Chapter Five

Accommodation

Don’t tread paths barred to you

Obey, never utter a ‘no’;

Submit and your life will be a paradise.

- Shashi Deshpande

Deshpande’s alienated heroines who are in search of their identity progress from alienation to existential affirmation. The novelist redeems them by making them return to their normal self and have a new start by accommodating to the situations prevailing in the society around them.

Accommodation is a process of adaptation and adjustment, in which one manages to understand the prevailing atmosphere and adjusts one’s thoughts with the thoughts of the people around. It is an excruciating as well as crucial process for the protagonists of Deshpande to locate themselves in the society, as the society wants them to be. Deshpande's protagonists reveal their existential predicament being in control of the society and the people around them but they finally return to conformity.

Every one lives in society as a social animal but is an individual by birth and is groomed by the society. Though he/she may fail to deny his/her originality and individuality completely, he/she is an individual first with all his/her ideal emotions. Humans have their own desire to nurture their instincts
which urge them to live their own life in spite of all the forced social demands. Humans are neither anti-social nor non-social and the roles they play are both social as well as individual. Deshpande, in her novels, delineates the individuality her protagonists would prefer to demonstrate with the companions in the family and the society. With their individual straits, they would have succeeded in the western society where their counterparts decide their life not by the influence of social life, but by their own instinct.

Deshpande, while describing the role of women in the society, observes how womanhood is viewed by the people of different ideologies:

- A woman is a womb, a uterus: the Greeks
- A female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities: Aristotle
- Neither was man created for the woman but the woman for the man: The Bible
- Day and Night women must be kept in dependence. Woman is never fit for independence. She should be guarded against evil inclinations: Manu
- Woman is a mutilated man: Freud.

*(Writing from the Margin and other Essays 87)*

In her thematic preoccupations and fictional techniques, Deshpande definitely marks an advance over Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal. She is be classified as a feminist though her feminism does not easily
fit into the largely westernized discourses and formulations of a gendered society. In an interview with Lakshmi Holmstrom, Deshpande says:

Feminism is not a matter of theory. It is difficult to apply Kate Millett or Simon de Beauvoir or whoever to the reality of our daily lives in India, and then there are such terrible misconceptions about feminism by people here. They often think it is about burning brass and walking out on your husband, children or about not being married, not having children, etc. I always try to make the point now about what feminism is not, and to say that we have to discover what it is in our own lives, our experiences. And I actually feel that a lot of women in India are feminists without realising it. (162)

Deshpande feels that the society has become a trap in which the entire creative energy of woman is simply allowed to go waste because she is forced to conform to certain expectations of the society. Women can be freed from this trap only if the society allows sufficient room for them to realise their creativity, and thus they seek fulfillment in the social framework to pursue their calling as a daughter, a wife and a mother.

Deshpande's novels present a social world of many complex relationships. Many men and women live together and journey across life in their different age groups, classes and gendered roles. Doubt, anxiety and often a feeling of being void of values push the characters in her novels to intense self-examination. These women are particularly caught in the process
of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationships within their given social world. Through the characters, Deshpande looks into woman’s changing perspective and their search for bonding within the family as a mode of strength.

The fact of being a woman has never been a source of pleasure or pride for Deshpande’s protagonists because it always seems to be a man’s world all around them. Saru remembers her mother’s preference for Dhruva and recounts how she pushed him off her father’s lap, hoping he would become a star like the legendary Dhruva. Even her birthdays were dull affairs when compared to Dhruva’s which were veritable feasts. When her mother recalls the terrible rains on the day Saru was born, Saru wonders whether the rains were terrible or the fact of her being born a girl is terrible. This feeling of terribleness continues throughout her childhood and even growing up becomes something shameful. Saru remembers the trauma that she underwent when her periods began and she was treated like a pariah for those three days. Acceptance of the fact of being a female as a mere biological reality comes to Saru only after she joins medical college, as she says:

It was only when I began to study anatomy and physiology in my first year of medicine that I was suddenly released from a prison of fears and shames. Things fell, with a miraculous exactness, into place. I was a female. I was born that way, that was the way my body had to be, those were the things that had to happen to me. And that was that! (TDHNT 63)
In spite of their attempts to fight gender roles, the fact of their being a female is dinned into Deshpande’s protagonists right from their childhood with marriage being projected as the final goal in life. The fairy tale ending of a man falling in love with her and marrying her is given great importance by Saru during her childhood. Ideas like looking beautiful and having soft hands that can be caressed by a man are stressed upon as essential goals in a woman’s life: “Everything in a girl’s life . . . was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male” (*TDHNT* 163). The influence of social norms shapes even a woman’s dreams. Saru recalls her adolescent days:

> I was female and dreamt of being the adored and chosen of a superior superhuman male. That was glory enough . . . to be chosen by that wonderful man. I saw myself humbly adoring, worshipping and being given the father-lover kind of love that was protective, condescending, yet all — encompassing and satisfying. (*TDHNT* 53)

Deshpande’s protagonists have a strong love-hate relationship with their mothers. Jaya voices it when, after her father’s death, she is forced to give up the home she loves. “‘We had no home anymore’” (*TDHNT* 156), moans Jaya and she also says “‘My mother made me homeless’” (*TDHNT* 153). Saru’s animosity towards her mother is also felt throughout the novel. She hates to belong to the same class as her mother: “‘If you are a woman, I don’t want to be a one . . . A kind of shame that engulfed me, making me want to range, to scream against the fact that put me in the same class as my
mother” (TDHNT 62). Instead of sharing female experiences, these characters dread the idea of having to tread on the footsteps of their mothers: “‘To get married and end up doing just your mother did seemed to me not only terrible but damnable’” (TDHNT 63). Indu does not remember her mother and it is the dictatorial Akka who becomes the surrogate mother for Indu. Indu resents her authority over the members of her family and chooses to marry Jayant in rebellion against Akka’s dictatorial authority. Ironically, Akka makes Indu the ideal inheritor to her property. These protagonists have their animosity towards their mothers by refusing to toe their line in many aspects of life. Their rejection of the rituals practised by their mothers like praying for a long life for their husbands is an “indication of their autonomy and their capacity to see their lives independent of their mother/past” (Ramamoorthy 41).

It is only when Saru withdraws from her immediate family — her husband and children — that she is able to overcome her sense of guilt. This sense of guilt has been thrust upon her by societal norms and the expectations of others. Her mother repeats it so often that Saru begins to believe she is responsible for her brother Dhruba’s death. Much later, when her father says “‘I never blamed you’” (TDHNT 193), Saru is able to see the untruth of the accusation. She now realises that she has not failed as a daughter because she had not walked out on her parents. In fact, it is her mother who had shut her out of her affections and even cursed her after Dhruba’s death saying “‘Why didn’t you die? Why are you alive when he’s dead’” (TDHNT 191). Her mother continues to curse her and Prof. Kulkarni recounts to Saru her
mother’s words: “Daughter? I don’t have any daughter. I had a son and he died. Now I am childless” (TDHNT 196), and “I will pray for her unhappiness. Let her know more sorrow than she has given me” (TDHNT 197). Saru now sees that she has been shut out by her mother from her world.

Shunned by her mother, Saru withdraws to herself. This withdrawal helps Saru get rid of her other guilt complex too of holding herself responsible for Manu’s sadism. She had begun to believe that her professional competence and success at work has driven Manu to his present state of being a monster at night. She now realises that being successful is no crime. Her resolve to face Manu and her future is made possible only after this complete withdrawal. She now sees that she has the inner strength to overcome the hurdles of her life including the accepted patriarchal norms. Though A. K. Awasthi calls Saru an “anxious, eager, ambitious . . . confused, hopeless, dull, almost thoughtless and a recluse run-away” (107), Saru needs this temporary withdrawal to resolve her doubts about her life and relationships. She has attained the inner strength to squarely face her problems, as she tells her father: “And, oh yes, Baba, if Manu comes tell him to wait. I’ll be back as soon as I can” (TDHNT 221). Saru’s withdrawal is thus not an escapism but a withdrawal which is essential for her re-integration into the society and it helps her to break the illusions that she had created and then face life courageously.

After meeting Manu, Saru continues to have the “age-old dream of a superior conquering male” (TDHNT 53), for whom she was always
“subordinating myself (herself) so completely . . . that I (she) was nothing without him” (*TDHNT* 53). These dreams are soon shattered when marriage does not provide the sought-after happiness. All the three protagonists agree that “marriage itself is a difficult enough business” (*RS* 98). Though they view marriage as an essential social institution, they have no romantic illusions about it: “‘Jayant and I . . . I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasise . . . Neither love nor happiness come to us for the asking’” (*RS* 13). Marriage fails to provide them with the love or the freedom that the protagonists aspire for and this is in accordance with what Ramamoorthy says “marriage, the promised end in a traditional society, becomes only another enclosure that restricts the movement towards autonomy and self-realization” (41).

Saru’s might seem like a successful marriage, but it is not so really. Her case is not only a case of marital rape but there is complexity in understanding the psyche of Saru. The ‘rape’ she endures every night with her husband, is the way shepunishes herself and this results in her being guilty and doubtful about her love for Manu. Later when she comes home to her father, she gets into the routine that her mother did by transforming herself into her mother “Her face had the same suffering look her mother’s had” (*TDHNT* 212). Young Madhav’s presence in the house and his calling her “Saruthai” (*TDHNT* 212) as Dhruva had done are the mechanisms that help her towards healing herself. The last conversation she has with her father is very telling. She faces the fact that in the end it is she who has lost her love
for Manu, and it is she who needs to make the decision about her life and marriage on her own. She understands that no one is to blame and no one can provide her with remedies. So she gradually moulds herself as a typical Indian woman:

... all those selves she had rejected so resolutely at first, and so passionately embraced later. The guilty sister, the undutiful daughter, the unloving wife... persons spiked with guilts. Yes, she was all of them, she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. But if she was all of them, they were not all of her she was all these and so much more. (TDHNT 220)

Indu in Roots and Shadows is not a creative writer but dabbles in Journalism. Faced with the bitter truth about a social worker of whom she had sung paeans, Indu decides to speak the truth. Her editor is aghast and scoffs at her desire to reveal the truth. This type of writing gives Indu no satisfaction but she continues with it: “Hating it, hating myself. Waking up each day and thinking... I can’t go on. Feeling trapped, seeing myself endlessly chained to the long dusty road that lay ahead of me” (RS 18). Like Kamat who points out the truth to Jaya, it is Naren who points out the hypocrisy of Indu’s writings for the magazine saying, “I don’t like it. It has no soul” (RS 71). Deshpande here suggests that all writing by women tends to get circumscribed by expected societal norms. It is only at the end of the novel that Indu, like Jaya, is certain that “I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of
doing” (TLS 187). This silence traps not only writers but women in all spheres of life. As a lady doctor, listening to the complaints from her women patients, Saru realises the enormity of:

all the indignities of a woman’s life borne silently and as long as possible. . . . Everything kept secret, their very womanhood a source of deep shame to them . . . going on with their tasks and destroying themselves in the bargain for nothing but a meaningless modesty . . . they had schooled themselves to silence. (TLS 107)

In Mohan’s mother’s total surrender to Mohan’s father, Jaya sees “a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon. Silence and surrender” (TLS 36). The protagonists are aware of this barrier of silence and each one tries to overcome this barrier in her own way.

Jaya’s attempts to carve out a space for herself in the world of writing meets with a similar fate. She tries her hand at writing but has to very soon make a choice between success at work and marital harmony. She gives up her writing as her husband disapproves of her attitude in her writing. She is silenced even before she has an opportunity to voice her opinion. He imagines that she is airing their family problems in her writings and she is left with no choice but to move on to innocuous stories for the Woman’s World. This writing is a far cry from what Jaya really wants:
That column, yes, it had made me known. My profile silhouetted in stark black that accompanied each article frightened me each time I saw it. It was like seeing someone masquerading as myself, or as if I was masquerading as the woman who wrote the column. (TLS 119)

Jaya is mature enough to realise that the blame cannot be totally put on the male partner and admits to herself: “... even as I listed these to myself, it came to me that perhaps it had nothing to do with Mohan, the fact that I had not done these things, that I had left them alone. Perhaps I had not really cared enough about these things myself” (TLS 148). Not wanting to face the tensions and friction that her actions may lead her into, Jaya, very often, crawls back into her hole that is unassailable and writes only light, humorous pieces about the travails of a middleclass housewife: “bicos she says. She could stay there, warm and snug” (TLS 149). As in the case of Saru, for Jaya too, the strength to write as she really wants to comes much later.

These women protagonists wish to move out of the limited space of their marital home and choose a career of their own, other than that of a house-maker. It is this desire for recognition that spurs Saru to become a doctor — she finds the need to prove to her parents that she is as good as or even better than Dhruba. However, very early in her career, Saru realises that success at work is not necessarily gratifying because of the resultant tensions in her marital life. A woman is made to feel a sense of guilt, “If the ‘I’ dared to overreach a male” (TDHNT 53). When Saru blossoms into a successful
doctor, Manu feels relegated to the background merely as the doctor’s husband. It is this hurt to his male ego that sows the seeds of discord between Manu and Saru. Any praise for Saru seems to bring on the dreaded bouts of sadism in Manu. He cannot accept any contravening of a secondary role for women because, according to Saru, “The same thing that made me inches taller made my husband inches shorter. . . . I was the lady doctor and he was my husband” (TDHNT 42). Saru is now convinced that the mathematical equation she had learnt as school was totally false: “a+b they told us in mathematics was equal to b+a. But here a+b was not, definitely not equal to b+a. It became a monstrously unbalanced equation, lopsided, unequal, impossible” (TDHNT 42). The fact of Saru being the bread-winner is acceptable to Manu only within the confines of their home. The suave Manu of their college days gradually grows into an uninteresting, unsuccessful lecturer in a second rate college while Saru provides both the bread and the butter for the family. So steeped is Saru in the traditional concept of a limited space and role for a woman that she considers herself responsible for his sadism: “It’s not what he has done to me, but what I have done to him” (TDHNT 216). It is only towards the end of the novel that Saru is able to free herself of this feeling of guilt and break away from the hold of societal norms, after a total, honest self-appraisal.

Like Saru, Indu is also educated, modern, self-reliant, and married to a man of her choice. By marrying Jayant, she subdues her own hobby of writing and alters her life-style to please him. She eventually becomes a submissive
wife to a domineering husband, letting herself to be swayed by the patriarchal notion that a man is superior to a woman. She says, “He chooses his level. And I try to choose the one he would like me to be on” (43). Jayant finds Indu’s passionate nature quite shocking, and this generates a peculiar tension between them, compelling her to hide her true self from him. She says “I had learnt to reveal to Jayant nothing but what he wanted to hear. I hid my responses and emotions as if they were bits of garbage (RS 41).

Fortunately, Indu is summoned by her grand aunt Akka who is now lying on her death-bed. At her natal home, Indu reflects on the cause of her discontentment and discovers it to be due to her unassertiveness resulting in the loss of her self-respect and freedom. For the first time in her life, she asserts herself by financing Mini’s marriage with Akka’s money. She also avenges herself on Jayant by making love to her friend Naren.

Urmila however, controls her feelings and thoughts and does not ask Kishore, even once, to leave his job and do some other work. She does not want to hurt him in any way, and hence feels incessantly sad and disappointed inwardly. At such moments, she is no better than an ordinary unlettered woman. She does not interfere with anyone else’s affairs, and she does not allow anyone to meddle with hers. So, she continues her friendship with D. Bhaskar Jain despite family protests. Her role as a liberated woman comes out vividly in the novel when she extends her unstinted support to the raped young woman, Kalpana, and her anguished mother, and to Shakutai, a
domestic servant. By indulging in such social works, Urmila finally overcomes the sense of suffering and shock caused by the death of Anu.

To Indu the idea of withdrawal for self-realization is very important and she says “‘I wonder if I will leave him one day and live by myself. The only way in which I can be my whole self again’” (RS 89). This desire for withdrawal cannot be understood or appreciated by everyone and hence Indu has to take cover behind pretence: “‘I had to pretend, to cover my reactions, act out a pleasant willingness that grated on me’” (RS 89), as Jayant will be shattered by her withdrawal. Though attachment is the universal law of human relationships, Indu dreams of detachment and solitude “‘Will I never reach that state . . . no passions, no emotions, an unruffled placidity? My recurring daydream into which I retreat at times of stress . . . me, lying in bed, wearing glasses and reading, tranquil, detached, unshakeable’” (RS 108).

Indu is aware that the tragedy of human life is the difficulty of staying away from attachments. As Old Uncle says, “‘In spite of the hurt, the suffering, the humiliations, you go on getting involved. That’s human predicament’” (RS 109). It is only after disposing off the ancestral home and executing her duties as she thinks best that Indu squarely faces her own future. Withdrawal is not a means of escape but a means to self-realization. Having withdrawn from Jayant physically and being away from their home, Indu knows what she wants from the future. The restricting bonds that she has tormented herself with can be totally broken as she realises that they are all self-made and decides to go back home:
Yes, home. The one I lived in with Jayant. That was my only home. To think otherwise would be to take the coward’s way again. I would put all this behind me and go to Jayant. What kind of a life can you build on a foundation of dishonesty, I had asked myself once. Now I would go back and see if that home could stand the scorching touch of honesty. (RS 186-87)

Going back home and doing the type of writing that she wants to do is a decision that comes to Indu only after a lot of looking inwards and soul-searching. It is only after this period of temporary physical withdrawal that Indu is able to realise what she really wants from life.

In a similar manner, Jaya needs a period of physical and mental withdrawal before she is able to come to terms with her expectations of life. When Mohan walks out of their Dadar flat, she is in a state of turmoil. Alone at home, with only Mukta and Nanda to nurse her back to normalcy out of her delirium and fever, Jaya is physically but temporarily alienated from her family. During the next two days she writes, pouring out all that she has attempted to suppress for years together. That writing is the novel That Long Silence, though it initially appears to be “‘like one of those multi-coloured patchwork quilts the Kakis made. . . . So many bits and pieces - a crazy conglomeration of shapes, sizes and colours put together’” (TLS 188). This writing, during a period of withdrawal, helps her realise that she alone is responsible for both her achievements and failures. She begins to see the truth
of the dictum, “Do as you desire” (TLS 192), only after this period of withdrawal.

The fictional world of women novelists today has a wider range than the limited social one presented by their predecessors. Today, women characters do not merely conform to male expectations but seek to exist as women. In having writers as the protagonists in two of her novels, Deshpande presents the problems that woman writers have to face, as described by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*. Jaya attempts to break not only her own silence but that of women, especially women writers, down the ages. A desire for identity and self-expression spurs the creative writer but Jaya finds it being smothered by her husband’s reactions. Jaya’s imaginative writing is not appreciated by her husband Mohan who asks: “How could you, how could you have done it? . . . How can you reveal us, how can you reveal our lives to the world in this way?!” (TLS 143-44). Consequently in an effort to fit into the pre-ordained mould of a good wife, Jaya finds herself content with writing the innocuous middle under the name Seeta. She begins to write what people want to read and not what she wants to write. Deshpande here subtly indicates the constraints under which women writers seek self-expression. Kamat rightly scoffs at that writing of Jaya as being written by a “plump, good-humoured, pea-brained but shrewd, devious, skimming over life” (TLS 149), type of woman. Even the pen name Seeta — that Jaya chooses is indicative of her desire for conformity — the traditional Indian woman who treads the expected path of a dutiful wife. In satisfying Mohan’s ego and expectations, Jaya is
forced to curb her creative genius. She gets smothered under the weight of her own silence. It is only at the end of the novel, after a period of withdrawal, exile and upheaval that Jaya faces the realities of life and decides to break her silence by speaking out:

I will have to erase the silence between us. While studying Sanskrit drama, I’d learnt with a sense of outrage that its rigid rules did not permit women characters to speak Sanskrit. They had to use Prakrit, a language that had sounded to my ears like a baby’s lisp. The anger that I’d felt then comes back to me when I realise what I’ve been doing all these years. I have been speaking Prakrit myself. (TLS 192-93)

None of Deshpande’s protagonists are presented in the traditional pativrata mould. Closely related to their attitude to marriage is their capacity to analyse their relationships. Since these relationships do not seriously affect their marriage or stretch over a long period of time, they are dealt with in a very matter of fact fashion by the protagonists. Saru thinks of Boozie as a step in the ladder of success and does not mind a mild flirtation with him. It is only much later that the fact of his homosexuality is revealed to her and she stops flirting with him. Saru next is impelled to a relationship with Padma and she says “I had done it deliberately, coolly, with calculation, because, foolishly, perhaps, I had imagined it would give me an escape route, something that would lead me out of a loveless trap” (TDHNT 132). She dismisses love and
romance as being meaningless words and is convinced that “Fulfillment and happiness come not through love alone, but sex” (*TDHNT* 133).

Jaya too considers love to be a myth. There had, however, been a time when she had:

> Faithfully followed all the edicts laid down by the women’s magazines. They had been my Bible and I had poured over the wisdom contained in them. Don’t let yourself go. How to keep your husband in love with you. Keep romance alive in a marriage . . . (*TLS* 96)

In the course of time, all these begin to seem absolutely untrue to Jaya. Her relationship with Kamat is incapable of being fit into any of the water-tight compartments into which human relationships are generally fitted, and Jaya realises: “My relationship with this man . . . refused to take any shape at all; it just slipped about, frighteningly fluid” (*TLS* 151). To her it is an intimacy that is both natural and asexual. She finds it possible to talk to him on subjects she rarely discussed with anyone else, including Mohan. He helps her to analyse herself and be honest, at least, to her own self. He is totally and brutally frank: “‘Spare me your complexes. And you’re a fool if you think . . . Don’t skulk behind a false name. It’s so much easier to be a martyr . . . Scared of writing, scared of failing’” (*TLS* 148). Unable to face his scathing analysis of her personality, Jaya chooses to get back into her hole — her pre-ordained role of Mohan’s wife and Rahul and Rati’s mother. When faced with a possible friction, women like Jaya tend to opt for the easier path of conformation rather
than confrontation. Jaya allows herself to be silenced and begins writing middles under the pen-name of Seeta. Though Jaya considers her relationship with Kamat to be an easy and uncomplicated one she describes in detail their moments of physical proximity:

. . . he held my face lightly within his palms, so light a touch . . .

His eyes looked steadily, almost dispassionately at me. And my body had responded to that look, that voice, that touch. I had almost felt his body on mine, becoming a part of mine, I had felt his mouth on mine, becoming a part of mine, I had almost been able to smell and taste his lips. (TLS 157)

Jaya is aware that in becoming Kamat’s Jaya, she had temporarily, totally annihilated Mohan. Years of traditional upbringing do not cause her to feel guilty and she is able to climb the stairs to visit him once again. He had awakened her capacity for self-analysis and helped her to come to terms with herself.

Like Jaya, Indu is able to dispassionately analyse her relationship with her husband and even discuss it openly with Naren:

You know the word ‘deflowered’ they use for girls, Naren? I thought of it when Jayant touched me for the first time, because what I felt was so much the reverse . . . . It shocks him to find passion in a woman. It puts him off. When I’m like that, he turns away from me . . . . And so, I pretend I’m passive and unresponsive. I’m still and dead. (RS 83)
When Naren tries to flirt with her and “laid his hand lightly, teasingly on my breasts” (RS 79), Indu warns him, “I’m essentially monogamous. For me, it’s one man and one man only” (RS 81). A few days later, however when she comes up to the terrace and is alone with Naren, “Naren came closer and put his arms around me. Now I could see no more nor think. I could only feel. I lay down impelled by his thrusting body. . . . An ecstasy filled my body and I could not be still anymore” (RS 151). Not willing to accept her natural, sexual urge, she tries to justify herself saying, “And for an instant, as if the lens had misted over, obscuring my vision, it was not Naren but Jayant” (RS 151). A sense of guilt engulfs her momentarily with Atya’s innocuous statement about the soot on her face after her sexual encounter with Naren. “You can have your bath now. . . . You’ve made yourself dirty” (RS 153). Indu wonders whether she will be troubled by her guilty conscience and associate words like adultery and sin with what she has done but instead of a sense of guilt, she exhibits a cool detachment. In order to avoid being tormented and crushed by misery and guilt, Indu says: “perversely, my mind began coldly, analytically, to think of what I had done. I thought of this with a kind of remorseless logic, a detached objectivity, as if I was thinking of some other person” (RS 155). Simultaneously, this analytical capacity helps Deshpande’s protagonists to view their experiences in a proper perspective. Like Saru and Jaya, Indu too scoffs at the romanticized concept of love: “It’s a big fraud, a hoax, that’s what it is. . . . The sexual instinct . . . that’s true. The maternal instinct . . . that’s true too. Self-interest, self-love . . . they are the
basic truths” (RS 158). Hence, the three protagonists are able to easily accept their extra-marital relationships and Ramamoorthy opines that:

> What is significant about such relationships is that they suffer no guilt and begin to evolve a new code of sexual ethics. Their path to individuation is marked by contacts with diverse experiences such as extra-marital affairs. They experience a sense of sexual autonomy . . . arrive at a realistic perception of love and physical instinct. (122)

This is a step forward from the traditional concept of women and helps each protagonist to establish an independent identity for herself.

In her quest of self-realization, each protagonist strives to carve a niche for herself outside the traditional, restrictive, familial surroundings. This is not acceptable to the male relatives who resent and dread “being whittled down by female domination” (TDHNT 85). In spite of being born in traditional families, these women want to be more than mere daughters, wives and mothers. They resent being relegated to the background and being wiped out of their individual existence. On seeing that she does not figure in the family tree, Jaya expostulates, “‘But Ramukaka, . . . I’m not here!’” and he replies impatiently, “‘How can you be here? You don’t belong to this family. You’re married, you’re now part of Mohan’s family. You have no place here’” (TLS 143). Jaya’s rational mind is baffled by the lack of logic in this argument because the family tree does not contain the names of the women who married into this family and wonders “‘if I don’t belong to this family, what about the
Kakis and Ai? They married into this family, didn’t they, why aren’t they here? And what about Ajji, who single handily kept the family together, why isn’t she here?” (TLS 143). Jaya begins to feel that all the women in the family are just wholly blotted out without any identity or even a name.

According to Indu, not having a name is tantamount to non existence.

Looking at the cook who is called Kaku by everyone she wonders:

Kaku, what was her real name? Perhaps, she had no name at all.

These women . . . they are called Kaku and Kaki, Atya and Vahini, Ajji and Mami. As if they have to be recognised by a relationship because they have no independent identity of their own at all. And in the process, their own names are forgotten.

How does it feel not even to have a name of your own? There are women who are proud of having their names changed by their husbands during their wedding ceremonies. To surrender your name so lightly . . . (RS 117)

As a woman, Indu believes that an identity of her own is important and this identity as a person is inextricably linked with a name of her own. Suhasini, on the other hand, has allowed herself to become Jaya and often finds herself facing an identity crisis as to which of the two is the real person. When Som leaves her, Madhu in Small Remedies establishes an identity with Leela and Savitribai and ruminates:

I’ve 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, looking for justice for the weak, my mother running in her bare feet, using her body as an instrument for speech-yes, they’re in it together. But they paid the price for their attempts to break out. (SR 248)

Madhu concludes that this is the best way for a woman to survive - to conceal her grief and live life as if it were a miracle indeed. She also compromises with the untimely death of her son Aditya, for death is as certain as birth in the cycle of human existence. There may not be complete and big remedies to bring a woman out of her claustrophobic existence, yet small remedies do exist and one has only to forage for them. Madhu tries to submerge her sorrows in Hasina’s melodious voice as she sings a Vachana by Akka Mahadevi, a saint poet of Karnataka. Memories come to the help of Madhu for she says hopefully. “As long as there is memory, there’s always the possibility of retrieval, as long as there is memory, loss is never total” (SR 324). Madhu is aware of the fact that she herself has to find a way out of the mire as no one else can help her. While undergoing self-introspection Madhu realises that her miseries are caused by misconceptions about life as well as due to distorted egoistic perspectives concluding that the power to emerge out of these, lies within her.

Akka makes Indu her successor as she knows that among all her relatives, Indu is the only strong one who can bear the burden of the
responsibility that goes with the wealth. Indu realises that she has to live up to Akka’s expectation and carry the burden. She also realises that Akka is not merely an interfering old woman but she is the prop of the family. Indu is now able to reconsider her feelings towards Akka who in her opinion was indomitable and bigoted. Indu realises that Akka knows that she would be able to show indomitable courage and strength thus fulfilling her responsibilities. Indu wants “To live without fear . . . fear of being unloved, misjudged, misunderstood, displeasing. Without the fear of failure” (RS 174).

Akka’s decision of making Indu the guardian of her property gives her strength to realise her own strength. She observes:

There are the strong and the weak. And the strong have to dominate the weak. It’s inevitable. And Akka thought I was one of the strong ones. That’s why she put the burden on me. And now it’s an obligation. I have to carry the burden. And to do that, I have to be hard. If I’m soft, I’ll just cave in. (RS 159)

Soon the new bonds and obligations crowned with responsibilities make Indu understand and appreciate the fact that rules add grace and dignity to life. The old house which Indu considers to be a trap is ready to be disposed off to Shankarappa who wants to construct a big hotel. Though the decision making is painful for Indu, soon she overcomes the pain. She reminisces the feelings and the emotions that are associated with the house in which she lived but not stayed. Though overcome by a sense of desolation and bereavement, she reminds herself that she must not allow soft feelings to come in her way of
doing what she thinks is the right thing to do, “One era ends so that the other might begin. But life will continue endless, limitless, formless and full of grace” (RS 127).

Indu resembles Geeta of Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli*, the educated urban woman, who also overcomes the feeling of suffocation and becomes an agent of change. Like Jayant, Ajay too realised his wife Geetha’s worth as an individual and says, “You did the right thing. I am proud of you. . . .” (142) Geeta plays a positive role and becomes an illustration of the slow change through conformity going on in the society.

Indu learns that there is beauty and security in life through reconciliation. She is happy when Jayant tells her that he is prepared to publish her work if no publisher comes forward. She cries, “Happiness, I never knew it was made up of such little things” (RS 13). Harmony and understanding of the mind that fluctuates between conflicting selves and the opposing ideals is a true basic human attitude. Indu exercises her potential self to a fuller use by asserting herself as an individual, pushing aside all her fears and doubts about herself. Moreover she continues to maintain her individuality in a house full of tradition-bound men and women. Indu’s predicament is representative of the larger predicament of women in the contemporary Indian society where the society from old cultural modes is in transition moving along with new socio-economic forces acting effectively on the pattern of human lives. Indu represents any woman placed in a transitional period, who is torn between age old traditions and individual views. She is
fully aware that these bonds are unreasonable and yet she yields herself to be bound by them as the typical traditional woman. She knows that transgressing them will certainly rupture the family ties. She realises that it would be an act of wisdom to keep the traditional family ties without losing her individuality.

From the traditional roles of daughter, sister, wife and mother, Deshpande’s protagonists emerge as individuals in their own right. They achieve this not by being brazen feminists or iconoclasts but by a gradual process of introspection and self-realization. These protagonists are neither rebels nor conformists neither trail-blazers nor self-effacers. S. M. Shanti refers to Deshpande herself calling her protagonists “middle of the road kind” (2). Faced with the dilemmas of life, they seek a path that allows them individual freedom and growth even within the constricting environs of a traditional upper middle-class family. In their reaction to role conflict in a patriarchal society, they show the strength to achieve their goals of self-realization. From a state of passive acceptance they move to one of active assertion. Without succumbing to societal pressures and without breaking away from accepted, traditional, social institutions, these protagonists succeed in being individuals.

Saru acknowledges that the independence and the rights of a woman are crushed down by woman herself. Enough reasons are created by women for their attitude. From the conversation between her mother and a neighbour, Saru comes to know of the ill-treatment of the in-laws of a lady in the neighbourhood. They had gone to the level of tying the lady to a peg in a
cattle shed for ten years. She was fed on scraps like a dog until her death. The merciless judgement of her mother on this issue makes Saru shudder “And her mother has said, ‘But how do we know what she had done to be treated that way? May be, she deserved what she got!’” (TDHNT 87). Though Saru has nothing to do with this matter, the reaction of her mother leaves her in remorse. She understands that the struggle is not against the men-folk alone but also against fellow women who never realise their shackles.

Saru returns to her father after a span of fifteen years of self imposed exile from her family. Though she had thought she could be successful, content and happy in her married life, her choice of her life partner and her career do not provide her freedom or satiation in life. Neither her motherhood nor the success in her career enables her to understand the real meaning of life. The free time she gets when she is away from her routine life, gives her an opportunity to review her relationship with her husband, her children, her colleagues and the others around her. Being relieved from all the responsibilities for the time being, she begins to realise her position and this helps her to confront reality.

Saru returns to her parents’ home, in the pretext of comforting her father, but actually she is in search of comfort by getting away from a marriage, which has become a farce. The affectionate but understanding relationship between Madhav, a young student who lives at this home, and her old father acts like a balm to Saru’s deep wounds. She is content to be part of this quiet life, to forget her profession, her young children, her life till then,
asking nothing of the days, expecting nothing from them, but still feels actually lonely till she finally opens her mind to her father.

Saru like her neighbourhood women can never voice her feelings until the real day arrives. Her heart explodes and she becomes so restless. She objectively analyses her share in her marriage turning out to be a disaster. Her ruminations make her think: “My brother died because I heedlessly turned my back on him. My mother died alone because I deserted her. My husband is a failure because I destroyed his manhood” (TDHNT 217). After reliving the past, Saru is able to confront her problems. She at last receives comfort from her father who advises her to forget about her role in the death of her brother and her mother. He further advises her that she should learn to encounter adversities as they come along in one’s life, and that she must be prepared to meet the present problem of facing her husband Manu.

The nightmares that Saru has in the dark, reflect the terror that Dhruva had felt of the dark. She carries this image with her whenever she thinks of him and realises that it is not the dark that holds the terror but what is in her tormented mind. She also understands to control her mind and finally learns to hear herself.

Jaya’s decision to go back to her parental home too enables her to chew her reminiscence over and to attain self-realization. The higher studies of her children and crisis in the profession of Mohan, take Mohan, Rati and Rahul away from home. This gives Jaya ample opportunity to spend her time looking deep into herself, to her role as daughter, wife and mother. She moves
to her maternal uncle’s flat in Dadar to conceal herself from the eyes of people around her. Her mind stays away from her body and peruses into her different roles of a woman in the family. She begins to go through her diaries of so many years “Looking through these diaries, I realised, was like going backwards. As I borrowed through the facts, what I found was the woman who had once lived here, Mohan’s wife. Rahul’s and Rati’s mother. Not myself” (TLS 69). In her attempt to find the ‘self’ she visualizes the way of getting the solution or answer for her search.

Deshpande makes her heroine think of the past and present and Jaya begins to self-examine herself. She sees no fruit from her seventeen years of married life. Vagueness fills her mind and she is driven to the state of delirium. Her longing for identity declines and is overtaken by the fear of being left alone.

The diversion of Jaya’s mind from self-search to self-security shrinks her thought. Her exile to the Dadar flat reduces her into a personality seeking shelter. She is terrified by the thought of living without Mohan. When Mohan is no longer around, Jaya realises that she has no face to show to the world. She is totally convinced that though her husband is not in a position to understand her predicament, he is the sole person who provides comforts and gives meaning to her life. Jaya may not have enjoyed the freedom she intends to enjoy but she is secure only in the company of Mohan. His absence makes her wade through the waters of uncertainty. She is rudderless and feels none can be a substitute:
His death has seemed to me the final catastrophe. The very idea of his dying had made me feel so bereft that tears had flowed effortlessly down the cheeks. It he had been a little late coming home, I had been sure he was dead. By the time he returned, I had, in my imagination, shaped my life to a desolate widowhood. (TLS 97)

The stronger she thinks about his death, the deeper she suffers. She is terrified and ashamed to expose her mind to anybody. Such a threat of possibility of fear draws her closer to Mohan. It reveals the reality that the human body comes together not only to satiate sexual urges, but also to attain mental comfort. It develops mental confidence to lead the given life fearlessly and carefreely. Prasanna Sree points out how the protagonists of many Indian novelists accommodate themselves with their given situation:

For Kamala Markandaya’s women, resolution always comes on a reconciliation with society, while for Anita Desai’s women it is submission to a more or less malignant fate. In case of Shashi Deshpande’s women, however, there is triumph after a long silence (82).

Jaya is a fragmented self with a tormented consciousness. Evidently, she does not know her identity and does not enjoy an individuality of her own. She sees herself as someone’s daughter, wife and mother, having no status of her own and says: “I was born. My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live” (TLS 2). Jaya accepts
a life of passivity for herself and practises or follows what her husband expects. She is a dedicated wife, even at the cost of losing her own identity: “I’m Mohan’s wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife” (TLS 191). Jaya’s review of her relationship with her husband points to an unhappy past. To her, married life becomes unbearable and monotonous, as it moves in a fixed pattern. Jaya and Mohan are leading the life of ‘a pair of bullocks yoked together’. They have nothing better to do but to pretend to have the illusion of happiness, as most couples generally do. Deshpande however explodes the myth of a perfectly happy wife and mother through her character Jaya.

Jaya’s supportive and accommodative role proves detrimental to her creative talent. She deliberately annihilates the creative aspect of her personality by ignoring the subject of women’s suffering which is so close to her heart. In accepting the role of a traditional housewife, she tries to suppress her own ‘self’ her own identity. Definitely she is not another Urmila, but she can easily be another Indu, who is also a writer of a sort. Jaya finally decides to come out the cocoon when life becomes intolerable to her. Her stay at the Dadar flat makes her realise that she has really distanced herself from her true inner self and that this distancing is due to her desire to act according to the wishes and patterns of others. So long, she has acted as her father’s daughter, as Mohan’s wife, and as her children’s mother, without realising that she has a personality too and that she has an independent existence of her own. Hence, she firmly resolves to break the icy silence which has plagued her family since
long. She wants to get back to her old, happy days by setting the present situation on a right track. Now she decides to “plug that ‘hole in the heart’ . . . I will have to speak, to listen, I will have to ease that long silence between us” (RS 192). This decision is her own and she now moves towards setting limits. This decision may not be so drastic or so startling, but it is of far-reaching significance in the conjugal life of Jaya and Mohan. Clearly, it will break the ice in the relationship of the wife, and the husband. It is to the credit of Jaya that she takes the initiative in this matter. It also promises a happy life of understanding between the two. Jaya’s initiative in breaking the long silence is decidedly a welcome step towards restoring normalcy and happiness in the family. Through her the novelist exposes as to where the roots of domestic joy and bliss lie.

Each of the protagonists of Deshpande wishes to tackle the world on her own, without feeling any affinity, even towards her own mother. Saru is plagued by doubts that she may be committing the same mistakes that her mother had. She wonders whether Renu and Abhi are the same as Saru and Dhruva and wonders if she is showing the same preference for the male child as her mother had done and she often asks herself: “Is it always that way . . .? Fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, Renu and I . . . Abhi and his father?” (TDHNT 151). Another nagging doubt for Saru is whether children will always have a grudge against their parents and hold them to be failures. The idea that their family is not an ideal one and can never compete for an ideal family contest is a view shared by both Jaya and Saru. Even motherhood
is not a longed for experience as is proved by Indu postponing the idea of having a child.

The titles of the novels *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows* and *That Long Silence* clearly indicate the need for efforts by each protagonist to achieve an identity of her own. Unless Saru recognises that the terrors are not created by darkness and that her guilt complexes are self made, and self-inflicted, she cannot bring together her various selves. Unless Jaya breaks her silence and begins to write as she wishes to, she cannot come to terms with herself and her position in the family and the society. Unless Indu strikes roots and begins to distinguish between illusion and reality, shadow and substance, she cannot live life meaningfully. All of them have to come out of their place of refuge and face the future with full confidence. The epigram for *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is apt for all the novels- “You are your own refuge / There is no other refuge”.

Deshpande’s male characters are seen as affecting the life of the protagonists. Saru’s father has no voice during her childhood as the mother is the dominant figure. Jaya is the darling of her father and blames him for dying before she realises her ambitions. Indu’s father is an enigmatic personality in the traditional joint-family where Indu grows up. Manu, Saru’s husband, is first “a man who was to take the literary world by storm, the man on the brink of doing so” (*TDHNT* 65). Later, he is projected a sadist by night and a failure by day. Mohan is a social climber - one who aspires to reach the topmost rung of the economic ladder by using right or wrong means. Jayant is hardly seen
throughout the novel except in Indu’s recapitulation of his reactions to events. Yet, the first person narrator is always honest in apportioning the blame and taking on her share too. Premila Paul is of the opinion that: “While offering sufficient sympathy for the protagonist, the novelist never takes sides. This is a remarkable achievement for a novelist who belongs to the suppressed class” (81). As the entire novel revolves around the experiences of the protagonists, the other women characters are far less developed. Mini with very little expectations from marriage is a contrast to Indu. Kusum’s madness helps Jaya to be aware of her own sanity and Saru’s college friends whom she meets later in life are foils to her. None of the protagonists have sisters or other close female friends. Two important women characters, other than the protagonists in these novels are Saru’s mother and Akka who becomes Indu’s surrogate mother. Both of them are very strong personalities. Peeping into her parents’ room, Saru thinks:

    It had been their room, but it had always seemed only his, so successfully had she managed to efface her personality from the room. And how powerful, how strong, she now thought, her mother must have been to achieve that. How certain of herself she must have been! (TLS 19)

Saru is terrorized of the darkness and the nightmares that she has in connection with her brother Dhuruva’s fear of darkness. Now, when she experiences more terror at the hands of her husband, the fear she had experienced out of her earlier nightmares diminishes in intensity. She had felt
repulsive at the frightened embrace of Dhruva but now, can understand her husband’s behaviour in the dark way. Though repulsive, she trains her mind to accept it and this acceptance helps her to overcome her guilt of her brother’s death.

Significantly, the three protagonists — Jaya, Saru and Indu — resolve their conflicts and reach an understanding of themselves without any external help. All the three novels end in a positive note with the protagonists determined to tackle the problems of life. Deshpande lays the responsibility for this courage only on the shoulders of the protagonists and offers no crutches to help them. Saru realises that, “If I have been a puppet, it is because I made myself one” *(TDHNT* 220). She has to learn to accept herself and her various selves: “Yes she was all of them she could not deny that now. She had to accept these selves to become whole again. But if she was all of them, they were not all of her. She was all these and so much more” *(TDHNT* 220). According to Rajendra Prakash it is only at the end of the novel that Saru realises that “she must peel away the multiple layers of roles in which she had swaddled herself before she can arrive at the truth about herself” (87). Jaya recalls her father’s words “Yathecchasi tatha kuru . . . do as you desire” *(TLS* 192). Having broken her years of silence and having written her story, Jaya knows: “. . . 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” *(TLS* 193). Indu also is certain that there is a need for total honesty as far as her expectations from life are concerned. She is responsible for her torments
and her restricting bonds and now all that she wants is to go home to Jayant as: “. . . there were other things that I had to tell him. That I was resigning from my job. That I would at last do the kind of writing I had always dreamt of doing” (RS 187). Having come to terms with themselves, all the three protagonists are able to integrate themselves with the family and the society.

There is no sense of pride or pleasure in being a woman for Indu too. The fact of her being a woman is thrust upon her rather brutally by Kakka and she hates it. This negative attitude towards being a woman affects her relationship with other women, particularly her mother.

In Deshpande’s *That Long Silence*, marriage becomes the locus of yet another compromise. Jaya’s perceived ownership by her husband, her commoditisation — paradoxically underwrites her status as a speaking subject in the world at large. This is because the prevailing cultural imperatives are formidably anti-feminist, predicted on the view that the female is a commodity. For Jaya, the only possibility for the recovery of her displaced texts is from within marriage. Although in socio-cultural terms, the right to speak may be a privilege awarded by marriage to women, the existential vision of Deshpande seems to suggest that a wife’s free speech is mandatory. Without the free discourse of the wife, the husband could be undermined by the deceit of programmed utterances. As D. K. Madhavi Menon observes: “When woman asserts her right to take a different path and ceases to be the silent sufferer, there is hostility” (33). This happens in the case of Jaya who reflects:
No, what have I to do with these mythical women? I can’t fool myself. The truth is simpler. Two bullocks yoked together. . . . It is more comfortable for them to move in the same direction. To go in different directions would be painful; and what animal voluntarily choose pain? (TLS 11-12)

Indu’s search towards detachment is futile. In her heart of hearts, she wonders whether she would ever reach the stage of no passions, no emotions, and unruffled placidity. She realises that she has attached and involved herself in multiple ways like any other human beings and yearns for the support and concern of her family members. When her father says that he has met Jayant she expects him to say that Jayant is pining for her, but her father’s answer “wonderful, oh, wonderful” (RS 92) irritates her. Similarly when Naren says that he is going back to his work, she feels like a deserted and abandoned child. She tries to be detached but realises painfully her failure and shakes off the feelings of detached. She finally realises that she wants “involvement, not detachment” (RS 89). She affirms:

Now I felt clean, as if I had cut away all the unnecessary, uneven edges of myself. And free. But not detached. I would, I knew, never hanker after detachment any more. The very word brought back Naren’s eyes as he lay on the grass near the tank. Detachment . . . it was for the dead, not the living. (RS 186)

This incident prompts P. Bhatnagar to comment that:
It was Naren who made her realise that she did not want, as she had believed earlier, detachment and non-involvement. Naren’s detachment made it possible for him to remain unaffected by anything. He could never be anybody’s husband or beloved. Her rejection of him had left him completely untouched, whereas she knew she could shatter Jayant completely with her rejection which made Jayant so precious to her. No, she did not want detachment and non-involvement which are meant for the dead not for the living. (125)

Indu now understands that her love is not a restricting but a uniting bond which will lead her to lose herself to Jayant, so that their lives shall be full of harmony and peace. Indu’s vision gets cleared as she decides to reveal to Jayant her whole self, her weaknesses and her strengths, her virtues and vices as well. This understanding makes her position clear in her family. She reflects “Here, in this house, in this family, was a role waiting, for me. A role that I could, perhaps, act out more successfully than the one I had tried until now. . . . I would stand out, sharp and clear” (RS 143). This is in accordance with that Jayant says, “But then, new pillars take the place of the old. You’re a pillar now yourself, don’t you know? Am I? Yes, that’s true” (RS 11).

With the realization that she loves and needs Jayant, Indu decides to get back to him, but it is careful not be influenced by him in career matters. She wants to restart her life built on the foundation of honesty and she decides to be her true self in her relationship with Jayant. She achieves freedom and
does what she thinks she should be doing. She also decides not to share with her husband her affair with the dead Naren as she thinks that this has nothing to do with Jayant. She returns “home”, to Jayant, now “equipped with that quality of courage” (RS 82), necessary to face the challenge of identity crisis that her marriage with Jayant had always posed “to question and to find roots” (Patil 136). Commenting on Indu’s decision to start writing according to her own wishes and not to use Akka’s money to enrich herself, Usha Tambe says, “The important point is that she is making independent decision” (124).

Saru understands that despite loneliness, man seeks meaningful life in human interdependence too. The perfect partnership between her father and Madhav is a pattern where they make no demands on each other. It is a partnership, wordless, uncomplaining and perfect, a tacit of understanding “As all good partnerships should be” (TDHNT 30). It is ironic that the father whom Saru has always considered a negative man, incapable of strong feelings and who always avoids the truths, facts, and life’s confrontations, is the one who ultimately urges Saru to confront facts: “Why do you torture yourself with others? Are you not sufficient for yourself? It’s your life, isn’t it?” (TDHNT 35) The courage to admit to herself that her orbit comprises her children, her home, her practice, her patients and very definitely her husband Manu brings enormous relief to Saru. At a point, Saru admits “I have been clinging to the tenuous shadow of a marriage whose substance has long since disintegrated because I have been afraid of proving my mother right” (TDHNT 220). At the end, Saru’s father urges her to confront reality. He tells her that she “can’t run
away this way” (*TDHNT* 216) and he advises her to face the situation “Give him a chance, Saru. Stay and meet him. Talk to him. Let him know from you what’s wrong. Tell him all that you told me’ . . . ‘Don’t turn your back on things again. Turn round and look at them. Meet him” (*TDHNT* 216).

Saru’s father is very sure about how Saru should behave. He appeals to her not to go away without meeting her husband. Though Saru thinks that Manu is responsible for shattering her dream of happiness in marriage and though she wants to be free from her terrifying loveless trap, she feels guilty of her share in the breaking off their marriage. She puts off the moment of confrontation, not only with her parents but also with herself. It is Madhav who makes her realise the reality when he says, “I can’t spoil my life because of that boy. It’s my life, after all” (*TDHNT* 208). Though Saru considers these words to be meaningless, soon she realises that if a young boy like Madhav can think of his life, why can’t she who is a successful doctor, think of herself and her life. Saru now feels that she has to face the situation courageously and that it is she who has to decide about herself. She also realises the facts that one cannot go back in life but has to continue on the path of one’s own choice whereever it leads “all those ties we cherish as eternal and long-lasting are more ephemeral than a dewdrop” (*TDHNT* 208). Saru says that the ultimate reality is one’s self, one’s own self. She is confused, gets nervous and finds no answer. Gradually, the need for quest arises. She gets answers she laments “. . . it’s all a question of adjustment, really. If you want to make it work, you can always do it” (*TDHNT* 118).
Darkness makes one incapable of seeing things clearly and objectively. It is also a source of constant fear when viewed from outside, it hampers the outlook of the inside, but it holds no terror in itself. The darkness of mind ceases to be terrible, the moment one is prepared to face the situation. Saru begins to understand things as she finds that the dark is not terrible. As realisation dawns upon her, she becomes aware that neither a secluded life nor the “wall of silence” will be of any help to her. She decides to speak of her being and realises that the individual fragments will not be taken away by anyone else. To Saru, therefore, there is realization that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. By gaining the identity as a woman Saru becomes, a new Saritha and learns to see reality clearly. She says “No, I’m a realist. We are realists. We deal with the ultimate reality . . . the human body. We come into this world alone and go out of it alone” (TDHNT 208). Saru is in the process of gaining her identity as an individual and is brave enough to realise that:

Walking along a road, going on and on knowing with a sinking feeling that something, somebody awful and frightening, was waiting for her at the end of it. But it was important to go on just the same, not to stop, even though there was doom waiting for her. (TDHNT 210)

It is clear that she will no longer remain as an object for Manu to vent his frustration on. Thus, Saru emerges as a new woman who can control herself and shed her passivity. Describing emancipated women, Maria Mies says:
‘The non-conforming conduct of the women is the consequence of an external necessity but of changed consciousness. They are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and women, but want to see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their individual capabilities are realised in their own lives’. (32)

This is exactly true of Saru who is the representative of the middle-class working women in modern India. She rebels against traditions, but ultimately tries to compromise with the existing reality because, she lives in a transitional society. Saru passes from illusion to reality, from frustration to submission and as the wheel finally comes round, she makes an ultimate attempt to reconcile herself.

Saru desires to liberate herself from the shackles of tradition and exercise her right to reveal her individual capabilities and realise her feminine self through identity-assertion and self-affirmation. In the words of S. P. Swain, “Saru’s journey is a journey from self-alienation to self identification, from negation to assertion, from diffidence to confidence. She learns to trust her feminine self” (39).

Urmila stands apart from the rest of Deshpande’s female protagonists, as she is a liberated woman. She is well-educated and self-dependent, and serves as a lecturer in a College in Bombay and lives with her mother Yamini (or Inni) and her six-year-old son Kartik. She chooses Kishore for her husband. He is her close neighbour and now works with the Merchant Navy
away from his home. Urmila is a strong-willed woman, being sometimes novel and startling in her ideas. She remains assertive of her individuality and is aggressive throughout. She takes decisions on her own, and the crisis in her life is not caused by Kishore but by the sudden demise of their one-year-old baby Anu. The demise upsets Urmila completely and she cannot reconcile with it easily. She is obsessed with that thought and lives in alienation. She says “I am running along the sea. There’s someone else with me . . . I can hear the footsteps. I can hear too heavy breathing, but I cannot see whoever it is . . . I have to keep running . . .” (TBV 82).

In fact, Urmila is passing through a state of psychological tension. As regards her relationship with Kishore, it is based on mutual love and trust, but sometimes she becomes apprehensive of the safe return of her husband. Now there is the fear of Kishore never returning home, “the fear of his not wanting to come back to me. Yes, that’s the thing, that’s what I am most afraid of” (TBV 82).

Urmila can never imagine that her mother-in-law too had suffered so much emotionally and though her lips were silent, her pen had spoken just like Jaya in That Long Silence. Urmila longs for the emotional pleasures of home and family which are so evasive. Kishore, who works elsewhere, comes home for brief periods and their love is only physical not emotional. She is in a dilemma when Bhasker Jain proposes to her knowing her marital status. She is aware that she had already entered the Chakarvyuha from where it is difficult
to escape and gradually accommodates herself to her family situation and is at peace.

Jaya finally comes to understand and accept that she is responsible for everything that has happened in her life including suffering. This realisation leads her to a better understanding of life and thus she is able to face real life. The novel ends with a note of affirmation. Indu too asserts her individuality as a woman and also as a partaker in the endless cycle of life. She lives to see life with the possibilities of growth.

The novels of Deshpande are indeed all about human relationships. As in *That Long Silence*, in *The Binding Vine* too, the novelist considers various relationships to be the vine that binds human beings together. The emotional attachments created within relationships help one to enjoy the beauty of life and to surmount the problems as well. In this novel, Deshpande portrays strong women characters who refuse to run away from the problems of life; in fact they face existential crisis boldly and successfully.

Deshpande portrays an essential woman’s world where men are present only by the power they wield over their wives and daughters. Hers is a world where women suffer numerous losses but cope up with each crisis with the passage of time. Women have the aptitude for survival. In fact, suffering and pain are sometimes necessary to develop one’s self and one’s individuality in particular.

The theme of a woman’s journey of self-discovery through the convergence of time - past and present is well explored in *Small Remedies*
Madhu, the protagonist introduces two women who have strongly influenced her — her aunt, Leela, and her childhood neighbour, Savitribai Indorekar, who is a famous singer. As Madhu shuttles between the past, the present and through future she tries to comprehend the nuances of Time and also attempts to find remedies to the problems of life. Delving deep into the world of reminiscence, Madhu realises that there are some memories she wants to preserve for they reflect her mental makeup, while there are others better to be cast away completely. Though the novel opens with the sentence, “This is Som’s story”, it is in reality the story of Madhu’s journey in life.

Madhu is happily married to Som and is blessed with a son Aditya. Much later when Aditya is seventeen years old, Madhu sees a painting at an exhibition, but the painter had committed suicide for some unknown reason. Madhu ruminates over her past and then confides in her husband about a sexual encounter with her father’s friend which had taken place several years ago. This revelation sounds the death knell for their peaceful marital alliance. Som is suspicious of her and henceforth violent arguments and quarrels ensue between the two, adversely affecting the tender psyche of Aditya. Soon Aditya leaves the house never to return for he dies in a bomb blast. Both father and mother are guilty for Aditya’s going away and his final death. In order to divert herself Madhu begins to write the biography of Savitribai who rebels for the sake of fulfilling her desire to become a renowned singer. Madhu’s aunt Leela was also a rebel, who being widowed at a young age, survives by her grit and becomes a social activist. She meets Joe and later
marries him against tradition. The lives of these two women instil courage in Madhu and she discovers her true self through introspection, recovers from her state of confusion and gains mental plenum. While writing the biography of Savitribai Madhu observes that “We see our lives through memory and memories are fractured, fragmented, almost always cutting across time” (SR 165). It is Madhu’s courage which aids in putting together the fractured, fragmented memories and in providing a meaningful existence to life.

In her most recent novel Moving On, Deshpande narrates the tale of Indian middle class families. Neatly concealed within the narrative, the novelist projects the view that family is a unit of the society and it is an enduring institution. The protagonist who takes up Manjari, Jiji, Ahuja various names is visualized as a complex character juggling frantically between the conflicting demands and roles of life. While trying to reach herself, Jiji also attempts to break from the past and move on. Two voices are apparent in this process: one is Jiji’s own, and other is the diaries which are discovered after her death.

Records in the diaries reveal the protective, submissive life of Jiji who later revolts causing a rift between her and the family. In contrast to the character of Jiji, is portrayed Raja, her cousin and childhood companion. Raja is more career conscious and practical in his approach to life. As Jiji grows up she sheds her romantic ideals and adopts a realistic view of life. In Raja’s company she finds peace and security which had so far eluded her. However, her estrangement with her parents is rather painful. There is a constant conflict
within her, between her intellectual and emotional being. In fact, there are many facets to her personality and she is forever struggling to strike a balance between them. To her, relationship with other human beings is important and so she is eager to please people. The past of Jiji may appear to be perfect but it is her present which is full of uncertainty. As a widow, nurturing her two children she finds it difficult to grapple with choices about the future. However as time passes and as experiences lead her the reality of life, she comes to accept life as it is. She accepts her state in the society and bravely moves on in her varied roles as mother and poet to face the world.

Marriage in Indian culture is a life-long bondage, easy to batter and yet hard to break. It is a peaceful married life that differentiates a home from a house. Though the society deprives the women of their freedom by ill-treating them, Indian women are traditionally bound to their roots and most of them accommodate themselves, digesting the agony they suffer. The plight of women in India is like that of a caged bird. Though at times they escape the cage, mostly they turn back to the cage itself, and this happens to be the only means to accommodation and solace.