Chapter Four

The Quest for the Self

The day for moving mountains is coming,
You don’t think so?
It is coming: for a while the mountain sleeps,
But in other times.
Mountains all moved in fire. If you do not believe that,
Oh man, this at least believe:
All sleeping women
Will awake now and move.

- Yasano Akiko.

A quest for the self generally implies a journey and an initiation into an experience. It is something ever continuous in human life. The quest motif is found in great literatures of all ages. In the Puranas the gods or god–like men went in quest of something or somebody or in search of adventures to prove their heroism. In literary works, the protagonists undertake long journeys to find out the value of life. The quest for identity in novels and short stories written both in the west and in the east, deal with uprooted and alienated characters.

Feminism strives to undo the distorted image of woman whose cries for freedom and equality have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world. Thus denied the freedom to act and to choose their own, women remain solely
inside the field of vision with mere illusion to be dreamt and cherished. A woman is a woman and she must remain a man’s shadow-self, an appendage, an auxiliary and the unwanted and the neglected other. A woman is held to represent the ‘otherness’ of man, his negative. The development of thought at the outset of this century has brought about a perspective change in the outlook towards women.

Deshpande’s idea of feminism is an offshoot of individualism – the doctrine which is rooted in the idea that an individual should take precedence over the interests of the social group, family or the state. However, in India, the idea strengthened by religion and culture is that individual rights should not be attained by isolating oneself from the family and the community. Deshpande assesses and reassesses what exactly the Indian woman wants, and stresses that through education and self-dependence Indian woman can come out of the servility syndrome.

When the Indian woman was uneducated, illiterate and ignorant she was hailed as a *pativrata*, a sati, as honourable woman and so on. Now she has started becoming aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her individuality, her place and role in the family and society. The women in Deshpande’s novels range from the ones who conform to the traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother to others who hanker after roles that would provide them opportunities for greater self-expression. They do not want to be acclaimed and praised for blindly following tradition. They do not bother even
if the society condemns and rejects them. All that they wish is like Tennyson’s Ulysses “to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield” (31).

The old set up of a woman’s life is replaced by a new outlook represented by the educated modern young women. They make an attempt to review the concept of self, sin, faith, love and so on. They have visions for their ideal detachment and freedom and try to achieve them. They try to see and listen to their inner voice of intuition and their conscience and this makes them go in search of their identity. Instead of adapting themselves according to the circumstances and environment, they, in fact, search for a new way of life breaking away from the psychological bonds that restrict their freedom.

Elaine Showalter posits three phrases in the growth of feminist tradition: “limitation, protest and self-discovery” (qtd. Krishna Daiya 72) and Deshpande’s novels are directly related to all these phases. Her novels encapsulate her artistic vision of feminity as alienation. Her protagonists pass through these three stages in their lives. In her novels, she explores and exposes the long-smothered wail of the incarcerated psyche, imprisoned within the four walls of domesticity. The protagonists are sandwiched between tradition and modernity, between illusion and reality and between the mask and the face. Deshpande’s women characters can be divided into three groups: those who follow tradition as a virtue; those who realise what is good but still are unable to come out; and those who are independent. The first group — the grandmothers, mothers-in-law, aunts and mothers of the protagonists — belong to the uneducated. They suffer and die without uttering
a single world in protest. They bank upon age-old beliefs and superstitions, and find it hard to change them. The second group of Deshpande’s protagonists realise what is good but still are unable to come out and the third group try to break away the rotten customs and rituals and instil a sense of dignity and self-respect in their lives. They are sensitive, self-conscious, brilliant and creative. Thus positioned, they disown a ritualistic and tradition bound life in order to explore their true self. Concerned with a woman’s eternal quest for an authentic selfhood and understanding of the existential problems of life, the heroines of Deshpande are all agog to retain their individuality in the face of disintegrating and divisive forces that threaten her identity as a woman.

Deshpande has dealt graphically with the problems that confront a middle-class educated woman in the patriarchal Hindu society. Hers is not the feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles. Rather her novels deal with the psychic turmoil of woman within the limiting and restricting confines of domesticity. Deshpande’s heroines are not like the heroines of Anita Desai, neurotic and hysterical. They are not a Maya or a Monisha ever ready to face the ferocious assaults of existence. Deshpande does not make her woman characters stronger than they actually are in their real life. She declares that her characters take their own ways and that her writing has to do with women as they are. Women as presented in her novels are incomplete selves and partial beings. They are in need of someone to shelter them — be it
their father, brother or husband. Bogged down by existential insecurity and uncertainty they are in quest of refuge.

The heroines of Deshpande are suppressed by their mothers in their childhood just because they are born female. They are left uncared for and made to undergo all ordeals because the “daughters were curses” (Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* 39). They are unaware where they are leading to and they have no rights to enjoy by themselves even in their personal matters. Higher education to a girl is taboo socially as well as economically and the parents of the lower middle-class strata have a second thinking before they extend higher education to the girls. They very strongly believe that the education of the girls exercises a powerful influence in their marriage. Murali Manu elucidates the concern of the parents in the following words:

*Where from can the parents bring money for daughter’s marriage celebration? If they are sent for college education the money can’t be saved for their marriages. If parents can afford and are broadminded then they would send them for higher education either expecting them to find their life partner or ease their problem with less dowry, projecting their higher qualifications. (38)*

Saru, the protagonist of *The Dark Holds No Terrors* does not care to listen to her mother regarding her higher studies. She is aware that she will never get a green signal from her mother for anything of her rightful desires. The illiteracy of her mother may be a cause of her concern as she would not be
able to assess the advantage of acquiring higher education for her betterment in life. She argues with her husband that they would have to spend a lot of money for Saru’s marriage: “‘What gives her the right to choose? Have we no say in the matter? And when it comes to the point, I know you’ll have to spend for her wedding as well. We can’t ever evade that responsibility’” (TDHNT 144). Thus dowry system stands as a stumbling block for girls with regard to their education. A similar concern is expressed by Rukmani in Mulk Raj Anand’s The Road. She knows that “If her hand had not already been given away, it was because there was not enough dowry in the family chest” (15).

Saru’s mother worries about very important aspects in the life of her girl child. Her experiences direct her to go for saving money for her marriage than offering her higher education. Y. S. Sunita Reddy in her study A Feminist Perspective on the Novels of Shashi Deshpande observes that “In this connection, Saru’s mother’s attitude is typical of most Indian mothers and a common enough phenomenon in the Indian context” (51). Saru’s father delicately handles the situation not hurting both the females of the family. He presents the available two choices — education and marriage — in front of Saru to choose as it would decide her future.

Saru’s aspiration has been to attain a better position in society by securing a respectable career as a doctor. Acquiring an educational qualification is not an easy task and so she sacrifices many things in her youth discarding all her dreams of teenage. Once the target has been achieved, she
thinks she would have no regrets in finding her life partner. She wins the love of Manu, the hero of the college, the heart-throb of the girls. The background of Manu is of very little importance to her to start a new life and lead an independent life. Susheela Singh is of the view that “The attitudinal postures of Saru confirm the theory of Julia Kristeva that the consideration of feminity and marginality offers a position and not the essence, as they exhibit the courage to transcend the marginality and activate their epicentric participation in life” (*Feminism and Literature* 4).

Deshpande’s woman protagonists generally seek to come out: “. . . from inherited patterns or thought and action in favour of new modes, arrived at independently after much consideration of the various aspects of the problem, keeping also in view the kind of society she lives in” (Viney Kirpal 148). Deshpande shows that the girls try to achieve freedom after marriage - the open sesame of all enjoyment – no matter where they reside or what kind of surroundings they are left with. Apart from her initial middle-class inhibitions, Saru is quite comfortable to respond physically to enjoy love, offering and consuming with great passion. In the act of physical union, satiation for sexual urge has been secondary to the grave requirement of love. Saru who has lacked love in her life finds a saviour in Manu and says “I was insatiable, not for sex, but for love. Each act of sex was a triumphant assertion of our love. Of my being loved. Of my being wanted” (*TDHNT* 40).

Jaya, the protagonist of *That Long Silence* stands in direct contrast to Saru in her role as a woman. She is not a full time career woman like Saru.
Jaya hails from a more comfortable atmosphere where she has managed to get English medium education in school. This could be possible due to the love and care of her father. Unfortunately, her father is dead by the time her school examination begins and so she is trapped among the traditional women who are bound by the conventional belief of a woman’s role in the family. She is supposed to lead a traditional, passive life like “Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupathi stoically sharing her husband’s travails” (TLS 11). Jaya has little opportunity to express her view on her further course of action. In the absence of her father, her brother Dada wants to dispose of his responsibility by marrying off his sister as early as possible. So Mohan, an engineer who has been looking for an English educated girl marries Jaya. She begins her married life with the hope of enjoying the happiness of freedom. She anticipates independence of self-fulfilment in a family of her own. She compromises many of her personal aspirations to please her husband and to make the house a happy little home. Adele King opines: “Jaya finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is” (Effective Portrait 97).

Jaya is silent and she feels she can ask Mohan, her husband, nothing more in life than to keep themselves in harmony and unity. She enjoys watching every movement of her husband. It is a great pleasure for her to mind his needs and she takes it as her profession to learn him thoroughly and act upon it.
Indu in *Roots and Shadows* is a determined girl, who always wants to be free and independent. This brings her into confrontation with her family and the society in general. Besides being an educated young woman, Indu is very sensitive to the situations. She aspires to become independent and complete in herself but finds so many hurdles coming in her way. As G. S. Amur remarks:

Woman’s struggle in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and reserve her identity as wife, mother, and most important of all, as human being is Shashi Deshpande’s major concerns as a creative writer, and this appears in all her important stories. (Preface 10)

Indu finds dominant Akka and her family to be great hindrances in achieving independence and completeness. When she studies in the college, Akka does not allow her to meet boys, and cultivate friendship with them. So, later on, Indu leaves the house and gets married to Jayant who is her own choice. She proudly says, “I had rejected the family, tried to draw a magic circle around Jayant and myself. I had pulled in my boundaries and found myself the poorer for it” (*RS* 10). She leaves one house and enters another happily hoping to be independent and complete.

Marriage is generally regarded as the goal and destiny of women and therefore it plays an important role in their lives. Denial of education and employment compels women to aspire for marriage as a way of fulfilment, but unfortunately it leads, in a majority of cases, to their confinement within the
parameters that men mark out for them, “To fulfil one’s obligations, to discharge one’s responsibilities . . . can one not find freedom within this circle?” (RS 15). A woman’s position in the family appears to be paradoxical as she is subjugated and suppressed and yet she is indispensable for the running of the family. Gradually socio-economic changes and access to education have made her conscious of her rights and she tries to refuse to be servile to her husband. Unfortunately she finds herself landed in a dilemma as she is also pulled by the traditional role society thrusts upon her.

Deshpande’s protagonists resemble Nayantara Sahgal’s Saroj of Storm in Chandigarh and Simrit of The Day in Shadow, who make every possible effort to compromise and strengthen their relationships with their husbands. They desire to be good wives, try to adjust and reconcile but not at the cost of their individuality and self-respect. In the words of Meera Bai: “These women reflect their creator’s life for individual freedom and her firm belief that the bond of marriage is to be cemented with mutual trust, respect and consideration” (Indian Women Novelists 171). But when the occasion demands, they exhibit rare courage and do not feel guilty of their own steps against the established norms of the society. They are also independent women, firm in their values, seeking justice, identity and equality with men.

Saru like Indu strives towards self-realization with the aim of establishing her identity and does not want to admit failure. Both Indu and Saru hope that by getting married they can achieve independence and completeness. Gradually they realise that their independence is not all
complete and total. They are not content with their married life and they seek happiness through extra-marital relationships.

Saru and Indu experience disillusionment in sex. Indu has extramarital relationship with Naren. When marriage does not give her expected satisfaction, this is the second step to express her self-autonomy. Though Saru and Indu seek freedom not only intellectually but sexually too, they suffer from no guilt and begin to evolve a new code of sexual ethics that suits their fantasies and undergo a new experience.

Saru and Indu give a new interpretation of ‘love’ through extra-marital relationship. Saru reveals: “Love . . . how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against, futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called ‘love’” (*TDHNT* 72). Marriage remains an outward union for Saru and Manu. She is tired of his sexual acts and is reluctant to share physical intimacy with him. She scorns to utter the word ‘love’, when it is claimed to be with her and Manu. It is not a futile attempt to enjoy or experience but also only a ‘need’ of a man and a woman. When one of them hates to experience it, it becomes abuse of one’s body, mind, and the entire self.

Saru substitutes the word ‘sex’ for ‘love’. She feels that love has no place in her life. She hates such a man-woman relationship and regards it as an attraction to satiate one’s sexual urge not out of love and concern. To her, “the code word of our age is neither love nor romance, but sex. Fulfillment and happiness came, not through love alone, but sex. And for me sex is now a
dirty word” *(TDHNT* 133). Sinha expresses a similar view of Saru when he talks about their relationship:

Man-woman relationship whether within or outside marriage, needs to be liberated from conventional approaches to it in order to become a satisfying and fulfilling one. Marriage is neither a system of slavery nor an escape route. It is not even a contract for it is wrong to approach that spirit. It is a partnership based on respect and consideration and requiring involvement from both. The relationship has been subjected to an unusual strain in number of ways. (128)

Similarly Indu laughs at the idea of ‘love’ and says, “I love a book, a word or sari, a curry, a dog, a man” *(RS* 88). When Naren asks her what the truth is, she answers:

‘The sexual instinct . . . that’s true. The maternal instinct . . . that’s true too. Self-interest, self - love . . . they’re the basic truths. You remember Devdas? I saw it with some friends. They sobbed when he died for love. But I could have puked. A grown man moaning and crying for love! God! How disgusting!’ *(RS* 158)

Indu thinks that marriage would bring her freedom but to her great shock and surprise, she finds that Jayant has not only expected her to submit but has taken her submission for granted. She also, not being aware of it, submits herself to him step by step in the name of love and she wonders why she is
trying to please him all the time, “Have I become fluid, with no shape, no form of my own?” (RS 49). She understands that it is not love but an adjustment as she does not want conflict in her married life. As it is a love marriage she does not want to give an impression to her parents that she has committed a mistake. The following words show how she pretends in the name of social obligation:

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

And so I went on lying, even to myself. (RS 159)

Thus both Saru and Indu realise that love has no place in the world as they see only deceit, treachery and hypocrisy. They also see that sex becomes a symbol of power and authority in marriage. To Anne Foreman, women experience themselves as the fulfilment of other people’s need: “Men seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women; for women there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structures of her oppression” (102).

The protagonists of Deshpande yearn for security and emotional attachment. They begin to understand that marriage has failed to satisfy their hunger for total independence. Marriage demands enormous sacrifice from woman and in that sacrifice she cannot be totally free and independent. In fact, a fresh bondage begins with marriage. In this way, both Indu and Saru
become disillusioned in marriage. Indu’s quest for completeness turns out to be her quest for meaning, for self and life.

Saru’s quest for freedom starts in her early age itself when her mother rules her with an iron hand. The double standards by which she and her brother are treated make her rise against them searching for peace and happiness. She in her early age seeks freedom in loneliness. As Adel Pal observes:

For Saru the very word “mother” stands for old traditions and rituals, for her mother sets up a bad model, which distorts her growth as a woman, as a being . . . thus the strange childhood experiences false up her inflated ego and her thirst for power over others. (74-75)

Marriage changes Jaya’s attitude in all aspects. She feels that she has lost her quality of being an individual and is forced to live a life of deception. Adele King opines that she “finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is” (97).

In spite of her good effort to keep the line Mohan expects Jaya to do, she happens to fumble a bit and this is just a momentary lapse on her part. The male chauvinistic attitude wakes up to question her roughly when Jaya is delayed at the Churchgate. They are the same toned words of her Ai when she was a small girl. Though Jaya hates to be dictated by anyone, she has to listen to Mohan’s pestering: “I’ve been waiting for over an hour’ he said, even before I could remove my slippers. ‘Didn’t you think of that?’” (TLS 75).
Jaya is deeply hurt for there is no mistake on her part. She wonders how to handle such situations. She admits that she is at the mercy of male help when she is scared of cockroaches, lizards or electrical gadgets, but things have changed her attitude towards the fear of trivialities: “But what puzzles me is this: how I get this way? I’m sure I wasn’t always like this. I can remember a time when darkness and insects did not terrify me so. When did the process of change begin?” (TLS 76).

Jaya outgrows being the stereotype of a woman. She resents succumbing to someone dictating in the society or in her husband’s working place. She curiously watches the agitation in the construction site when Mohan himself panicks and orders the driver not to slow down. Overcoming all these inner fears, Jaya seeks the ‘self’ in her. The question “who am I?” (TLS 24) haunts her so obsessively that she fails to find her ‘self’. She is “an utter stranger, a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motives of her actions seemed impossible” (TLS 69). Hence she cries agonisingly – “I can’t hope, I can’t manage I can’t go on” (TLS 70). In such a stifling and suffocating domestic ambivalence and patriarchal set-up, she finds her female identity diminished. She has to pay for her happiness at the cost of her freedom.

For Jaya, ‘love and romance’ is all about songs, poems and stories. Physical contact makes no stir in her and she is unwilling to recall the experience. The conversation between Jaya and Mohan after physical contact
is: “‘Did I hurt you?’ and my answer, ‘No’ Each time, after it was over, the same question; and my reply too, invariably the same – ‘No’” (TLS 95).

Jaya confesses that physical contact is momentary and illusionary. Mohan is unable to grasp the fact that the sexual act involves both physical and emotional factors. Hence, she surrenders herself to the need of Mohan. She expresses little of her preference from Mohan on bed. ‘Sex’ becomes, to a great extent, an unrelated extraneous affair to Jaya. She never wants him to be in an uneasy situation, and is “scared of hurting Mohan, scared of jeopardising the only career I had, my marriage” (TLS 144). Her disinterest in the act of sex does not deny her of the quality of sustaining her husband. ‘The habit of being a wife’ is entrusted deep into her mind that she cannot get rid of it easily. However, deep in thought, she stays awake and is restless thinking how to express her reaction being an Indian woman with traditional belief — “With this man, I had not been a woman I had been just myself — Jaya” (TLS 153).

The reminiscence of the protagonists gives evidence to their unpleasant sexual experience with their life partners. Either it is uninteresting or a painful activity that they would like to forget. The diminishing attraction for their husbands puts them in a vulnerable position. Love-making for Mohan and Jaya is a silent and inarticulate affair: “God, how terrible it was to know a man so well. I could time it almost to the second, from the first devious wooing to the moment he turned away from me, offering me his hunched back” (TLS 85). Their predicament creates a curiosity within themselves and draws their attention towards other possible male acquaintance.
Indian women quite often become victims of extramarital affairs and the heroines of Deshpande are no exception. The reason for their liaison cannot be their weakness alone but their surroundings, cultural impact and the attitudes of their husbands. The heroines thirst to enjoy independence in the family of their own, but they are denied of their yearning, their aspiration, their right and their independence. Out of frustration, they go astray, but their intention once again fails due to the impact of social clutches over man and woman and their relationships. The society cares very little for individual emotions, because of the composed set of social rules and regulations. In the hands of the society, the aspiring mind of an individual is tossed constantly and is not allowed to settle down. As Bhatnagar says: “In the end comes the realization that freedom lies in having the courage to do what one believes in the right thing to do and the determination and the tenacity to adhere to it. That alone can bring harmony in life” (qtd. in Kumar Gupta 45).

Although Saru’s social and financial status grows, there is no peace for her at her home. Her feelings on being an economically independent individual are worse, as there is an inverse decline in her conjugal relationship. Her ambition to move higher in life is ignited by Boozie, a handsome and efficient doctor. He is flirtatious in nature but Saru has no aversion towards his flirts.

Saru has another extra-marital affair with Padmakar Rao, often called Padma, an outspoken boy. Her encounter with him after long years proves that he has not changed much. Saru is refreshed by his candour as she has been
hushing up so much of her emotions. His understanding of the people from the worst slums of Bombay helps him to argue or reason with the patients. The sharing of his experience gives Saru light moments and she considers it as an escape route from her loveless trap to find another man.

The closeness with Padma begins to sneak into Saru’s composed business. Gradually, she is fed up with Padma’s insistence for her company and his inability to see the other’s point of view “I knew it was not just the consequences I feared and hated, but the thing itself. What had I imagined? Love? Romance? Both, I knew too well, were illusions, and not relevant to my life anyway” (TDHNT 133). Saru’s affair with Padma fails to fulfil her inner craving for love and communication. This relationship is neither soothing nor comforting to her. Commenting on Saru’s relationship with the two men, Kamini Dinesh says:

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors* also there are other men but the relationship gives no solace. On the other hand the homosexual Boozie and the frustrated Padma bring to Saru the disillusioning realization that there can be no happiness or fulfilment in these relationships. They cannot be an escape route from the tension of married life. The woman seeking a crutch has, finally to fall back on herself. (200)

Marriage leads Indu into deception and artificial show. Marriage to Indu is just “a cold-blooded bargaining to meet, mate and reproduce” (RS 3). The tragedy of her marriage is that it fails to assure her the promised happiness.
Finding her sexual personality repressed within her marital relationship, Indu strives for expression and acceptance through an extra-marital affair with her cousin Naren:

I can go back and lie on my bed, I thought, and it will be like erasing the intervening period and what happened between Naren and me. But deliberately went to my bed and began folding the covers. I don’t need to erase anything I have done, I told myself in a fit of bravado. (RS 152)

This bold assertion of Indu sparks off a better understanding of her own predicament of existence. P. Rama Moorthy in his *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English* observes:

This sheds a brilliant light on Indu’s awareness of her autonomy and her realization that she is a being, and not a dependent on Jayant. The novel gains its feminist stance in Indu’s exploration into herself but it also moves beyond the boundaries of feminism into a perception of the very predicament of human existence. (129)

The bitter fact of losing her identity to her husband frightens and scares Indu. The paradox of the situation is that she is not happy with Jayant, but at the same time, she cannot live without him. At one point, in the novel, when Naren tries to make love with her, she declares, “I’m essentially monogamous, for me it’s one man and one man only” (RS 80). Later, she offers herself twice to Naren and then the question haunts her how she will
view the act of adultery. First she does not take love-making as a sin but the very next day, she starts thinking of the enormity of what she has done:

“Adultery . . . what nuances of wrong doing . . . no, it needs the other, stronger word . . . what nuances of sin the word carries. I will now breed on my sin, be crushed under a weight of guilt and misery” (RS 155).

Indu tries to reason out each and every action. Her mind starts musing over the reasons for giving her body to Naren. She muses on the matters of sin, crime, right and wrong:

Apart from wronging Jayant? wronging Jayant? I winced at the thought. But had I not wronged Jayant even before this? By pretending, by giving him spurious coin instead of the genuine kind? I had cheated him of my true self. That, I thought, dishonorable, dishonest, much more than this, what I have done with Naren. (RS 171)

Indu does not believe in love and deems it false. To her there is no such thing as ‘love’ in real life. Love is a big fraud and if somebody believes in it, he or she is trapped and becomes humble and dependent.

Jaya in That Long Silence is in a predicament similar to that of the other protagonists of Deshpande. Having lost the thrill of enjoying the closeness of Mohan, Jaya is at bay. Her individuality is ignored, and her creative skill is not recognized. She is the secondary citizen of her family despite her complete sacrifice to the family. Though the relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and
enduring, the relation between Jaya and Mohan is an epitome of failure. The blunt confession of Jaya is “Love? No, I know nothing of it” (TLS 153). This lovelessness in her marriage draws her towards Kamat, a middle-aged lonely intellectual who is not rich or socially significant as Mohan.

Kamat is a widower who lives in an apartment above Jaya’s flat at Dadar. He is of the view that woman makes a man helpless and dependent by her culinary art and he had overcome the hurdle by mastering cooking. His handling of tough situations skilfully draws the attention of Jaya who lives in emptiness. He warns her against wallowing in self-pity and asks her to pursue her literary career by giving expression to her real inner self.

Jaya becomes so uninhibitive towards Kamat that their relation leads to physical attraction. Sometimes his behaviour is father-like but on occasions turns into lover-like. He treats Jaya as an equal and Jaya is completely at ease in his company, sharing with him things which she cannot tell others including Mohan. Her affair with him is out of the rebellious strain in her. The physical urge remains a minor aspect of their relationship while the understanding and friendship becomes more important. The extramarital liaison ends up abruptly like a dream in her life with the death of Kamat.

In the Indian society a woman becomes a husband’s private property. A woman is not to indulge in love affairs with others before or after marriage and is required to serve her husband with single-minded devotion and loyalty. Even if the husband is lecherous, she is not to question him. Sunitha Reddy says, “our society has been so conditioned as to categorize women as immoral
on the slightest deviation on their part from the normal course of behaviour” (132).

Deshpande’s protagonists of the new generation review everything rationally. They analyze the idea of detachment and freedom and try to achieve these. They try to listen to their voice of conscience and revolt. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* explores the inner self of Saru who symbolizes the new woman who is educated and who lives in close association with society brushing outside all its narrow conventions. She disowns a ritualistic and tradition-bound life in order to explore her true self. She is on a quest for an authentic selfhood and an understanding of the existential problems of life.

Saru’s burning ambition to study medicine is rewarded when she gets a first class in the finals at the school. With the support of her father, Saru moves to Bombay and joins medicine. She becomes a doctor and marries Manu. For the first time in her life, Saru feels that she is wanted, needed and loved without any kind of reserve, but soon Saru’s confidence in her husband’s literary capabilities evaporates. Her sole aim is to succeed professionally and she does not allow any sort of scruple to come in the way.

In a patriarchal society, women should not hold better positions than men. No matter how much love the man claims for his wife, when it comes to the difference in earnings and status, he always expects that he has to be superior to her. Over the years women have accepted this norm without question, but now are a little more liberated. Saru says at one point of time that were times when women were chained to their husbands and liked it that
way. She says it would have been better for her marriage, but the idea of liberation and equality has brought turmoil in because women’s expectations have grown but men have not accepted it yet. Saru initially fails to notice the change in Manu but later realises that “… the esteem with which I was surrounded made inches taller. But perhaps, the same things that made me inches taller made him inches shorter” (TDHNT 42).

When Saru becomes more successful and respected, it creates a rift between the two. It is really a matter of wonder that a man who claims complete love and devotion for his wife, suddenly starts to think of her as his competitor. She is left to wonder about her own incapacities, faults and reasons, yet theirs is also a love marriage. So she begins a journey of self realisation to discover life single handedly.

Being a doctor, she is recognized and confirmed as an individual with supernatural powers, talents and capacities. She overshadows her husband in all aspects as the society gives her more importance and weight. Since Manu is unable to compete with her as an equal, he emotionally and physically tries to suppress her. Saru struggles to free herself from such suppressions which are experienced by the women in the Indian society.

One may draw a parallel between Saru and Janu in Jaishree Misra’s Ancient Promises. Janu was forced into an early marriage by her parents, the reason being that she falls in love with a boy from a different community. Marriage becomes a trap to her and she has an emotional breakdown in the hands of her husband. She feels that financial independence is a must for all
married women and takes a job after completing her B.A. Once she is economically independent, she breaks all bonds and rises against her husband who had no concern whatsoever for her and takes her own course, in the quest for real identity.

Saru hates gender discrimination that encourages a faulty upbringing of male and female children. She also rebels against the conventional education imparted to women and becomes a professional doctor herself. The male domination and the rigid retributive attitude of the patriarchal Indian society towards women is again a challenge for Saru.

Through the character of Indu, Deshpande portrays the inner struggle of an artist to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potentiality, i.e, creative writing. Indu is interested in creative writing — a means to articulate her voice of justice, to forge moments in art that are arresting and original. To this Jayant says ‘No’ because they need money and they have a long way to go but “To go where?” (RS 19), Indu cannot ask for she has no right to ask. It is the authoritative husband who has the say and not a meekly submissive wife like her. As Bhatnagar rightly remarks: “... the novel deals with a woman’s attempt to assert her individuality and realise her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with family, with male-dominated society” (125).

Indu, true to her feminine virtue, plays the role of an ideal housewife but the role of a wife restricts, rather circumscribes her self-development – firstly by taking away her freedom of thought and expression and secondly by
denying her the scope of giving free play to her artistic potentiality. Regarding a woman’s role-play Rosemary Tong in her *Feminist Thought* observes: “Sometimes women play their roles not so much because they want to, as because they have to in order to survive economically and/or psychologically. Virtually all women engage in the feminine role playing” (208).

A woman’s response and relating to other’s needs may distract her from her own sense of identity. Even in her professional life too, Indu has to curtail her freedom and submit to the dictates of the editor. She cannot give up her job which fails to be self-satisfactory because Jayant wants her to compromise with the profession of being a writer. In this context it is quite relevant to note what Berger in his *Ways of Seeing* says:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself . . . She has to survey everything she is and everything she does . . . Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another . . . Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at . . . The surveyor of woman in herself is male the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (46-47)

With the realization that freedom lies in the courage to do what one believes is the right thing to do and the determination to adhere to it, the meek, docile and
humble Indu, finally emerges as a bold, challenging, conscious and rebellious woman. She resigns her job, thus defying the male authority. Her self-discovery is the frightening vision of the feminine self’s struggle for harmony and sanity.

With regard to Jaya, marriage has changed her attitude in all its aspects. She feels that she has lost her quality of being an individual and is forced to live a life of deception. Mohan discards the interest of Jaya to take up a profession but Jaya finds some satisfaction in involving herself in creative activity. She is a successful columnist and an aspiring writer of fiction. She proudly says: “That column, yes, it had made me known” (TLS 119). Mohan, who takes pride in being the husband of a writer, interferes in the subject matter she happens to touch. Mohan is worried about the reach on, of the society. Some of the details from their own life in the story, which is selected for a prize, embarrass him. He is not angry with the details but feels hurt when it is revealed to the world. His reaction instigates Jaya to revolt but continue writing.

Jaya has to give up her aspiration to be a writer to avoid hurting her husband, and this results in savage anger in Jaya mounting against Mohan. All her adjustments for his pleasure get no reciprocation from his side and Jaya is helpless and says, “‘I had shaped myself so resolutely to his desires all these years, yet what was left with now? Nothing. Just emptiness and silence. . . .’” (TLS 144).
Mohan, Jayant and Manu consider their wives as their possession and forget about their individual ‘selves’ in their profession. They are normal husbands in the Indian society who enjoy financial benefit as well as social status. However, the wives — Saru, Indu and Jaya are suppressed to stick to the role of Indian wives, the subordinates to their husbands. Their perseverance and hardwork right from their childhood to attain a position in the society is easily ignored and they are expected to surrender themselves easily. Ramesh Kumar Gupta’s observation about Indian women is worth considering in this context — “The general perspectives about woman as a shadow – figure to a male caretaker, be he a father, a husband or a son continue to persist. Man’s affinity with woman is most often the bond exists between a master and a slave” (111). The protagonists of Deshpande however revert the ‘perspectives about woman’ that has crushed their soul. The process of self-discovery is illuminated and it is a cathartic experiment. It is a rebirth and a resurrection of self. “Life has always to be made possible” (TLS 193) is the note of hope and affirmation. The protagonists are in search for the means to overcome oppression, develop their powers and abilities for personal fulfilment and self-actualisation.

Urmila in The Binding Vine tells Dr. Bhaskar that marriage provides security to a woman. She makes an apt remark that in a patriarchal social set-up, an unmarried woman is socially vulnerable. She is happily married to Kishore and has a supportive family. She realises the need for female
solidarity, the need to reach out and establish links with the oppressed section of women.

No other character in Deshpande is so rebellious like Urmila. All her other characters may be independent to some extent but are firmly bound by the shackles of tradition. Moreover, the protagonists in the earlier novels are aware of the inequalities of society but they do not attempt to set them right. Indira Nithyanandham observes:

The Binding Vine is a refreshing change from the first three novels of Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonists here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes. The hope for Indian women lies in the happy fact that though here are Miras and Kalpanas and Shakutalas, we also have Urmilas. (66)

Urmila may be educated and exposed to western ideas but nowhere does she show that she agrees with Simon de Beauvior’s belief that marriage diminishes man but almost annihilates woman. Besides, Urmila is able to see the contrast between her life and the terrible life women have been forced to lead.

Urmila realises the difference between her life and lives of others and thinks: “I’ve managed, but I’ve been lucky, that all. What these women . . . they never had a chance” (TBV 174). While Kalpana’s mother moans, “Why does God give us daughters . . . ?” (TBV 60) to Urmila, who is mourning the recent death of her infant daughter Anu, the thought is jarring: “We dream so
much more for our daughters than we do for our sons, we want to give them
the world we dreamt of for ourselves” (TBV 124). Urmila’s grandparents bring
her up believing in giving freedom to girls. Thus, she had the freedom to make
choices and so naturally plans the same for her child, “I will let her soar, I had
thought, I will let nothing fetter her, not even my love. She will go far, she
will climb high, she will do nothing she wants” (TBV 124).

*A Matter of Time* portrays a woman who is more mature and dignified
than her predecessors. While others cannot think of themselves outside the
familial bond, Sumi, finding herself in, is unperturbed. Being a little detached,
she manages herself admirably and almost becomes self-dependent.
Deshpande quotes Kierkegaard saying “Life must be lived forwards, but it can
only be understood backwards” (AMT 98).

Sumi is married to Gopal who for no apparent reasons deserts her.
Sumi soon picks up the threads of her life, takes good care of her daughters,
educates them and tries to give them a stable life. Aru witnesses the strained
man-woman relationship from a very tender age and is the worst affected. She
is unable to understand why her father has deserted her mother or why her
mother has remained a mute spectator. She takes over several responsibilities
when Sumi and Shripathi die in an accident. Stoically she stands by Kalyani
and “Aru rushes to Kalyani and kneeling by her huddled body says, ‘Amma,
I’m here, I’m your daughter, Amma, I’m your son, I’m here with you . . .’”
(AMT 253).
The suffering of Kalyani and Sumi are a sort of incentive for Aru to become a lawyer, so that she can fight the injustices inflicted on women. She even joins a women’s activist group so that it gives her a platform to voice her anger and frustration against the tradition bound society. In the words of Prasanna Sree:

Modern and liberated in outlook, Sumi defies the outdated social opinion and orthodox treatment of a woman subjected to desertion by her husband. She has the courage to rise above the consequential problems and difficulties, humiliations and frustrations. She has the generosity to gracefully free her husband from marital bonds without venting ill-feelings. (118)

Sumi thus comes a long way from Indu, Jaya, Saru and even Urmila for whom marriage is mostly the be-all and end-all of their existence. They dread loneliness and disintegration resulting from a broken marriage and hence opt for a compromise without, losing their individualities. Sumi is confident of her capabilities to make choices and assumes control over her life. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her proves that she has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and self-fulfilment. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure.

In *Small Remedies* Savitribai, Madhu, Leela, Lata, Rekha and Kaveri are portrayed as ‘new women’. The ‘new woman’ never compromises or lets go her interest or dream. The novel talks about these women and their journey
from slavery to freedom. Deshpande’s novels are all about growing up into ‘selfhood’. In her novels, married women like Madhu and Savitribai have to find their ways in the world to move through the progress of separation towards a concept of self. For their growth, identity and individuality these women reject male support. For their life as ‘single woman’, they have been criticized and looked down upon but they do not care. They want to have their own life where they search and struggle to give a new meaning to their existence and to the meaning of their own choice. The female self in order to emerge in its own right has first to validate her existence on her own terms. To acquire herself, Madhu leaves her husband. She, who had been working as an Assistant Editor with ‘City View’, now becomes a writer of her own right.

Savitribai, though belonging to a very traditional orthodox Brahmin family, develops interest in music and singing which is not considered respectable for ladies of reputed families. She wishes to learn music and dreams of being a singer. Once she happens to hear Pundit Kashinath Buwa, one of the famous singers of the time and she decides to have him only as her ‘Guruji’. While talking to Madhu, she says she is ready to disguise herself as a man just to attend those music meets. Thus Savitribai is conscious and desperate to fulfil her desire.

To learn music Savitribai leaves her husband and his house and goes to Bombay. She keeps on visiting and requesting Pundit Kashinath Buwa to accept her as his disciple but all go in vain. Pundit Kashinath as a traditional
man of the patriarchal orthodox society is of the opinion that singing is not a profession meant for a respectable married woman.

After recovering from his illness, when Kashinathji returns to Bhavanipur, his hometown, Savitribai follows him regularly to be his disciple and finally he accepts her as his ‘Shishya’. This brings to light the new woman’s struggle, ambition, hardwork and persistence in the character of Savitribai. She travels everyday by train, the shuttle service that moves between Bhavanipur and the next town. There she walks two miles from the station to guruji’s house just with the aim of having her own individuality and a life of her own choice. Deshpande puts forth few questions through the narrator Madhu about Savitribai:

In this story I see the artist, the woman in search of her genius, of her destiny. But the artist was born of the woman. First there was the woman and then the artist. Is it possible to cut the umbilical cord, to sever the connection between the two? Did Bai manage to do this? (SR 133)

Savitribai adopts the surname ‘Indorekar’ as a singer not compromising either her maiden name or her married one. She acquired hers from her mother’s home town Indore. She gives the same surname to her daughter also — Meenaxi Indrokar — marking her out as her child alone, not the child of her marriage and not the child of her lover.

Savitribai can be called a rebel who rejects the conventions of her times. She can be introduced as a feminist who lives her life on her own
terms. She can be looked upon as a great artist who struggles and sacrifices everything for the cause of her art. In order to establish her identity as a woman she gives up everything — a comfortable home, a husband and a family. She is a courageous woman to leave her husband for a Muslim lover and to be a singer. She leaves behind all relations to reach her goal. Madhu, while writing her biography, appreciates her:

To me, Bai was Munni’s mother. She was different, certainly, from other mothers — I never saw her do the mundane thing other mothers did, I never saw her behave the way the other mothers did. Nevertheless, her identity was, for me, connected to Munni. That she was something else, something more, was brought home to me the day I saw her on stage. (SR133)

Madhu very objectively appreciates Savitribai’s idea of being immortal through music. She laughs at and rejects the idea of being immortal by burning one’s own self as ‘sati’ after the death of one’s husband. She is a frank woman who accepts her husband’s pre-marital affair without any opposition or contempt. She expects a friend in a husband, and speaks about her single physical relation at a quite young age with her father’s friend, Chandru. She confesses, “He slept with me, I was only fifteen then. He — I don’t think he meant it, but it — it happened. And that’s why he — that’s why he died. He killed himself because of what he did to me” (SR 262). This reveals the daring frankness or transparency from the woman of this new generation.
Leela, in this novel, is introduced as a rebel in the family. She is a widow who remarries a Christian man, though she is a Brahmin. She is a teacher, an active leader in the trade union — among the factory workers. She also plays a very important role during emergency. She is a social worker who also gets involved in the strikes of the railway workers. For her activities she is imprisoned but this does not weaken her spirit. She also participates in the 1942 Quit India Movement. She is responsible for many daring deeds in the male-dominated society. Deshpande herself speaks through Madhu:

But I have begun thinking that in writing about Bai, I’m writing about Leela as well. And my mother and all those women who reached beyond their grasp. Bai moving out of her class in search of her destiny as a singer, Leela breaking out of the conventions of widowhood, reaching out from her small room to the world, looking for justice for the weak, my mother running in her bare feet, using her body as an instrument for speed, to break out of the shackles, finally triumphantly breasting the tape—yes they’re in it together . . . . (SR 283-84)

The life of Savitri Indorekar, a lover of music and Leela, a social reformer are presented from the perspective of Madhu, the narrator of the novel, who herself is under identity crisis. The story of the novel goes back to some 50 years ago when life for women in India was governed entirely by male dictators and traditions. The two young women — Savitri who is obsessed with music and the other Leela, a passionate believer in the communist world
— give up their families and try to seek fulfilment in public life. Savitri starts her life as a dutiful daughter-in-law in an orthodox Hindu household, but breaks away from it, to fulfil her ambition of being a fully fledged singer and creates a space of her own thereby attaining freedom devoid of any kind of affiliation. Leela, on the other hand, gives up herself for the uplift of the party and works closely with the factory works of Bombay. Both the women have in them independent spirits and give up respectability to gain happiness and unhappiness in equal measure.

The failure in parental homes as well as in their homes is not caused by the people around the women protagonists of Deshpande. The protagonists themselves are not able to fit themselves in the given situations. Everyone around them is secondary including their own children. They are not bothered to distance themselves from their mothers, husbands and children. The real meaning of the institutions — marriage and family — is not understood by them. They are over anxious and ignore the welfare of their husbands and the future of their children. Finally, the search drives them back to their birth place where they lose their real self.

Deshpande’s objective in her novels is to show that one should take refuge in the self which means that the self is not metaphysical but psychological. According to Deshpande a woman should assert herself so that she can overcome or thrash the suppressing forces. It is only through self-analysis and self-understanding that a woman can to change her life and overcome the hurdles in her way to progress. Women have to fight with
determination and courage in order to obtain what they want. Jaya’s words in the concluding lines of *That Long Silence* epitomizes this determination — “We don’t change overnight. It’s possible even over long periods of time. But 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” (192-93).

Liberation does not mean being free of all shackles. There are several duties that each individual has to perform. A woman has to be a mother and fulfil her role as a mother but it is not right to expect her to conform to all notions of the society and this is the point that is stressed by many women writers. One can also come to this conclusion by the words of Jasbir Jain when she states her idea of post-feminism:

> It is not just the discovery of the self, the exploration of the past, the correction of history, the shaping of epistemological systems which are of significance but also the participation in the present, and the acceptance of new definitions of space and freedom, so that the centre and margins do not appear as antagonistic, hostile, mutually exclusive categories but acquire sufficient fluidity to enlarge each other. Feminism is about the self, about rights and about differences; Post-feminism is a move towards reciprocal change, and expresses a need to look anew at the harsh political realities. Post-feminism, in its impact on literary aesthetics, shifts the issue from identity to relationships, from a concern with oppression to one with the
concept of freedom. By refusing to be constrained by the label of feminism, women writers are foregrounding all the above mentioned issues and sending across a message that to be a feminist is not to be non-human. (43)

Deshpande’s protagonists belong to different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, and the novelist is against the patriarchal establishments, which cripple the innate creativity of women. The protagonists enter into marriage with the hope that the marriage would provide them respect, security and status in the society but, unfortunately, they are disappointed and subsequently disillusioned. Deshpande elaborates on the major exploration of her heroines by transcending the boundaries of the female gender.

Deshpande, therefore, suggests that women themselves have to break the shackles that have kept them in a state of captivity for several centuries. Finding themselves trapped in the roles assigned to them by society, her women attempt to assert their individuality, confront their husbands in search of freedom and try to redefine human relationships. Without rejecting outright the cultural and social background, they realise the need to live in the family but reject the roles prescribed to them by the society. They try to achieve self-identity and independence within the confines of marriage and try to extricate themselves from male dominance.

At the same time, Deshpande’s women character are unwilling to forego the security marriage offers them. They are concerned with the duties of a devoted wife *Pativrata* and they revolt against slavery only with this
inner struggle. Finally they come to the point of compromise and avoid all open fights. They practice non-violence and advocate that people should learn to negotiate disagreements and problems without fighting. Deshpande brings out the guilty feelings of her protagonists which instigate them to move in a positive direction to maximize their potential and get accommodated to the situations in life.