CHAPTER ONE
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'Tis [marriage] like a summer bird-cage in a garden: the birds that are without despair to get in, and the birds that are within despair and in a consumption for fear they shall never get out. (John Webster The White Devil Act I Sc(ii))

Marriage has always been felt to be a cage for women. It is often said to be a necessary evil. With all the adverse comments about it, people have always felt that as an institution, marriage offers stability and security. In this institution called 'marriage', it is the woman who is always the underdog. It is and has been a very difficult job to change the situation because the underdogs do not realize – do not care to realize – their predicament. In the Indian context, the woman seems to love her position. The Pathiviratha concept and the myth about chastity and the ritualistic role of woman as goddess have kept the women permanently in chains – though the chains may often be made
of gold. The pity is that the western countries are no better in providing a respectable position for women with all their claim for modernity.

The women models described by litterateurs and the adjectives used by sociologists contain baffling pairs of opposites such as submissive-aggressive, emotional-logical, dominating-self-sacrificing and frigid-lustful. And what is worse, in a male-dominated society, men and women are judged by different yardsticks so that what would appear normal in a man is often considered to be a negative quality in a woman. As Ferguson puts it:

"Possessiveness in men is associated with protectiveness and responsibility, in women with narrowness and selfishness; self-sacrifice in men is marvelled at, taken for granted in women. Women are seen paradoxically as highly materialistic and as devout and pious; but they carry these traits to undesirable extremes, whereas men exemplify admirable restraint when it comes to lovingly polishing furniture or putting on church bazaars. A woman may be less or more desirous
of sex than a man; either frigidity or lust in a woman is a negative characteristic because the male appetite is the norm. (Images of Women in Literature 7)

Even one's personal images of others are coloured by the ideas of society, family, country and the age. In every age, woman has been seen as mother, wife, mistress, sex object - their roles in relationship to men. The social stereotypes of women have been reinforced by archetypes. In patriarchal societies the woman who willingly submits to her husband is an ideal wife. From Chaucer's time one can identify this archetypal portrayal of woman. Griselda in Canterbury Tales is glorified for her absolute obedience and meekness. She does not rebel even at the stage of giving up her children. She is finally rewarded when she is reunited with her husband and her children whom her husband had only pretended to murder. On the other hand, in the story of Cupid and Psyche, where Psyche overrules the forbidden act by trying to look at her lover, she is condemned to be the slave of Venus. These two different effects caused by the varied attitudes of Griselda and Psyche exhibit the reward for abject obedience and the penalty for disobeying. These stereotypes have been used as propaganda material to blind women to the nature of their oppression.
In a country like India, religion along with its myths and legends justifies the roots of gender inequality. Women are portrayed as the sole bearers of virtues like loyalty, chastity and fidelity. Through the images of chaste women presented in myths, the Indian woman learns to sacrifice herself to the welfare and honour of her family. In the Ramayana, after Rama's victory over Ravana, he is not willing to accept Sita. He makes her go through fire to prove her chastity in the eyes of people. Larousse presents the situation as follows:

At first Rama refuses to accept Sita as a wife, for he wishes to prove to everyone that she has remained true to him in spite of the time spent with Ravana. So, Sita longs only for death, and has a funeral pyre built. Approaching the flames with joined hands, she cries: 'Just as my heart never leaves Rama, so may thou, Agni, never deprive me of thy protection!' Then she steps into the flames. While all those present are lost in lamentation, Agni is seen to rise with Sita in his lap, as radiant as the morning sun. The judgement of Agni has been given. Rama opens
his arms wide to the irreproachable, saying: 'I knew of Sita's virtue, but I wanted her to justify herself in the eyes of the people. Without this trial, some would have said: "The son of Dasharatha yields to desire and scorns traditional laws." Now, everyone will know that she is really mine, like the sunbeams, which belong to the sun, their source'. (World Mythology 217)

From such mythological, ideal models of women, the Indian woman is not able to disentangle herself. The moral behind all myths and legends is that...

...docility in a wife leads to happiness for all - husband, wife, father; and that upsetting the domestic order may lead to disrupting social and cosmic order. Woman in her place is the cornerstone of society. (Ferguson Images of Women in Literature 19)

It is not only the women of lower class but those of the middle and upper classes who suffer from male dominance and
ill-treatment. As Maneesha Dube says,

The skeleton, which for long had been presumed to exist in the homes of the depressed sections of society, was also to be found in the closets of modest apartments and stately bungalows. It was the woman next door - the coy bride, the dutiful housewife, the loving mother - who was suffering the ignominy of being beaten, harassed and subjected to mental and physical cruelty. (*Indian Express Sunday Magazine*, March 8, 1992)

The spread of modern educational facilities, advancing technological inventions, growing creative innovations, economic mobility and legislative measures supporting modernisation have made a subsection of Indian women undergo a metamorphosis. And it is necessary to make a systematic study of the problems which confront women in a changing social order.

While women try to make new choices, there is a need to reappraise all their existing roles. The quality of being a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, and mother needs to be
redefined. Women not only confront these issues within themselves but often encounter protests, doubts and ridicule from without. To her exercising a choice of this nature means accepting her own legitimacy in the wider world and stepping beyond the stereotypes. But for many a woman her new-found beneficial threshold becomes a short-lived factor because

Fear, terror, anxiety about being isolated, loneliness, and accusations, all encourage a woman to return to the prison rather than to experience autonomy and freedom. (Indira J. Parikh and Pulin K. Garg Indian Women: An Inner Dialogue 165)

For more than three hundred years these intrinsic and delicate problems have been given due importance and relevant treatment by literary writers. During the eighteenth century there were a number of women novelists who made a notable contribution. Writers like Hanna More, Miss Fielding, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier, Mary Russell and Mrs.Radcliffe presented the female world elaborately.
Similarly, women novelists of the twentieth century have represented the world from the viewpoint of woman. Among them, Henry Handel Richardson, Dorothy Richardson, Humphrey Ward, Sarah Grand, Clifford, Rose Macaulay, Elizabeth Bowen, Ivy Compton Burnett, Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf deserve one's attention.

In India, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have set a new trend in Indian English fiction by their selection of themes centering upon women.

The outstanding trait of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande is their preoccupation with the individual while others stress the social, economic, political and cultural milieu of the time. The new woman who is dissatisfied with the assigned roles and her resultant inner struggle are pictured by both of them. Their writings represent the gradual growth in the awakening and awareness of women. The new cultural milieu which makes it inevitable for women to face the emerging reality of rising aspirations, has placed them in a transitional phase. The fears and anxieties created in this period, and their sense of guilt at the abandoning of roles.
form the canvas for Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. To understand the steady growth of female awareness a brief study of feminist movements will be of help. Women’s urge to discover and identify their personal resources does not come overnight. Richard Evans underscores its multi-faceted nature:

The origins of this historically novel development lie in a conjunction of historical forces operating at three different levels - intellectual, economic and social, and political. (The Feminists: Women’s Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australia, 1840-1920)

The ideological origins of feminism must be sought in the first place in the eighteenth century intellectual Enlightenment. The intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment was expressed in an almost infinite range of theorising and empirical investigation. In the years 1789-93, in Paris and the major provincial cities women began to organise themselves in their struggle for their rights. They formed women’s political clubs and exerted strong pressure on some of the leading men’s political clubs which formed the
equivalent of political parties in the Revolution. The leading figure in this movement was Etta Palm, a woman of Dutch origin, who spoke in favour of equal rights for women in education, politics, law and employment. During the French Revolution, women actually tried to band together to fight for their rights and showed that social groups - above all, the middle classes, to whom the feminists belonged - did possess the power to shake off legal and institutional restraints and achieve equality of status for women.

The feminist movement in the United States began earlier than elsewhere. The women led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone and Lucretia Mott concentrated on the political and economic subjection in civil law. In 1860 they won their right to collect their own wages, to sue in court, and to inherit their husband's property. The feminists suspended women's rights activities during the Civil War and rallied to the support of the Union in a number of ways. They believed that they would be rewarded for their support after victory was won. But they were to be disappointed. When the Republican Party introduced the Fourteenth Amendment to the constitution in 1866, the Amendment explicitly denied the vote to women. The feminists
were outraged by the refusal of the Republicans to accede to their demands.

They had expected the anti-slavery movement to support their claim to the vote as they themselves had supported the abolition of slavery and the victory of the Union. The black leader Frederick Douglas had seconded Elizabeth Cady Stanton. But later he withheld his support. The failure convinced Stanton and Susan B. Anthony that the fight for women's rights now had to be waged by women alone.

Stanton, Anthony and their followers formally withdrew from the Anti-Slavery Equal Rights Association and founded a National Woman Suffrage Association. It stood for social purity and moral reform, and it believed in women's independence in family life. Above all, it was individualist to the core.

Many American feminists, less bold than Stanton and Anthony, were not prepared to follow them. Under the lead of Lucy Stone, they succeeded in forming the American Woman Suffrage Association. It represented the more conservative wing of the movement. Its aims differed from those of the
New Yorkers under Stanton and Anthony in several respects. It concentrated on the vote and paid no attention to many issues such as the condition of working class women, which Stanton and Anthony considered important. It considered that the correct way to win the vote was in a gradual state-by-state campaign. It thus rejected the Stanton-Anthony policy of a direct assault at the federal level.

Admitting women to the medical profession was one of the major aims of moderate feminism everywhere. The lead in opening the profession was taken, characteristically, by voluntary associations, above all the Female Medical Education Society. American women were also entering other professions as well in the 1870s and 1880s. In 1870, Myra Bradwell applied to the Supreme Court of Illinois for a license to practise law. Only by 1880 it became a possibility.

The growing numbers of professional women were matched by the proliferation of societies to cater to their needs. The astronomer Maria Mitchell, who was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, founded an association for the advancement of women. In 1882 women
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graduates led by Marion Talbot founded the Association of Collegiate Alumnae later to become the American Association of University Women. In 1868, the first professional women's club was founded.

The significance of these developments was twofold. First, they drew an increasing number of women into the wider orbit of the feminist movement; and second, they constituted for the feminists themselves evidence of progress and success.

The entrance of women into certain of the professions was only one of the social changes underlying the growth of the American feminist movement in the two decades after the Civil War. Another was the increasing involvement of married women in movements of moral and social reform, above all in the rapidly developing and newly colonised areas of the West and Mid-west.

In 1873-74 a 'women's crusade against alcohol' swept across the American Mid-west. Hundreds of bars were closed but most of them opened again later, and the women soon realised the need for a more sustained campaign. The result was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. All these developments
laid the social and organisational foundations for the development of feminism into a mass movement.

Although the major part in bringing feminist organisations into existence in many countries was played by the Americans, British feminism also had an influential role. British feminism was chronologically the second after the American movement to emerge in an organised form. It was out of the involvement of middle-class female philanthropists that organised feminism emerged.

The disasters of the Crimean War (1854-56) inspired a growing concern with ability and professionalism as the criteria of administration, expressed among other ways in widespread demands for the abolition of the purchase of office. This not only had the particular implication for women of demanding higher professional qualifications, but also in a more general way spawned a whole series of associations dedicated to social reform, of which the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, the parent body of the early feminist movement, was perhaps the most important. In 1867 National Society for Women's Suffrage was formed.
Originating in the 1850s, radicalising prematurely in the 1860s, then more thoroughly in the 1890s, British feminism followed a course not dissimilar to that of feminist movements elsewhere. Viewed in a European perspective, the British feminist movement was by the 1900s not only large and vigorous but also radical and successful. By 1910 its Suffrage Movement had become one of the biggest in the world. Its tactics, which included frequent marches through the streets and mass demonstrations in the open air, were more daring than those of any other feminist organisation outside the United States.

As far as India is concerned, in the early nineteenth century, women occupied a very low status. Customs such as sati, child marriage and polygamy were widely prevalent. Widows were prevented from re-marrying and their condition was pitiable. Denied education, vocation, and social, economic and political rights, the widows were wholly confined to the four walls of the house. The forces working against them were so strong that they seemed reconciled to this state of affairs and silently accepted their 'fate'.

The first man to speak out publicly against the injustice perpetrated on women in the name of religion and tradition
was Raja Ram Mohan Roy who in 1818 wrote a tract condemning sati. He vividly described the degenerate state of Indian society and held the deplorable condition of women as one of the causes responsible for this.

Taking the lead from Roy, social reformers embarked upon the task of improving the condition of women, particularly those from the urban, upper caste families belonging to the middle strata of society.

Roy's mobilisation of Hindu reformist opinion against sati created a climate that made it possible for Lord William Bentink to pass a law banning it in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar took up the cause of widows, which led to the passing of Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. The issue of child marriage was taken up by a number of reformers. Behramji Malabari, a Parsi reformer from Bombay, launched an all India campaign to raise the age of consent of marriage from 10 years to 12 years, and in the process created a nationwide controversy between the orthodoxy and the reformers. Despite the storm of protest, the Age of Consent of Marriage Act as proposed by Malabari was passed.

Education was considered the most important means of improving the status of women. Christian missionaries
were the pioneers in this field and they set up several schools. Robert May opened the first girls' school at Chinsura in Bengal. Vidyasagar set up schools for girls in Bengal. Similar schools were opened at various places: Jyotiba Phule in Poona, the Students' Literary and Scientific Society in Bombay and the Arya Samaj in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

By the end of the nineteenth century, women were gathering courage to challenge the society. Many hailed from reformist families and they formed their own organisations and, in fact, the emergence of a rudimentary women's movement in India can be traced from this time. The Tagores of Bengal played a pioneering role at the time. Swarnakumari Devi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore, an author in her own right and a novelist of distinction, organised the Sakhi Samiti in 1882. It was later converted into a craft centre for widows. The same year, Pandit Ramabai Saraswati, a remarkable woman from Poona, founded the Arya Mahila Samaj and went on to set up a series of women's associations in various towns of Bombay Presidency. Ramabai Ranade established the Seva Sadan. The year 1908 saw the beginning of a Gujarati Stree Mandal in Ahmedabad and a Mahila Sewa
Samaj was founded in Mysore and Poona. Women's organisations were started in Madras also.

Initially, these associations were confined to a locality or a city. The credit for starting the first all India women's organisation, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal (1901) must go to Sarla Devi Chaudhrani, the daughter of Swarnakumari Devi. However, the venture proved short-lived. It was in 1917 that the Women's Indian Association was started in Madras city by Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret Cousins, together with a group of Indian women.

Conscious of their political rights and influenced by western democratic values, these women worked actively to generate political consciousness among women during the early decades of this century. They took up the issue of voting rights for women with the Secretary of the State for India, Lord Edwin Montagu, who was in India to discuss the demands for political reforms. The Southborough Franchise Committee was initially reluctant to give women the right to vote but because of the sustained campaign launched by women's organisations and the support given to them by the Indian National Congress and other political parties, it was
finally left to the provincial legislatures to decide the matter. Madras was the first province to grant the franchise in 1920 followed by Bombay in 1921.

The first All India Women's Conference on Educational Reform was held at Poona in 1927. It was a historic event. It brought together women from different parts of India and from all castes and communities. The Conference began a new era in the evolution of women's education in India and laid the foundation of the All India Women's Conference which henceforth met annually and became a leader among organisations fighting for women's rights and equality. The Movement of the Indian women is unique in more than one sense. It had the support of men social reformers like Gandhi and Nehru. The Movement was above party and communal politics.

In the historical context, the AIWC is of great significance. It symbolises the transfer of leadership of the women's movement from men to women. It has revealed women's early awareness that the responsibility for women's regeneration belongs to women. In the nineteenth century, as women became more educated, they came to form their own associations and occupy leadership positions. It has been a path-breaker.
The organisation has provided women with opportunities to come out into the world outside the parameters of the home, in order to contribute something to society at large.

On the whole, aided by the expansion of female education and female professions, feminism became a mass movement. Various organisations like the National Councils of Women and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance were formed to bring about unity in the feminist movement.

Female emancipation became a major political issue:

At every stage in its development, organised feminism was closely interwoven with the political changes and the shifting balance of social forces that came with economic growth. The actions and beliefs of feminists were not the outcome of a simple passion for female equality; they were a complex mixture of many political and ideological elements, of which the desire for liberation as women was only one. (Richard J. Evans The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movement in Europe, America and Australia 1840-1920 38)
As the feminists established themselves as an organised union, they turned their attention towards more intrinsic problems such as love, marriage and sex. They were opposed to

... marriage laws that denied women legal rights, just as they were opposed to an economic system that forced women into loveless marriages and kept them tied to cruel and perhaps dissolute men. (Banks Olive *Faces of Feminism* 229-30) √

The radical feminists went further, alleging that

... marriage is at the very root of woman's subjection to the man because through it man controls both her reproduction and her person. (230) √

Even romantic love did not escape their attention, as it was seen as a way of trapping women into accepting their own subjugation.
They criticized the way in which women had been made victims of male lust, both within and outside marriage. They were deeply concerned with male violence towards women, expressed in such forms as rape, and saw sexual violence in particular as a significant consequence of male domination and female oppression.

Women are treated as the virtue-holders of society, living a life of roles and doing their duty as daughters, wives and mothers. But the fullness of their persons has never been allowed to break through these tailor-made roles. They have to sacrifice their personal aspirations and surrender their individuality to the organization called family. But today, this aspect of women's lives has acquired a new dimension. Educated, armed with knowledge and skills, women enter formal work setting, delinking themselves from their social structures and network of relationships. But they undergo severe mental strain and stress both outside and inside family due to their dual responsibilities. Women in such critical states are portrayed by Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande in their novels. They represent the gradual growth of feminist writing and in their novels one can trace out the progress of this genre. They portray the psyche of women, which is conditioned by the rigid social system; and
thereby the plight of women, especially educated and working women, since liberation does not solely rely on education or economic independence.

Anita Desai was born in Mussouri on 24 June 1937. Having a Bengali father and a German mother, she was subject to diverse influences. At the age of seven, she began to write, and some of her writings got published in children’s magazines. She graduated from Miranda House, Delhi University. She worked for a year in Max Muller Bhavan, Calcutta. She has been living in various cities - Calcutta, Bombay, Chandigarh, Delhi and Poona. Some of these places have become the settings for her novels.

Her first novel, _Cry, the Peacock_ (1963) deals with the psyche of Maya, a hypersensitive young woman. She suffers from father-obsession and looks for the typical father image in her husband. She is obsessed by the fear of death due to the foretelling of an albino astrologer that either she or her husband will die four years after her marriage. As an afterthought, she realizes that one of the two doomed to a premature death could be her husband Gautama and therefore she kills him by pushing him off from the balcony.
Voices in the City (1965), her second novel, depicts the failures of Hirode, the troubled and isolated life of Monisha, the commercial art of Amla and the detached attitude of their mother.

Published in 1971, her third novel Bye-Bye, Blackbird portrays the plight of Indian immigrants in London. The three main characters - Dev, Adit and Sarah - are portrayed effectively with their existentialist problems of loneliness.

Her next novel Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975) realistically pictures the tension between a sensitive wife Sita and her rational husband Raman. Sita, mother of four children, is reluctant to deliver or to abort the fifth one, due to her fear of violence in the world. According to Madhusudan Prasad,

This novel is certainly a study of the marital discord resulting from the conflict between two irreconcilable temperaments and two diametrically different viewpoints represented by Sita and her husband Raman. (Anita Desai: The Novelist 64)
Fire on the Mountain, published in 1977, won Anita Desai the Sahitya Akademi Award of 1978. In this novel, she skilfully explores the inner emotional world of a great-grandmother, Nanda Kaul, wife of the one time Vice-Chancellor. Again, the estrangement between the husband and wife forms the thematic nucleus of this novel.

Games at Twilight, her collection of short stories, appeared in 1978. They deal with the world of children, domestic life, human relationships, tradition and individualism and problems of women.

Clear Light of Day "is set in Old Delhi and records the tremendous changes that a Hindu family goes through since 1947" (Sunil Sethi, "Interview with Anita Desai" India Today (December 1-15 1980) 142).

In her next novel The Village by the Sea (1982), she compares and contrasts the rural life with the mechanical life in Bombay.

In Custody (1984) is about Deven, a lecturer, who is carried away by lofty idealism.
Her latest novel *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) is the story of a German Jew, and his sense of isolation in an alien land.

While Anita Desai's novels are a documentation of the "radical female resistance against a patriarchally defined concept of normality", (Shantha Krishnaswamy *The Woman in Indian Fiction in English* 163) Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with "the Indian middle-class women's turmoils, convulsions and frustrations and their silence as a means of communication" (Sarabjit Sandhu *The Image of Women in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* 17).

Shashi Deshpande, born and brought up in Dharwar, graduated in Economics from Elphinstone College, Bombay. Later she graduated in Law from the Mysore University, winning two gold medals. She has been writing since 1969. She started with short stories and then began to write novels. She has brought out some stories for children also.

Her first collection of short stories *The Legacy* was published in 1972. Following that three other collections were published - *It was Dark*, *The Miracle* and *It Was the Nightingale*. She has written six novels so far.
Her first novel, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980) is the story of Sarita, who is always ignored in favour of her brother. Educated against her mother's will, she develops her sense of reasoning and questioning. She chooses Manu, a college lecturer as her life-partner, but her marriage begins to crumble under the burden of success in her profession. Her realization of her tiresome married life and her willingness to confront reality mark the end of the novel.

Her next novel *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983) is a sort of detective fiction, which deals with a series of murders taking place inside a reputed girls' high school campus. Despite the crime theme, the primary female characters of the novel represent modern women with their sense of liberation to think and act.

*Roots and Shadows* (1983) which won her the prize for the best Indian novel of 1982-1983, explores the inner struggles of Indu, who represents a set of modern women who are grappling with the critical problems of love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality. The novel brings to light how a woman's attempt to assert her individuality brings her
into conflict with her family and with the male chauvinistic society.

If I Die Today (1984), yet another novel dealing with the theme of crime, is a story of men and women charged with fear and with a sense of violence around them. The death of Guru, the central character of the novel, rocks the medical college campus, and his death generates various suspicions. In the course of their efforts to identify the villain, Shashi Deshpande very realistically portrays certain estranged pairs in marriage, who apparently have a sophisticated and contented life.

That Long Silence, which was published in 1988, portrays an intellectual, Jaya, who finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men. Her inner turmoils are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out. Very clearly the novel indicates that the traditional roles of women still have primacy over all the newly acquired professional roles.

So far both Anita Desai's and Shashi Deshpande's novels have only been individually viewed in the light of feminism and psycho-analysis. R.S. Sharma considers Anita Desai's first novel Cry, the Peacock "the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in English" (Anita Desai 24). She has been praised by critics for her adroit handling of themes like withdrawal, alienation, loneliness, isolation and lack of communication. According to Ramesh K. Srivastava,

In Desai's novels most protagonists are alienated from the world, from society, from families, from parents and even from their own selves because they are not average people but individuals... (Perspectives on Anita Desai xxviii)

Considering her involvement in exploring the hidden voices of women, Irma Maini says,

... she is able to project the Modernist consciousness of the twentieth century woman. The question of what Kate Millet calls "sexual politics," is not dramatized in an open manner... Her feminine sensibility becomes in
the process, a fine instrument of perception and protest ("Anita Desai And The Feminine Sensibility" Commonwealth Quarterly 9 28 11)

The inner voices of her heroines are often interpreted as the outcome of their mental stress. The reason behind their psychological disturbance has never been dealt with systematically. Incompatibility between husband and wife has escaped the criticism of reviewers. Likewise, Shashi Deshpande's fictions are also glaringly focussed as explorations of the interior monologues of suppressed women. She has been discussed as feminist and psychoanalyst, but not as an interpreter of the myth and reality that exists in married life. Commenting on her first novel Roots and Shadows, P. Bhatnagar says,

The novel deals with a woman's attempt to assert her individuality and realize her freedom. It depicts how it brings her into confrontation with the family, with the male world and the society in general. ("Indian Womanhood: Fight for Freedom in Roots and Shadows" in Indian Women Novelists 118)
Shashi Deshpande's heroines are viewed as the representatives of this era of reasoning and advocates of individuality. Saru, the heroine of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, is interpreted as a representative of the middle class working women in modern India. The cause behind her sojourn in her parental home has not been given due importance by reviewers.

The characters of both Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande cannot be stamped as the reflectors of this modern era alone. They portray the complex human psyche, conditioned by the rigid social systems which compel the living of man and woman together irrespective of their differing attitudes.

Taking into account the mental torture experienced by the women characters one cannot deny the impact of their inharmonious marital relationship. Marriage leads them to the point of being neurotic, as there is no better alternative available.

Convinced that misalliance is the root cause for the pathetic condition of the heroines, the researcher intends to analyse the novels of Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande accordingly.