CHAPTER THREE
THE MYTH AND THE REALITY
CHAPTER THREE
THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

Any commitment, however desirable, imposes restraints.... Marriage, whatever form it takes, is for most... a compromise between conflicting impulses. Most people come to terms with this conflict. (Jessie Bernard The Future of Marriage 275)

Marriage is often defined as the harmonious union of a man and a woman. Religion has given it an aura of sanctity and permanence. From a sociological point of view, the institution of marriage has been a source of harmony, refinement and security in a civilized society. To emphasize the validity of marriage as a social institution, it is often said that man and woman are equal and they are complementary to each other.

An archetype is myth in action. In Hinduism Siva-Parvathy is an archetype of the concept of marriage as Adam-Eve is an archetype of the same concept in Christianity. Orthodox Hindus, who protest against feminism in any sense, argue
that feminism is not needed in India because women have always enjoyed equal rights. They quote the example of Siva who has accepted his wife Parvathy as half of him. But the fact remains that even as the legend goes Parvathy did penance to become part of Siva and Siva accepted her condescendingly.

Similarly, according to Christianity God created Adam first and Eve was created only to be a helper and that too from his rib. This again clearly shows that while man is superior, woman is inferior and destined to be so. At the human level, if one listens to the marriage oaths taken at a Christian marriage one can realize that the man is of primary importance and the woman gets only a secondary role. The same is the case with any other marriage according to any other religion. Hence, with all the religious sanctity that goes with the concept of marriage it is clear that the man gets the priority and the woman an inferior status.

As an institution marriage has come to stay and as a sex women are always suppressed. For both men and women marriage has been a way of obtaining comfort and status as well as sexual service. But this avenue is closed to women who have
lost their chastity by some accident or other. They have to live on the fringes of society as servants or prostitutes. Sexual politics keeps women as men's subordinates and dependents, property to be kept locked in the name of chastity. So there is always a clash between the exploiter and the exploited. In this struggle women readily step forward for compromise, as they have to face more difficulties outside wedlock. All their sufferings result in their fear-imposed silence:

A silence of misplaced devotion, a silence to maintain a facade of a successful marriage. A silence to avoid scandal. But a silence that ensures that the crime is repeated again and again. (Indian Express Sunday Magazine March 8 1992)

In the reality of marriage, the hope of a romantic encounter remains unfulfilled, creating a haunting sense of the meaninglessness of life in many women. Women nurture a craving for a space in which they can experience the splendour and glory of a fulfilling human relationship. They also long for someone who will share the pathos of their being held for centuries in their symbolic identity of being
women. They wish to be free from the captivity of the bio-social and bio-psychological norms of society.

However, even longing has become a taboo. Women have learnt to accept the burden of socio-psychological uprooting during marriage. At every turn of life, they are confronted with the illusion of myth and the bitterness of reality. Women who make frequent attempts to redefine their roles invariably return to the traditional choices. Their primary focus is on men and relationships with them. They ignore their own proclivity.

Though divorce is common now, its long winding process tires people. Only in terms of law, women are safe. The law protects them from dowry harassment and forced sexual intercourse. But in practice, they never come out to voice the injustice done to them. Till recently women had to play passive roles. Very mildly women have begun reacting. Gradually they have started realizing their real status and worth.

This has been effectively presented by various writers:

Literature both reflects and helps to create
reality. It is through their preservation in works of art that we know what the stereotypes and archetypes have been and are; in turn, knowing the images influences our view of reality and even our behaviour. (Ferguson
Images of Women in Literature 10)

In this transitional era, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande portray the individuality of women and their psyche. Anita Desai's characters are capable of analysing their wants and needs. They are different from the tradition-bound women who have nothing but to think of their husbands and children and their needs. As Usha Bande puts it,

They are peculiar and eccentric. To accept life as it comes in routine is a sign of averageness, and Anita Desai refuses to see her creations in the light of mediocrity. They are individuals with the force of personality to say "Yes" or "No". (The Novels of Anita Desai 19)

Following Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande presents a more advanced set of women who are ready to act and meet the
consequences. They reflect the metamorphosis which has taken place within a limited period.

Although the sacrosanctity of marriage still retains its value, it is on the verge of losing its stranglehold on women, for

We do not tolerate today forms of marital behaviour that were matter-of-fact in the past; our standards - as measured in terms of the grounds on which divorce is permitted - are... higher. (Jessie Bernard The Future of Marriage 281)

But that does not bring in a marital utopia as it revolves not only within the socio-cultural limits, but around intricate, delicate human feelings. It is mainly the psychological need of the human beings - to be loved, to be wanted - that leads them towards marriage. Still, the fear of losing their individuality, selfhood and freedom restricts their sole reliance on it. The advancement of science has made the development of an embryo possible without a licensed father or mother. But it is subject to
various debates. As far as India is concerned, one must admit its vigilant step towards modernism. We are now placed between tradition and modernity. Although it is not a question of what is correct and what is wrong, but a matter of metamorphosis, we drag a lot before moving one step further, because women who internalise their identity pattern,

... surrender their dreams and aspirations, their very lives, first to the parents and later to the husbands. They accept a destiny that is controlled by others, and are guided by a set of values, beliefs, and role processes of a bygone era. They become what can be termed as the echoes and shadows of the social system. In this they feel that they achieve their acceptance and affirmation for they tend to be glorified; in reality, they are merely the victims of situations and people. (Indira J. Parikh and Pulin K. Garg Indian Women: An Inner Dialogue 53)

The priority given to tradition, culture and status hinders women from turning over a new leaf. Actually, women are on
the horns of a dilemma, and more often than not they prefer
a known devil-marriage - to an unknown angel - single life.
At this juncture it is only natural that they are willing to
sacrifice their education, career, parental home and
individuality at the altar of the idealized security that is
expected to come through marriage.

Irrespective of the illusory security that marriage
provides, it cannot guarantee happiness. Jessie Bernard
observes:

No amount of tinkering with social system, or
even complete revamping of it, can overcome
the inherent contradictions involved in
marriage. (The Future of Marriage 283)

Like a storm in a tea cup, these contradictions are solved
through compromises - mainly on the part of womenfolk.
As Tocqueville rightly remarks:

[Women]... attach a sort of pride to the
voluntary surrender of their own will, and
make it their boast to bend themselves to the
yoke, not to shake it off. (Democracy in
America 61)
Whether it is a matter of pride or social status, they pay a lot for this compromise. Under the cloak of compromise their emotions and feelings are suppressed only to end up in neurosis and the like.

Maya in Anita Desai's *Cry, The Peacock* is a typical example of this kind. Sensitive Maya with fine feelings is unfortunately yoked to Gautama, a pragmatic man. The very opening of the novel, describing the death of Toto illustrates the deep cleavage between them. As Madhusudan Prasad comments:

> The death of Toto which means something traumatic to her in fact, nothing to him, suggests the lack of any possible emotional communication between them. (Anita Desai: The Novelist 5)

Besides this incident, whenever Maya craves for Gautama's warm affection, he simply ignores her. While Maya bubbles with mirth and gaiety Gautama is like still water, without exhibiting any emotion. As Ramachandra Rao explains,

> She [Maya] represents the passion of life,
while Gautama, her husband, stands for the prosaic qualities of life. Gautama is coldly irrational, and is impatient of Maya's emotion-charged responses to events and incidents which to him are nothing extraordinary. ("Themes and Variations in the Novels and Short Stories of Anita Desai" Journal of Literature and Aesthetics 2: 2-3 74)

Maya who is unable to communicate with the cold Gautama laments:

He was not on my side at all, but across a river, across a mountain, and would always remain so. (Cry, the Peacock 131)

The epithets "river" and "mountain" are aptly used here to suggest the distance between the husband and wife - their physical nearness and mental estrangement.

A similar pair is portrayed by Romen Basu in his novel Your Life to Live. In the one year of their married life, Ashoke and Zarina never shared and enjoyed anything in
Almost one year of marriage and there was nothing ever discussed of any of her hopes, dreams and wishes. Ashoke was thousands of miles away from her. He was happy with his fast car, fancy food, Latin rhythms, and sex. If Zarina read out a quotation from the writings of a famous poet or a philosopher, he would make fun of her. (Your Life to Live 75)

Similarly, Nanda Kaul is much worried on account of her marriage to a loveless man. She deliberately suppresses her alienation from her husband in the subconscious mind. She remains submissive despite her husband's affair with Miss Lavid. Here, she seems to follow the rule of Manu: "The wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities." (Manu Quoted in M.K. Gandhi Woman and Social Injustice 14). She represents the typical Indian woman who endures all the sufferings in her married life patiently unlike Nora in Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House, who walks out of her house rather than endure insults. Yoked to a husband for whom a wife is a non-entity, she proves herself an obedient wife
wearing silk sarees and playing the hostess but she always wears a mask and only pretends to be happy.

This meek uncomplaining wife of a Vice-Chancellor reminds one of Dr. Kulkarni's obedient wife Shanta who silently tolerates her husband's affair with the Dean's wife in *If I Die Today* of Shashi Deshpande. Dr. Kulkarni and Shanta are poles apart in their temperament. Yet, Shanta remains a "shadow" of him. In the words of Manju,

> I wondered what it was to be Shanta, dull, colourless, a shadow of her husband who looked at another woman that way.... I thought of the words of umpteen Hindi movie songs..."I will be your shadow." For some reason it angered me. (*If I Die Today* 36)

This vast difference in task and temperament is skilfully managed not only in the Kulkarnis but also in all the pairs who are in their

... neat, well-built, bright, comfortable houses, with enough money, scarcely any troublesome dependents, and just one or two
children... intelligent, liberal and modern...

(If I Die Today 3)

Their children are healthy, have their shots at the right time and drink boiled water only as long as it is necessary. They do the work they want to do. Still, Manju questions, "... was there one moment... when I said to myself... I am happy?"(4)

Manju is the representative of all those who silently suffer, but outwardly lead a happy life, smiling, looking contented, with just two children, as in the advertisements. It is no matter how much they earn, how they choose their life partners and what respectable occupations they have. They merely adjust themselves to "stay" with the other person and not to "live". As Shaw aptly observes,

Man and wife do not, as a rule, live together: they only breakfast together, dine together and sleep in the same room.... The majority of married couples never get to know one another at all: they only get accustomed to having the same house, the same children, and the same income. (The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw 11-12)
This fact is very sarcastically conveyed by Shashi Deshpande through her heroine Indu. She remarks, "Husbands and wives... their worlds touched briefly only in the darkness of the night" (Roots and Shadows 46). The same thing is felt by Jaya in That Long Silence. After seventeen years of her married life with Mohan, she objectively views their life:

A man and a woman married for seventeen years.
A couple with two children. A family somewhat like the one caught and preserved for posterity by the advertising visuals I so loved. But the reality was only this. We were two persons. A man. A woman. (That Long Silence 6)

Two human beings living together is artificial. Only at the romantic level is there a successful cancellation of "I" by both the partners. Actually, it is the woman who is expected to change and adjust. This very attitude smacks of male chauvinism. Ironically, woman considers it her pride to do things to the satisfaction of her partner without realising her loss of identity. Jaya crisply states how she yells over her achievement of keeping things neat and how her
conscience and the "I" within her contradict each other:

...the ghost most fearful to confront is the ghost of one's old self. This was what I saw, the ghost of a woman who had scrubbed and cleaned and taken an inordinate pride in her achievements, even in a toilet free from stains and smells. (That Long Silence 13)

She is "finely tuned... to Mohan's thinking"(59) and thus their "delicately balanced relationship"(59) keeps "the scales on an even keel"(68). Though the continuous presence of Mohan irritates and burdens her, she gulps that silently. Her precious hours without Mohan have gone out of her reach.

She laments:

It was a relief to be alone. I'd always treasured my hours of solitude without Mohan and the children. Mohan's constant presence, since we came here, had become a burden to me. (68)

Satre's idea that hell is other people is evidenced here by
Jaya. Shaw also presents the same idea:

Very few couples can live in a single-roomed tenement without exchanging blows quite frequently. In the leisured classes there is often no real family life at all. The boys are at a public school; the girls are in the school room in charge of a governess; the husband is at his club or in a set which is not his wife's; and the institution of marriage enjoys the credit of a domestic peace which is hardly more intimate than the relations of prisoners in the same gaol or guests at the same garden party. (The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw 12)

Shavian philosophy is proved to be correct when Jaya states that "we lived together but there had been only emptiness between us". (That Long Silence 185). In Roots and Shadows Indu realises the illusory nature of what is called perfect understanding and communication after her marriage. She questions whether there is any such thing as harmonious relationship:

And in Jayant, I had thought I had found the
other part of my whole self. Not only that, but total understanding. Perfect communication. And then, I had realised this was an illusion. I had felt cheated. But, can perfect understanding ever exist? (126)

After coming out of her illusion regarding marriage and the harmonious relationship, she understands how she has been cheating her own self by saying that she is in love. She completely submits herself to Jayant just to avoid conflicts, and not out of love as she herself acknowledges:

And I had found out that he too expected me to submit. No, not expected. He took it for granted that I would. And I did it, because, I told myself, I loved him. As if that justified everything. As if the word took away the taint from the deed. And remembering how I had surrendered to him, step by step, I realise now, that it was not for love, as I had been telling myself, but because I did not want conflict. (174)

Not only the avoidance of conflict but also her independent choice of her life partner becomes a burden
and she is afraid of accepting her marriage as a failure. She readily compromises to convince others that her marriage is a success. While Indu raises a question on Mini's marriage, Madhav Kaka poses a very reasonable question to Indu who has chosen her life partner. He asks,

...what couple could be perfectly matched?
Tell me, Indu... you chose your own husband.
Are you a made-for-each-other couple?(108)

He further proceeds saying,

Marriage... is a difficult enough business.
For two people to merge into one identity, it's... almost an impossibility.(108)

If merging of identity is the ideal state of marriage, that is a total impossibility. It is farcical to talk of a successful marriage. It depends on a successful compromise and not on a merging of identity. Walter Trobisch, a notable marriage counsellor admits the fact that no marriage can be labelled as perfect:

There is no such thing as a perfect marriage.
Marriage keeps us humble. The safest way to
become humble about one's virtues is to get married. (I Married You 47)

This compromising attitude prevails in almost all Anita Desai's women characters.

In Voices in the City, sensitive Monisha experiences nothing but disappointments, frustrations and unexpected hurts from the very first day of her entry into Jiban's big joint family, where women are perfectly trained to cook, dress, talk and behave as they are expected by men. She silently tries her best to get accustomed to that strange environment. Her first experience at Jiban's house is very significant:

In the small of my back, I feel a surreptitious push from Jiban and am propelled forward into the embrace of his mother who is all in white and smells of clean rice and who, while placing her hand on my head in blessing, also pushes a little harder than I think necessary, and harder, till I realize what it means, and go down on my knees to touch her
feet.... Another pair of feet appears to receive my touch, then another. How they all honour their own feet... feet before faces here... *(Voices in the City 109)*

Several women who fall within this pattern of identity remain captive. They are married more to the families of their husbands rather than to the husbands as individuals. They internalise the deprivation generated by the roles considered significant in the social system. They crave for love and praise, but ultimately remain objects of seduction. Disowning their assertiveness, creativity and their being, they start playing proxy roles. Outwardly, they remain innocent, shy, introvert and hesitant.

Her sister Amla wonders,

... how and why it was that Monisha had been married to this boring nonentity, this blind moralist,... this rotund, minute-minded and limited official,(198)

and she is unable to get an answer for the silent stubborn Monisha's unrebellious attitude. Even when Monisha is
accused of stealing her husband's money, she shrinks within herself. She is unable to voice her right to use Jiban's money. She retains her submissive attitude till the end of her life, unlike Manju in *If I Die Today* who holds a realistic view on marriage -

*A marriage. You start off expecting so many things. And bit by bit, like dead leaves, the expectations fall off* - (24)

though she seems to lead a comfortable, secure and happy life. When she sees Guru's suspecting look falling on Vijay, she becomes wary to have a keen eye on each and every movement of Vijay and his colleagues.

While she reacts to any situation readily, Vijay remains detached. Even Manju's pregnancy fails to create warmth in Vijay. Manju clearly distinguishes the difference between what is usually expected and said of husband and wife's intimacy during pregnancy and what really happens in their life:

*I'd heard of a pregnancy bringing a husband and wife together. With Vijay and me, it*
seemed to have the opposite effect. We had drifted even further apart. This child I had made my own, the fight to bring it to life, my own struggle. I don't know if Vijay had sensed this feeling of mine; but he kept himself aloof. He looked after me, but it was the detached kindness of a stranger. (43)

Bearing Vijay's child in her womb, she could think of him as nothing more than a stranger. Like Maya, Manju longs for Vijay's comfort and concern, but unlike Maya, she tries to break the silence between them. Manju's use of the word "stranger" reminds one of Gulab and Esmond's condition in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's _Esmond in India_. Even the rare discussions taking place between them do not bear the warmth of love but cold indifference:

They could, occasionally and in between their quarrels, converse about indifferent subjects, if not like friends then at least like strangers shut up together in a railway compartment. (166)

The emergence of the compromising step, primarily from
Manju, indicates her urge to bridge the gap between herself and Vijay. Shashi Deshpande underlines here the plight of the women who feel compelled to come to a compromise in all the conflicts as they hold a lower hand in the game of life. Vimala "the picture of competence" (If I Die Today 17) painfully admitting Sumant's need to take her hands and her inability to prevent it, adds emphasis to Shashi Deshpande's view.

Another pair consists of Sunita and Shyam Puri, "a radiologist and surgeon. A perfect husband and wife team. A made-for-each-other couple"(16) as described by Manju. Yet they make their home a hell for their son Anand by fighting over such a trivial matter as having Sunita's mother at their home. While Shyam cares much for his research opportunity in the States, Sunita feels she will be homesick. But she is helpless. Pathetically she questions, "Can I stay here? Can I break up the family?"(16) Gulping her personal wishes and feelings, she proceeds with Shyam. If individual taste differs in Sunita - Shyam couple, economic and status imbalance causes separation in Cynthia - Tony couple.

When they fell in love, Cynthia was doing her course in
medicine. She was head over heels in love with Tony. But once she became a doctor while Tony just remained a physical director, Tony started feeling an air of superiority in Cynthia. He confesses to Manju:

Don't let them tell you it doesn't matter who earns more money in a marriage. It does. There was Cyn before marriage, crazy about me, looking up to me, ready to do anything for me.... I don't know if you've felt it, Manju, but these doctors... they get that air of authority, superiority... I started feeling Cyn was patronising me.(84)

Manju witnesses one more couple - Ashok and Meera belonging to different planes. Ashok is notorious for his flirtations. He takes Meera's silence for granted and proceeds happily with his playboyishness. The conversation between Manju and Ashok reveals clearly his stand.

"What if Meera had decided to give you up?"
"Oh, she wouldn't," Ashok replied, looking unforgiveably smug. "She knows me. She understands me."(80)
Meera reflects the traits of the ideal woman characterised by Manu. She consciously shuts her eye to Ashok's philandering. Ashok's temperament suits that of all the male chauvinists who keep scales only for women.

Holding different yardsticks for men and women causes psychological stress and strain in marital relationship. If it so happens that the wife earns more, the husband's inferiority complex results in sadism as in the case of Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Sarabjit Sandhu aptly remarks:

> While there is a decline in her conjugal relationship, her status in society rises day by day. It may imply at one level that her rise in importance is inversely proportionate to the fall in the importance of her husband, creating a conflict between her achieved position and the ascribed position of Manu.... The financial ascendance of Sarita, at the same time, renders Manu impotent. The only way he can regain that potency and masculinity is through sexual assault upon Sarita, which, for him, becomes an assertion of his manhood...  

("The image of woman in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*" in *Indian Women Novelists*, 85)
When the assigned roles undergo change at the functional and psychological level, there is a clash between what ought to be and what actually is.

As Ferguson puts it,

A person who deliberately departs from a socially approved stereotype by playing a new role - developing a new life style - usually must pay a heavy cost in guilt, alienation, or psychosis. (Images of Women in Literature 9)

Myths idealising women as embodiments of patience, devotion and love are carried over from time immemorial to keep them under control. Love, marriage and motherhood become traps to chain them perpetually. Indu's remark that "love is a big fraud, a hoax" (Roots and Shadows 173) shows her

... distaste for love that is non-real and absurd, and love that lacks the humanizing influence in the context of marriage for the female partner, both physically and spiritually dissatisfying. (Ujwala Patil "Marriage and Selfhood in Roots and Shadows" in Indian Women Novelists 132)
People who are brought up traditionally, hold a modern view that marriage becomes a conflicting situation. They hang between traditional expectations and demands of their "self". At this juncture Shashi Deshpande's heroines raise questions, search for answers and try to act, whereas Anita Desai's women stop with mere questioning.

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* sensitive Sita flees to the magic island Manori to retain her child in the womb for fear of letting it face the horror and violence of this world. Pragmatic Raman fails to understand her finer feelings. He is surprised to hear that Sita is bored. In turn Sita is puzzled and pained to know that he had not known that

...she was bored, dull, unhappy, frantic. She could hardly believe that although they lived so close together, he did not even know this basic fact of her existence. (144-145)

They lack even common taste and understanding. That is why when Sita remarks upon his visitors, "They are nothing—nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex and money matter. Animals" (47), innocently he replies," I thought you liked animals" (47).
Still, throughout their married life, like any other successful pair they "preferred to avoid a confrontation" (33). Avoiding is indicative of escapism and a cowardly attitude to reality. Like parallel rails they safely prevent both merging and clashing. The intense desire to be secure drives Sita to follow Raman irrespective of her ideal wish.

Though they are poles apart in temperament, she readily tunes herself to match Raman's. Her searching for Raman's foot prints and placing her feet in them denotes her compromise:

She lowered her head and searched out his foot prints so that she could place her feet in them, as a kind of game to make walking back easier, and so her foot prints, mingled with his, sometimes accurately and sometimes not, made a chain of links,... Seeing one foot print follow another so precisely, so logically, words, too, sorted themselves out,... (150)

Sita's hatred for the humdrum city life and the mechanical process of family life is expressed by Jaya of *That Long*
Silence. She confesses:

... I had to admit the truth to myself - that I had often found family life unendurable. Worse than anything else had been the boredom of the unchanging pattern, the unending monotony.(4)

Like Sita, she is imaginative. She holds a flair for visuals. The "cosy, smiling, happy families in their gleaming homes spelt sheer poetry"(3) to her. To Mohan, sitting before the fire, waiting for her husband to come home and eat hot food is the real "strength" of a woman, whereas Jaya considers it as despair. They widely differ in their attitude:

Due to differences in attitude, their marital life grows shaky and gloomy. It becomes more of a compromise than love, based on social fear rather than on mutual need of each other. (Sarabjit Sandhu, "The Image of Woman in That Long Silence" in Indian Women Novelists 143)

Their unequal cognitive status causes troubles in their
marital life. Finally, unlike Sita who follows the footprints of Raman, Jaya decides to erase the gap of silence between them by voicing her feelings. On her realisation of speaking prakrit so far in her life, her firm decision to utter Sanskrit emerges. Awareness of the actual state leading further to functional stage, denotes metamorphosis. While Anita Desai's characters are noted for their evolution from ignorance to prudence, Shashi Deshpande's characters demand attention in their rapid actions.

Though "the ideal husband and the ideal wife are no more real human beings than the cherubim" (Bernard Shaw, The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw 21), and they keep the marriage vows "in the technical divorce court sense"(21), the institution of marriage is still popular.

Conditioned by the so called social and moral codes, men and women pull themselves down to dwell under the same roof. Their success lies in their ability to conceal the worst and reveal the best. They do not live their life but act it out. To prove their life successful, they act, adjust and get accustomed to each other. In this foul play, it is the woman
who needs more skill, more deception and less feeling, for she is taught that she is to marry and beget children. She can never be as important as the man even as the soil can never be as important as the seed. By her very nature, she is considered secondary, auxiliary. She becomes "a breeding animal" (If I Die Today 23), neither a life-partner nor a better-half.

Growing economic independence of women promises progress in their attitudes and outlooks. The picture of "happily married" is dimmed by the increase in schizophrenia and suicide among women who find role conflict intolerable. When the old stereotypes are found destructive, the creative force of society lends a helping hand to form viable new ones.

If marriages are made in heaven as it is accepted by all religions, it is difficult to explain the increasing number of divorces. Again it is not that only those who divorce have difference of opinion. Most of the successful marriages can be interpreted as successful compromises, where woman is always the willing loser. In the Indian context, especially in joint families, the daughters-in-law as a class undergo
very painful experiences. Dowry deaths have become so innumerable that all the women's movements have become very much concerned about this recent phenomenon. Female infanticide is a more serious menace which feminism has to face.

This bitter reality has to be contrasted with the myth that marriage makes life complete. The contrast has been analysed so far as evidenced in both Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. How both of them have effectively and artistically exposed this contrast between myth and reality is the keynote of the next chapter.