Chapter V

5. Summation

In all her novels, Deshpande presents not a woman who revolts openly in the beginning and later on reconciles to the situation, but a kind of woman who wants to revolt but ultimately does not. “Her inner turmoils are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not to be frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her actions by the society. She is unable to unfold the truth. Her image becomes like that of a bird who has got wings and knows that it can fly, but, somehow, does not” (Sandhu 43). Sarita and Jaya are aware of their abilities and they show that they can expose them openly but they do not. They always remain silent and their role is one that of a traditional woman. It is as Maria Mies in Indian Women and Patriarchy observes:

the career woman has not only to face the opposition of her surroundings and to struggle against many objective obstacles, but she is often divided in herself because she often subscribes to the Indian idea of womanhood. Her problems arise, firstly, from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a new social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity. (130)

Deshpande has a specific drive to unveil the gender imbalances in the society. She ventures to explore the life of an Indian woman with socio-cultural and psycho-ethical paradigms of human existence. As a writer, she reveals her consciousness of her own position as a woman and accepts that woman is always marginalized in a male dominated
society. Disgusted with social contempt and neglect, she tries to reconstruct the identity of her protagonists, particularly, their intellectual identity in the form of their creative talents. She expresses the silent suffering of her protagonists. Her female protagonists often make struggle to search out new identities but they simultaneously make efforts to conform themselves with the conventions of family and society. Jaya in *Silence* realises that her unconditional surrender to Mohan is not a desirable option to her. In *Moving on*, Manjari selects her own code of life and makes confession of her choices but finds it difficult to compromise with the resultant agony. In *Shadows*, Indu leaves her home and arranges a marriage of her own choice but finally returns to the house of her grandparents. In *Vine*, Urmi discovers the silence of her mother-in-law, Mira, through her lost poems. In *Deceit*, Devyani finds that she cannot continue her relationship with Ashok. However, she suffers mutely. The protagonists of Deshpande suffer because of their failure to reconcile with the social roles and self-desires. In fact, Deshpande tries to advocate the case of female sexuality. Most of her characters make confession of their desires in which there is an urge to synthesise the instinctive sexual desires with the emotional fulfillment. The lack of harmony in body and mind generates a futility and depressive pattern of behaviour in which woman always finds herself weak and betrayed. Saru of *Terrors* becomes an unfortunate victim of the sexual sadism of her husband. The identical insecurity can also be seen in Urmi and Manjari. K.M. Pandey in “Tearing the Veil: *The Dark Holds No Terrors*” comments:

> Though Saru’s suffering is like that of other women in the novel, yet she is different from them in that she becomes her own protégé. Unlike other women who bear suffering like the torture of Sisyphus, she gathers
strength not to run away from the problems, not to commit suicide, not to be behind the symbolic *pardah* or veil-in a word, not to accept defeat. Rather she accepts the challenge so as to prove herself a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, and a good human being – not from the phallocentric point of view but from her own ‘female’ view point. (56)

Deshpande's novels present a social world of many complex relationships. In her novels many men and women live together and they journey together across life in their different age groups, classes, and gendered roles. The women are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationship within their given social world. Deshpande has presented in her novels modern Indian women's search for definition about the self and society, and the relationships that are central to women. Her own struggle as a writer to focus on women's issues, problems and experience is equally symptomatic of the resistance to feminist expression.

Deshpande is mainly interested in presenting women's point of view in the clash of tradition and modernity. Her young heroines rebel against the traditional way of life, its rituals, ceremonies, and patriarchal values. Her protagonists like Madhu, Saru, Indu and others perceive the structuring of men and women in gendered roles, restricting their human potentiality and fullness. They rebel, reject and seek freedom from the traditional norms and ways of life by escaping into marriage. Her novels present women pause at some point in their adult roles as wife and mother, and take a long careful looking back into the formative periods of childhood and adolescence. Interconnecting these two phases, youth and adulthood, provides a new insight into their lives as women within a
particular society. These women also reconstruct their relation with past and tradition while reforming their relationship with their lives within the parental home. The new relationship of these women seems to be based on a mature understanding of women's roles and responsibilities within their society. It is true that Deshpande's women protagonists reconsider the value of the traditional world. Their struggle for fuller self-development and clear articulation is balanced constantly by the awareness of a world that has still something to offer in the modern world. Her portrayal of women's relations is a process of balancing the modern and the traditional and the individuals with their selflessness. The women’s self-respect grows as she manages her duties as a wife and mother. Women’s lives within the society takes them towards a new understanding of the significance of family. Women’s roles do not remain closed and inhibiting and through them they gain fulfillment and self-awareness. Creative self-awareness can be realised from their social relations. Commenting on the women and their roles / images M. Mani Meitei in “Subverting Phallocentrism : Feminine Discourse in Roots and Shadows” classified the women characters of Shadows as follows:

Indian women can be divided into three groups: (1) those who follow tradition as a virtue; (2) those who realise what is good but still are unable to come out: and (3) those who are independent. To the first group belong the educated. They bank upon age-old beliefs and superstitions, and it would be hard to change them. They are foolishly sentimental and egoistic. Narmada (Atya), Kaki, Sumitra, Kamala, Sunanda and Kaku are remarkably traditional in their manner and outlook. Akka, too, belongs to this class but without the selfishness, narrowness, powerlessness, languor
and mawkishness of any one of them. Although she has some charming qualities, yet she is not an original creation of Shashi Deshpande. Like Miss Havisham of *Great Expectations*, she is a surrogate mother. In the second group none shines as brightly as Mini. Educated and, to some extent, aware of the peculiar situation in which she is placed, she is deeply bound by tangles of her society out of which she cannot come out with her independent voice as Indu can. She lacks will power, and too much consciousness makes her sacrifice her self and individuality. At the other extreme stands the indomitable feminist Indu, the central character in *Roots and Shadows*. She is independent, uninhibited and the influence of the family cannot imprison her. No other character in the novel can come anywhere near her. The Akka family's class and caste consciousness, superstitious beliefs (such as the wife's calling of her husband by name shortens the longivity of the latter's life span, the eating of the husband's left over by the wife, etc.) are to Indu nothing more than putting a dead albatros around the neck of the people. As a young girl she liberated herself from the impinging influence of the family by running away from it, and again after the death of Naren. (80-81)

*Shadows* highlights the agony and trauma experienced by women in male-dominated and tradition-bound society. The novelist exposes the absurdity of rituals and customs which only help to perpetuate the myth of male superiority. This shows how a woman grows from 'self-surrender' and 'self abnegation' to assert her individuality with newly emerged identity. *Terrors* rejects the traditional concept that the sole purpose of a
wife’s existence is to please her husband. It reveals a woman's capacity to assert her own rights and individuality and becomes fully aware of her potential as a human being. *Silence* traces the passage of a woman through a maze of doubt and fears towards her affirmation. Viewing the man-woman relationship objectively, the novelist does not throw the blame entirely on men for the subjugation of women. She observes that both men and women find it difficult to outgrow the images and roles allotted to them by society. *Vine* shows how the educated earning woman helps a poor woman thereby inculcates the spirit of solidarity among women. The novelist depicts the agony of a wife who is the victim of a marital rape. She also portrays the plight of women raped outside marriage who would rather suffer in silence in the name of family honour. *Time* portrays a woman who is more mature and dignified than her predecessors. While others cannot think of themselves outside the familial bond, she, finding herself in, is unperturbed. Being a little detached, she manages herself admirably and almost becomes self-dependent. K. Chithra in “Quest for Identity in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels” says:

While exploring man-woman relationship in Indian society, Shashi Deshpande points out the intimate and domestic tyrannies suffered by women. The novel assertively exhibits the thesis that women should have an assertive individuality which includes the capability to take decisions about their life and carry them out with a sense of responsibility. Within the societal role she can be herself by erasing her conditioning and freeing her from her inhibitions. The haunting riddle of the ultimate purpose of a woman’s life within the family can be solved when she learns to assess her
worth as an individual and shuns to be guided by pre-fixed norms about it.

(11)

Deshpande’s women stand at the cross-roads of traditions. They see change but within the cultural norms, seek not to reinterpret them but merely to make them alive with dignity and self-respect. Her women seek anchorage in marriage. They perceive it as an alternative to the bondage imposed by the parental family and opt for it. Soon thereafter, they realize that one restrictive set-up is replaced by another. It is to say: “new bonds replace the old, that’s all” (RS 14). Her women protagonists are caught in the conflict between responsibility to oneself and conformity to the traditional role of a wife. They do not accept to be considered merely as the objects of sexual gratification. They challenge their victimization and seek a new balance of power between the sexes. Yet, their concept of freedom is not imported from the West. They believe in conformity and compromise for the sake of the retention of domestic harmony rather than revolt which might result in the disruption of family relationship.

To Deshpande’s women, relinquishing of roles as daughters, wives, mothers, homemakers and professionals is a very painful process. When the female protagonists start living in their parental homes, they sense a relief, in their new/old shelter. They revert back to their elders style of living giving up the routines to which they got used to in their marital homes. Saru finds herself taking over efficiently all the chores that she administered dutifully day in and out at her marital home. Indu feels a curious sense of freedom and homecoming. She also finds herself resuming the role that her aunt played as the family head. In assuming new roles or new altitudes towards old roles, they break the mental barriers, which they had initially built around themselves.
Deshpande portrays the career women as subjects of victimization as well as agencies of change. Career women appear in her novels not merely as the passive victims of an oppressive ideology but also as the active agents of their own positive constructs. She deals with women’s conditioning in relation to their choice of career. They seem to be bound within the traditional roles of caring, curing and nurturing. By her portrayal of career women, Deshpande puts in contrast the plight of housewives who have been confined and constrained by the marriage contract which gives unlimited power to a husband. Shubha Dwivedi in “‘To Be or Not To Be’. The Question of Professional Women in Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors, Roots and Shadows and Small Remedies*” says:

Shashi Deshpande’s fiction sets forth the nature and influence of Indian woman’s role as a ‘co-provider’ on her own as well as on her husband’s domestic role and on their familial and marital relations. The questions related to professional woman’s role, status, power, duty, obligations and empowerment vis-à-vis her husband’s are congenial to feminist studies and a clear assessment of professional woman’s experience regarding their role-conflict, role overload marital stress, dilemma, fatigue and self doubt can be explicated through the study of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Saru is caught in an emotional flux, endeavours to come to terms with her protean roles, while trying her best to integrate her true self. (232)

In Deshpande's novels, three types of suffering women recur with subtle changes. To the first type belongs the heroine's mother or the mother figure-the traditional woman
who believes that her place is with her husband and family. Whatever be her troubles, she does not leave her husband. She strives for a working relationship with him at any cost. In a sense, she represents the traditional religious ethos and confirms to the Manu code that the woman should be under the control of the father in the maidenhood, the husband in her youth and the sons during her old age. Despite being the victims of patriarchy, some of these women hold power or control over other women in the family because of their status as mothers or mothers-in-law. Jaya's mother (in Silence), Indu's (in Shadows) and Saru's mother (in Terrors) belong to this type.

The second type of suffering women is the converse of the traditional type. The woman is bolder, more self-reliant and rebellious. She cannot conform to the Sita's version of womanhood and is consciously inclined towards what could be designated as radical feminist ideology. Such Ibsenian Nora kind of women characters are very rare in Deshpande’s novels. They are mostly the heroine’s friends and classmates. Saru’s friend Nalu in Terrors holds a feminist ideology to life for the sake of which she chooses to lead an independent life as a spinster.

The third type of woman characterizes the woman in between. Most of Deshpande’s heroines belong to this category. This woman is neither traditional nor radical in her ideas and practice. She might walk out of her home in protest against her suffering, but gradually realizes that walking out does not solve her problems. Saru in Terrors broods over her agonies, even after she escapes her marital home. Indu in Shadows leaves her husband to seek refuge in her ancestral home but she is unable to accept her fate as any ordinary woman might do. These heroines suffer more because
they are aware of the escape routes of two other types of women, the traditional and the radical, but hesitate to choose those options. Their initial position is one of remaining at the crossroads. It is towards the end of the novels that Deshpande’s female protagonist realizes herself and learns to live up to the challenge. Saru decides to face her husband and not to run away. Indu and Jaya decide to confront their husbands and take the matter out in order to arrive at a solution.

Deshpande gives importance to the role of a mother. Motherhood, she admits, is the most authentic feminine experience. Through her portrayal of the role of mother, she tries to portray the socio-cultural and psycho-philosophical dimensions of womanhood. Motherhood is not only a biological bonding but a role defined in the context of gender. Madhu in Remedies and Urmi in Vine suffer tremendous loss after the death of Adit and Anu respectively. Their mental anguish after the death of their children justify the concept of motherhood.

Deshpande’s portrayal of the mother seems to be a reaction to the idealized depiction of the mother and motherhood. She wants to depict woman as an individual rather than as cast in a particular mould or role. The daughter in a traditional family is considered the responsibility of the mother who imposes restrictions on her to prepare her for a harsher future as a part of the process of socialization. The conflict between mother and daughter is direct. “In the course of their self-exploration, however, the protagonists analyze their relationships with their mothers with retrospective maturity and realize that their mothers too have been victims of patriarchal socialization and gender-based oppression” (Atrey 78). The daughters try to break free of their mothers only to realize
that they are merely expressions of their mother. Indu is in many ways akin to Akka. Like Indu, Saru and Urmila learn to come to terms with their antagonism towards their mothers.

Before their marriage, even in their parental homes, Deshpande’s heroines find it difficult to adjust to the kind of family relationships that exist in the traditional middle class. They then experience uneasiness or even hatred towards their mothers, whom they view as dominating and oppressive individuals. Against their mothers’ wishes, they attempt to leave their parental homes in the name of education or marriage. The fathers of the heroines, on the other hand, become the source of support or even inspiration for these women. The heroines like Saru and Jaya see marriage as an escape route made in order to liberate them from the suffocation they experience in their parents’ home. Their act of marrying outside their community, as in the case of Indu, can also be seen as their way of rebelling against patriarchal attitudes (with the mothers themselves becoming the tools of patriarchy) towards marriage.

They learn more about their mothers and gradually overcome their feelings of alienation / hatred / resentment towards them. In fact, they tend to identify themselves with their elderly counterparts and assume the roles of their mothers or mother figures after they return home. With their contempt towards mothers deciphered, they tend to turn inward. Their stay at ancestral homes gives them the chance to recollect the past and re-evaluate their decisions and actions. Their parental homes do not provide them any permanent relief from their suffering. However, these transitory retreats help them
confront their real ‘I’ and understand themselves better. It is here that they explore the sexual and other causes that had led to their marital discords.

Saru, Jaya, Kalpana and Manjari make efforts to carve out their open spaces. In *Terrors*, Saru’s antagonism towards her mother is felt throughout the novel. She hates to be the mirror image of her mother. During the time of puberty, she develops an aversion to all traditional practices adopted by her mother. Besides the directions of her mother, she resolves to marry Mohan, the man out of her own caste. Jaya also shares the anguish of her mother’s discriminatory behaviour and complains: ‘She behaves as if she owns me’ (LS 75). The conflict between Urmi and her mother is direct and frontal. In *Shadows*, Indu does not remember her mother and turns back to her dictatorial grandmother, Akka. Through the different types of mother figures, Deshpande presents an elaborate analysis of disharmony existing in mother-daughter relationship. Sudhir Kakar in *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* observes:

> In a daughterhood, an Indian girl is a sojourn in her own family and with marriage, she becomes less a wife than a daughter-in-law. It is only with motherhood that she comes into her own as a woman and she can make a place for herself in the family, in the community and in her life circle. (52)

In the context of mother-daughter relationship, Deshpande finds that mothers are usually negligent, apprehensive and aggressive and even hostile to their own daughters. Saru’s mother in *Terrors* always humiliates her and considers her responsible for the death of her son, Dhruva. Saru being neglected by her mother suffers with childhood insecurity.
Indu and her mother in Shadows, Jaya and her mother in Silence, Kalpana and her mother in Vine have strained relationships. Jaya, Indu, Saru, Urmi and Kalpana and even Madhu are all the victims of childhood insecurity inherited from their mothers. In Remedies, Madhu and Savitribai represent two opposite poles of maternal sensibility. In the absence of her son, Madhu suffers the bouts of depression while Savitribai in order to preserve the secrecy of her relationship with Gulam Saab and to sustain her passion for music without least hesitation disowns her relationship with Munni, her daughter. Sumi in Time is more conscious of her own ego than the sentiments of her own daughter. In Moving on, Manjari retains the impression of the hostility of her mother. Commenting on the mother’s attitude towards their children Usha Bande in “Mother, Daughter and Daughter’s Daughter – A Study of Shashi Deshpande” says: “After all, these older women are ‘mothers’ and must possess motherly affection; only they fail to express it in a convincing manner because they themselves have led narrow, restricted lives, the only reality for them” (139). Further, Usha Bande cites instances where Saru’s mother takes her to the temple and presents her gold ear-rings, but when the daughters begin to question the validity of old, traditional values, they break away from them as mothers. Again Usha Bande admits: “Jaya’s ajji (grandmother) who lives a ‘bare’ existence after her husband’s death, with shaven head, sleeping on the strawmat, confined to the room her husband used once, cannot understand Jaya’s need to be ‘herself’. Saru’s mother, a traditional middle-class woman, does not realize that by indicting Saru for Dhruva’s death, she is giving the daughter a traumatic girlhood” (139). In fact, the mothers are as Ances Jung in Unveiling India observes, “negating themselves” (119). It is all because they have invisible lives. They are invisible women. Usha Bande again admits:
The protagonists: Indu, Saru and Jaya, respectively recast their part in their quest for self-definition and in the course of their narratives show ambivalent attitude toward their mothers or mother-surrogates – anger and remorse, hostility and harmony. Mothers and mother-figures are not the matriarchy to reckon with, but suffocating ‘shadows’ to be shunned. Whereas the three relate sympathetically to other female characters – a host of aunts, cousins and friends and even maid-servants-they use all either angry or flippant with their mothers. (134)

As Saru, Jaya and Indu have rebelled against their matriarchs, their daughters also rebel against them. Jaya has a grown-up daughter, Rati, a defiant young girl. Jaya describes her as "grave, serious, independent, understanding” (LS 173). Saru's daughter Renu, though yet a kid of nine, disturbs her mother by her weird imagination. Her Paintings are lonely, cheerless and frightening. Saru describes her as a "cold, shrewd, objective observer" (DT 33). The girl seems to lack feelings, sensitivity and makes her mother nervous, unsure and uncertain. Adesh Pal in “That Long Silence: A Study in Displaced Anger” says that “Deshpande’s protagonists suffer from ego-inflation on account of their strange childhood and improper child-rearing” (121). Saru in Terrors suffer from ego-inflation on account of her mother’s unqualified, biased preferences for her brother, Dhruva. In Shadows, Indu revolts against Akka, her world, her authority, and her values. Akka being a ‘Terrible mother’ threatens the inflated ego of Indu. Similarly, Jaya in Silence is a victim of ego-inflation on account of her improper child-rearing.
Deshpande expresses her deep concern for the various phases of the life of a traditional woman, who in the role of wife accepts the unconditional hegemony of her husband. Mira in *Vine*, Mini in *Shadows*, Mai in *Moving On*, and Sumi in *Time* are all silent women. She also perceives the peril of rape in marriage in which a woman is not able to express her resistance. Saru of *Terrors* is a victim of rape in a marriage. It makes her a psychopath. In *Vine*, it is revealed through the poem of Mira that she has had repulsion for sexual act. Urmi admits: “It runs through all her writings a strong clear thread of an intense dislike of the sexual act with her husband, a physical repulsion from the man she married” (BV 63). And as a result, some women like Saru of *Terrors* being disgusted with her husband’s repulsive behaviour thinks of Boozie, the Professor at the Medical College, Jaya of *Silence* being disgusted in her relationship with Mohan, turns to Kamat, a publisher who encourages her journalistic career and Indu of *Shadows* being disgusted with Jayant, revives her sentiments with her childhood friend, Naren. Like Saru and Jaya, Indu too expresses her indignation at the romantic concept of love. She broods: “It is a big fraud, a hoax, that’s what is it… the sexual instinct, self love… they are the basic truths” (RS 158). In *Moving On*, Manjari being disgusted with her suppressed energy, turns on to Raman and Raja. In *Deceit*, Devyani turns to the married man Ashok.

For Deshpande's characters, marriage is no longer a sacrament. It is a convenient arrangement always to the disadvantage of women. Indu in *Vine* observes: “what was marriage after all, but two people brought together after cold-blooded bargaining to mate, unite and reproduce so that the generations might continue” (3). To Urmila of *Vine*, the back of the bride’s neck, nervously awaiting the first night onslaught, looks like a lamb
waiting for the butcher's knife to come down upon it. In Silence also, a couple is compared to a pair of bullocks yoked together. In Terrors, Saru also finds her marital condition unbearable and feels "the desperation of a rapped animal" (195). However, marriage proves to be no escape. The husbands accept their wives as working women but at the same time do not recognize or encourage the ‘feminist self’ in them. The heroines are left without any sense of fulfilment, both physical and mental, because of their husbands' lack of understanding. The heroines who have children also sense a kind of uneasiness in their relationship with their siblings. They often wonder whether history repeats itself when it comes to the misunderstanding between the parent and the child. The uncaring husband and the demanding children become obstacles to achieve individuality. Hence, the feeling of being trapped comes back to them after the marriage also. Their professions or social commitments sometimes come into conflict with the expectations of their husbands and create tensions within the family. Finding it difficult to cope with the tensions arising out of their professional roles and domestic expectations, women initially seek relief through abandonment of their professional roles. They quit their professions and try to seek peace by confining themselves to their familial roles as homemakers.

In marriage, the female body is foregrounded as a commodity. Akka’s marriage as a child to an aggressive older husband terrifies her in Shadows and Mira’s marriage in Vine to a man who initially adores her also results in reducing her to a body. Even in Shadows, Indu has a sense of discontentment and failure. Jaya in Silence is unhappy and is no longer able to sustain the illusion of happiness. She cries: “The illusion of happiness – yes, I had to let it go” (LS 5). Jaya finds that “family life unendurable”
but it makes Gopal in *Time* to walk out of it. The focus in Deshpande's work is not necessarily on the youthful protagonist or narrator. Urrni's mother-in-law Mira and stepmother-in-law have had unhappy married lives in *Vine*. Akka and Atya in *Shadows* are marginalised and oppressed. Kalyani’s husband is estranged and Gopal walks away from Sumi in *Time*. There are unhappy, estranged and broken relationships even in the lower classes. The expectations from marriage remain the same even if there is a difference of priorities or qualities: protection, economic security, sexual satisfaction, children, and common bond. Problems arise due to estrangement, unemployment, brutal claims of the male or alcoholism. Shakutai in *Vine* has had her own share of troubles. Her husband has abandoned her for a mistress. And right from the beginning, it had been a relationship of struggle. Left with her parents after her marriage, she followed him to Bombay on her own where she discovered that he was without a job. Yet, bravely, she continued to work on her marriage, cooked for the men and took up all kinds of available jobs.

The heroines of Deshpande resort to freedom not only intellectually but sexually too. Their sexual starvation forces them to seek recourse to extra-martial sex. Saru’s affairs with Boozie and Padmakar Rao seem to be temporary substitutes for the unfulfilled marital life. Indu represents the new woman who is on her way to an erotic sexual utopia. She is sexually satisfied with her cousin, Naren and does not feel guilty of it. Jaya’s affair with her neighbour, Kamat, is an aborted one and she like Saru, feels guilty of it. Saru, Indu and Jaya become victims of sex. They keep a terrified silence over it. Saru’s silence against her sexual predicament reveals the modern woman’s dilemma. She says: “I could do nothing, I can never do anything. I just endure” (DT
182). The sexual impasse rocks their lives along with their acute, unusual and unconventional sensitiveness.

Deshpande is pained to notice ways of subordinating women by male members of the society. Economic deprive and rape are the main instruments employed to curb the spontaneous growth of a woman. The role of wife is nothing less than walking on the razor’s edge. Realizing this fact, Saru ironically asserts that a wife must be always be inferior to her husband in all walks of life. What makes matters worse for Indian women is that there are no choices before them. Like marriages, their decisions are made in the heaven in their husband’s mind. This is a sad commentary on the incompatibility in and hypocrisy of married life, which the novelist has presented realistically by her characters.

A.G. Khan in “Shashi Deshpande’s Heroines : Prisoners by Choice?” says:

Rape victims abound in The Dark Holds No Terrors and The Binding Vine. Sarita considers herself to be a victim of ‘legalised’ rape. There is another incident of rape by a father of his three daughters. That provokes Sarita to avenge this kind of injustice by committing adultery with Madhav (though she spares him from her designs). In Binding Vine, Mira is also a rape victim and so is Kalpana. (206)

Although physical aspects of body have not been allowed to sway; creditably enough Deshpande is not obvious of its legitimate claims. But, apparently her women characters seem to be rather fettered by the natural functions of the body. Growing into woman is to Saru of Terrors, for example, is something ‘shameful’ and ‘torture’. Jaya, in Silence, is
painfully conscious of the fact that around her husband’s needs and desires her life revolves.

Neither the woman nor the man in Deshpande's novels try to do something about their marital/sexual monotony. The women specially tend to ignore the sexual roots of their marital discord. Their assumed roles do not give total sustenance, as their sexual dissatisfaction raises its ugly head at times and disrupts the harmony of their patterned living. Hence, they seek sexual gratification by resorting to extramarital relationships. Saru tries to justify her affairs with Boozie (her boss) and Padmakar Rao (her college classmate) as the substitutes she had found for her unfulfilled marriage. Yet, such affairs do not give her total satisfaction as in the case of Indu's affair with Naren (her cousin). One can see a woman-in-guilt. Like Indu and Saru, Jaya in Silence feels guilty of her aborted affair with Kamat.

Deshpande's protagoinsts might be considered as sexual profligates as they go off the track of tradition. But their extra-marital refuge fails them because their sexual freedom does not pilot them out of their predicaments. Instead of helping them to confront the problem, they only postpone the problem. When their sexual escapades bounce back, they divulge their problems to their friends or relatives. For example, Saru confesses to her father about her marital crisis to save herself from it. Her father advises her not to run away but to face the problem. The awareness of the self and the ultimate refuge in the self are inveterate experiences in the novels of Deshpande. The awareness of the self is nothing but the awakening of woman’s consciousness. The determination to confront and accept the self is seen in all the female protagonists of Deshpande. The act
of confrontation gives them the courage to decide things for themselves and increasingly leads them to a positivistic detachment from life. The refuge in the self guides them towards a deeper awareness of their predicament. According to Deshpande, the solution cannot be given because it is self-bound in other words. It depends on the individuals concerned. It depends on the fiber of their self. A deeper awareness of the self leads to understanding of its true nature. Nevertheless, the heroines do not go to that extent. Their self-realization is psychological rather than metaphysical. Towards the end, Saru refuses to call her predicament as fate and would rather call it as something she had helped to happen. For blaming only the patriarchy or only certain external causes for her predicament, she takes her away from the fact that she had also to be blamed for being weak and allowing her predicament to happen.

Daughters, as they grow up and leave their initial insecurity, move back towards their mothers in understanding. Urmi is able to understand Inni’s submissiveness in her marriage and her seeming indifference to motherhood in Vine. Similarly, in Terrors Saru works herself into a position where her hidden tears are exercised. Urmi, Saru, and Jaya are mothers themselves. They are better able to relate to their mothers. It gives a sense of power to them. The wish to control the child is camouflaged as concern and manifested as love and caring. It is also a fulfillment for the ego. Madhu is a possessive mother. So is Bhaskar’s mother in Vine. Vanaa’s mother in Vine and Sumi in Time are mothers who take a back seat and still care. Here, the change in the concept of motherhood is not entirely a matter of individual personality but responds to social change and space for women in other roles. Family relationships in Sahdows work through power and money. In Terrors, they function through the mother-daughter
relationship, through cause and effect and exclusion and resistance strategies; in Silence through economic structures and middle-class aspirations, but in Vine they work through man-woman relationships and marriage.

Deshpande’s novels begin at a mid point. The protagonists or narrators are adults. Indu is married. So is Jaya, who is also the mother of two children. Saru, when she returns home, has been married for fifteen years. Sumi, when Gopal leaves her, has an eighteen year old marriage behind her. Madhu has just a seventeen year old son. All of them moved out of the family circle. They distance themselves and are returning home now. It is a homecoming of sorts for each one of them. Indu has been summoned by Akka and being recognized as an heiress. Saru comes back in anger and hurt. Jaya returns to the Dadar flat inherited from her uncle and to the memories of Kamat. Sumi is brought back by her father to the ancestral house Vishwas. Madhu, a woman without family, is offered a home by Lata and Hari. Homecoming signifies a return to the past, to the world of memories. In it, individuals are trying to take stock of their lives.

In Terrors, when Saru comes back home, she is not sure why she has come. There may be many reasons: the need to escape from Manu, to grieve for her mother, to comfort her father, to involve her surviving parent in her problems and break through the isolation that is fast enveloping her and so on. Coming home after a gap of several years, she looks around and feels nothing has changed. Yet, there is silence in the house. The communication remains tentative and minimum. The role of Saru as a non-confirming woman makes an equation with what Maria Mies calls in Indian Woman and Patriarchy that “the non-confirming conduct of the woman is not the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric
of equality between man and woman but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realized in their lives” (110). This is exactly what one can see in Saru. She rebels against the tradition but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. In fact, she is passing through the transitional era. Saru represents the middle-class working woman who rebels against tradition but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality. When her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life, she undergoes a trauma but realizes that escapism is not a solution and that she is her own refuge. Her reconciliation with her husband is not a defeat or submission but her new found confidence to confront reality. She achieves freedom and harmony in life without compromising on her obligation and responsibilities. Siddhartha Sharma in Shashi Deshpande’s Novel : A Feminist Study observes:

She is neither the typical western liberated woman nor an orthodox Indian one. Shashi Deshpande does not let herself get overwhelmed by the western feminism or its militant concept of emancipation. In quest for wholeness of identity, she does not advocate separation from the spouse but a tactful assertion of one’s identity within marriage. (37)

It makes her analyse not only the past and also the present and her self too. She makes herself subject to scrutiny. It is as Parvati Bhatnagar in “Search of Identity : A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s The Dark Holds No Terrors” says : “This entire process of self analysis made Saru realize that it was her sense of superiority over Manu that had destroyed their relationship. She also realized that women are charged with greater
responsibility as they are required to play more challenging roles” (57). Saru undergoes a kind of self-introspection. It is a kind of trauma as S. Prasanna Sree in “The Woman Steps out to Conquer in The Dark Holds No Terrors” observes:

Falling in line with Indu of Roots and Shadows who seeks freedom within the boundaries of obligations and responsibilities, who also conquers her fears and achieves harmony in life, Saritha in The Dark Holds No Terrors too, undergoes similar trauma, confronts reality (sic) and, at the end, realizes that the dark no longer holds any terrors to her. She survives in a male dominated world. She neither surrenders to nor escapes from the problems but with great strength accepts the challenge of her own protege’. (94)

Saru has to overcome all her imbalances in life. She has to make a compromise. She has to adjust herself and find a permanent solution. It is as T.M.J. Indra Mohan in “The Dark Holds No Terrors : A Feminist Concept” avers:

The novelist brings out powerfully the psychological problem of a career woman and discusses it artistically without crossing the barriers of art. The novel also transcends feminist constraints and raises issues which the human beings in general encounter in their lives. The novelist’s objective is to show that one should take refuge in the self which means that the ‘Self is not metaphysical but psychological’. In other words, Deshpande means here that woman should assert herself so that she can overcome or thrash the suppressing forces. She makes Sarita’s
consciousness to be touched by her experience as a doctor. She analyses her own physical and psychological trauma with the detachment of an analyst. Her dilemma is not mysteriously resolved at any point though, to an extent the epigraph from the Dhammapada, showing way out for Sarita’s predicament. But Sarita’s realization that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere, puts an end to her problems. She realises that we come into this world alone and go out of it alone. The period in between is short. (108)

As in the case of Jaya in Silence, Sumi in Time, Urmila in Vine, Madhu in Remedies and Manjari in Moving On, women have the power to assess and judge their condition and situation. Family is their priority and is of the most important thing but how much the family provides space and freedom to the individual is also a question. Sometimes, it reduces personal space and imposes aspirations and expectations which the individuals take as burden. Rejection by a family can make the individual alienated and rejection of the family lead to feelings of loneliness and guilt.  Jaya, a modern woman rooted in tradition, experiences an impulsive desire to be emancipated and at the same time an almost instinctive urge to be traditional and conservative. She tries to be a suitable wife in order to retain her identity as an individual. She turns to be a stereotyped house-wife. In the end of the novel, Silence, Jaya wants to erase her silence. In this context, Ram Sharma in “Writing from the Margins: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” observes: “It is this erasing of the silence that symbolizes the assertion of her feminine voice, a voice with hope and promise, a voice that articulate her thoughts” (93). Indu strongly believes that women should have the courage to express themselves and
expose the evils of the society fearlessly. She is indignant at the uncomplaining attitude of the victims. She is an independent individual from the beginning with an identity of her own. Ramesh Kumar Gupta “Image of Woman in Shashi Deshpande’s Novel Roots and Shadows” concludes that “Here one can see Indu’s failure as her new efforts are also rooted in adultery and dishonesty. She is always in a chaotic state of psyche and combining with the circumstances to reach a final solution. Indu has confronted her real self and she knows her roots, she need not be ashamed of her body and sexual needs; she has to decide what her job will be; she is capable of taking decisions not only for herself but for others too, and life does not come to an end with individuals, be it Indu or Jayant” (46-47). It is mostly accepted by many critics. Gunjan Sushil in “Shashi Deshpande’s ‘Roots and Shadows’ – A Feminist Study” says that “Thus, not only in Roots and Shadows, but in her other novels as well, Shashi Deshpande has employed withdrawal as a tool for both introspection and self-realisation for her protagonists. These characters withdraw, not into a world of fantasy but into a world away from the suffocating circumstances of their lives unable to adjust to the social demands on them, they attempt a temporary psychological as well as sociological withdrawal” (117).

Deshpande, without over-dramatizing or sentimentalizing the women’s predilection, tries to portray in her fiction the role of modern young women who are struggling to synthesize both their professional and private lives. The career woman has to face not only the opposition of her surroundings and to struggle against many obstacles but also has to subscribe herself because she often subscribes herself to the role of an Indian woman. Indu in Shadows and Jaya in Terrors have similar predicament in their lives. Both hate the oppression at home, leave their respective parental homes, get
married to the man of their choice in a gesture of rebellion, find marriage to be an entrapment rather than a heaven, try to take refuge in their ancestral homes, find they cannot, engage themselves in self-exploration, realize ‘their own truths’ and finally assert their individuality. Both Indu and Saru adopt marriage as a means to get away from their families. They find themselves rather enclosed in their parental homes as they curtail their individual freedom. The home becomes a metaphor in these novels. “The home in both the novels stands as an image for the mother square and the traditional values she represents” (Prasanna 41). Both Indu and Saru are not for motherhood even though Saru has two children. “They resent the role of a daughter and look forward to their new roles in life with hope. But this proves to be an illusion. Indu’s relationship with Jayant and Saru’s with Manu is not all that satisfactory. The financial and professional success leads to discord and disharmony in both the cases. Both experience sexual disappointment and humiliation” (Prasanna 41). Commenting on Jaya’s attitude in the end of Silence, Rupalle Burke in “The Search for a Voice : A Study” says : “At last she emerges, vocally triumphant, out of the dark tunnel, to see the light of self-awareness and self-affirmation. Jaya’s victory can be attributed to her strength of ‘forgiveness’ and her ‘creative imagination’” (69). In fact, she assumes : “We can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this : life has always to be made possible” (LS 193). With this knowledge and her refusal to get fragmented further, she emerges as a new woman and creates a new self. Commenting on the character portrayal of Jaya in Silence Seema Sunil in “Emergence of New Woman in Indian Fiction : A Study of Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife, Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence and G.W. Desai’s Frailty, Thy Name is (W)Oman” observes :
Jaya, in *That Long Silence*, is a mature person. She is a writer, an intellectual, and conscious of her rights. She is educated, modern, while as her husband is a traditionalist, rooted in age-old customs. The relationship between Jaya and her husband is forced and not a natural one. She protests against her husband’s dominance, challenges the social taboos and social norms, but gives in ultimately – she makes a compromise realizing that it is the only course open to her to save her marriage. (228)

David Kerr in “History and the Possibilities of Choice : A Study of Anita Desai’s *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English August* and Shashi Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*” also observes:

Shashi Deshpande in this novel offers readers an intimate and domestic chronicle of the subtle tyrannies suffered by women and of the pain of coming to self-knowledge, or at least to the conditions which must be fulfilled before self-knowledge can be attained. There are portraits of the personal annihilation experienced by women who become victims of social stereotyping, sometimes blindly, sometimes willingly, and there is the final promise of hope for those who keep the gates of choice open. (137)

She has to express herself. She has to articulate her own silence. So that only while commenting on the ending of *Silence*, Subhash Chandra in “Silent No More : A Study of *That Long Silence*” observes that “By penning her story, she has achieved articulation of
her predicament, her constraints, her anguish and has thereby broken her silence” (155).

It is equally avered by S.P. Swain in “Articulation of the Feminine Voice : Jaya in Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” that:

In That Long Silence, Shashi Deshpande delineates the delicate swings of mood, the see-saw moments of joy and despair, the fragments of feelings perceived and suppressed, the life of senses as well as the heart-wrenching anguish of the narrator protagonist Jaya, a housewife and a failed writer.

(87)

Deshpande makes her character a common type. It is from particular she moves to generalizations. In this connection Rajeswari Sunder Rajan in “The Feminist Plot and the Nationalist Allegory : Home and World in Two Indian Women’s Novels in English” observes:

The force of Deshpande’s indictment of women’s lives lies in the way she is able to universalize their condition, chiefly by drawing similarities among Jaya and a variety of other female figures, including characters from Indian history and myth; and among three generations of women in her family (Jaya, her mother, her grandmother); among different classes of women (Jaya, her maid Jeeja); among different kinds of women of the same class and generation (Jaya, her cousin Kusum, her widowed neighbor Mukta). (78)

Sumi of Time gradually emancipates herself as a new independent woman from the utter desolation and trauma of being a deserted wife. She demonstrates strength and maturity.
She displays rare courage and self-confidence in trying to cope with the consequential problems and difficulties and humiliations and frustrations. She desires to be economically free and independent and asserts her identity. She has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment by courage, dignity, and responsibility.

Deshpande's novels are all about growing up - not through an adolescent period, but growing up into selfhood. Her characters are able to outgrow the traditional training imparted to a girl child and the socialisation which renders her docile and obedient. They have to find their way in the world. They have to move through the process of separation towards a concept of the self. Except for Roots, where the crisis is not self-related, the other novels begin with a crisis in the lives of the women protagonists. Jaya is shaken out of her notion of respectability and huddled into semi-hiding in the Dadar flat. Saru moves from rejection of her parental home to rejection of her marital home. Sumi is thrown out of her wifely role in one stroke. Madhu is bereaved and experiences a sense of both abandonment and loss. They are up against forces that they do not fully comprehend. Urmi has also undergone a bereavement, but the focus is not so much on Urmi as on Mira and Kalpana in Vine, where the body is pinned down against the woman's wish, curbing her freedom. The imposition of sex on these female bodies is contrasted with its absence in Urmi’s case, where Kishore is away for long stretches. These women have to work through their sense of loss and vulnerability to set about finding new sources of sustenance. Families may disperse in Roots, economic security threaten in Silence, bodily freedom assault in Terrors, and apparently happy marriages collapse in Time. The ‘other’ man, wherever 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 is equally reluctant to accept Ramesh’s help. In *Remedies*, Madhu finds herself looked upon with suspicion when she spends the night in a hotel. Women have, over centuries, been treated as exchange items between men – from father to husband, and at times, as in Kalpana’s case, to an uncle who wants to take her as a second wife. The female self, in order to emerge in its own right, has first to validate her existence on her own terms, without male protection or support. A woman does not necessarily or automatically grow into a self. She has to acquire a ‘self’. In Sumi’s case, this idea comes to its realization in a sense it doesn’t happen with either Jaya or Indu. She begins to accept the idea of exploring freedom and living for her self. Saru, too, finds a new source of sustenance in her profession. It is no longer merely a source of income or self-assurance, but her very being as she nurses Madhav and attends to the neighbour’s child.

The female protagonists of Deshpande are not representations of traditional ‘Sita' images. They are the ‘new women’. The heroines are initially fugitives who seek refuge to escape from domestic, professional and sexual traps in which they find themselves. But each refuge, whether it is love, marriage or sex, only turns out to be another trap wherein they further lose their freedom and identity.

Deshpande not only tries to make her women characters stronger than they are in real life but also exposes their passivity, anxiety, and confusion. Her educated women demand more sexual freedom and independence but are not very sure about what they should do with the same. It leads them to a bitter confusion, anxiety, and tension. Their
psychology is wedded to tradition. They have a need for change but at the same time they continue to cling to the old values as they have been brought up with them.

In her works, Deshpande affirms her view that the young modern women, who are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, who leave behind the conventions and take the initiative to join the modern world, are entangled. Even though they have the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and tenacity to adhere to it, they remain failures either for fear of failure or because of timidity.

Deshpande’s women are not very brave. They never brave the new world being festooned in their traditional environments. In fact, they struggle to find their own voice – Jaya in Silence, Indu in Shadows, and Saru in Terrors continually search to define themselves. Indu has “become fluid, with no shape, no form of her own” (RS 15). Jaya is split into two; Jaya and Suhasini and still she knows that “The real picture, the real ‘you’ never emerges. Looking for it is as bewildering as trying to know how you really look. Ten different mirrors show you ten different faces” (LS 1).

Terrors analyses the complex relationship between Sariu and Manu. In Shadows, Indu, being ambitious, is confused about her concept of love, marriage, career and her own life. She marries for love but is herself not sure whether it is real love or just an attempt to show the elder people how correct she was in taking a decision for herself. In Silence, Jaya is confused about the whole set up. She finds no other way but silence as her only means of communication. In total, in can be taken that the woman presented is not complete in herself unless there is someone to shelter her. Indu in Shadows says:
“This is my real sorrow, that I can never be complete in myself” (RS 34). Women, themselves, want to be supported by someone. Indu, when she comes across Jayant, feels the release of burden. She says: “The day I had met him, a burden, the weight of uncertainty had fallen off me. There had been an absoluteness, a certainty instead. I had known then… it was this man and none other” (RS 50). In Silence too, Jaya is not sure of herself and her own identity. Her name changes from Jaya to Suhasini when she got married and becomes her husband’s property. She becomes a very submissive woman and longs to be called an ideal wife. The only weapon she has with her is silence and surrender. She is used to compare herself with others. In the end, she takes that she is not Kusum. She is better than her: “suddenly it occurs to me – as long as Kusum was there, I had known clearly who I was; it had been Kusum who had shown me out to be who I was. I was not Kusum. Now, with Kusum dead…?” (LS 24). Similarly, Saru is not a natural woman in her role. She is not in natural terms with her husband. She finds it difficult to express herself. She accepts: “And each time it happens and I don’t speak, I put another brick on the wall of silence between us” (DT)

The protagonists of Deshpande seek their own salvation. Thus, Saru in Terrors fights to bring the husband-wife relationship on an equal footing where there are no hierarchised oppositions like superior/inferior, high/low, and man/woman. Indu in Shadows is worried about her interactions with the varied personalities in her large family and her resolution to overcome her own personal crisis. Jaya in Silence copes with her own suffering, silence and surrender and wins her freedom as an individual. Contrasted with all these is Urmi, who is concerned with the redemption of her own caste. The effort of Urmi to publish Mira's poems aims at discovering the strangled voice
articulating woman's silent discourse, deciphering the coded language and liberating the imagination of woman from interior to exterior. This may be taken to mean that Deshpande converts a muted woman into a talking woman and provides the cause, will, strength and means to articulate the silence of women. She is a revisionist questioning the adequacy of accepted conceptual structures.

Some of her protagonists adopt the device of temporary withdrawal. They try to probe deep into their own psyche and to make attempts to understand their own dilemma of existence. Seema Jena in *Carving a Pattern Out of Chaos: Withdrawal – A Narrative Device in Women’s Writing* says: “The technique of withdrawal becomes a mean by which a woman rediscovers her personality and digs up her inner potential and learns how to express her talent” (10). Return to the past becomes a mechanism to decide future course of action. Saru in *Terrors* desperately returns to her parental home but this move of Saru is not an escapism but it is a method to examine her pre-marital and post-marital relationships. The idea of withdrawal is significant in *Shadows* because it signifies Indu’s affinity with the past. In *Silence*, Jaya concentrates her future in her career as a journalist during the period of withdrawal. She realizes herself that she is also responsible for her own weaknesses. In *Remedies*, Madhu’s efforts to revive her career as a writer to discover the life of Savitribai becomes a remedy to her own anguish as a wife and as a mother. In most of the cases in the periphery of familial relationship, her protagonists make efforts to reconstruct their identity. Madhu in *Remedies* pursues her career as a journalist to avoid the loneliness of her life. Sumi in *Time* finds herself isolated and frustrated after the desertion of Gopal. Similarly, Jaya in *Silence*, Indu in *Shadows* and Urmi in *Vine* are frustrated in their personal lives.
In her novels, Deshpande explores the illusion of the abhorable reality. She points out that the customs like child birth and child rearing are the causes of neglect and humiliation for women in society. She is of the opinion that the entire social framework is constructed with the assumption that woman’s role as a wife and as the mother is the culmination of feminine desires as she has no right to assert her voice beyond the obligations of motherhood.

As Deshpande is aware of female freedom, she resists the forces of oppression and injustice to women. However, she no longer defends the cause of rebellion and violence but seeks the space for the sublimation of suppressed feminine sensibility. Her female characters alienate themselves from the traditional roles and seek alternative spaces / roles in the form of professional competence. It subsequently contributes to constitute a voice of resistance. Her women characters, even though they remain victims of patriarchal society, are self-willed and capable of mediating over the solid, sterile existence. In fact, they are endowed with a vision to carve out their own spaces. They make a search to find out their individuality. M. Sharada Iyer in “Socialisation and Gender Construction in Shashi Deshpande’s Novels” comments:

From Akka in Roots and Shadows, who was married at the age of thirteen to Manda, Nilima and Sati in That Long Silence Deshpande traces the pattern of socialization and internalization of patriarchal norms and values. While the older woman remains chained to traditional background, the younger emerges confident. The type of family structure plays an important role in the change. (48)
Most of Deshpande’s protagonists are born in traditional families and struggle between a traditional upbringing and a longing for freedom and self-expression. They rebel against traditional norms. Saru in Terrors flouts her mother’s patriarchal impositions. Indu in Shadows follows her own path quite against the wish of Akka, the matriarch. However, as it is observed by Vincent Aerathu in “The Girld (sic) is Mother : Girl Children in Shashi Deshpande’s Select Novels” as follows:

Though the protagonists rebel against tradition, they are not fully free from their traditional upbringing. Indu silently pushes on an incompatible match with Jayant in order to hide her failure from her family. Though she is educated, she is not fully emancipated to declare her independence from a fruitless marriage. Saru in The Dark Holds No Terrors is so smothered by her mother with her gender bias that she develops a ruthless ambition to prove her mother wrong. But in the bargain she cripples her too self-conscious husband and renders him an impotent sadist. Jaya in That Long Silence, though she had a comparatively free childhood without too many bruises from socialization, also fails. She doggedly tries to squeeze herself into the mould of the wife that Mohan has made, abandons her talent at writing and falls into apathy. Sumi of A Matter of Time is incapable of asking Gopal for the reasons behind his walking out on her and her three children. She carries within her the picture of a helpless mother, Kalyani-one who never had the right to enter the premises of her husband-a couple that never communicated except through a calling bell. So, though these protagonists are quite
educated and have declared freedom from traditional upbringing, they carry the ghost of their childhood grooming with them. (149)

Deshpande says that women themselves have to exert and come out of the mire of patriarchal structure and its oppression to emerge as individuals and as human beings in their own might.

Deshpande’s novels follow the same structure. The protagonists experience a major crisis in their lives and they return to their parental home. In fact, Deshpande uses various narrative devices to entitle them away from their usual scrutiny and search for answers to present problems. In the process of delving deep into their past, they move from anxious, unhappy, and unassertive women into mature, awakened, assertive women, who understand and perceive the gender politics as socialization. Rashmi Sahi in “Human Relationship in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande” concludes that “In the struggle of these women to give shape and content to their individual existence in a sexist society the realization comes in the end that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination and tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life” (170).

Saru’s quest for self-identity in Terrors leads her into her past in the course of which she comes to terms with a traumatic childhood experience and a problematic marital relationship. Shadows traces the attempts of Indu to resolve her personal crisis through a temporary return to the old house where she had grown up. Jaya interrogates her past in Silence to arrive at a solution to the present predicament. Urmila in Vine delves into the past to redefine her relationships and her identity as an individual. Nisha
Singh in “Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande – Liberation on the Psychic Realm of Experience” is of the view that

Modern and liberal in outlook, Sumi defies the outdated social opinion and orthodox treatment of a woman subjected to desertion by her husband. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her prove that she has reached a stage of self sufficiency and self-fulfillment. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure. (128-129)

The contemporary women are facing structural inequalities between man and woman and cultural rationalization of these inequalities. With their education and their social awareness, these women have thrown off their conditioning and the whole psychology of oppression. They bear the burden of the past and the aspirations of the future. They desire to overcome dependence syndrome and have an urge for self definition. They care for sensitive family relationship and emotional involvement of the self. In fact, in all her works Deshpande portrays a picture of Indian woman, who is really sensible, educated, attached to her roots, economically independent and yet who is different from her past image / the traditional role of Gandhari, Maitreyi, and Sita. Deshpande’s Saru, Indu and Lata are examples of women who make complex negotiations in the space on and around the threshold. Her narratives deconstruct the idea of Indian woman generally related to a sacrificing, non-assertive, and satisfied being and traces of her positioning in a system of difference. “In order to overcome their self-alienation and subjugation by misogynistic prejudices, Deshpande’s women work against numerous monolithic systems. She
explicates multiple differences, multiple desires utilizing personal narratives and lived experiences of her heroines. Multiple voices in her novels explore the burden of private history. Her novels have a thematic framework which studies the interface between women’s silence and their speech, their cultural erasure and resistance” (Dwivedi, “To Be or Not To Be” : 229). Shubha Dwivedi also avers further:

Deshpande’s novels record polyphonic voices behind every structure and relationship which have contributed to silent Indian women. Muted by society/patriarchy her protagonists feel crippled by a sense of inferiorization, non-entity and loss of ‘self’. Deshpande's novels encapsulate the tensions underlying women's aspirations and their cultural identities. Their urge for self-definition culminates in the identification of the areas of conflict. They are encased and suffocated in the patterns of androcentric culture and their desire to perform is taken over by the necessity to conform. These women are steeped in the conventions and customs of a patrilineal society which dislocates and alienates them from the process of being and becoming. Deshpande's novels are polemical attacks against the patriarchal world where women are treated as a 'kind of non-man.' Like Margaret Atwood, Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, Deshpande also argues that male assigned roles of wife and motherhood entrap women in the masculine plot of desire and thereby marginalize them from other socio-political, economical and creative spheres of life. (225)
In fact, Deshpande decentres the male hegemony by presenting her characters in a jeopardy. D.E. Benet in “Storming the Literary Space and Breaking the Biological Boundary in the Postcolonial Context: An Analysis of Shashi Deshpande’s ‘Small Remedies’ and ‘That Long Silence’” concludes that “Deshpande decentres androcentric opinions and demonstrates how women can temporize before they come up with strategies to cope with demands like parturition, sexual services, and household chores and so on. Her heroines overcome their shortcomings, resist patriarchal interference, and strangely find fulfillment in matters like sex, career” (140-141). Her women characters strive to attain freedom and independence in their different roles. S.K. Salahuddin in “Feminist – feminism in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande” says:

Shashi Deshpande’s novels represent the contemporary women’s struggle to define and attain an autonomous selfhood. Her female protagonists are at great pains to free themselves from stultifying traditional constraints. The social and cultural change in the post-independence India has made the women conscious at the need to define themselves, their place in society, and their relationship with their surroundings. Shashi Deshpande’s concern is to explore the root cause of the fragmentation and the dichotomy of characters and to find out what happens in the psyche of these heroines in the process of individuation. She has created authentic female characters – flesh and blood characters with recognizable credentials. She has successfully delineated their problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, failures and foibles, dreams and disillusionment. (110)
In conclusion, it is better to quote N. Sethuraman’s words in “Silence, Surrender and Compromise: A Study of Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence” that Deshpande “is in the quest of creating ‘New Woman’ out of her protagonists who belong to different cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. The novelist is against the patriarchal establishments, which cripple the innate creativity of woman” (199). Deshpande desires to transform the society. She realizes the necessity for women’s education and economic independence. Her ‘new woman’, despite the obstacles of poverty and the denial of formal education, identifies and uses her potential to emerge successful in life.

Reference


