roots and Shadows*” she analyses Indu’s situation thus: “The conflict situation of Indu’s marriage, her awakened consciousness, her confused psyche in the face of it and the consequent emotion-rooted ambivalent attitude towards love and marriage suggest how for a woman as a woman realisation of the self can only be self in conflict” (135). It is apparent that as the conflict intensifies Indu with her split self seeks refuge under self-deception. The alienation she suffers as a woman is the result of the consciousness that her self is unfree; the awareness that her ambition to be a creative writer clashes with the cultural
idea of feminine passivity. Indu, unhappy with her present unscrupulous job, yet not quitting it due to her husband’s interest in her fat pay packet, is divided within, and the alienation surfaces in her writing. This is all because women have only roles to play: daughter, wife, mother, etc. The imposition of a ‘role’ creates a tussle in the minds of the girls, and with the growing awareness of the stilted social system they feel stifled. Urmi’s wail in *The Binding Vine*: “We all of us grow with an idea of ourselves, an image rather, and spend the rest of our lives trying to live up to it. But for me, I suddenly realise . . . it’s been a constant struggle against an image of myself imposed upon me . . .” (7) is true and genuine regarding the lives of other women too.

Inevitably, the woman writer’s personal life becomes an integral part of her writing to be analysed and approved by the reader, which is not something the male writer experiences or suffers. Thus, the inclusion of autobiographical elements unmistakably makes women’s writing problematic, as readers generally tend to trace the fictional characters to live personages or the incidents to the author’s life. Mainly on account of this, in *That Long Silence* Mohan objects to Jaya writing on man-woman relationship. This is what bothered the Bengali feminist writer, Nabneeta Dev Sen also. She confesses that there was a point in her life when she stopped writing poetry and shifted to humorous prose because her readers had started finding personal messages about her private life in her poems (Joseph et al. 21).

The Malayalam short story writer, Chandramathi also airs the same view. She stopped writing for eighteen years because she saw a shadow cross her husband’s face when someone remarked he was a ‘character’ in her story. As in Chandramathi’s case, we find that Jaya gives up serious writing to preserve marital harmony. Thus, it becomes apparent that “[c]onjugal peace is a powerful silencing
agent” (Joseph et al. 20). In one of her stories, “The Story of a Poem”, Chandramathi states that the description of marital discord or extra-marital affairs in the stories of a female writer will quite often be attributed to her personal life. If there is a discontented wife the so-called critics will adjudge her to be none but the author herself. The ‘blinkered’ Reghuraman, the husband in this particular story, characterizes the patriarchal mindset of reading between the lines in a female authored text. His wife Sushama, who finds contentment scribbling verses stealthily, points out that expressions quite commonplace that any poet may use, be he a Romantic or Postmodernist, when penned down by a woman makes a world of difference. This sort of discrimination inhibits the woman writer to express freely and fully her thoughts.

Thus, we see the process of female creativity is often misinterpreted. In That Long Silence Mohan is ignorant of the fact that the experiences a writer culls from life form the raw material, and in the crucible of her / his imagination the experiences get transmuted into a different substance before being related. Jaya fails to explain these things to him. She is astonished to see his wounded pride, and feels guilty for having crossed the permissible limits, as well as having failed in her duty to “water” “the sheltering tree” (that’s what she is told a husband is) (Silence 137). She feels ashamed that she cannot even clear her stand. Because giving an explanation will only make her writing, which is considered just a hobby, appear rather serious. This is a pointer to the status of women’s writing; it is assigned only a decorative or recreational value. Moreover, Jaya is not able to explain things to him because of the silence she practises in her life. And she is goaded to believe it is sinful for a woman to raise voice against her husband. Mohan warns her “My mother
never raised her voice against my father, however badly he behaved to her”. Jaya
realises that to Mohan “anger made a woman ‘unwomanly’” (Silence 83). Anamika’s words throw light on how the “needle and thread” syndrome in women’s
lives seals their lips and force them to observe a stern “aesthetics of silence.” She
says she is acculturated to believe that it is “only the second-rate, the underclass,
who ‘speak’ – the very young, the aged, prostitutes, witches and slave girls” (qtd. in
Joseph et al. 191-2).

Jaya’s freedom as a writer is evidently being challenged. Ammu Joseph
remarks that a ‘silent woman syndrome’ is encouraged in the field of politics as well,
where the female ministers and MPs appear on campaign platforms “but rarely speak
and never answer media questions (“Confessions” IV). Jaya is pained to realise that
Mohan disregards her as a writer; he looks at her as “an exhibitionist.” The fact that
she has won a prize for the story is insignificant. What matters is his image as the lord
of the family has crumbled. He bridles her from portraying ‘real’ characters. The
attitude of Mohan not appreciating Jaya’s prize-winning story throws a wet blanket
over the enthusiastic writer. She stops writing and relinquishes all those stories that
had been taking shape in her because she is scared – “scared of hurting Mohan, scared
of jeopardising the only career” she has, her “marriage” (Silence 144). The writer’s
ture feelings such as indignation at unjust social practices and stale oppressive
customs find no outlet, because she has pruned herself to be the submissive, docile
wife, snipping off all those untamed and wild impulses of the girl ‘Jaya’. Dev Sen
looks upon a woman’s relationship with her writing with much sensitivity: “We
consider ourselves free spirits but our words remain unfree….Women are late-comers
to writing and are unwelcome” (qtd. in Nambisan IX).”
At the stage of self-discovery, Jaya feels ashamed of putting the entire blame on Mohan and disclaiming her role in shaping her destiny. She grows bolder and she owns up her complicity. “My rejected stories. My failures. Of course, Mohan had nothing to do with these. He didn’t even know I’d written them” (Silence 146). Jaya becomes aware of her role as an ‘accomplice’ in the patriarchal system. By not asserting herself, she brings in her own disintegration, and she slowly awakens to it. Her conviction that they are substantially good stories are shaken. She sets out to examine why the stories fail to appeal to the readers. She realises that ‘feminine mystique’ is really detrimental to her writing. The forces that have acted on moulding her into a submissive and passive woman work on the characters too. Thus, the characters created are a replica of the author, for the woman writer is always conscious of her gender constraints. (This is further expounded in Chapter IV)

Thus, a woman writer is constrained to depict characters far removed from reality: contented, obedient and subservient women or aggressive and despicable characters. The social role expected of her (and enforced on her) overpowers the role of the writer. Inevitably then as a woman writer, Jaya represses the true feelings of her characters. Her asymmetrical married life surfaces in her writing, making it insipid and lifeless. An unabashedly committed writer, Nobel Laureate Doris Lessing says of her vocation: “One is a writer because one represents, makes articulate, is continuously and invisibly fed by, numbers of people who are inarticulate, to whom one belongs, to whom one is responsible” (qtd. in Anklesaria 1). The writer’s relation to the collective life is a buried theme in her fiction. Lessing endorses the sense of social commitment that a writer must essentially possess. But
the writer-characters of Deshpande, like Jaya in *That Long Silence*, are constrained by the conservative society.

In a patriarchal society, we know that it is passivity and not passion that is encouraged in women. Women writers are trained to refrain from rendering their experiences honestly. In *That Long Silence* we have a peep into the practices that silence a woman writer. Jaya explains to Kamat the reasons for her restraint. He remarks that her stories will be better if she bangs her pots and pans. She is not convinced, for she has been groomed to believe that “[a] woman can never be angry; she can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated” (*Silence* 147). She wails: “‘There’s no room for anger in my life, no room for despair, either. There’s only order and routine — today, I have to change the sheets; tomorrow, scrub the bathrooms, the day after clean the fridge . . .’” (*Silence* 147-48). Her words only underscore that a woman is confined to the domestic sphere. Her career pales away as she plays up the womanly roles.

How life and writing are intertwined is explicit in Kamat’s words when he tells Jaya not to evade her duty under lame excuses such as women are the oppressed sex. He exhorts her to triumph over the forces that bog her down. He warns her of ‘women are the victims’ theory which will drag her into a soft, squishy bog of self-pity. Through Kamat, Deshpande drives women ahead of the ‘consciousness-raising’ stage of early feminist works to the more optimistic and celebratory phase of gynocriticism. He exhorts her to take herself seriously, not to regard writing as a hobby, and not to skulk behind a false name. He points out that “[t]his scribbling now and then”, not taking writing seriously, is under the pretext that she has no time to spare after her ‘womanly’ duties. Jaya dodges from Kamat’s attack: “But I’m a wife and mother first, my home and children come first to me . . .” It is a subterfuge;
Kamat admonishes her. Jaya reflects: “Even a worm has a hole it can crawl into. I had mine – as Mohan’s wife, as Rahul’s and Rati’s mother”. The truth is that she is “[s]cared of writing. Scared of failing.” It is actually her fear to face challenges that prompts her to “crawl” into her “comfortable” “unassailable” “hole” (Silence 148). Having internalised patriarchy she tries to shield herself from open attack. It is worth noting that Laurence’s Morag is quite unlike Jaya, Indu or Madhu. Morag does not surrender her career for traditional roles. When she finds wifehood an impediment to her creativity she breaks off her marriage. Regarding motherhood, Morag balances it with her career, careful that one does not impede the other.

The fear of failure is another reason that inhibits Jaya not to don the attire of an earnest writer. The fear that she may become like her father a failed writer haunts Jaya. She wonders how her father who possessed “that intellect, that sense of humour” could churn up such “sugary, sentimental stuff”. She remembers the heaps of unsold copies of the one book of poetry he published, and her mother’s cruel remarks: “‘Why don’t you sell them off as trash?’ . . . . They’re just cluttering up the place – one day the white ants are going to feast off them, that’s all!” The abject state of her father disillusions Jaya. She knows it is much harder for a woman to establish herself in the field of letters. The barriers writers, especially women writers, have to cross are pointed out by Woolf as she probes into the dearth of female creativity. From the autobiographies and biographies of great literary personalities she infers that “to write a work of genius is almost always a feat of prodigious difficulty” (Room 58). The obstacles great men come cross would be far more formidable in the case of women, as the world is not just indifferent but really hostile towards them. The world will guffaw at women writers: “Write? What’s the
Such a cold approach lowers the vitality of women writers, and tells profoundly on their work. Thus, the development of a female literary heritage under unsympathetic circumstances is rather difficult, as freedom and fullness of expression form the very essence of art.

Fear of failure intimidates women. Rosalind Miles in her non-fictional work *The Female Form: Women Writers and the Conquest of Novel* admits: “whatever the authority of women’s writing, its individual practitioners cannot always shake off the sense of strangeness with which their productions are likely to be greeted. It is as if there is some irreconcilable tension between the two realities of being a writer, and of being a woman” (199). Generally women desist from serious writing because they are too much aware of the hostility and derision they have to face. This is one of the reasons for Jaya to refrain from writing anything of serious import. Hence Jaya dislikes to be labelled a ‘writer’. The guilt of not discharging her social duty and the fear of being stamped a failed writer make Jaya disclaim the prestigious title of ‘a writer’. The conflict in the woman writer’s mind becomes apparent as Jaya denies that she is a writer while basking in popularity as a columnist. That is why, after the success of ‘Seeta’ when Laxmankaka commends Jaya as a writer, she suddenly recalls her father’s (his brother’s) ambition to become a writer, and at once she disavows that she is a writer. “‘A writer, Laxmankaka?’ . . . ‘No, I’m not really a writer. I just write a bit here and there for magazines and papers. Small articles and stories. I’m not a writer’” (*Silence* 150).

Jaya’s self-internalisation of the patriarchal notions that a woman writer cannot produce anything substantial and worthy but can pen only trifles reflect in these words. Nonetheless, she is aware of her irresponsibility of frittering away her
potential, and the ‘sense of morality’ that her writing lacks. Deshpande in her article “Seeking a Moral Base” states that being true to oneself as well as one’s art constitutes the morality of literature. When the artist, that is, the medium is clear the art flows unimpeded, and reaches the reader/listener/viewer unsullied (IX). However, when writing becomes a ‘gendered’ activity and the author loses her/his integrity s/he finds her/himself in a blind alley. Hence Jaya disclaims being a ‘writer’.

Women writers who dare to write /right the inequities pay heavily for their transgressive act: they are silenced, rendered faceless, stripped of identity and excluded from the historical record. The great responsibilities of a writer and the huge barriers especially for a woman writer to surmount daunt Jaya from venturing into serious writing. She is just interested in providing delight, not wounding anybody’s sentiments or provoking anybody’s displeasure. So, evading the intimidating task of being a serious writer, Jaya gives up writing fiction, and conveniently switches over to the ‘middles’. She abides by the accepted norms, limits herself to approved topics and, most importantly, sticks to a language usage that is “gendered, sanitized and safe” (Joseph et al.11). Thus, the column ‘Seeta’ takes birth: “light, humorous pieces about the travails of a middle-class housewife. Nothing serious…” (148-49).

The name ‘Seeta’ is highly suggestive of the ‘male construct’ her writing has become. Like the mythical character Seeta, Jaya blindly and unquestioningly follows the patriarchal dictums and makes herself ‘acceptable’ in the male-oriented society. This is why she turns a deaf ear to the wail of woebegone women, suppresses the murmurs of her own mind, and becomes a woman with no self-identity. She represses the ‘resisting’ impulses to be an ‘ideal wife’, which naturally makes her a widely accepted writer, that is, one who raises no threat to the
dominating system. Here we notice the impact of mythical characters on the character formation of Indian women. Jaya is not ignorant of the fact that the mythical characters like Seeta, Draupadi, Gandhari and others are very much unlike her true nature which questions every irregularity; her spirit is akin to the intelligent and independent Maitreyi. In India female mythical characters who uphold the value of self-effacement are set as role models for Hindu women. Dev Sen underscores the purpose-built construct of the Sita myth while considering the alternative interpretations of the Ramayana thus:

> Just as the Rama myth has been exploited by the patriarchal system to construct an ideal Hindu male, Sita too has been built up as an ideal Hindu female to help serve the system. Sita remains the ideal Hindu woman through whom patriarchal values may be spread far and wide, through whom women may be taught to bear all injustice silently. ("Alternative interpretations of the Ramayana . . ." 588)

‘Role conflict’, an outgrowth of the tension between career and female expectations, is seen in a künstlerroman novel as the career-woman heroine tries to separate her professional life from her personal life. Laurence herself, in an interview with Rosemary Sullivan in 1983, spoke about the ‘role conflict’ family and career posed for women. Laurence’s character is also subject to social conditioning: Morag feels guilty when she does not act up to the traditional role. She resents Brooke’s assumption that she will always prioritise wifely duties over her career. Self-internalisation becomes apparent, for, whether she is preoccupied with her duties or desists from them, her activity of writing is hindered. This makes her pursue her writing in a desultory fashion, temporarily suppressing her identity as a writer so
that she may better play her role as a professor’s wife. Although Morag does not articulate her dissatisfaction with her life, she feels increasingly frustrated. Finding life empty she begins a novel, and in resuming her writing, Morag also resumes her real identity. For Morag, “writing becomes the medium of a careful and sustained process of thought. It is essential to the communication of Morag’s reflective development towards greater self-consciousness”, comments McCallum (qtd. in Lindberg 194). Later Morag steps out of the restrictive role of a wife when she realises that it hinders the blossoming of her creativity.

The conflict between the ambition of a woman and the expectations of the society is often a continual process due to self-internalisation. Morag is often caught at the disjunction between the world of womanhood and the world of the desexualized writer: this is illustrated in the scenes in which she cannot get “outside the novel” in time to welcome Brooke home to dinner, and years later, when she still tries to get “inside” the world of her writing in the morning and “outside” it in time to welcome Pique home from school (Diviners 341). In Vancouver, without Brooke’s interference, “she is too tired and lousy most evenings to do any writing at all” because of her pregnancy (242). In England, her writing is interrupted by Pique’s illness and her affair with McRaith. In each instance, Laurence reminds us these interruptions, stemming from Morag’s feminine role of mother and mistress, are interruptions: “A month away from it, and getting back inside will be torture,” thinks Morag after Pique begins to mend. And, she acknowledges, “she works much better when McRaith is not in London . . . herself and her time then not being divided” (310). Morag marks her annoyance when Royland, the Smiths, and even Pique interrupt her at work. “This had been the pattern of life for how long?” she
thinks after one such interruption. “Morag at this table, working and people arriving and saying, in effect, Please don't let me interrupt you. But they did interrupt her, damn it” (286). But she goes on to indicate her allegiance to both worlds: “The only thing that could be said for it was that if no one ever entered the door, the situation would be infinitely worse” (286). In her wish to share in both the career world and the world of the traditionally feminine woman, Morag Gunn is at one with most contemporary fictional career heroines, says Susan Ward in “Morag Gunn in Fictional Context: The Career Woman Theme in The Diviners” (183).

The institutionalised role of wife intimidates the woman writer; she finds it difficult to escape from the construction of her ‘gendered’ self and be in a ‘neutral’ domain (an individual’s psycho-social and sexual selves are gendered in an androcentric set up). Schooled about the need for the approval of family and community, risking disapproval or criticism is a serious threat to the marital and social life of women writers. The fact is not that they are unaware of a writer’s role regarding social upliftment, but the great responsibilities and the enormous barriers that a woman writer has to surmount daunt them from venturing into serious writing. Moreover, to women who dare to trespass it is a process both traumatic and emotionally crippling to be accused of being unfeminine and destructive. The reasons why a woman writer is constrained to compromise is dealt exhaustively by Deshpande in That Long Silence, Roots and Shadows, and Moving On. The confused mind of the woman writer torn between her duties as wife and writer is undoubtedly represented in the characters of Indu, Jaya and Vasu. The issue of role conflict does not arise in the cases of Mira, as she withdraws from the arena before she is married,
Madhu, as she gives up writing on her own accord to be a ‘full-time mother,’ and Sumi, as she takes to writing rather too late, after being deserted by her husband. In *That Long Silence* Kamat reproaches Jaya for not being bold to take up challenges as a writer. ‘Scared of failing’, she prefers to remain an uncommitted writer. In the hostile patriarchal world a woman writer dreads if she will become the butt of ridicule. When her creative powers are restricted to writing trifles like ‘Seeta’, Jaya poses no threat to the patriarchal society and hence will not face any serious blows. But she experiences severe identity crisis. She feels fragmented: “Ten different mirrors” show her “ten different faces” (*Silence* 1). She has been practising self-deception and waging guerrilla warfare all along. Who, and why is she hoodwinking? What becomes apparent here is that women writers cannot remain under cover for long; besides, the disguise is also problematic. For a woman artist is, after all, a woman – that is her real ‘problem’ – and if she denies her own gender, she inevitably confronts an ‘identity crisis’ as severe as the ‘anxiety of authorship’ that she is trying to surmount, analyse Gilbert and Gubar (65). That is why, when a woman writer attempts at masking herself, she goes to the point of effacing herself. (Jaya’s lifeless stories and Madhu’s biography of Hamidbhai are instances).

Jaya takes stock of her life when the ‘writer’ and the ‘woman’ are at loggerheads, and she reaches the verge of falling to pieces. She blames Mohan for her failure as an artist, for erasing her identity. With a savage anger she turns on Mohan: “Yes, it was all Mohan’s fault. I had shaped myself so resolutely to his desires all these years, yet what was I left with now? Nothing. Just emptiness and silence” (*Silence* 144). Later as the rage subsides, she realises the truth that it is not only the dampening attitude of Mohan that has disheartened her, but the social
conditioning that she has been subject to from her childhood has also strongly impacted her: suppressing her feelings, constraining her writing, and rendering her to a non-entity. “I hadn’t stopped writing because of Mohan; I could not possibly make Mohan the scapegoat for my failures, for I had written even after that confrontation with him – stories that had been rejected, stories that had come back to me, stories that I had hidden here in this house” (*Silence* 145). The conflict in Jaya deepens. She is torn between the demands of an ideal woman and the struggle for self-actualisation. The predicament Jaya faces is shared by other writer-characters like Indu and Madhu.

Indu (*Roots*) is also disgusted with the existing order of things which she says is a Big Sham, for hypocrisy, corruption, snobbishness, etc., rule here. She compromises with the unscrupulous job to comply with her husband, who lured by money, repeatedly reminds her of the futility of waging a war single handed against the system. Constrained, thus, Indu writes articles sacrificing her sense of morality and social commitment. When Naren denounces her writing as soulless she makes an outburst of her repressed resentment of surrendering her identity and integrity. It is not the ignorance of a writer’s duties – to expose the inequities and redeem the society– but the patriarchal constraints and fear of failure that prompt Indu to simulate. Indu who has married outside her caste, disowning her family, wants to prove that she is successful and so she obliges her husband. The wife in Indu, thus, overpowers the writer.

Deshpande points out that even Vasu (*Moving*) who comparatively is the most traditional and conservative of her writer-characters suffers from role conflict. She, though a writer of fiction, consciously keeps a low profile so as to avoid marital
friction. Hence her husband Badri takes an upper hand and enjoys more privileges at home and respect from others as a person who writes ‘non-fiction’. Despite her constant efforts to suppress the writer’s demands we notice that the ‘writer’ at times supersede other roles, making her transitional passage from Vasu the writer to Vasu the wife or mother rather slow. It takes at least a ‘miniscule moment’ for her to shift the roles and overcome the bewilderment of being interrupted in her work.

It is evident that family stands foremost among the regimes of censorship on women’s writing. Women in general, particularly in India, cringe at the thought of risking the family’s honour. The family, signalling the maintenance of honour and dignity is sacrosanct for them. The pillars of the community – marriage, motherhood, control of sexuality and tradition – must be kept secure in the interest of preserving the culture of the community. Family honour, the compulsion to be a good daughter, a good wife and a good mother – all these lock a woman writer into the ‘good girl syndrome’ and she is silenced to write about sex, passion, discontent, etc. So a woman writer who writes in her own voice is considered a threat to the family. Marathi writer Mangala Godbole says, “For me creativity is like a raincoat. When I enter my house I hang the raincoat outside the front door” (qtd. in Joseph et al. 11). At the National Colloquium, “The Guarded Tongue” held in Hyderabad from 20th to 22nd July 2001 many female creative writers shared the experiences of being constrained by the inability to express the thoughts and feelings on what they saw as important and problematic aspect of human life.

Thus women’s writing becomes problematic when it questions or transgresses ‘acceptable’ (patriarchal) sexual norms. Sex and sexuality are, perhaps, the most sensitive areas, and women writers are wary while treading over them. Writing
uninhibitedly on them may prompt gossip and innuendo in social circles and create problems in their personal relationships. So many female writers keep sexuality out of their work for the sake of their family and friends’ honour, and to avoid the risk of being identified with the characters, states Joseph in the article “The Censor Within” published in The Hindu (IV). They practise self-censorship and modesty, even at the cost of truth, so as not to hurt their loved ones. So topics such as sexuality and autobiographical references will be consciously and cautiously avoided.

In such a social context if a woman writer ventures into the forbidden territory of man-woman relationship, pulling down the walls of domesticity to release her long repressed desires and frustrations, she will have to contend with severe problems. Deshpande deals with this at length in the novel That Long Silence. Jaya’s husband, Mohan who has internalised patriarchy always conforms to the societal norms. He wants his wife to guard the honour of the family, and maintain the divide between the public and the private. He, therefore, disapproves of her writing on man-woman relationship. In one of her stories Jaya writes about a husband who cannot reach out to his wife except through her body. Mohan fears that the readers may read autobiographical overtones into it. They may think he is that character; he is that kind of man. “‘Jaya, . . . ‘how could you, how could you have done it?’ . . . how could you write these things, how could you write such ugly things, how will you face people after this?’ . . . ‘How can you reveal us, how can you reveal our lives to the world in this way?’” (143-44) Shocked at her brazen and uncouth behaviour, he induces her not to deliberate on such themes that may scandalise their marriage. It is not an uncommon thing to relate to the female author’s life the estranged relationships, illicit affairs, and the like that are being
narrated in her work. This is apparently a strategy to attack, enervate and debase those women who wield power with the (pen)ile tool. Women writers who dare to bypass the “gravel” to walk across the “turf”, in Woolf’s words (15) are effectively intimidated in the name of honour and dignity.

In *Moving On* also we have an instance where autobiographical reference causes embarrassment to the family. Vasu’s niece, Pushpa, who stumbles upon the fact that her aunt is a writer after watching “Manasi”, feels the film-maker has not done justice to the novel. She seeks Jiji’s permission to film her aunt’s last story “Blackout” herself. But later when she makes no contact Jiji infers that the turmoil the off-track story raised among the readers and the autobiographical elements in it must have prompted Pushpa to withdraw from the attempt. This story of Vasu’s, based on lust and hatred, marks a departure from the regular formula she followed. Unlike her other stories which appeared in women’s magazines (that is, a very limited readership), “Blackout” has been published in the Sunday supplement of a newspaper (so a wider readership). The controversies that followed forced Vasu to withdraw from the scene of writing.

The feminist and autobiographical poems of Mira (*Vine*) are also a cause of concern for the family when Urmi discovers and decides to publish them. Like a message tapped on the wall by a prisoner to another in the next cell, Urmi senses Mira’s unfulfilled dreams. She grasps the subversive potential of Mira’s secret writing that speaks of the ‘speechless woe’, her attempts to subvert patriarchal ‘truths’. The very act of female writing is, thus, intimately linked to stealth, subterfuge and defiance. Urmi decides to do justice to this ‘unsung’ and ‘unhonoured’ poet even at the cost of the family’s honour. Here it is worth noting
that a woman takes the initiative to publish another woman’s writing; Deshpande’s other writer-characters have men as their mentors. Unlike Pushpa (Moving) who backs off at thought of the family’s disgrace, Urmi, brushing aside the displeasure and doubts of the family, tries to retrieve Mira’s subjectivity by daring to publish her poems. It is interesting to note that had it been not for the gynocritical efforts of these two female characters, Urmi and Jiji, Mira and Vasu’s lives as writers would not have been known. Such attempts to retrieve women’s subjectivity through published narratives help women’s writing secure representation in the phallologos.

Jiji also turns up a writer, that is, a diarist, penning in the diary of her father.

Urmi’s discovery of Mira, a poet from a state of abandonment strikes some similarity to Kamala Das’s discovery of her great grandmother’s younger sister, Ammalu, a gifted poet who was struck by fate to be paralysed and to meet an untimely death. Das realises the worth of her great grand-aunt only much late in her life. Among the old books at her ancestral house, Nalapat, she found some that contained Ammalu’s poems. Das writes in her autobiographical work titled, My Story: “I felt that after thirty years she was trying once again to communicate with the world and with me” (18).

Deshpande frequently juxtaposes conservative and progressive characters to highlight how women writers are fettered by societal mores. In That Long Silence Mohan, a traditionalist, and Kamat, a liberalist, are juxtaposed. Mohan epitomises the patriarchal society’s attitude towards a woman writer. It is striking that, as in The Golden Notebook where Saul Green inspires Anna Wulf to resume her literary career, men become mentors to the women writers in Deshpande’s novels. Contrary to Mohan’s opinion, Kamat emphasises the importance of expressing personal views in
one’s writing. He points it out as one of the major shortcomings of her lacklustre story: the author effaces herself in her writing, (a general flaw of women’s writing due to self-effacement inculcated in women). As a result, “[t]here isn’t even a personal view, a personal vision” (*Silence* 147). When Jaya needs Kamat to enlighten her on this essential requirement of writing, Madhu of *SmallRemedies* (a writer-character of an advanced period) herself realises the difference between a work where the author effaces herself and the one where the author emerges through it.

In this context a comparative analysis of the male characters that encourage / discourage women writers is relevant. An examination of Mohan and Kamat in *That Long Silence*, Naren in *Roots and Shadows*, and Brook Skelton, Christie Logan, Jules (Skinner) Tonnerre and Dan McRaith in *The Diviners* sheds light on the restrictive rules of the patriarchal institution, marriage, as well as the dissimilarity of Indo-Canadian socio-cultural backgrounds. Mohan reins Jaya’s writing when he fears it may trigger off gossips about their marital life; as a married man he thinks it is important to keep the family’s honour intact. When Kamat advocates unrestrainedness in Jaya’s stories, and Naren reprimands Indu for sycophancy and hypocrisy, we find they are but ‘third party’, that is, they are outside the fold of marriage to be concerned by what women (or someone else’s wife) write.

Wifehood is a trap for a woman as it deprives her of self-identity, and the burgeoning of her creativity, especially if she is a writer / artist. *A Matter of Time* illustrates the effects of internalisation of the patriarchal roles of wife and mother. Sumi, the protagonist is so obsessed with the enactment of the traditional roles that she fails to realise the fount of creatitivity within her. She feels contented and carefree, for she regards Gopal as a sturdy, supportive pillar. Nevertheless, when she is bereft of
the comfort zone and is compelled to fend for herself and her daughters, she stumbles on her talent to write. But the late realisation of her gift for writing and the untimely intervention of “the blind Fury with th’ abhorred shears” (Milton line 75) prevent her growth as a writer. Hence the concomitant issues of a woman writer are not laid emphasis on in the novel. However, the changes are to be noted when Sumi is not constrained by the gendered role. Free from her husband, and on her own feet, Sumi, unlike Deshpande’s other writer-characters, vents her thoughts uninhibitedly. The demystified experience of marriage and wifehood, the burdens of single parenting as well as her imaginativeness enable her to view things in a new perspective. She successfully renders a short story riddle of her childhood into a play. This brings her accolades, and thereassuring experience turns her attention to revisionist mythmaking. She decides to re-inscribe the female characters cast in a bad light by the patriarchal society. Her radical stance is obvious as she explicitly challenges the meanings attributed to mythical figures and tales, asserts the feminine self and subverts the masculine authority. Had not the race of her life been so quickly run she would have developed into a feminist writer and would have reconceptualised womanhood. Sumi’s instance unmistakably confirms how the traditional roles constrict the growth of a woman, and once unshackled she can soar to great heights.

She disregards his advice and sends Spear of Innocence out to publishers without effecting any of the suggested changes; she explodes in anger because Brooke refuses to accept her statement that she knows something about novels, gained from “something different from reading or teaching” (213). His attempts to keep her dependent: by speaking to her as if she were a child, and ‘correcting’ her
attempts at short story and novel writing, highlight his disregard for a woman writer. All these cause the marriage to break down.

Just as the role of wife curbs the growth of woman writer, motherhood can also affect the burgeoning of creativity. Rich affirms the complexity of mothering in the lives of women and criticises the conditions that shape those experiences. She argues that it is the patriarchal construction of the institution of motherhood that is oppressive, not the actual act of biological mothering. Susan Maushart’s *The Mask of Motherhood: Why Mothering Changes Everything and Why We Pretend it Doesn’t* (1997) unmask the sentimentalised myths of motherhood and the current contradictory notions and demands of motherhood. Maushart breaks the code of silencing on many mothering issues. Her concern that we live in a culture “that glorifies the ideal of motherhood, takes for granted the work of motherhood, and ignores the experience of motherhood” (22) echoes Rich’s argument of a couple decades earlier.

What we observe is that neither Laurence nor Deshpande glorifies motherhood or wifehood, the ‘dual crowns’ bestowed on women by patriarchy to confine them to immanence. Instead they demystify the roles of wife and mother. The writer characters are warned of the dangers of effacing their identities. The epigraph Deshpande gives to the novel, *The Binding Vine* (taken from Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*) is significant; “What was the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here?” (*Vine* 6) She emphasises the importance of transcending the ‘roles’ imposed as part of the politics of creativity. The denigrating remarks of Venu in *The Binding Vine* relegating Mira (any woman) to mere bodily functions, Brooke Skelton ignoring as well as snubbing Morag’s creativity,
Reghuraman and Ruel Johnson’s attitude to their writer-wives are ample evidences that the patriarchal society confines women to the ‘immanent’ roles. The entry of women into the arena of letters has raised this problem: politics of creativity.

In *The Diviners* we observe that the Brooke tries to divest Morag of her powers – both creative and procreative. As truly pertaining to patriarchy, we see Morag’s reproductive powers are controlled by her husband; he denies her the right to bear a child. Not only does Laurence take Morag’s sexuality and reproductive capacity into account, she also uses Morag’s experiences as a mother both to enrich her experiences as an artist and to suggest that a female artist’s experience of her artistry may be as unique as that of her sexuality. She reveals this a phenomenon, which she has recognized in her own life, in her memoir, *Dance on the Earth*.

Cixous views motherhood as a major catalyst for writing, although Woolf notes that the four great women novelists of the nineteenth century – Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, and George Elliot – being childless must have had more time to spare for writing. Unlike Deshpande’s characters, Morag takes on motherhood as an experience. She does not give up writing like Madhu (*Remedies*) at any cost. Morag forgoes the comfortable and secure life of a professor’s wife to retain her rightful privileges even at the cost of financial insecurity. She disallows her husband Skelton to overpower her; she starts writing secretly when she senses his rather cynical and critical attitude. She does not hesitate to come out of the shackles of marriage when her childbearing rights are being challenged. She liberates herself from the clutches of patriarchy to fulfil her birth right to be a mother, that too a single parent.
Morag wrests from Brooke her rights over her ‘self’, body and mind. Despite grabbing her procreative rights, and struggling with and enjoying the childbearing and rearing experiences she admits that motherhood at times does wear her down. She tries to avoid worrying over her daughter “but this ploy was not successful” (*Diviners* 3). It is writing that helps her keep her composure, for she says: “If I hadn’t been a writer, I might’ve been a first-rate mess at this point” (4). Morag in love with Dan is in double mind whether to marry him. But she resolves to remain single because she wants to have undivided time for her writing, even as her daughter, now eighteen, decides to leave her and lead an independent life.

It may appear rather contradicting here that motherhood is not a hindrance to some career women; they find jouissance in the experience of motherhood. When imposed as an institution, motherhood constricts a woman, leaving her with no other option but only the traditional roles to play. Then a clash ensues between the expectations of the society of a woman and the aspirations of the ‘individual’ woman. There are several women writers who despite knowing the fact that the ‘roles’ impinge on their career manage to strike a balance without sacrificing their duties. Malayalam writers like Lalithamika Antherjanam and Kamala Das acknowledge that they write after everyone goes to bed.

The Indian society attributes much respectability to motherhood; it is glorified as the ultimate fulfilment of life. The impact of the ‘mystified’ state of motherhood is visible when women dissolve their identities in the pre-assigned roles, and submerge themselves in sorrow, as in the cases of bereavement like Madhu’s in *Small Remedies* and Urmi’s, the narrator in *TheBinding Vine*, who both refuse to be comforted by others. Here Deshpande deals with motherhood as an
institution that denies ‘space’ to a woman. For instance, the brave, independent Urmi, though not carried away by romantic feelings, trips over motherhood. She refuses to come out of the traumatic state caused by the loss of her two-year old daughter. Adamantly she clings to the ‘dead past’. It is another tragic incident – a raped girl in comatose – that arouses her once again into life. In this novel we find the poet Mira, who has not surrendered her self to the pressures of patriarchy, has also fallen into the quicksand of motherhood. She experiences the jouissance of motherhood as she conceives a child. But she cannot free herself fully from the tentacles of patriarchy, for we find her yearning for a male child.

Urmi and Madhu are consumed by the myth of mother love. This myth promotes attributes that are humanly impossible to sustain: forever self-sacrificing, self-effacing, unchallenging and all-encompassing. Madhu’s life changes completely on conceiving; she resigns her job. All the baits her employer, Hamidbhai tries fail, for she has made up her mind to give her child all her time, and “not a measured amount of time, only a part of her life” (Remedies 146). Madhu, who has the most unconventional upbringing among Deshpande’s heroines, shows that patriarchy easily trips a woman into the ‘socio-cultural’ role. She effaces her ‘self’ into ‘Adit’s mother’, silencing the writer in her. “Motherhood takes over my life, it makes me over into an entirely different person. The in-control-of-herself Madhu is lost, gone for ever. It’s my baby’s dependence that changes me; my place in the universe is marked out now” (Remedies 183). She experiences the jouissance of motherhood and realises that “[m]other love is one of the great wonders of this world . . .” (Remedies 184), and happily dons her new identity, Adit’s mother. Madhu, we notice, is now fastened to the well-defined traditional role of motherhood. She says: “Motherhood absorbs all of me.
I’ve nothing left for anyone, for anything.” Selfishness enters her; Adit becomes the centre of her world; even Som is pushed to the periphery. This kind of self-negation of the traditional roles does not lead to self-sublimation. She says: “Motherhood absorbs all of me. I’ve nothing left for anyone, for anything” (Remedies 146). She effaces her ‘self’ into ‘Adit’s mother’, silencing the writer in her.

The death of Adit alters Madhu’s life mainly because she is a doting mother and her life is just revolving round her son, ever perceptive of his every need. Chandru, their friend, comes with an enterprise to “rehabilitate” (Remedies 14) her from the “[h]opelessness, childlessness [and] emptiness” (Remedies 113) that she is tormented with. Rather unwillingly Madhu accepts the “professional job” (Remedies 14). But this project of writing the biography of Indorekar Bai takes her on a quest – physical, emotional and psychological – that finally enables her restless soul to reconcile itself to Adit’s cruel death.

Deshpande accentuates the fact that the significance of a woman writer gets slashed when the roles of wife and mother gain more prominence. She points out through her characters that mothering is not biological. In the course of their self-exploration, the protagonists analyse their role as mothers and their relationships with their mothers with retrospective maturity, and they understand that women have always been under the spell of patriarchal socialisation. On conceiving Madhureadily abandons her career; she is only too happy to perpetuate the myth of motherhood. Vanaa (Vine), on the other hand, complains that women are being brainwashed into this issue of ‘motherhood’ by making it “mystical” and “emotional” when the truth is it is just a “myth” (Vine 76). Women give too much of importance to mothering, as a result of which their career gets sidelined.
In the novel, *Moving On* also Deshpande underscores that mother myths and maternal instincts are but the social construction of the patriarchal society. Jiji reflects on her mother Vasu: “Mai was the centre of our universe, she was the sun around whom the three of us, Baba, Malu and I, revolved” (118). But later in her life, as Jiji tries to comprehend Mai, she has doubts about Mai’s contentment as mother and wife. She recalls Mai’s “blank and unfocussed” look, as if she does not see them, or seeing, fail to recognize them, when they as children so eagerly return home to narrate those wonderful experiences of their outing. The “pause”, the “tiny moment” before she speaks is a cue that they are not entirely welcome. In that “miniscule moment” Vasu journeys from the world she is in to the world that contains her children and husband. When she successfully negotiates that passage she smiles, caps her pen, puts it down carefully and says, “‘So, you’re back?’” (119) Mai’s is, to an extent, a mechanical enactment of the ‘roles’ forced upon her. She does not experience the ‘jouissance’ of motherhood like Madhu (*Remedies*) who enjoys every bit of mothering. Furthermore, in this novel the lack of mother’s love is not experienced by the motherless Baba (Badri) and Gayatri. Unlike the traditional idea that a motherless child is pitied and uncared for, Baba grows up as a normal child. Laurence also demystifies motherhood. Morag Gunn is portrayed as an orphan raised by the refuse collector and his wife. Morag also does not believe in the myth of motherhood; she does not forgo her writing for the sake of bringing up her daughter, Pique.

Feminist sociologist Ann Oakley defies the notion of ‘maternal instincts.’ From her extensive anthropological and sociological research she has found that biological mothering is not a natural need for women nor is being reared by one’s biological mother a natural need for children. In short, Oakley’s work contributed to
the exposure of the cultural construction of, patriarchal complicity in, and oppressive nature of traditional motherhood discourses. Therefore, we deduce that mother myths and maternal instincts facilitate the patriarchal society to inveigle women into ‘feminine’ duties and keep their hands off ‘male monopolised’ jobs.

Emancipation for women should begin at the fundamental level by repudiating motherhood – “the noblest fulfilment of our womanhood”, believes Dora Russell, British author and birth control advocate (qtd. in Spender 668). Being a mother, wife, daughter, or sister is important to a woman; but it is essential that her ‘self’ should not be confined to these ‘roles’. The writer-characters chosen for study establish that wifehood and motherhood as institutions are mythified and mystified to ensnare women into those roles. But these writer-characters deconstruct those roles which ‘demoralise’ them as mere stereotypes to live out the way they realise to be better humans, fulfilling their artistic yearnings and social duties. Both Deshpande and Laurence depict woman as an individual rather than cast her in the self-effacing mould of idealised wifehood / motherhood.

Thus, we perceive the hostile, indifferent and misogynistic attitude of the phallic world cause many a Shakespeare’s sister to stifle her creativity and many a mute inglorious sister of Milton to pass into obscurity. The numerous curbs on female creativity as examined above show the overt and covert ways gendered socialisation work, and the resultant problems they pose to women writers.

This chapter looks at genderism as operative in the world of letters. Genderism works on the chink of ‘triviality’ of women’s experience to ‘exclude’ and ‘marginalise’ women writers. Thus the ground is set for publishers, editors,
readers, critics and the like to censure women writers. Another powerful censor, the family / society concocts various schemes like the ‘silent/good woman’ syndrome, the mystification of wifehood and motherhood, bestowing the status of torchbearer of culture and guardian of family honour, etc., to confine women to domestic sphere. The life of a woman and her career are so intertwined that her subordinate social status becomes the mark of her artistic expression as well. A career-role conflict ensues forcing women writers to withdraw from the field of writing or compromise with their writing. Writing only on women’s matters and finding a space only in women’s magazines make women writers feel ghettoised. An unwelcoming and uncongenial atmosphere for female creativity is thus created. Male literary dictatorship is retained through various subtle means. All these evidence that genderism is the determinant in the politics of creativity. Nevertheless, the writer-characters examined in the selected novels pursue undeterred to claim a space denied them historically.