EXTRA-MARITAL RELATIONSHIP

Outside conjugal relationship, there exist several relationships. Extra-marital relationship is a sexual relationship which happens outside marriage. Biologically both men and women are promiscuous. While it is not in the nature of men to be confined and they have a natural habit of sowing their seeds wherever and whenever they can, the women in whom vests the responsibility of reproduction and nurture are forever in search of a male partner who will not just produce children but also stay put to rear them. Women fuse love with fidelity but biological determinists claim that male fidelity is an evolutionary impossibility as men see love as a transient phenomenon and move from one woman to another. And so do the women in search of love from one man to another. Hence man-woman relationship, cast in the mould of monogamy and marriage, is open to biological conflict.

Marriage and monogamy, however, are not biological but social contracts. Marriage is a social contract that reduces sexual competition and leads to stability and democracy. Monogamy ensures that as society becomes more complex, men and women are able to form task-oriented groups and work together in non-sexual settings. But according to Victoria Griffin as long as there is marriage, there will be mistress (The Other Woman). If marriage is for stability, extra-marital relationship is motivated for sex. People become martyrs for their hormones. The slogan for extra-marital relationship is not ‘I love you’ but ‘I need you’ though very few people in extra-marital relationship have spine to admit it.

Marriage in India is regarded as a sacred relationship based on the foundations of love, trust, faith and hope. If these are broken, marriage is likely to break-up as a self-respecting wife or husband finds it very difficult to tolerate infidelity which has always been a large stakeholder in a marriage. However, extra-marital relationships come about in different ways, for different reasons, perhaps the most important being the boredom with marital sex which
is common among both men and women and which prompts them to cheat on their partners. Many husbands confess that their ideal bed mate is not their wife; many wives say that sex becomes monotonous and useless after a few years of marriage. Hence seeking pleasure and fulfilment outside marriage is common as marriage is no longer confined to the belief in the husband’s total possession over his wife’s body and vice-versa. But still one finds it very difficult to feel free to use one’s body without experiencing guilt. So, however just, strong and valid may be the reason for having extra-marital relationship, it is always kept under wrap, never admitted or exhibited publically. The man-woman relationship, going by the norms of society, is dictated by deceit and treachery and human beings more often than not prefer to go by the dictates of society rather than be truthful to themselves as individuals. Appearances have to be maintained in extra-marital relationships.

Extra-marital relationship needs to be seen in a given socio-cultural context as it has different connotations in different socio-cultural contexts. In Indian context, for example, a man-woman relationship outside marriage is considered as extra-marital relationship even though husband’s male friends and wife’s female friends play an important role in the family matters and social setup. In the Western context, however, extra-marital relationship has a different connotation as the sexual contact between unmarried partners is not a taboo. Besides, in the developing society like India’s, the scope of extra-marital relationship is widening due to the influence of the Western culture, particularly in the modern elitist society. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community are asserting their gender identity and human rights to have sex with their partners. Though same-sex love and live-in-relationship are gradually getting legal and social recognition in India, such relationships are still outside the purview of marriage and come under extra-marital relationships and are considered as threats to the institution of marriage. The culture of having sex with inanimate objects like ‘sex dolls’, and ‘body pillows’ often called ‘2-D Love’ which offer unconditional sex and control and were confined to a certain section of the Japanese society is also taking over the elite of metro cities in India and giving new dimension to extra-marital relationship.

Extra-marital relationship has been an important subject of literature and it has been depicted in a variety of ways. In fact, the subject appears to be inexhaustible and the changing time and changing social situations have served to bring out its amazing diversity and infinite variety.
Shashi Deshpande’s exploration of man-woman relationship is not only within the framework of marriage but also without it. She explores extra-marital relationship-pre-marital, in-marital and post-marital relationships-in most of her novels. She considers marriage a very important institution but not a sacred institution. She thinks that monogamy, fidelity and sanctity of marriage are hard for human beings to adhere to and, therefore, majority of men and women find it to be a very difficult institution. She is of the view that there is no need to uphold marriage at any cost except at one’s convenience. In her interview on 3-6-2003, she says about an incident in one of her novels: “When Gopal walks out of her marriage in *A Matter of Time*, it’s not an easy decision for him to take. He suffers on account of it. On the contrary, Sumi is able to accept it more comfortably.”(2005:230) In Shashi Deshpande’s novels, extra-marital relationship is no longer the privilege and luxury of the socialites with easy moral code as it happens in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, Shobha De and Namita Gokhale, it is a need cutting across the barriers of class and gender. Many of her protagonists and their relatives who belong to the educated middle class and even the uneducated lower class servants and maid-servants forge extra-marital relationships as per their need and convenience.

*The Dark No Holds Terrors*, the first published novel of Shashi Deshpande, depicts the extra-marital affairs of Saru, the protagonist, with her teacher, Boozie and her Colleague, Padmakar Rao. For Saru, her relationship with Boozie, her professor at Medical College, is a relief from frustration in her conjugal life. As a woman she deserves attention. She is a middle-aged woman, like so many other plump, large hipped, with seven pearl earrings in her ears and black beads round her neck. Her hair like that of the other is parted in the centre and tied into a light bun above the nape of her neck. She looks gorgeous but her husband does not admire her, her parents do not like her. Naturally, she cannot resist Boozie’s attention and feels drawn towards him for emotional reasons-to fill the emotional vacuum created by her desertion by her parents and her ill treatment by her husband during sexual intercourse at night. Feeling suffocated, she is looking for an escape and desires to put herself in another’s hands. Besides, she wanted Bozzie’s help and support for her career advancement in medical profession.

Boozie(so called by his students because his initials are B.O.Z.) is a person with a definite romantic air about him, a bohemian nonconformist male. He is fond of women and drinks and fits the description of
a woman killer: “He was...dark, rugged, handsome and masterful. Everything about him...his language, his accent, his stride, his pipe...contributed to the aura that surrounded him.”(88)When Saru goes to him, he opens the door and welcomes her warmly saying, “Saru, by all that’s wonderful! How long is it since you come to see me, girl? And I think of you every day. Every single day. Come in, come in.(97)He pulls her in and gives her a hug. He poses to be overwhelmingly masculine, but behind it all was nothing. Saru realises that she, as a woman, did not rouse him but left him cold. But she does not care. She clings to him because he displays interest in her and he has all that she had aspired for in a man-money, position, power, fame, romance.

Saru’s affair with Boozie does not result into Physical relationship as Boozie is a homosexual and his drama of interest in pretty girls was just a cover for him. She was one of the pawns in his games. But she did not mind because Boozie was also a pawn in her game. She wants Manu to be jealous of him, to object to his flirtatious behaviour, to play the sturdy husband for her, and when he does not, she begins to resent it: “I hated...Manu for doing nothing.”(94)She also deceives herself into believing that there is only a teacher-student or mentor-creator relationship between them. She says:

...(I)t was the Pygmalion-Galatea story all over again...(H)ow fast I learnt things apart from paediatrics...From him. It was he who taught me to dress with elegance and simplicity, he who taught me to speak good English...how to read and what...(91)

Boozie does help Saru grow in her profession and encourage her to climb the ladders of success. He helps her in buying a good house and improving her personality.

However, both in allowing Boozie to shape her career and in wanting Manu to reprimand her, Saru unconsciously exhibits the traditional need of woman to be controlled and protected by a male. There is both cunningness and immaturity in her behaviour. It is cunningness to want to enjoy her power over both men-one for desiring her and the other for his weakness. It is her immaturity and irresponsibility that makes her long for romance ignoring her age and motherhood.

As Boozie suddenly disappears from the narrative and Saru, without any sexual relationship with him, remains a chaste Indian wife, this extra-marital episode seems to have been introduced into the plot merely to
complicate the conflict between Saru and Manu. According to Kailash C. Baral, Saru’s relationship with Boozie is not an extra-marital relationship because it is devoid of love and sex. To quote him:

Sarita’s love life is not fabulous but familial and normal, except that Boozie, her mentor, takes personal interest in her, which, however, does not result in any physical relationship. She has never looked for love beyond marriage; Sarita’s love begins and ends with Manohar. Love has neither been Platonic to her nor an abstract emotion; it is always housed in the domain of sex. (2005:88)

G. Dominic Savio, however, differs from this view and contends that physical sex and emotional love may not necessarily be the basis of extra-marital relationship and often such a relationship may be an escape route for emancipation. To quote him:

Emancipation and marital incompatibility force Deshpande’s heroines to have extra-marital relationship...They suffer no guilt and they begin to evolve a new code of sexual ethics. They experience a sense of sexual autonomy freeing themselves from sexual politics. Saru’s socializing with Boozie, “the fairy godfather” is a calculated move in that direction. She has no moral qualms in allowing herself to be the raw materials in the hands of a Pygmalion to be shaped into perfection, a Galatea. (2001:64-65)

Saru’s affair with Padmakar Rao is also an escape route but for the opposite reasons. Padmakar Rao forges Extra-marital relationship with Saru to escape his overindulgent wife who does not relate to him on equal terms. She waits on him, never calls him by his name, cooks just what he likes and never has her food until he has taken his. She could talk of only middle class concerns like economising the family budget though she does not need to. Padmakar Rao who is a failure in worldly terms as he has opted out of the rat race, practises in a poor district and is engaged in researching on essential diseases is fed up with his highly traditional, devoted and submissive wife. His is a failed marriage and he has pushed his wife into the shadows. Instead, he seeks Saru in order to share his medical discoveries. He threatens to become a habit dangerously close to an emotional attachment.(125-133) This too, like Saru’s previous affair with Boozie, is devoid of love and sex and hence it is not a serious matter.
Extra-marital affair in *If I Die Today* is also a result of stress and alienation. Rani, the wife of Dr. Aggarwal, the Dean of the hospital, has an affair with Dr. Kulkarni which is a result of her strained relationship with her husband and also her loneliness owing to her husband’s long absence. She spends much of her time in Bombay flat away from her husband and joins him when their children come from the boarding school to visit their parents. Deshpande’s successive novel *Come Up and Be Dead* has no focus on extra-marital relationship as Devayani and Kshama, the chief female protagonists, remain unmarried and the third important woman character, Mrs. Jyoti Raman, though married, remains a single parent with her daughter Sonali after seeking divorce from her husband.

*Roots and Shadows* is the first novel of Shashi Deshpande to deal with the extra-marital relationship substantially, seriously and extensively. Indu, the protagonist, meets her cousin and childhood friend, Narendra alias Naren when she returns to her natal home after a gap of 12 years and when she is undergoing a phase of uncertainty and emotional upheaval in her conjugal life. Indu’s loss of interest in her husband, Jayant, and his physical absence drive her to extra-marital affair with Naren who, like Boozie in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is a bohemian and unconventional male character.

The attraction between Indu and Naren is based on their having some common characteristics. Like Indu, Naren is motherless and has been raised in the joint family in the old house. Like Indu, he is a rolling stone. Both Indu and Naren have undergone a phase of transformation but Indu finds that while she has changed enormously after her marriage, Naren has remained the same. She was no longer the simple and austere girl of the old house-she was living a married life of a fashionable life-style, doing the job of her choice and belonging to “smart young set”(27).But Naren was still a free man, who had never bowed down to the dominant social moves and norms while she, after marriage, had rapidly turned into the middle class man’s ‘ideal wife’. He reminds her of all the cherished values she had suppressed. Besides, Naren is a foil to her husband, Jayant-they are opposite of each other in their taste and outlook of life: while Jayant is fastidious and a perfectionist, Naren is rootless, careless and casual, unconcerned with material progression, drifting from job to job, never achieving steadiness. Unlike Jayant, Naren is a sensitive person who understands her problems and doubts, displays a genuine interest in her writing,
strongly criticises some of her articles, and feels concerned about her deteriorating quality. He tells her:

The kind of writing you have been doing, I’ve had my eye on you, young woman. I’ve read most of the things you’ve written. And now...interviewing society dames and showering them with adjectives. What do you do that for?(26)

This more than solicitude and Indu is moved by it. Her husband, Jayant, had never taken her seriously as a writer and shown interest in her writing; instead he had advised her to compromise her ideals and even to be false to herself in order to continue successfully in her job as a journalist which added to their family income. In Naren’s criticism she recognises his genuine interest in her growth as a human being. She says: “How long was it since someone had really talked to me? Talked about things as if he understood she cared? Reading across?”(27)To her he is a catalytic agent or conscience keeper who, through a brief encounter with her, makes her see her own deterioration, realise her worth as a vibrant, emotionally alive human being and, in the end, turn into a writer to recover her lost sense of worth. Obviously, Naren enters her mind and heart.

Indu feels at ease and moves freely with Naren. She uses such words as ‘kiss’, ‘rape’, ‘deflowered’, ‘orgasm’(78),etc. without any inhibition. Naren tries to arouse her natural ‘sexual passion’ which Jayant used to find ‘shocking’ in her. But initially she resists his advances to her and declares: “I am essentially monogamous. For me it’s one man and one man only.”(81) But when Naren firmly tells her not to fight her womanhood on her needs but to express them without shame, she who is hedged in because of her husband’s rejection and because of being a woman which brings so many deprivations, yields to him. She narrates:

Naren pulled me down so that I lay on the carpet beside him, his face close to mine...”Why do you deny the fact that you’re a woman?”...You can’t deny this”, he said, his hands tightly teasing on my breasts “...or this”...and I was, yes, responding to him with ardour and warmth when I realised who it was. (87)

Indu allows Naren to make love with her and thanks him when it is over. Her attraction for Naren and the easy compatibility between them makes her take this daring step. Immediately after the act, she goes to her own bed but she does not sleep on it lest it should erase the sign of their love-making. She thinks:
I can go back and lay down on my bed, I thought, and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately, I went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don’t need to erase anything I’ve done, I told myself in a fit of bravado. (108)

But the question haunts her how she will view her act of adultery—was it a sin or crime or fulfilment of her natural spontaneous urge or her biological need? She begins to think coldly, analytically and objectively what she had done. On the terms of her married life, she feels that her casual and matter of fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they didn’t lack courage? Is this really representative of the modern Indian women?(129)

When she feels helpless, frightened and confused, she goes to Naren again and has sex with him. She tells Naren that it was neither love nor meek submission to man’s will but “The sexual instinct...that’s true. The maternal instinct...that’s true too. Self-interest, self-love...they are the basic truths.”(158)She believes that what was happening between them was complete in itself. ‘It needed no commentary, no explanation.’(160)While making love with Naren, she experiences in her own words “the organic overflowing of female pleasure”(167)that she has schooled herself to suppress after marriage.

As Indu ponders over the reasons for offering herself to Naren, she draws a parallel between her submission to Jayant and that to Naren:

Then I had met Jayant. I had found out that he too expected me to submit. No, not expected. He took it for granted that I would. And I did it because I told myself, I loved him. As if that justified everything. As if the word took away the taint from the deed. And remembering how I had surrendered to him, step by step, I realise now that it was not for love, as I have been telling myself, but because I did not want conflict. The hideous ghost of my own cowardice confronted me as I thought of this...that I had clung tenaciously to Jayant, to my marriage, not for love alone, but because I was afraid of failure. I had to show them that my marriage, that I, was a success. Show whom? The world. The family of course. And so
I went on lying, even to myself, compromising, shedding bits of myself along the way. (158-159)

She does not take love making as a sin or crime but the next very day she starts thinking of the enormity of what she had done.: “Adultery...what nuances of wrong doing...no it needs the other stronger words...what nuances of sin the work carries. I will now brood on my sin, be cursed under a weight of guilt and misery.” (170)

Indu’s extra-marital affair with Naren shatters her romantic illusion about ‘love in real life’ and she realises that true love or unconditional love exists only in books and movies as she had seen in the film Devdas in which a grown up man moans, cries and dies for love and is appreciated. But in real life, love is an adjustment which one reaches again and again to avoid conflict and keep harmony in conjugal life. A girl is taught to be obedient, submissive and unquestioning to her husband for this purpose. But with Naren, it was not so. By offering herself to Naren, she had done what she really wanted to do. It was not adjustment; it was not pretension. So, it brought freshness and fullness without any bondage. She reflects:

For Naren and I...it was no infatuation. Naren was still Naren to me. I saw him for what he was. Twice, briefly, our flesh had touched. But that had oddly created no new bond between us. It had not been so for me with Jayant. Then with his touch, I had felt as if I had lost not only part of myself, but the whole. (171)

Her extra-marital relationship with Naren is without any rider. She does not feel trapped. She does not become humble and dependent. There is the same ease and comfort between them. They have no lingering feelings to make each other comfortable. So she overcomes her guilt consciousness as she says:

What then, had I achieved by giving him my body? Apart from wrongdoing Jayant? Wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him a spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, is dishonourable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with Naren. (171)

Commenting on the significance of this event, Mary Eagleton observes: “Because female desire...is repressed or so misinterpreted in
a phallocentric society, its expression becomes a key location for deconstructing this control.”(1952:73) Jayant’s thwarting her body and derecognizing her way of writing is representative of the female condition in a phallocentric society and Indu extra-marital relationship is an attempt at deconstructing that control. Indu does not feel guilty about it. She recovers her self-worth as her affair with Naren had given her an opportunity to listen to the dictates of her conscience and to be true to herself in speech as well as in action. According to O. P. Bhatnagar, Indu’s affair with Naren brings liberation and harmony in her life. To quote him:

> In the end comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and determination and the tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life. (Unpublished Paper)

Her affair with Naren acts as a catharsis and frees her of herself imposed limits. Having purged herself of the feeling of guilt and shame towards Jayant who humiliated her for being initiator in their sexual relation, she decides that she will no longer try to deceive him not hide her true-self from him in order to make herself more acceptable and lovable to him.

But Indu’s extra-marital relationship, like any other extra-marital relationship is to remain a secret. Like a traditional Indian wife, Indu has no courage to make it known to her husband and others as it will not be tolerated and will certainly end her marriage. But Indu gives an altogether different reason for it when she says: “Nevertheless, I knew. I would not tell Jayant about Naren and me. For that was not important. That had nothing to do with the two of us and our life together.”(187)Commenting on her decision not to reveal her extra-marital affair with Jayant, P. Ramamoorthy says: “This sheds a brilliant light on Indu’s awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, not a dependent on Jayant.”(1991:124) But the question naturally arises: ‘Does this mean that her extra-marital relationship, like her conjugal relationship, is also rooted in dishonesty?’ According to Parag Moni Sharma, this dishonesty is a lesser evil she has chosen. To quote him:

> Physical relationship outside marriage often becomes a defining moment in a woman’s life, a moment when one comes to terms with one’s own sexuality, so often suppressed. She (Indu) realises that
there were other dishonesties potentially more harmful than an incidental physical contact. (2005:125)

And now Indu is going to get rid of the ‘more harmful dishonesties’ by telling Jayant:

That I was resigning from my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing. That I would not, could not enrich myself with Akka’s money. That I would, on the other hand, pay for Mini’s wedding. (187)

Indu’s extra-marital relationship with Naren not only provides her with a sexual outlet but also enables her to regain her identity and take revenge against her husband for posing a threat to her identity. According to Manjari Shukla:

She (Indu) is obsessed with her identity. It was for the sake of her identity that she had courted exile from the family and then took the revenge by selling the ancestral house. And she also took revenge by making love to Naren because Jayant had unwillingly become a threat to her identity. (1998:105)

Indu’s extra-marital relationship with Naren, a completely detached and non-involved person, transformed Indu as a wife and as a person and revitalised her relationship with her husband and her relatives in the following ways:

i) It made her discover what was wrong with her marriage. She realised that she had surrendered before Jayant not for love but for pretending to her family that her marriage had been a success. She had wronged both Jayant and herself by not revealing to him her true self.

ii) She came to realise that she did not want, as she had believed earlier, detachment and non-involvement. Naren’s detachment made it possible for him to remain unaffected by anything. He could never be anybody’s husband or beloved. Her rejection of him afterwards had left him completely untouched whereas she knew she could shatter Jayant completely with her rejection; which made Jayant so precious to her. Detachment was for the dead, not for the living.

iii) Naren had taught her, through his love of music, that there was nothing shameful in her need for Jayant. It did not make her less of a human being. The whole world is made up of interdependence. Her love was not a restricting
bond, but a uniting bond. Her losing herself in Jayant without any pretension alone could create harmony in their life.

iv) It made her realise that Akka was a pillar of strength because of her strong belief. She had not allowed anything to come into her way. And she (Indu) must rise up to Akka’s expectations—fulfil her obligation and responsibilities to family. She came to understand that rules add grace and dignity to life; within them one is free to do what one wants.

But Parvati Bhatnagar asks a very pertinent question about the whole episode in the Indian context:

*The way an intelligent and sensitive person like Indu who was so very choosy in her affection is made by the writer to resolve her doubts and uncertainties is very alarming. She had to commit adultery to come to terms with her married life. Indu’s casual and matter of fact attitude to what she had done is shocking. Have our morals really gone so low that women commit this sin for nothing, just to prove that they do not lack courage? Is this really representative of modern Indian woman?* (2001:49-50)

*That Long Silence* depicts the extra-marital relationship of Jaya, the protagonist, with her neighbour, Kamat. Their relationship is never precisely defined, but like Shashi Deshpande’s other protagonists, it is Jaya’s empty, meaningless and loveless relationship with her husband, Mohan, that draws her towards Kamat who is opposite to Mohan. To her it is an escapade to find some human empathy and to share a fulfilment of her desire for affectionate relationship, a kind of inner satisfaction that her relationship with Mohan alone had failed to provide.

Kamat, a middle-aged bulky man and an advertiser by profession, is a well read and liberated person, free from patriarchal bias. He shows deep understanding of a woman’s predicament and advocates that every woman must assert and develop her ‘self’ to her full potential. Jaya finds him totally different from most other men she has known, particularly in a sense that he has no reservation about doing things like cooking, which are usually considered to be a woman’s domain. Men generally hate being seen working in kitchen before a female, but Kamat has no such inhibitions. In fact, he takes pride in his culinary skills and invites Jaya to share a lunch cooked by him. She is more uninhibited in his company than in that of her husband. She feels totally
at ease with him and opens up to him all her problems because he treats her as his equal not as a sex object as most men do. While the other males including Mohan talks down to her, he talks to her, being considerate and attentive. Jaya is pleasantly surprised and intrigued by the discovery, as she says:

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

Kamat is free from the usual male complexes that put men on guard in their relationship with men. He is a lonely intellectual with whom Jaya can exchange ideas. She shows him her stories and he analyses them objectively but sympathetically. His “full blooded smile”(153) encourages her to go on. She discusses writers and writing with him and confided in him things she had “never been able to speak of, not to Dada, not to Mohan.”(153) He showers his attention on Jaya and understands her problems but he refuses to let her wallow in her self-pity. He analyses her situations objectively and rationally without offering her the luxury of burrowing in false sympathy. He offers constructive criticism to Jaya with regard to her writing and makes her aware of the connection between her passivity as a writer and as a woman and tells her how she could make her writings more forceful and hitting. He understands her fear and even volunteers to receive her mail at his address, so that she could avoid a confrontation with her husband who disapproves of her writing. He gives her right advice. He makes her realise that she lacks the courage to accept her failure as a writer, lacks the courage to write about “women...(who) might resemble Mohan’s mother or aunt or ...(her) mother or aunt”(149) Similarly he makes her aware that it is her fault that she has compromised her individuality and given into Mohan’s demand that she should write about subjects that were more acceptable in their social circle. Adesh Pal makes an important observation in this respect: “Kamat makes her aware of her fear of failure. He awakens her anger which she has to bring out from the long suppression and face wonder to articulate her predicament as a writer.”(1998:123)

Jaya-Kamat relationship cannot be placed into a particular category. At one moment he chides her like a father and the next moment he
complements her like a lover. To Jaya his solicitousness seems warm and comforting like “Appa’s coat on a chilly night, like sitting before him on his bike.”(155) He makes some personal remarks which are not usually made by men to women who are not their wives or lovers. For example, he once tells her, “I prefer clean, spare lines in a human being. You for example—“…your name is like your face.”(152) Initially their relationship is Platonic but it develops into physical relationship in course of time. Her physical intimacy with Kamat is characterised by spontaneity and ease which she had never felt with Mohan. Kamat had once told her that “The relation of man to woman is the most natural of one person to another.” (158) and his “gift of casual, physical contact” had amazed her.(15) R. K. Sharma, in his article “That Long Silence: Long Night’s Journey into Day” makes a mention of their sexual relationship when he says:

Sex had always seemed such a momentous thing to her, but he made her feel it as just another part of the over-all scheme of life, and certainly nothing to feel guilty about. And while they did have sex occasionally, and while sometimes she did feel an “overwhelming urge to respond to him” bodily(157), it remained basically a minor aspect of their relationship; more important was the intuitive understanding and friendship between them. (1998:114)

However, there is nothing in the text of the novel to suggest that they had sexual relationship even once. In fact their physical relationship stops sort of sexual contact in a particularly emotional moment when she had just finished telling Kamat about the trauma she had suffered as a schoolgirl at her father’s death, and found herself in his arms; and as he attempted to console her, the comforting touch had suddenly changed, especially for Jaya, into a sexual awareness and she had responded to his touch and come closer to surrender her body to him. But confused, she had instantaneously rejected the body response, moved away, left him without a word and rushed back home. Later recounting the experience, she reflects: “There had been nothing but an overwhelming urge to respond to him with my body; the equally overwhelming certainty of my mind that I could not do so.”(157) In spite of the willingness of her body and the ample opportunity provided in the seclusion of his apartment, Jaya overcomes her yearning in the interest of safeguarding her marriage. Her affair with Kamat was pulling her away from Mohan as she says, “It had annihilated Mohan entirely, it had frightened me the way it had annihilated Mohan entirely.”(157) But she remains ‘Jaya’, the invincible.
Jaya, like other protagonists in Deshpande’s novels keeps her extra-marital affair a close guarded secret. Her social and conjugal responsibility prompts her to behave in an utterly callous way on the death of Kamat. When she goes to Kamat one afternoon and finds him lying dead on the floor of the room unattended and alone, she feels heartbroken. She was the eyewitness to the event. He had collapsed on the floor, “his eyes glassy and wide open, vomit dribbling out of the corner of his mouth” (151) but all she can do is to slink away scared to acknowledge her clandestine relationship before the world. She rushes back to her house, picks up her bag and leaves for home in Churchgate, pretending she knew nothing. Social taboos inhabit a married woman like her from openly having a male friend. She is unable to pay homage to her friend for the fear of getting involved in any scandal which might endanger her marriage. A terrible feeling of guilt envelops her, but she remains helplessly passive. The self-imposed calm after the event breaks down in the privacy of the bath: “...the tears had cascaded over. It had been like a sudden haemorrhage. The rackin g sobs tore me apart as I had tried to contain them.” (158) Then she washes herself, goes back to her room and makes love to Mohan. According to Sarla Palekar: “She perhaps does her role wife to perfection but fails as a human being.” (1991:166)

Kamat’s sudden death puts an end to Jaya’s extra-marital relationship with him. In reply to the question, “Whether there should have been a full blown affair between Jaya and Kamat?” Shashi Deshpande replied to Lakshmi Holmstrom on June 6, 2003:

Jaya couldn’t have done it; it wouldn’t be consistent with her character. But yes. I did bring in Kamat to serve a purpose; to show Jaya the kind of relationship that she could achieve with a man. She gets a kind of companionship with Kamat that she never gets from her husband. Yet that is marriage and this isn’t.

But perhaps I do idealise that kind of relationship, the kind of companionship that is possible, although it is very rare. Often it is missing, because of the predominance of the sexual motif in India, within marriage. Because of being forced to stay together. (1998:247)

Kamat appears off and on in the reminiscences of Jaya as a foil to her husband, Mohan. She says: “Kamat comes again and again ruthlessly
elbowing himself into the story of ours.”(14) He is a means of escape for her from a suffocating marital life. When Mohan runs away from home, Jaya discloses to Mukta her secret extra-marital affair with Kamat. Mukta holds her extra-marital relationship with Kamat responsible for it. But Guru Bachan Behera, an eminent critic of Deshpande’s novels, has a different take in this matter when he says:

Mukta’s interpretation of Jaya’s failure as a wife because of her relationship with Kamat is an approach which is a commonsense reading of what is apparent and visible. But Jaya’s entire narrative presents a much wider perspective, a more sensitive approach that brings in the entire issue of gender discrimination and the tradition of man-woman relationship. (2005:141)

But the episode has a positive side as well. It is when Mukta directly confronts Jaya with her abandonment of dying Kamat that Jaya is made to face her own true self—that a woman running away from her own self in pursuit of happiness. In her terrible loneliness she realises and understands what Kamat said to her: ‘pursuit of happiness is meaningless’; ‘loneliness is the essential condition of human existence’ and ‘everyone has to fight one’s own battle’.

Like the other extra-marital relationships in Shashi Deshpande’s novels, Jaya’s relationship with Kamat has a liberating effect on her and works out her emancipation. Kamat points out that it was her fear of failing as a writer that kept her away from her profession, and not her responsibility towards her family. He advises her to be herself and work seriously for her own fulfilment, instead of running away from it. Her awareness of her own incompleteness makes her more sensitive to the emotional need of her husband. She realises that her failure to establish normal reciprocal relationship with her husband had enhanced her self-alienation. Her relationship with her husband must take from within the totality of her life as a woman, only then it can lead to harmonious relationship. Rashmi Gaur observes in this context:

Jaya’s relationship with Kamat is significant to the development of the novel, not only because it respects her need of emotional sharing, but also because it enables her to analyse her individuality once again and have faith in her capability to transcend the social barriers in the pursuit of fulfilment. (2001:95)
The Binding Vine presents an altogether different kind of extra-marital relationship. Urmila, the protagonist, has more of a friendship in her mind and heart in her relationship with Dr. Bhaskar Jain, her family doctor, and her need of having a male friend is prompted by the long absences of her husband, Kishore who works in the Merchant Navy. Urmila works as a lecturer in a Bombay College and lives with her mother and six year old son, Kartik. Bhaskar is unmarried and lives with his mother. As both are intellectually equals, Bhaskar does not contribute to her growth and development as the male friends of other protagonists do. However, like Jaya’s Kamat and Indu’s Naren, Bhaskar is Urmila’s good and dependable friend with whom she can freely share her innermost thoughts and emotions because she knows she would be misunderstood or evaluated by the usual patriarchal norms of society. Bhaskar enables her to talk about the loss of Anu, about Ranidurg, about Baiaji.

Bhaskar has a great admiration for Urmila who is aggressive, economically independent and able to take her own decisions. Unlike Jaya, who runs away from the dead Kamat to save her reputation, Urmila insists on confirming her friendship with Bhaskar openly. Taking a lift in his car occasionally, accepting a dinner date or going with him to his house to meet his mother, are simple expressions of a friendship between two professionals who enjoy each other’s company. But Urmi’s friendship with Bhaskar is commented upon both by her mother, Inni, and her sister-in-law, Vanna and both advise her to consider the social implications, leading Urmi to think about reworking her space within her marriage. Urmi reflects:

Her(Inni’s) uneasiness is palpable. She doesn’t like my going out with Bhaskar; nor does Vanna. “Do you expect me to live like cloistered nun just because I’m married?” I asked Vanna irritably. “It’s not that but...” she did not go on.”(115)But she assures them: “...I’m safe.(165)

But Urmi knew she was vulnerable. In the long absence of her husband, Urmila, like a normal human being, often feels erotic feelings within her, whenever she comes across any object of love. Sometimes she finds it hard to control and wishes: “I could put my desires into a deep freeze and take them out, intact and whole, when he returned.”(164-165)One day when she had seen Vanna showing amorous gestures to her husband, Harish, and him instantly responding to her, a pain of deprivation slashed through her. After the death of her daughter, Anu, she had lost her sex-drive and her body instinctively
recoiled from Kishore’s approach for sex. But now that phase was over. She recollects what happened the following morning:

I tried after that to control the erotic fantasies that invaded me in the early hours of the morning, fantasies in which I wove, in great detail, different patterns of love-making; but I soon realised the only way I could come to terms with my sexuality was to recognize it. Now it is no longer necessary. (165)

And when she develops the friendship with Dr. Bhaskar, her sexual urge is restored. She says: “And yet for a moment I was tempted, I was perilously close to responding to Bhaskar, to giving him what he wants.”(165) She compares this act to that in the hostel when at the age of 18, she had got out on the ledge outside her window to pick up a book she had dropped and expresses her inability to try such things at the age of 30. Yet she confesses in the following words:

And yet it seems to me that this, responding to Bhaskar, is the only way of releasing the mushy adolescent with her dreams of ‘living happily ever after with Kishore’, who’s trapped inside me, of finding out what’s left when she’s gone. (165-166)

Urmia’s extra-marital relationship with Bhaskar has been a long conflict between her mind and heart. The conflict becomes apparent and their relationship becomes problematic when Bhaskar evinces sexual interest in her. He loves her but cannot accept it to her. When Urmia asks him if he had any problem in getting married with a girl of his mother’s choice, he gives her a clear hint saying: “None, except that I’ve gone and fallen in love with a dark, sharp-tongued, married woman.”(161) He grows serious in his intention towards Urmila considering that a woman whose husband is away for several months and who never speaks of him could not be very happy in her marriage. His patriarchal expectations prompts him to express sexual interest in her by inquiring about her husband and when she avoids a reply, he leans forward and takes off her glasses saying: “I want to see your eyes. I want to see you without any shield.”(161) But Urmila ignores his advances as she picks up her glasses and puts them on. But Bhaskar sticks to his point and asks her to tell him about her marriage, and even when she keeps silence, he goes on to ask if she loved her husband. Urmila does not respond to his intensely personal questions but she feels angry and shocked at this development. She feels misunderstood and
cheated. But she is not angry with herself because she ought to have expected it. She did not really know what his role was but certainly that was not of a lover. She repents why she could not tell Bhaskar that Kishore was her first and last love whom she is in love with since the age of fifteen. Although she chooses to remain faithful to Kishore, there is Indu like momentary rebellion in her, as she wonders if she ought to have exercised her disappointment in Kishore by giving in to Bhaskar. She realises now that it is so much easier, so much simpler, to just think of virtue and chastity than being a good wife.

Urmi-Bhaskar relationship brings out the bitter truth that Urmi is not satisfied with her married life, the life with a man who fits into her life “a few months in a year and flits out again, leaving nothing of himself behind.” In fact her extra-marital relationship works largely to foreground her suppressed dissatisfaction with Kishore. It also enables her to recognise how deeply she loves her husband. According to Nisha Trivedi:

...a marriage that suppresses Urmi’s human demands, a marriage that denies her fullness of experience, forces her to take refuge in Dr. Bhaskar Jain’s friendship. She tries to find herself in relation with Bhaskar because he is a patient hearer to her talks, gives her right response, cares for her emotions and makes her feel complete. (1998:146)

As a whole this relationship shows the meaninglessness of marriage as a social institution. The marriage for women in the male dominated society is both physically and spiritually dissatisfying. It creates confusion in her whether to take up the path of submission or rejection because both end in discontentment. Marriage has degenerated to the level that there is no involvement except in sex and everything goes on mechanically to carry on life. As a result marriage has become meaningless and sex alone seems to sustain man-woman relationship. According to R. Mala: “It is this working of an individual dialectic of the sexual dilemma in her novels that makes Shashi Deshpande a modernist feminist.”(1991:57)

Small Remedies is Shashi Deshpande’s only novel written so far, which deals with the pre-marital relationship of the protagonist and shows its negative consequences on her conjugal life after her marriage. Madhu had pre-marital sex with her father’s young artist friend, Dalvi, when she was barely fifteen. It was performed in innocence and ignorance when Madhu believed her
father to be dead and Dalvi tried to comfort her and assure her. It was not lust; rather it was either an understanding that was extended or tender affection that was offered to pull her out of despair. Madhu had this secret locked up in the innermost recess of her mind but one night, waking up after a nightmare, she had revealed it to her husband Som. Som took this relationship as an act of betrayal and wanted her to condemn the act as rape and profess innocence. But Madhu who considered it neither rape nor love refused to oblige. The episode brought discord in their otherwise happy conjugal life and also affected their filial relationship with their son, Adit, leading to his death. Som himself had a full-fledged pre-marital relationship with a woman, but his patriarchal mindset cannot accept that his wife had been a willing partner in her pre-marital sexual act. The fact that Madh’s father had a mistress might have influenced his attitude. All these led to the breakdown of communication between Madhu and Som and their subsequent withdrawal from relationship for a considerable time. This also leads to Madhu’s extra-marital relationship with Chandru, Som’s friend. But this relationship is frowned upon by her acquaintances. She observes how Hari and Lata looked at her when she returned after inverently spending a night in a hotel room with Chandu. She thinks:

it does not matter that Chandu is Som’s friend and Chandu and I had been friends as well for nearly 25 years. I remember the waiter’s look last night, when he brought us our dinner, the gleam in his eyes when they rested on me.

Men and women can never be friends. Men can be brothers, fathers, lovers, husbands, but never friends—is that how it is?(254)

Leela’s pre-marital relationship before marrying Vasant stands in contrast to Madhu’s as Vasant, unlike Som, is able to resist cultural influences and accept unconditionally the pre-marital relationship of his wife.

Savitribai Indorker’s extra-marital relationship with Ghulam Saab also has a negative impact on their filial relationship. Savitribai, the wife of an affluent Brahmin, had left her husband and forged a live-in-relationship with her Muslim lover, Ghulam Saab to pursue her passion for song and music. She had abandoned her husband’s surname ‘Joshi’ and used her maiden surname ‘Indorker’. Her husband never comes in the picture and Savitribai has no regret for what she had done. Her relationship with Ghulam Saab is a power relationship. She uses Ghulam Saab for her own ends and, having used him,
discards him. But this relationship affects their relationship with Meenakshi alias Munni, their daughter born of this association, who always felt deprived of the community life because of the extra-marital relationship of her parents. She resented her father and the loss of her family name. When Ghulam Saab, the Station Director of Neemgaon, frequented her house and got many contacts with the radio for her mother, the children of the neighbourhood teased Munni calling him ‘mama’, a kind of euphemism for a mother’s lover. She hankered for her mother’s previous name ‘Savitri Joshi’. She took the name of ‘Shailaja Joshi’ leaving aside her parental name ‘Munni’ and lives like a Hindu woman to regain her identity. But Savitribai, being ruthless in the pursuit of her talent, never cared for her rebel daughter. Munni remains unreconciled to her parents. She discards her just like her lover Ghulam Saab. She had the only solace that her family had a history of extra-marital relationship-her father-in-law had a mistress, a singer famous for ‘thumari’ singing.

Moving On again brings a detailed depiction of extra-marital relationship. Manjari, the protagonist, is a widow and she had a conviction after the death of her husband, Shyam, that she would not let anyone into her life ever again. She had her grown up children—a son and a daughter—from her dead husband. She successfully wards off her widower cousin, Raja’s persistent efforts to persuade her to marry him. But lonely and prematurely widowed Manjari cannot resist the hunger of sex and the relentless demands of her body to be fed and forges extra-marital relationship with her tenant, Raman, a much younger man. Once when Raman, grieving over the death of his friend, Divakar, holds her hand and takes it to his face, she resents it and he has to apologise to her. But she realises that her body had given a startled leap in response to his touch and she had been invaded by a stranger, a stranger she had kept out successfully for so long. So next time when she returns home drenched on a rainy day and sees Raman, she cannot resist her desire of having sex with him. She calls him and he readily obliges her. But she feels she has become dirty after the act and wants to punish her body. She does not go for bath but she feels a pain. But the pain helps her and relieves her of mental agonies. The restlessness of her body was gone and something inside her had been stilled. But she is still obsessed with the feeling of her body being dirty. She reflects: “I wish I could put my body in the machine and let it go through the cycles: wash, rinse, dry, wash, rinse, dry...”(232) And yet she knows she feels full of energy, her body feels lighter. She is aware of it from her fingertips to her toe nails. Thus the first experience of extra-marital sex leaves her physically relieved but
mentally restless. But again when she hears Raman’s footsteps of climbing the stairs, she wants him to come in; as if she has been waiting for him to come. But she calls up her son, Anand, to divert her attention and overcome her physical desire.

But Manjari could not resist for long. When Raman approaches her at 11:00 P.M to handover a parcel he had received for her from the courier, she shows her displeasure and dismisses him after receiving the parcel. But the next moment her physical needs overtakes her. She reflects: “I sit on the edge of the bed, my knees close together to stop my legs from trembling. What is happening?”(257) Finally and inevitably she goes to his room stealthily and offers him her starved body on her own terms, at her whim and desire, not his: “Only the body, his body, only my body, and my starved body. No thoughts, no feelings, only sensations.”(257)When she comes back and goes to her own bed bathed and changed, she tells herself “Never again. It’s over.”(257) But it was not the end but just the beginning. She confesses: “It’s something neither of us has any control over. Our bodies have taken charge, we’re caught in the grip of something that won’t let go.”(257) She can only lay down the ground rules i.e. she will go to him not he to her; he can never approach her or ask her any question; she will go to him at her own will; he would not say anything or do any other thing-no words, no touching, no foreplay, etc.

Like other Deshpande’s protagonists in extra-marital relationship, Manjari too wants to keep this relationship a secret and she tries her best for it. She never tells him when she is coming but he is always waiting. He has learnt to close the door without any show. But her body reveals all and she does not want to regret it. She says, “But if the face knows how to deceive, the body can’t lie,...The body is honest, yes, it told me its need and I’ve gone along with it. I’ve given it what it wants. I’ve done no wrong.”(259)To her it is quite natural “Like drinking water when you’re thirsty, like a diabetic’s craving for food.”(259) and there is nothing wrong with it. But at the same time she finds it hard to resist cultural influences and resulting guilt consciousness as she asks,

And yet , why do I bathe three times a day, why do I scrub myself when bathing as if I want to flay myself, why do I punish my body so angrily?...why am I ashamed of what I’m doing? Hiding all traces of
it as if I’ve committed a crime, as if I’ve murdered someone. Like a criminal washing away the bloodstains. (259-260)

She wished it could have been an arrangement as she had read in a novel about a woman academic having an affair with her young student. They were together in the night, he goes away in the morning and they do not speak of the night when they met during the day. Manjari assures herself that she is not committed to this relationship. It is just a convenience. She is in command of this relationship. She would let it run its course. She owes him nothing and she can put a stop to this relationship whenever she chooses. But it was just her presumption. When, after the discovery of his criminal association which she found hard to believe, she puts an end to this relationship and asks him to leave her house for good, he resists and prays to her to let him stay, not for anything but only to see her, only to look at her. And she has to threaten police action to evict him. Now she is only afraid of the revelation of her affair with Raman. She worries: “What if he blackmails me?…Sachi and Anand—what if they come to know? Will they be disgusted and turn their backs on me? Will I lose them?” (278)

But her secret was also out along with Raman. The discovery of her affair with Raman and her subsequent confession of having sexual relation with him devastated Raja. He stops looking at her and talking to her. Manjari reflects: “But he still finds it hard to look at me, he finds it difficult to speak to me. It is as if he can see the imprint of Raman’s body on mine, as if he sees us together each time he looks at me.” (299) Raja too is worried for her children. He bursts out, “How could you, Jiji, how could you...” (281) He also accuses her of being insensitive, unfeeling and uncaring to her parents, and living alone and behaving herself like a tragic heroine. But Manjari firmly stands her ground and telling him not to bring her children into it, she retorts underlying her own rightful needs: “I was twenty-one when Shyam died…did he expect me to live the life of a chaste widow the rest of my life? “(283) She tells him how difficult it was for her to live alone—her friend’s husband had tried to induce her to become his mistress; her employer, a man of her father’s age, had slobbered all over her and then fired her, calling her a bad character; a man had tried to rape her in her own house, with her children sleeping inside. But she had fought back. She explains to him that Raman was better than those preying fellows and she was herself responsible for her affair with him. And she asserts: “And for me it was just his body, nothing but his body.” (284) However, she
knows that her relationship with Raja is no longer the same afterwards. She reflects: “Raman has come between us. No, not Raman, it’s my own body which has played traitor. Raja will never forgive me, never.”(305) and later she confirms it again, “It still lies between me and Raja, a ghost that will continue to haunt us all our lives.”(312) But she is not able to get rid of her pricking conscience and the fear of discovery. When Sachi comes to stay with her for some days and wants to look at the rooms, she becomes apprehensive of the discovery of her affairs with Raman: “What if there’s something that will give me away, what if I have left evidence of what happened there? But I can’t tell her this; I can’t evade her either.”(309) But it never happened.

Manjari’s extra-marital relationship, like those depicted in the preceding novels of Shashi Deshpande, has its own riders but it presents the modern Indian woman in a new light. According to Chanchala K. Naik, Manjari, as the survivor, redefines freedom and relationship and comes out as “a model practitioner of relational autonomy, situated in family and bound by relationships, yet subservient to none.”(2005:227) She is a new woman who lives on her own terms and let others live on their own. To quote C. K. Naik:

...Manjari is also a woman who cannot betray her desire and the demands of her own body. Her sexual relation with her tenant cannot be considered otherwise, for she is in full command of the situation as she wants to move out of the eternal “conflict between man and woman, the man asserting his rights, claiming his rights to her body, the female denying him.”(276)

and claiming her body for herself. In this realization, Manjari underlines Deshpande’s view that the woman should be herself, “not owned or claimed by men. (2005:226)

*In the Country of Deceit* differs from other novels of Shashi Deshpande in depiction of Extra-marital relationship in the sense that the protagonist Devayani alias Devi, a woman nearing thirty who forges relationship with Ashok Chinappa, is a spinster. They first meet in a party hosted by K. N and Rani at their residence. Devi had seen Ashok in a football match a few days ago and found him attractive. Ashok had fallen in love with her at first sight and her face had been haunting him. After a few successive meetings he rings her up at night only to hear her voice. He goes for a walk in the morning past her house hoping for a glimpse of her. Finally he leaves
everything to her, to make the next move if she likes. Rani gets disturbed and lay awake thinking about him and the possibility of their sexual relationship as she reflects: “I lay in bed wide awake, conscious of my body in its nightdress, thinking, that’s the point of marriage. Sex without guilt. Sex without any strings attached. Sex without fear.”(77) She knows that Ashok has wife and children and wants to be on guard against this intimacy. But she is frightened, not of Ashok, but of herself, of her desire to run, not away from him, but into his arms, despite his telling her clearly, “I can promise you nothing, nothing.”(91) She wants to write him a letter reminding him of his filial and conjugal obligation and making it clear that her being single does not mean that ‘she is available’. But finally she decides against being personal to him by saying such things. Her confusion is clearly stated in these lines: “No I don’t have to do anything, I don’t have to give him any answer; in fact he has not asked me for one. Yet I found myself looking at the morning, I rushed to pick up the phone the moment it rang.”(95) But her confusion is over when she sees Ashok’ wife and daughter and the happy filial and conjugal bonding between them. She decides to walk in the other direction saying, “Thank God, it’s over.”(96)

However, all is not over. Her struggle to come to terms with her desire for Ashok is not over. Sindhu’s letter telling the story of a man wishing to return to his wife after 15 years of abandoning her and his children to live with a much younger woman, and her watching of a movie dealing with a classic story of adultery starring Rani as the betrayed wife uttering a primitive cry for help-’Mai, Mai...’ haunt her and warn of her own predicament as a lover of Ashok. Her memory of her first love who flirted with her and gave her an impression that he was seriously interested in her and later, went away and returned engaged to a classmate of his, strongly advises her to stay away from Ashok. But all these can only check her mind, not her body. Her desire for a man, the longing to be held by a man, to feel his body against her, remind her of Ashok and his words: “I would wait all day for a small glimpse of you.” and “I can promise you nothing.” And when Ashok invites her to join him, she drifts towards him. They make love twice at a secluded place with ease and intimacy. But then she is overcome by the feeling of guilt and fear. She reflects: “…What have I done, my God, what have I done? I was full of fear, I felt I was looking into deep, dark abyss, that I have lost my way and would never be able to find it again.”(136) But when she wakes up after a good sleep, it seemed right and natural to find him beside her. But at night the guilt consciousness again takes roots and she starts thinking about why she had done it. She knew that she had
done it because she wanted that relationship but it was difficult to define the relationship forged between them. Was she the “Mistress? The Other Woman? The Kept Woman? She could not be his wife who has a right to talk to him whenever she wants; who is his sexual partner. But this relationship has a healing effect on her—it relieved her of her grief for her mother’s death and brought back “in the world seeing, feeling, loving...”(143)

Devi, however, does not feel at ease because of the recurring feelings of guilt and fear. Those feelings overcome her again when she talks to her elder sister, Savi, and her aunt, Sindhu about Vivek, but not about Ashok. She reflects: “I had entered the country of deceit. I could no longer be open and honest with people I loved; I had to deceive them.”(147) She wonders if she looked like an adulteress. She remembers an adult couple in Rajnur, who had been caught in the act by the woman’s husband in their own home. Snatching at their clothes, and trying to cover their nakedness, they were left with nothing, not even a shred of dignity. She realises that adultery remains adultery whoever the couple may be; that it is always riddled with guilt and fear, constantly swinging between euphoria and despair; and that the main preoccupation of all adulterous couple is how to meet and where? She knows that their secret meeting was not easy: “A man in his position, living in a small town, was like a fish in a glass bowl. And I, a single woman living alone, was just as visible.”(149) The cold hard truth dawns upon her: “we could never be able to live together...He had his life, his work, his wife, his daughter. All that I had was guilt.”(152)

Like other protagonists of Deshpande’s novels Devi too is worried for keeping her affairs with Ashok a secret. She suspects that Rani who is close to Ashok, knew about it. She cannot escape seeing herself through the eyes of Kusuma and K. N’s mother who had deep hatred for the ‘Other Woman’ that she has now become. She thinks of the reaction of Ashok’s wife and children—will their life change forever because of what she and Ashok are doing? She also imagines Ashok abandoning his wife and children. She thinks she cannot bear all these and decides to end the relationship. But nothing happens and her feelings of guilt and fear are buried under the demand of her body. Rather she buys a cell phone for convenience, the commodity she had been avoiding even after much pressure from Savi and Sindhu. She goes on with her secret meetings and love-making but remains passive in this affair as she says, “I had made it a rule never to ask him when he would come next, or
why he stayed away when he did.”(173) And she notices the change in herself: “I had become cunning, concealing my devouring curiosity from him, conjuring up facts from the nuggets of information I could get.”(174) But she understands the limitations of this relationship-Ashok can never come to her house in the day time; she cannot have children; and she cannot be free from guilt and fear. She is overcome by her primitive fear of a vengeful God when she hears about Arjun’s pneumonia and prays to God: “Let Arjun be all right, I’ll give up Ashok...”(177)

Devi’s clandestine relationship with Ashok is out in the open when Savi heard her talking to Ashok on her cell phone and she told her the truth. Savi was shocked and furious. She calls her affair reckless, foolish and ruinous on her part as it was only for sex. She warns her: “He’ll sleep with you and dump you.”(184) But Devi does not heed to the warning and goes on to spend two days with Ashok at Bombay. In his pleasant company and passionate embraces, she feels the liberating effect of such relationship, opposed to the captivating effect of marital relationship. But their passing time and doing things leisurely also bring to her mind the joys of married life as opposed to clandestine hurried meetings of extra-marital affair with small moments of romance and excitement. She expresses her preference for married life when she says: “I don’t want clandestine meetings, drama, constant fears.”(191-192) But that was possible only if Ashok divorced his wife and married her, and that meant destroying a marriage and a family. Shree, Devi’s brother-in-law, who is opposed to this relationship, rules out even this possibility-she cannot expect a man disloyal to his wife and his marriage to be loyal to her. Devi’s assertion that Ashok is the most loving person to her and he has never cheated her does not matter because, as Shree points out, it is Devi who is cheating herself. But she dismisses his suggestion saying, “...there are no boundaries for love.”(199) and feels satisfied with what she has at hand. But she has a second thought when Sindhu’s visit to Rajnur and staying with her does not bring happiness to her as it is going to interfere in her secret meetings with Ashok. She admits; “Savi and Shree are right. Something is wrong with our relationship.”(202) She refuses to accept a gold chain from Ashok as her birthday present because she felt as if she were being paid. He lost his temper and walked out. She felt hurt but waited for him eagerly every day. She goes to meet him in Pune. Savi finds it ‘crazy’ and ‘terrible’ and she accuses Ashok of hypnotising and corrupting her. Savi faces Ashok when she goes to see off Devi at the railway station and asks him to stop exploiting Devi and end this affair. But Devi stands by him.
reiterating her love for him and expressing her desire to be born again for Ashok, to live and die with Ashok: “But only with Ashok, only for Ashok.”(221)

Their affair, however, comes to a sudden end when Ashok leaves Rajnur for a senior post in Bagalore. She shows no enthusiasm when he offers to meet her during her visit to Bangalore for her friend’s wedding. And when she finally meets him she refuses intimacy and love-making saying, “I feel...cheap.”(232) But Ashok would not take it. He expresses his determination to divorce his wife and abandon his daughter to be with her and clarifies that he wants her not for sex, rather loving her body is a part of his love for her. It was the repetition of her own view that sex was showing love through body but now she is not convinced. Ever since the beginning of this affair, she had been thinking of it being wrong; she had been haunted by the unhappiness of others; and she had never looked beyond the few moments, the few hours they had together. She is now tired of lying and deceiving the people she loves and she cannot go on like this. Her final verdict is: “The word ‘love’ can’t change anything. It is not a detergent that can wash out the stains. The wrong remains a wrong.”(236) But she ends this relationship without any blame or regret, but with a sense of fulfilment as she writes to Ashok:

I would never have known the joy, the experience of loving, of being loved, of becoming one with another human being. I wonder whether this union is what we long for all our lives. And you and I were lucky to have it. But we can’t go on, that is the truth, however precious this is to us, we can’t go on.

It has to end...To be without you is like stopping breathing, it’s like death.

But I will survive. So will you. If there is no future for us together, each one of us has a future of our own. We will...(238)

But the car accident in which Devi and Rani were injured brings Ashok back to her life. She remembers him and wants to meet him to pour her grief out of her. He comes and she asks him to lie down with her and make love to her. After that he leaves her in silence. He comes again before leaving Rajnur to meet her. He apologises to her whispering: “I’m sorry, Divya, I’m sorry. I can’t lose my daughter, I can’t let her lose me.”(254) But for Devi his departure is unbearable. She grieves: “It was like death to think of my life
without Ashok, without hope of Ashok.’”(255) He has his work, his family to survive. She wants to survive without the memory of past. But some pictures will remain intact in her memory forever: “Pictures of Ashok’s face, looking at me, loving, wanting, enjoying me, Ashok kneeling before me, his face humble, supplicating, Ashok on the beach, holding out his arms to me, Ashok folding me in his arms.”(258) And her life is going to be from now: “...a constant struggle between trying to forget and wanting to remember?”(259)

Besides Devi-Ashok relationship, there are other extra-marital relationships, involving minor characters in the novels. Devi’s grandfather had an extra-marital affair with a woman and he visited her every day, much to the displeasure of his wife. Kusuma’s husband has a mistress whom Kusuma calls a ‘whore’ and she had walked on him in protest against his extra-marital relationship. K. N’s father had an extra-marital affair with his colleague who was younger in age and he had run away with her leaving his wife and children behind. His wife took vengeance by burning all his books and even after decades and his death, her wounds of betrayal were still, raw, still sore, still bleeding and her anger was as fierce as if it had happened yesterday.

Priya Ranjan alias Rani, a film actress and wife of Prem, had extra-marital affair with Mahesh Tiwari, to boost her career declining after the birth of her daughter, Roshni. They had come closer to each other during the making of a movie produced by Mahesh with Rani as the leading lady in that classic story of adultery. Theirs was a torrid affair marred by the drinking, the arguments, the abuses and the violence which often followed. Rani’s warning to Mahesh that she would go to work for another producer who was offering her a good film. For Mahesh, his relationship with Rani was emotional but for Rani, it was professional. Rani had left Mahesh after the bouts of violence and returned to her husband and daughter, but had gone back after patch up and assurance. But when abuse and violence began all over again, she went to her brother leaving Mahesh for good. Mahesh asked her return and threatened to kill himself if she did not. And he really killed himself as she did not return to him. Later, Rani regretted her decision and vowed to live his dreams. Even after marrying K. N, she is working on the dream project of Mahesh. But Rani’s extra-marital relationship has adversely affected her filial relationship with her daughter, Roshni.

A study of the extra-marital relationship in the aforementioned novels of Shashi Deshpande stresses the fact that man and
woman, particularly with incompatible partners naturally seek an ideal companion outside their marriage. In almost all these novels, Deshpande has presented an understanding male friend with whom the protagonist can share everything. He represents the ideal companion that every woman seeks in a husband and she is naturally drawn towards him for some physical, mental and emotional fulfilment which she fails to have from her own husband.

The male companions like Boozie, Kamat, Naren encourage, support and inspire the protagonists to grow and evolve, and to express and assert themselves, and redefine their lives within marriage. But some of them like Bhaskar Jain do not contribute to the growth and development of the protagonist, Urmi; he is only a friend whom she can trust. Some like Boozie has no sexual interest but they do help in their development. Raman and Ashok Chinappa do not steadily move beyond physical relationship. Only Naren in Roots and Shadows makes sexual relations with the protagonist and also helps in her evolution. Most of these male partners stand on the fringes of the society, challenging and undermining its patriarchal values. Most of the women in extra-marital relationship are living a kind of deprived, monotonous and adventureless life after their marriage.

All these extra-marital relationships exist under the cover as vulnerable man’s or woman’s desire of having an extra-marital affair is matched by a fear of exposure. None of these relationships lasts long. They end with sudden death of the male partner( as Naren in Roots and Shadows and Bhaskar Jain in The Binding Vine die a sudden death) or his departure from the place of the protagonist( as Raman in Moving On and Ashok Chinappa in In the Country of Deciet have to go away suddenly) and the protagonists resume their life without them. It seems to suggest that the novelist does not approve of the ‘Other Man’ in the marital life of a woman. Jasbir Jain makes an important observation in this context;

The ‘Other Man’ whoever he is –Naren in Roots, Kamat in silence, Padmakar in Terrors, Bhaskar in Vine-is either dead or discarded. Male support is rejected. In Time Sumi is reluctant to go on staying in Vishwas and equally reluctant to accept Ramesh’s help and in Remedies Madhu finds herself looked upon with suspicion when she spends the night in a hotel. (2003:265)
As it is obvious now that extra-marital affairs do not bring any valid solution to the problems, the question that naturally arises is what purpose is ultimately served by these extra-marital relationships except temporary respite at a high risk. Nisha Trivedi has tried to see some significance in her following observation:

Extra-marital love, though not a true solution to the problem of such couples, finds a prominent place in Deshpande’s novels. It shows the craving of the New Woman to assert herself whether it is inside marriage or outside it.(1998:146)

Besides, extra-marital relationships highlight the fact that marriage does not fulfil all of an individual needs. Moreover, it often helps overcome the moments of crisis and survive traumas of life. Jasbir Jain refers to two novels of Shashi Despande when she expresses her view in this context: “Sex outside marriage or before marriage is associated with a moment of crisis at least in two novels. In Roots and Shadows Indu and Naren have a relationship, willingly and with full knowledge of each other’s position. It fulfils a need in each one of the two. And Indu does not feel guilty about it. The sexual act is an act of communication. In Small Remedies, it happens when Madhu believes her father to be dead and her father’s young friend tries to comfort her and assure her. It is at this particular time that the love and warmth of a human being is able to provide sustenance.”(2003:120)

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